INTO AFRICA ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW: AFRICOM AND A HISTORY OF TELLING AFRICANS WHAT THEIR PROBLEMS ARE

David Chuter

It is a truism that the identification and analysis of the major security problems of the world are for the most part in the hands of western interests. This dominance is not complete, and not unchallenged, and is starting to fray at the edges as new forces like China seek, to shape the global agenda in their own interests. But it remains true that the most discussed global security issues tend to be those which are important to western governments, and which are analysed by western think-tanks and western media. These issues may, or may not, be truly the most important, and the solutions proposed may or may not be appropriate: likewise local elites may genuinely share the western analysis or they may not. But in any event, there is usually only one game, with a dominant discourse, and those who wish to be players have to accept it.

There is nothing particularly sinister or unusual about this state of affairs. It has been normal for much of history; one thinks of the power of the discourse of the medieval Church in Europe, for example. But this domination has not seriously been challenged since the end of the Cold War, and it has been especially strong, and effectively unchallenged, in Africa.

We take it for granted that most books on Africa are written by non-Africans, and that, for example, the vast majority of the sources on the 1990-1994 Rwandan crisis available to a researcher in Mali or Malawi will be written by whites, and often non-experts at that. Whilst African intellectual capital is abundant, much of it has to go abroad if it is to make a living, and learn to express itself in a former colonial language if it is to have influence. Books by scholars of African origin are almost always published in the West, or by African institutions themselves funded by western donors. There are more researchers on African problems outside Africa than there are in the continent, just as there are probably more government officials working on African issues in the external world, than there are African diplomats. It is only when we try to imagine, say, an international conference on the current American economic crisis held in Dar-es-Salaam and where the working language is Swahili, that we realise how strange this situation is.

The same is true at a more practical level. Western leaders attempt to solve African crises, rather than the reverse. It is regarded as normal that western states form contact groups, and take the lead in finding solutions to problems in Africa. When Africans try to do this among themselves, as recently in the Ivory Coast, the West feels hurt and excluded.

There is nothing new about this dominant/submissive relationship between the West and Africa, either in its substance or in the way it is reflected in academic and popular discourse. The perception of African

security issues, and the discussion of ways of dealing with them, have been so firmly in the hands of the outside world for so long that it is legitimate to describe the situation as one of hegemony, in the intellectual sense of the term.

As defined by the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, hegemony refers to the ability of one group to impose a discourse (a way of thinking and speaking about the world) on other groups. Critically, this involves not only the use of coercion, but, more importantly, the spontaneous consent of other groups that this discourse is correct.[1] An example from history would be the loyalty of many ordinary Europeans to a monarchy, even when a move to democracy would have benefited them. Gramsci was writing in a domestic political context, but of course the same idea can be usefully applied at the international level.

Western intellectual hegemony has a long history in Africa, and it began in the nineteenth century with the concept of a "continent without history". The lack of written records encouraged the idea that there was no civilisation in Africa, and never had been, and that, as a result, African experience itself was irrelevant. Thus, "nothing useful could develop without denying Africa's past … and a slavish acceptance of models drawn from entirely different histories."[2] This was believed not simply by colonialists, but by Africans themselves. From the pioneers of African nationalism in the nineteenth century to the founding fathers of African independence, African intellectuals and leaders believed that they must reject the past entirely, and follow models imported from the West, if they were to become truly modern and part of the international community. There having been no states in Africa in the past, it was assumed, they had to be built through imitation of European models[3]

African leaders were not alone in wanting to borrow from the West, of course, and they frequently looked at Asian states, especially Japan, for inspiration. Yet Japanese modernisation (like that of Korea, Singapore and others later) was not based on a rejection of the past, but rather its use as a firm base from which to select only those foreign ideas which seemed interesting and useful. Moreover, Japan was not colonised, and was free to choose between different sources of advice – the British to train the Navy, the Germans to train the Army etc. This was a model subsequently followed by other Asian nations. African nations not only lacked the well-organised and effective states that had developed organically in Asia, but tended to be overwhelmed after independence by the influence of the former colonial power.[4]

---

[1] These terms come from Gramsci's essay "The Intellectuals", reprinted in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Noel Smith (eds) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, International Publishers, New York, 1972.

