Changing with the Tide: The Shifting Orientations of Foreign Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy orientations in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are in flux. Since the full-scale adoption of structural adjustment programmes (SAP) by SSA countries in the mid-1980s and the abatement of the Cold War at the end of the decade, new anxieties have emerged to challenge established assumptions, analysis and praxis. The last decade has seen a phenomenal proliferation of armed intra-state conflicts, which have not only shaped Africa's foreign relations, but also featured on the foreign policy agenda of its states and regional organisations. This trend contradicts old assumptions in which the foreign policies of SSA states were explained exclusively within the contexts of colonialism, the Cold War and its aftermath, debt and structural adjustment.

The growing incidence of conflicts and their ancillary effects, including economic and political insecurity, interventionism, refugees and migration, not to mention AIDS and drugs - have assumed critical importance for foreign policy makers in SSA and actors within and outside the region with whom they seek relations. In addition, foreign and local non-governmental organisations (NGO) now pushing the dual agenda of development and democracy, also influence foreign policy, albeit to a limited extent. Thus, impinging as these developments and actors are on the region's affairs, intellectual discourse and analysis on the foreign policies of SSA require a paradigm shift and a more holistic approach.

This paper demonstrates the shifting orientations and preoccupations of SSA foreign policies occasioned by changing exigencies and pressures. It argues that the containment of conflicts has become one of the most central, if not the dominant, concern of foreign policy in SSA. Divided into sections, the first conceptualises foreign policy and its objectives in SSA; the second examines the shifting orientations in foreign policies since the 1960s; and the third, which is followed by a short conclusion, demonstrates the extent to which conflicts are currently shaping the region's foreign policies.

1. CONCEPTUALISING FOREIGN POLICY IN SSA

Conventional thinking holds that foreign policies aim at enhancing a state's ability to achieve a specific goal or a set of objectives (Holsti 1990: 13). Thus according to Hermann (1990: 5), foreign policy is "a programme (plan) designed to address some problems or pursue some goal that entails action towards foreign entities." Arguing about SSA, Kraus (1994: 257-9) notes that such foreign policy goals involve two critical issues; namely, the quest for security, and the desire to extend influence. In retrospect, security has remained a universal concern in almost every foreign policy calculation. The ability to ward off external aggression is not only a mark of statehood, but is also crucial for internal peace and development. It was for this reason that realism, the dominant intellectual tradition during the Cold War, depicted the twin concepts of power and security as the most central concerns of foreign policy. Conceived of in largely strategic terms, the sources of security threats were seen as primarily external. Thus the bolstering of national defences through the acquisition of sophisticated military hardware became a popular method of deterrence and the lessening of external security threats.

In the post-Cold War era, however, both the nature and sources of insecurity have changed. Emphasis has shifted from military and strategic concerns to economic and human security. This shift reflects popular feelings that military security means nothing for a population in desperate want of food and shelter. Zdenek Cervenka has argued that for regions battling with the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment, "security should first and foremost include food, physical survival, family and community security rather than military security" (Cited in Ornas and Salif 1989: 15). Thus, a region displaying the worse human development indices across the world, security in SSA should be concerned with improving upon the quality of life. Furthermore, Africa's post-Cold War realities have amply shown that the sources of security threats are principally internal, posed among others by opposition elements, the unmitigated tension between structural adjustment and democratisation, and the rising spate of armed rebellion against established regimes (Rugumamu 1994; Fatton 1992: 110; Akokpari 1996a). To a large extent, foreign policies in SSA aim at assuaging the security threats posed by these conjunctural factors.

The second concern of SSA foreign policies, the extension of politico-economic influence beyond national borders, is itself dependent on the containment and elimination of internal security threats. A collapsing or politically unstable state will of necessity expend its resources on security rather than on the pursuit of regional honours. The preoccupation with internal security therefore renders a state inward-looking and thus reduces its ability and success to influence other external actors. Morgenthau (1967: 106-144) postulates that a state's ability to extend its influence through foreign policies is a function of, or contingent on, certain key factors, including its geographical and strategic location, economic strength, military prowess, the size of its population, the quantity and importance of its

natural resources, and the type of regime. Lacking most of the above attributes and in particular presiding over fledgeling economies, most SSA countries, with the exception of South Africa and, to a lesser extent, Nigeria have limited capacities to influence actors beyond their borders. Incapacity to pursue dynamic foreign policies is further compounded by SSA's economic vulnerability, which is in turn a function of the region's simultaneous marginality in, and dependence on, the global economy (Callaghy 1991: 36-68).

In many respects, foreign policy is both a means and an end. The overt and covert objectives of foreign policy are to persuade but sometimes to compel other actors to behave in a manner that facilitates the achievement of stated goals. Sometimes, however, even powerful states must redirect their foreign policies in order to enhance goal achievement. Such foreign policy adjustments and redirection are rare and are dictated either by expediency or exigency (Hermann 1990). However, for SSA countries, policy adjustments are the rule, not the exception, because of the continuing economic and security constraints confronting them. Accordingly, SSA countries have had to constantly reorient their foreign policies to reflect or accommodate domestic and external vicissitudes. Such orientational shifts have rendered SSA's foreign policies innately malleable and pliable, deprived of coherence or consistency. Since the independence decade of the 1960s, shifts in the orientation of foreign policies of SSA states have been profoundly evident.

2. CHANGING ORIENTATIONS IN SSA'S FOREIGN POLICIES

Since the 1960s, roughly five developments have shaped SSA's foreign policies, each associated with a specific period in the post-independence history of the region: (2.1) decolonisation and non-alignment; (2.2) the debt crisis; (2.3) structural adjustment and democratisation; (2.4) marginalisation, and (2.5) armed conflicts. These developments are by no means exhaustive or discrete. Indeed, in addition to overlapping, all but the fourth were overlaid by the impact of the Cold War. To what extent have these developments conditioned foreign policies in SSA?

2.1 DECOLONISATION AND NON-ALIGNMENT

There is general consensus that during the immediate post-independence years Africa's foreign policies were informed by its colonial experience (Austin 1972: 167-172; Clapham 1977; Aluko 1977; 1991: 33-44). Agreement is also wide on the view that these policies were dominated by presidents who reduced foreign ministries to mere emissaries following the replacement of pluralist politics with one-party rule. As Hill (1977) has noted, the overriding concern of Africa's first generational leaders included the total decolonisation and deracialisation of the continent, the establishment of the new states' identities, keeping the new governing

elites in power, reducing the influence of former colonial powers and, tackling the challenges of development.

In addition, African leaders had to counter the now familiar pathological effects of colonialism, which were manifested in various ways. For example, it established strong ties between African states and their former colonial powers. Francophone Africa in particular retained strong economic, political and military ties with Paris long after independence, giving the latter considerable influence over the former. It was even claimed that French Africa required clearance with Paris before implementing most of its foreign policies (**Africa Confidential**, December 2nd 1987). Also, colonialism forged closer ties among countries with similar colonial experiences, creating political blocs and fissures which now characterise Africa's post-independence continental politics. Further, with the introduction of cash agriculture, which was a logical consequence of colonialism, Africa was incorporated into the global economy. This process became the foundation of the precarious mono-crop and agrarian economies that characterise African states. Again, colonialism bequeathed arbitrary national boundaries, which are seen as part of the causes of conflicts and insecurity in contemporary Africa. Considered largely inimical to development and the pursuit of continental foreign policies, some African leaders sought to address these legacies.