[2] Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation State*, Oxford, James Currey, 1992, p.42.

[3] See JF Ade Ajayi, "The Continuity of African Institutions Under Colonial Rule" in *Tradition and Change in Africa; The Essays of JF Ade Ajayi*, ed Toyin Falola, Trenton, New Jersey, Africa World Press, 2000.

[4] For the different experiences of African and Asian states see Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: Rich Nations, Poor Policies and the Threat to the Developing World* , New York, Random House 2007.

The natural result of all this was a lack of African self-confidence in defining African problems and solutions, and the growth of a deracinated African elite, educated abroad, speaking a colonial language, and with a pre-emptive cultural cringe towards foreign experts, whether they were missionaries or Marxist-Leninist political commissars. Nowhere was this more obvious that in the definition of Africa's security problems, and AFRICOM, with its stated objectives of bolstering security, preventing and responding to humanitarian crises, encouraging African unity and preventing conflict, fits very much into this historical paradigm.

During the colonial era, the problem of African security could be defined simply as the preservation of colonial rule. Security forces were largely recruited from indigenous peoples, and were geared to maintaining internal order rather than protecting borders. They would have been much too small for the latter task, and anyway, apart from a few skirmishes in the margins of the First and Second World Wars the imperial powers did not fight over their African territories: it simply wasn't worth it. Meanwhile, the first stirrings of nationalism in the 1930s attracted the interest of the colonial police authorities who assumed that the nationalists were Communist agitators, or manipulated by them.[5] Africans were not consulted about such issues.

There was a distinction, certainly, between the majority of colonies, where independence arrived quickly, and those with large settler populations, like Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola and of course South Africa, where the colonial or settler governments resisted independence violently. The African security problem in the 1960s was defined as preventing the takeover of white settler colonies by Moscow-financed terrorist groups. African leaders like Patrice Lumumba (the Osama Bin Laden of the 1960s) were regarded with horror and terror by western political leaders, fearful that Africa would collapse into bloody chaos if they were to take power. Lumumba's murder in 1961 was greeted with relief by right-thinking people everywhere.[6]

By the 1970s, the African security problem was seen as countering the policies of the Soviet Union, and to an extent China, by financing more or less anyone (UNITA, RENAMO) opposed to a government which enjoyed Soviet or Chinese backing, and supporting moderate African political leaders in states which were still settler-run. In Rhodesia, this meant backing the deservedly forgotten Abel Muzorewa and Ndabanige Sithole (both, conveniently, churchmen) who favoured accommodation with the white regime, over Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, collectively the Osama Bin Laden of the 1970s. Africans were generally not consulted, but where they were, as in the 1972 Pearce Commission on the future of Rhodesia, they turned out to have very different views from those of the West.[7] The "trans-national terrorism" element of AFRICOM's mandate is essentially a continuation of this policy of

---

[5] See Davidson, *Black Man's Burden*, p.170 for one example.

[6] Ludo de Witte, *L'Assassinat de Lumumba*, Paris, Karthala, 2000, is based on contemporary Belgian and other records.

[7] *Rhodesia: Report of the Commission on Rhodesian Opinion under the chairmanship of the right honourable Lord Pearce,* London, HMSO, 1972.

countering attempts by non-western actors to become influential in Africa.

By the 1980s, the security problem in Africa was seen as the sustainment of the white regime in South Africa, as the West's one reliable anti-communist ally, but without being too obvious about it. African leaders like Hastings Banda of Malawi who advocated accommodation with the apartheid regime were praised for their realism. Those like Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia who supported the African National Congress (its headquarters was in Lusaka) were criticised for supporting terrorism. Africans were not consulted unless, like Chief Mangosutu Buthelezi, they were prepared to ally themselves with the apartheid regime. Above all, the West was concerned that any transition of power to the black majority should be to leaders like Buthelezi, rather than the terrorist Nelson Mandela, the Osama Bin Laden of the 1980s.