One approach to these ravaging colonial legacies found expression in the proposal for African unity. However, as it became clear, subsequent on the subject were characterised by wide disagreements, dramatised in the emergence of three ideological coalitions: the radical Casablanca bloc which advocated total political unity; the conservative Monrovia bloc which wanted economic and cultural union instead; and the ambivalent Brazzaville group, sandwiched between the two poles (Tordoff 1993: 235-241). These blocs were significant in that they symbolised both the lack of consensus among African leaders on the form of African unity, and the deep fissures and fission that had emerged on the African continent. While stronger linkages developed among coalition members, the gap between these camps grew irreconcilably wide, making subversion of regimes in the rival camps an implicit goal in foreign policy (Aluko 1977). With the demise in 1966 of Kwame Nkrumah, the leading exponent, rhetoric about continental unity receded.

But, if disagreements arose over the nature of African unity, there was broad consensus over the need for a non-aligned posture in a bi-polar world. As the Cold War gathered momentum, African countries chose to remain neutral, a position that ideally guaranteed some leverage in foreign policy choices. However, as inter- and intra-African conflicts erupted and intensified, and as the challenges of development became more poignant, non-alignment as an ideology became more pretentious than practical. In reality, Ghana, Guinea and Tanzania, among those adopting radical and statist approaches to development opted for socialism or some version of it and thus tilted towards Moscow, while Liberia, the Ivory Coast and Kenya, among the pro-market candidates, inclined towards the West. As the Soviets overtly armed Ethiopia, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) from the late

1970s, and as the Americans in turn aided Somalia, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO), Africa became a de facto Cold War battleground and the facade of its non-aligned posture became even more palpable.

2.2 THE DEBT CRISIS

While the rumblings of the Cold War continued, shaping and influencing foreign policies, SSA's mounting debt was already deflecting attention from post-independence anxieties and non-alignment. At the close of the 1970s, majority of SSA countries were deep in debt following the cumulative effects of crushed primary commodity prices, oil shocks, discredited statist policies and dysfunctional military rule. By 1984, for example, SSA's debt had soared to $91 billion up from $14.8 billion in 1974. Against a backdrop of increasing debt and decreasing prospects for repayment, Western interest in SSA waned. To a considerable extent, the debt crisis atrophied the interest of Western private banks and EEC countries in SSA as the latter increasingly became unprofitable for any form of investments. Thus as indebted SSA countries attempted to reclaim western attention and also lessen the crippling effects of debt, rescheduling - the arranged postponement of debt repayment - became a key preoccupation of their foreign policies. Evidence of this was reflected in the fact that of the 42 countries rescheduling their debts between 1975 and 1985, 19 were from SSA and of the 144 rescheduling world-wide during the same period, 67 were for SSA countries. It was, however, paradoxical that while rescheduling dominated its foreign policies SSA still remained "by far the most rescheduled region of the world" (Callaghy 1987: 154).

Worse yet, far from being an act of charity, rescheduling neither alleviated nor stabilised the debt of SSA countries. Rather, this process compounded the interest on the capital, eventually increasing the original debt. As a result of rescheduling, for instance, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo - DRC) paid $191.5 million more to its creditors than it received in 1984 alone. Similarly, between 1983 and 1993, the World Bank and the IMF injected a total of $9.3 billion as aid into Ghana's economic recovery effort. During that same period Ghana paid back to, or repurchased from, the IMF more than that amount resulting in a negative net transfer (Ofori-Atta 1993: 1813). On the aggregate, SSA's interest payments rose from $221 million in 1980 to $7.2 billion in 1989 (Kraus 1994: 251; Parfitt and Riley 1989: 88; **New African**, October 1991: 32). With an overgrowing debt, foreign policies had a clear objective of endearing countries to creditors, especially the London and Paris Clubs, in order to achieve debt relief, rescheduling or fresh loans. Because SSA economies were dependent and fragile, generating only small revenue, much of which was siphoned away by insidious corruption, external borrowing continued unabated. With the rate of debt escalation completely outpacing economic growth and creating bleak economic recovery prospects, SSA

became a high-risk unattractive region to investors. Consequently, Western private banks totally retreated from SSA.

2.3 STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND DEMOCRATISATION

The void left by private banks was filled in the 1980s by multilateral financial agencies, notably the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had hitherto maintained a low profile in the region's development effort. With structural adjustment, the neo-classical paradigm which calls for the replacement of the state with the private sphere in development, the Bank and Fund sought to reverse SSA's economic malaise. In the process, the twin Washington-based institutions both initiated and determined the contents of domestic and foreign policies in virtually all countries aboard the structural adjustment wagon. For the most part, Bank/Fund-initiation of foreign policy in adjusting countries was covert, but quite conspicuous in Ghana, which was eventually depicted by Western creditors as a successful structural adjuster (**Africa Report** 1987; World Bank 1994; Akokpari 1996b). Zaya Yebo, an ex-cabinet member of the Rawlings regime, notes that shortly after Ghana concluded a stabilisation agreement with the IMF in 1982 World Bank officials were attending cabinet meetings in Accra (Ankomah 1992: 14). This development was not surprising; it represented a logical consequence of heavy dependence international aid. As one United Nations Committee Report noted,

> "Countries which are dependent on concessional financial flows . have also been constrained in their national policy-making as a result of pressures from international financial institutions and the loss of relative autonomy vis-à-vis those institutions." (CDP 1997: para. 45)

For a region constantly struggling to revitalise its ailing economies, submitting to foreign influence may not be atypical for SSA once this promises economic assistance. Agyeman-Duah and Daddieh (1994: 44) have persuasively argued that the foreign policies of developing countries are driven primarily by the quest for financial assistance and development aid.

From the mid-1980s discussions and implementation of adjustment policies dominated SSA's development agenda, altering both the content and locus of foreign policies. To better meet the requirements of SAPs, foreign policies shifted effectively from politics to economics, and from presidential mansions to central banks and finance ministries. Here, not only did Bank and Fund officials set the development agenda, but they also exercised unfettered control over foreign economic relations. The intricate interconnection between politics and the economy meant that control over the latter led inexorably to the domination of foreign policy. Indeed, Callaghy (1987: 149) could not have been more correct to argue that SSA's "foreign economic relations are in many ways [its] high foreign policy writ large".

The fragility of SSA's economies and the compelling need to secure Bank/Fund support or simply their 'seal of credit worthiness' in order to qualify for bilateral assistance, obligate SSA countries to waive their sovereign rights and to succumb to extra-regional dictates in the determination of their foreign policies.

The beginning of the 1990s brought further intrusive, second generational conditionalities to augment existing compulsions under adjustment. Underscored by liberal beliefs, these new conditionalities obliged SSA countries to, among other things, dismantle authoritarian rule in favour of Western-styled multiparty politics and the respect for human rights in exchange for Western aid, credit and investments. Desperately hungry for aid, the majority of SSA countries complied. Even the leaders of Ghana, Kenya and Zambia who initially argued frantically against multiparty democracy on the grounds of its incompatibility with Africa's social reality, succumbed. In the meantime, the results of the multiparty democracy experiment in SSA have so far been mixed, if not totally dismal. While a few countries like Ghana, Benin, and Zambia made successful transitions, the majority, including Sudan, Nigeria, Gambia and Sierra Leone, to mention a few, have either remained impervious to democratic pressures, retreated to the old-style military dictatorships, or are swinging back and forth between constitutional and military rule. The euphoria about Africa's 'second independence' envisaged to accompany the democratic transitions has thus waned and Western governments, which were initially hopeful about nurturing genuine democracy in Africa, have become only cautiously optimistic.

To be sure, the twin processes of structural adjustment and democratisation, along with their attendant conditionalities circumscribed the foreign policies of SSA states as their regimes came under close international supervision, scrutiny and surveillance. Indeed, as Bank/Fund officials, election monitors, representatives of NGOs and human rights investigators made ceaseless trips to individual SSA countries to check on the proper utilisation of aid, the preoccupation of policy makers was to demonstrate their countries' simultaneous commitment to market and democratic reforms. It was clear though that in most countries typified by Nigeria such commitments particularly towards the latter project were dubious, if not totally feigned.