By the time of the unexpected end of the Cold War, the tradition of foreign definition of Africa's security needs was well established. Subsequently, the weakness of many African economies has meant that this domination has been extended to actual influence, and even control, over the security sector itself. The debts which the West had persuaded African countries to take on to finance export-oriented growth became impossible to repay when that same export growth led to a huge surplus of raw materials and a corresponding fall in prices and export earnings. Africa economies were thus delivered largely into the hands of western economic institutions, and their governments and security sectors soon followed. As a result, the security sectors of many African countries have been extensively remodelled in recent years, often by different actors at the same time, and not infrequently in ways that are inconsistent with each other. But this is, in fact, merely a continuation of former colonial practice.

The colonial effort was always confused and divided, and never limited to the formal European authorities. Especially in colonies where "indirect rule' was practised, these authorities did not intervene very much in the lives of the ordinary people. Few colonies were rich (Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company never paid a dividend in all its decades of operation) and there was little appetite in colonial capitals for expensive health and education schemes. Their priorities were internal peace and economic benefits to the homeland. Finance ministries were always complaining about the costs involved, and infrastructure projects were largely limited to constructing ports and railways to assist exports. Some colonies indeed (like Rhodesia) were private businesses with their own mercenary armies: the Congo was initially a personal economic possession of King Leopold of the Belgians. A surprising amount of African colonisation came about when governments – often reluctantly – took over territories originally acquired by private businessmen looking for a quick profit.

Much of the white man's burden, in Africa at least, was therefore taken up by voluntary societies, especially missionary organisations like the large and influential London Missionary Society, founded in 1795. Whilst practice varied among denominations, missionaries naturally tended to be active and evangelical, as well as highly dedicated. In the British tradition, they applied

the logic of their domestic missions – saving souls and reforming morals – to the African population. They aimed at nothing less than the complete transformation of African society and the production, through the schools they ran, of young Christian gentlemen (and later women) essentially like themselves. (Joseph Conrad's International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs in *The Heart of Darkness* was not entirely a joke). Their ambitious objectives and high moral tone have been inherited by many of the NGOs who work in Africa today.

Africa remains the only continent still receiving large amounts of development aid (more than half of all IMF loans go to African states), and the only one where the West still has a real ability to influence internal political and economic developments. Unsurprisingly, therefore, nations, international organisations and NGOs compete with each other to define Africa's problems as ones that they have the answer to, and this is nowhere more obvious than in the security sector.

As a result, there is no single western discourse about African security, but rather a complex set of competing ones, with a rather different mix in different countries, and sometimes overlapping and conflicting efforts even in the same country. It is thus arguments among westerners, rather than debates among Africans, which determine what Africa's security priorities are seen to be. One can follow, for example, the evolution in the thinking of the development community from the 1960s to the present day, from hostility to wary acceptance of the security sector, and from indifference to deep involvement in its transformation.[8] There are signs that International Financial Organisations may be moving gently in the same direction; again, the interlocutors remain the same but the message changes subtly over the years. Even within governments, the balance of power between ministries can shift over time; the UK's Department for International Development, created in 1997, rapidly became an actor in a field hitherto dominated by others. Elsewhere, development ministries have become involved in the African security sector to an unprecedented degree, and in some countries – Germany for example – they are the most powerful actors in making security policy towards Africa. But development ministries, for all their expertise elsewhere, do not have automatic credibility with professionals from the security sector. Some of them resort to arms-length financing to secure influence indirectly, others to seeking to expand the definition of the security sector to include elements – like parliaments – where they believe that their involvement will have more credibility. It is no surprise that Africans are often confused by the variable geometry in which the West appears.

The same is true of NGOs. Like missionaries of different sects a century ago, they are in competition with each other in the market of ideas, and have to attract funding by offering to work in areas which are attractive to donors, even if they are not necessarily the most important areas as seen by Africans. Moreover, almost all NGOs in Africa are ultimately funded by governments in

---

[8] See for example Michael Brozoska, *Development Donors and the Concept of Security Sector Reform*, Occasional Paper No 4, Geneva, Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2003.

some form, and they are often resented by locals as mechanisms for indirect western influence. It is also true that, when NGOs employ local talent, they frequently hire good people from government and the security forces, because they pay better and more reliable salaries.