Structural adjustment and its vast panoply of conditionalities also spawned further pernicious implications for regionalism in SSA. Among other things, it reinforced linkages between SSA countries and Western countries and institutions at the cost of intra-African ties. Some observers contend that such adjustment-inspired extra-African orientations are certain to make effective regional cooperation among African states a permanent nirvana, never a reality (Shaw 1989: 112). Moreover, SAPs emphasis on export agriculture in a region whose countries are predominantly agrarian, producing similar primary commodities, creates strong disincentives for regional integration. Not only does the production of similar commodities among a group of countries undermine the possibilities for specialisation, but it also limits opportunities for exchanges. In brief, with adjustment and democratisation, SSA foreign policies became severely constrained.

In the main, foreign policy was aimed at improving the credit-worthiness of countries through policies of strict adherence to international conditionalities.

2.4 MARGINALISATION

As SSA grappled with the adjustment-imposed constraints on foreign policies, the attenuation of the Cold War brought new challenges. The collapse of the Soviet bloc terminated the ability of SSA states to play one superpower against the other, as their strategic importance became superfluous. Even so, SSAs gains from the Cold War should not be overstated. With the exception of Zaire, Malawi, Liberia and Somalia whose regimes, in addition to economic aid, enjoyed western protection against popular accountability; and those in Angola, Ethiopia and Mozambique which also received large amounts of Soviet military aid, the majority of SSAs 48 countries hardly gained from bipolar politics beyond the leverage to freely switch between patrons (Copson 1994: 117).

The end of the Cold War neither reversed this situation nor brought new gains. On the contrary, SSA, including former Cold War beneficiaries, became competitors with the liberated economies of Eastern Europe for dwindling Western concessional credit. With political turmoil accentuating SSAs economic uncertainties, Eastern Europe enjoyed unquestioned preference as the pattern of the flow of Western aid and investments shows. In 1992, for example, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) pledged an estimated $45 billion to Eastern Europe for its 24 members. That year the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) total pledge to the entire African continent was $34 billion. Similarly, although global flows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) rose by 40 percent between 1994 and 1995, reaching $315 billion, those for SSA fell from $5 billion to $4.7 billion, or just 1.5 percent of the 1995 world total (Kraus 1994: 256; **Africa Recovery** 1996: 23). For much of SSA, then, neither the Cold War nor its abatement brought gains for foreign policy making. It is clear that the proverbial grass which only suffers when two elephants fight is safer, perhaps luckier, than Africa which continues to suffer (even more intensely) when the fighting elephants now make love. Worse yet, while its foreign policies remained circumscribed by debt, structural adjustment and marginalisation, armed conflicts and insecurity have further limited the contents and scope of SSA foreign policies - an issue to which we now turn.

2.5 ARMED CONFLICTS AND FOREIGN POLICIES

Armed conflicts and wars are not new in SSA. However, the increase in their scope, intensity and frequency has been phenomenal since 1980 (Copson 1994; Brown 1995: 101). In addition to generating insecurity, conflicts induce refugees and

migration (Akokpari 1998). These, along with the attendant economic and environmental implications, compel beleaguered states as well as adjunct and regional governments to respond through the reordering of their foreign policies. In general, such foreign policy responses aim at mitigating the effects of the conflicts on their countries. In some cases such policy responses are intended to make diplomatic gains through the extension of the state's influence in the region.

That conflicts influence the foreign polices of SSA is hardly disputable. At the height of their civil wars, Angola, Burundi, the DRC, Liberia, Rwanda, and Uganda, to name just a few, hardly followed any coherent foreign policies beyond measures designed to suppress internal insurgency or salvage the collapsing state. In pursuing these goals, the foreign policies of conflict-torn states have focussed on either one or both of two concerns. First, they aim at increasing the defence budget to enhance the state's ability to contain internal security threats or repel invading rebels. For example, by 1988 the regime of Mengistu had increased Ethiopia's defence expenditure to half the national budget, about $1 billion annually, in response to the Tigre and Eritrean rebellions, and the Ogaden war. Much of this budget went into meeting the cost of imported Russian-made military hardware, the maintenance of Cuban troops, and the remuneration of Soviet military experts. The war budgets of Sudan, Western Sahara, and Namibia were similarly estimated at $1 million a day, while that of Sierra Leone accounted for 75 percent of total government expenditure by early 1995 (Copson 1994: 15; Reno 1997: 227-230).

Second, the foreign policies of beleaguered regimes seek to solicit external military assistance. In the wake of the advance of Charles Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), for example, Samuel Doe, on 7 May 1990, appealed to Nigeria to intervene after an earlier request to the United States was rejected (Ofuatey-Kudjo 1994: 272). Similarly, President Ahmed Kabbah of Sierra Leone extended an invitation to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to restore him to power after being deposed by the country's military on 25 May 1997 (**Pan African News Agency**, May 29th 1997). In the same way, the regime of Laurent Kabila in the DRC is currently sparring no diplomatic efforts to elicit support from a host of African and non-African governments in its fight against the country's mainly Tutsi rebels who have coalesced into the Congolese Rally for Democracy (CRD) (**The Sunday Times**, August 9th 1998: 4).

Unilateral intervention in which sympathetic regimes attempt to rescue the besieged government is most often covert. However, some beleaguered regimes have openly hired corporate mercenary armies to bolster their defences. Both the Angolan and Sierra Leonean governments have at various times engaged the services of the South African-based Executive Outcomes (EO) to repel the incursions of UNITA and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) respectively. Also, in December 1996, the ailing regime of Mobutu Sese Seko hired 400 extra-African mercenaries, including Belgians, Croats, Russians and Serbs to augment its forces as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) closed in on Kinshasa (Rubin 1997: 44-55; **Africa Today** March/April 1997: 22). In general, the foreign policies of states threatened by conflicts or collapse tend to

focus on ways of ensuring regime survival as well as the maintenance of internal order.

However, where the conflict is one in which the state is not a direct combatant but one mainly between contending factions, such as the violent conflict between ethnic Gonjas and Konkombas of northern Ghana in 1995, the objective of foreign policy will often, though not always, include securing external humanitarian assistance for war-ravaged communities and for displaced persons. Often, where the scale of the conflict and the number of casualties threaten to raise security concerns for investors and the international creditor community, the state-controlled media may either underreport destruction or may simply not carry any news about it.

Just as war-torn states reorder their foreign policies, neighbouring countries also respond to political turbulence across their borders. Such responses include direct and covert intervention and may be driven by various motives, including the desire to protect their economic and strategic interests. Thus, as Lemarchand (1988: 109-110) argues, Libya's support for Chadian dissidents in the 1980s was motivated not only by Qadhafi's suspicion that Chad backs Libyan insurgents, but also because of his belief that Aouzou strip, the main bone of contention among the country's protagonists, had large deposits of uranium, phosphate and manganese from which he could benefit. Intervention may also aim at either toppling or entrenching the incumbent regime. Rwandan support for the ADFL in the 1996-7 Zairian conflict was aimed principally at overthrowing the regime of Mobutu in retaliation of Kinshasa's support for Rwandan rebels, while the involvement of UNITA forces in the same conflict was orchestrated at strengthening the regime's capacity to counter the AFDL. Angola and Uganda are now openly involved in the current conflict in the DRC for strategic reasons - to create buffer zones in which to contain Hutu extremists (Trench et al. 1998: 1).