For more than a century, therefore, Africa's problems have largely been identified and analysed by different groups of foreigners, who have then set out to solve them, often in competition with each other. Whether this analysis and these solutions have been correct or not is not really the issue. The missionaries have won, and it is simply impossible to know whether, despite their best endeavours, Africans are actually articulating their own security needs, or unconsciously rehearsing what they have learned from us. All of this makes the current –laudable- desire for African "ownership" of security issues rather problematic.

Often unconsciously, the West has been able to impose a series of understandings about security issues on Africa, and, often unconsciously, Africans have accepted this imposition. At the highest level, the West's international security agenda of non-proliferation and "terrorism" has generally been accepted by Africans as applying to their own continent as well.[9] More importantly, Africans have largely come to accept the West's characterisation of their own problems – corruption, poor leadership, ethnic rivalries, war, atrocity, even child soldiers – as well as the West's proposed solutions, even as the latter have changed over time. Now some of these are real problems, even though there is little comparative evidence that corruption has any real influence one way or the other on economic growth.[10] But even if Africa could somehow benefit from the stellar level of political leadership we take for granted in the West, it is not clear that all its problems would thereby be solved. The *real* problems in Africa are those of hunger and malnutrition, poverty, infant mortality, and avoidable deaths from communicable diseases and polluted drinking water, as well as an undeveloped infrastructure, and states which were hustled into the world without the necessary economic underpinning. The common factors among these problems are that they are rarely photogenic, often structural and difficult to resolve, and take time before results are visible. It is not necessary to accuse the West of hypocrisy or callousness in preferring to address, say, child soldiers rather than infant mortality; politicians, like NGOs or the media, have to mobilise public opinion and money, and some causes are easier than others. But it does mean that Africa's problems tend to be defined as those which the West thinks it understands and can do something about.

Obviously, these two sets of problems are not wholly distinct from each other. In particular, there is a recognised link between security and development – the one is essential for the other, although it does not guarantee it. But the human security problems listed above are not necessarily

---

[9]   Although African governments have often been reluctant to join the "war on terror" in any tangible form. African officials say privately – and sometimes publicly – that they have no desire for their countries to get mixed up in violent conflicts between the United States and those who oppose its Middle East policies.

[10]   The disgust of many ordinary Africans with the corruption of their political elites is, of course, understandable and entirely justified, but is rather a different issue.

the result of wars, nor does peace necessarily make them better. Indeed war, or even "armed conflict," is not really the fundamental problem in Africa. Studies suggest that for ordinary people it is the insecurity of daily life, the exposure to petty crime and violence without a capable state to protect them, which is more the problem. [11] Even during African wars, most casualties are not directly from violence but from second and third order effects. Estimation of deaths in African conflicts is always problematic, and most figures quoted are simply wild guesses. But even if we accept that the orders of magnitude of deaths in recent conflicts are roughly correct (several million in the Congo, several hundred thousand in Darfur) nine out of ten of such deaths are likely to be from hunger and disease rather than violence, and this kind of suffering does not necessarily stop when the fighting does.

One way in which the West has traditionally tried to understand Africa is through the relentless ethnicisation of its problems and conflicts. Europeans arriving in Africa, armed with the racialist ideology of the time, expected to find tribes (as they were then called) and tribes they duly found. So the assumption that the political conflict in Rwanda (and neighbouring Burundi) was essentially one of racial struggle and hatred led to an ethnic interpretation of the 1990-94 crisis, and its accompanying discourse of "genocide," which Africans themselves had to accept if they wanted to be taken seriously. Ironically, "such is the instrumentalisation of conflict today that the actors involved spontaneously give an ethnic explanation for it". [12] Once more, the missionaries have won. In turn, this interpretation leads to western-sponsored "reconciliation" processes among ethnic groups, or alternatively trials of alleged "ethnic entrepreneurs," or sometimes both at the same time. The West is therefore puzzled to find that apparent bitter ethnic enemies are capable of cooperating and negotiating with each other for their mutual political benefit, as in the Ivory Coast.