Prior to 1990, ideological considerations influenced some policy responses to conflicts. Somalia's covert support for Ethiopian separatists was dictated by the logic of the Cold War. The same could be said of Zaire's support for UNITA. Other times, neighbouring states intervene non-militarily as, for example, Kenya's current mediatory efforts between Sudan and Uganda whose relations have suffered sharp deterioration in recent years because of support for each others' dissidents, and the attempts by Zimbabwe to resolve the dispute between the government of the DRC and its rebels. In doing this, both Kenya and Zimbabwe enhance their own diplomatic images in the region. Yet still, foreign policy responses from some neighbouring states may be purely defensive and non-interventive, aimed primarily at averting the spilling over of the conflict or its effect. Thus, fearing the overflow of refugees and the possibility that the war might extend into the country, Sierra Leone closed its border with Liberia at some point in 1990 (Sorenson 1994: 179). Also, in December 1996, Tanzania ejected thousands of Rwandan Hutus taking refuge within its borders mainly for economic and security reasons.

Since the effects of conflicts are felt beyond their epicentres, governments in the region also formulate appropriate foreign policy responses. These responses depend

on their perception of the consequences of the conflict. Essentially, such policies aim at ending the conflict, but the method may involve mediation or the clandestine aiding of one faction. Generally, unilateral military intervention may prove costly for states that do not immediately border on the conflict-ridden country except when undertaken in concert with other countries or under the auspices of regional organisations. Nigeria's current military intervention in Sierra Leone under the aegis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Botswana/South African intervention in the 1998 Lesotho conflict under the banner of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are illustrative examples of this point. Non-neighbouring states, however, tend to support one faction for economic, security or ideological reasons. South Africa's involvement in the Angolan civil war from 1978 in support of UNITA was both for ideological and economic reasons - to outgun the Soviet and Cuban-backed MPLA and thereby contain communism in the region.

Other times, regional states intervene diplomatically to achieve specific foreign policy goals. South Africa's mediation in the 1996-7 and the on-going Zairian conflicts illustrate this point. Since the inception of the new political dispensation, South Africa has emerged as an undisputable regional hegemony and a custodian of democracy and human rights. Its foreign policies have aimed at exporting these ideals. However, in a few instances, South Africa suffered setbacks in its campaign to promote human rights beyond its borders. For instance, not only did it fail to dissuade Nigeria's former strongman, Sani Abacha, from executing Ken Saro Wiwa and other environmental activists in November 1995, but it also failed to garner African support to impose punitive sanctions on Nigeria after Abacha defied international pleas for clemency and carried out the executions.

Moreover, although South Africa's president, Nelson Mandela, succeeded in getting Central and East African countries to impose a trade embargo on Burundi following the Pierre Buyoya-led 25 July 1996 coup, that new military regime has survived much to the displeasure of South Africa. Again, in October 1996, besides failing to dissuade Frederick Chiluba from barring ex-president Kenneth Kaunda from contesting the 18 November presidential election, Mandela was accused by Zambia of unduly interfering in its internal affairs. Occasional foreign policy failures are normal in international relations. However, for a leader with considerable international stature like Nelson Mandela, a leader perceived as a symbol of freedom and democracy, this chain of foreign policy fiascos represented major setbacks. Against this background of debacles, the South African president was ultimately persuaded that engineering the resolution of the 1996-7 conflict in Zaire would bolster his image, overshadow past failures and generally reassert Pretoria's dominance in Africa. Although the 1996-7 Zairian conflict eventually ended on a military note, only few would dispute the role of South Africa's shuttle diplomacy. For similar reasons, using SADC as a springboard, South Africa plays a pivotal role in the efforts to resolve the Lesotho crisis and the post-Mobutu conflict in the DRC.

Like adjunct and surrounding states, regional organisations are also compelled to reorder their foreign policies to accommodate the shocks generated by conflicts. Since 1990, meetings of the ECOWAS Heads of States, for instance, have been overshadowed by discussions on how to contain conflicts in the sub-region. Few will disagree with the contention that conflict management has displaced and replaced economic integration in priority as ECOWAS seeks lasting solutions to the seemingly intractable conflicts in Liberia and now Sierra Leone. Preoccupied with these conflicts, moreover, military intervention, peacemaking and peacekeeping have become key components of the community's foreign policies. These new policy orientations reflect changing trends at both the global and regional levels. The UN is currently caught in a financial quandary and is unwilling to take on any new peacekeeping roles in Africa. Also, because Cold War tensions have eased, undercutting the strategic salience of SSA, Washington has no inclination to sanction a US- or UN-led intervention in the region. Worse yet, since the ill-fated, Nigerian-dominated Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) military intervention in Chad in 1982, the organisation has shown a weakening capacity to militarily intervene in conflicts beyond mediation. The weakness of the OAU was amply demonstrated when full-scale wars raged between Ethiopia and Eritrea; and between rebels and the government of Guinea Bissau at the same time that the organisation was meeting in Burkina Faso in June 1998. It was the perceived incapacity of the OAU to resolve armed conflicts that compelled ECOWAS to compose the Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 to contain the Liberian conflict. After many setbacks, ECOWAS succeeded in overseeing general elections in Liberia in July 1997.

Although a myriad of factors incapacitate the OAU from militarily intervening in Africa's conflicts, its policies nevertheless reflect a desire to do so diplomatically. Like ECOWAS, the recent agenda of the OAU has been dominated by conflicts. The last two OAU Summits in Harare and Burkina Faso in June 1997 and 1998 respectively were dominated by the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Somalia, the DRC as well as the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Machipisa 1997). As the military is slowly but surely returning into politics casting doubt on the sustainability of Africa's democratic revolution, and as threats of violence, genocide and insecurity loom across many SSA countries, the OAU may be compelled to dissipate a significant proportion of its meagre resources on conflict resolution. Already, hitherto topical issues such as structural adjustment, debt, environmental conservation, democracy and gender parity have relapsed to the margins of policy as the containment and prevention of conflicts as well as coup reversals assume prominence on the OAU's agenda.

The OAU is not the only continental organisation compelled by conflicts to recast its foreign policies in recent years; the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), a policy and research-oriented institution, is now involved in discussions about conflict prevention. Acutely aware that development is impossible in an environment charged with turmoil and instability, the ECA shifted from a position of apparent non-involvement to active involvement in the search for solutions to

Africa's conflicts. This shift in position was reflected in the fact that during the 1997 OAU Summit in Harare, the ECA Executive Secretary, Mr. K.Y. Amoako, made passionate appeals to African leaders to spare the already debt-ridden continent of wars (Machipisa 1997). The ECAs involvement in the search for peace was a strong indication that discussions on peacemaking were no longer the preserve of the OAU. In short, regional organisations have not been left out in the reordering of policies occasioned by the ubiquity of armed conflicts. Like neighbours to a warring state, the foreign policies of regional multilateral organisations have of necessity been conditioned by conflicts and wars.

3. CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the orientations of SSA foreign policies have undergone dramatic and fundamental shifts. Since the independence decade of the 1960s, the foreign policies of the region has shifted from one concern to another in accordance with changes at the international and domestic levels. These shifts have affected not only conflict-stricken and regional states, but also Africa's multilateral organisations. Such orientational shifts also suggest that assumptions about SSA foreign policies constantly require revision if they are to remain valid. While decolonisation, African Unity and non-alignment dominated foreign policies in the immediate post-independence years, this is not the case in the post-Cold War period in which SSA battles with a hostile global economy, and the constant menace of conflicts.

Clearly, regional stability has become the dominant preoccupation of foreign policy as states and regional organisations engage in frantic searches to prevent, contain or terminate conflicts. It is uncertain how long conflicts will remain at the top of the SSA largely pliable foreign policy agenda, nor is it clear what new orientation will be spawned by the tide of change. It is certain, however, that while the recipe for conflicts - debt, structural adjustment, poverty, scarcity and undemocratic regimes - exist, internal dissent, rebellion and conflicts will in the meantime remain SSA's worst nightmare, and the principal preoccupations of its foreign policies.

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