The situation is very similar with attempts to rebuild states after a conflict. Planning and execution of post-conflict reconstruction is largely in the hands of western organisations, to the point that if the African Union, for example did prepare a plan for rebuilding a country, "international aid agencies would probably ignore it." But it remains true that even if Africans want "ownership of reconstruction processes ... few, if any, African governments are doing anything to challenge the factors that perpetuate the " 'donor domination of the development agenda'."[13]

Armed with these understandings, then, the contemporary western

---

[11] See for example the pioneering World Bank study Voices *of the Poor*, available at <u>web.worldbank.org.</u>

[12] Michael Neuman and Jean-François Trani, "Le Tribalisme explique tous les conflits" in Georges Courade (ed) *L'Afrique des idées reçues*, Paris, Belin, 2006, p. 144. Neuman and Trani quote an astonishing article from *Le Monde*, dated as late as 1990, talking of "Nilotic" Tutsi and "Bantu" Hutu. Perhaps it is the exalted racial status of the Tutsi during the colonial period that accounts for the extreme – almost hysterical – western reaction to the 1994 Rwanda crisis. The Tutsi were seen, then and subsequently, as not really Africans, at all, and basically whites. The slaughter in 1994 is therefore an acting out of the white settler nightmares of the colonial period where the brutish Africans (here represented by the Hutu) would rise up and slaughter their colonial masters

[13] Richard Gueli, "South Africa: A Future Research Agenda for Post-Conflict Reconstruction" in *African Security Review¸Vol 17 No 1, March 2008,* p.89.

response to Africa's security problems, as it perceives them, has been to suggest, once more, that African states become more like the West. The African response has generally been to agree. A series of initiatives has aimed at reinforcing African military capabilities through western-sponsored training programmes. The British Military Advisory and Training Teams (BMATT), the French RECAMP[14] programme and the US African Crisis Response Initiative have all been intended, in the words of the official description of the ACRI concept to "enhance the capacity of African nations to better perform peacekeeping and relief tasks and thus encourage regional self-reliance."[15] AFRICOM is essentially the latest bilateral initiative. The culmination of these ideas is the planned African Standby Force intended to be operational in 2010. AFRICOM is intended to support the ASF, as now is the French RECAMP initiative (since taken over by the EU). Bilaterally, the French have also reconfigured the command of their stationed forces in Africa to match the ASF regions.

The ASF, established under Article 13 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, agreed at the 2002 Durban summit, is intended to carry out "a multiplicity of peace support operations" including "preventative deployment, peacekeeping, peace building, post conflict disarmament, demobilisation and humanitarian assistance."[16] It is intended to consist of five regional brigades, each of some 4,300 personnel, including four infantry battalions, with signals, engineer and logistic support. Reasonable progress is being made towards this capability, though with considerable variations between the regions.

It is always useful in a situation of this kind to reverse-engineer the proposed solution, and to ask what the problem must be for the proposed solution to be appropriate: if the ASF is the answer, in other words, what must the African security problem be? Continuing in the line of the western initiatives of the 1990s, the ASF implicitly defines the problem primarily as the incapacity of Africans to perform the kind of peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction tasks which were carried out by the UN in countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia. This incapacity is not really disputed; what is less clear is that it is the main factor in Africa's security problem.

Depending on the scenario, a brigade should generally be capable of deployment within 30 days, with a lower figure – 14 days - for intervention operations. To keep a multinational force available at that degree of notice means that its components cannot do much else, nor can they be kept at that level of preparedness for ever. When a brigade is deployed, there is also a limit to how long it can be expected to remain before being relieved. At the moment, it is assumed that an ASF brigade would be relieved by a UN force – and that may not always be a safe assumption.

---

[14] *Renforcement des capacités africaines maintien de la paix.* See http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/afrique_1063/renforcement-capacites-africaines-maintien-paix-recamp_335/programme-du-recamp_8886.html

[15] At http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/af/acri/

[16] Jakkie Cilliers, *The African Standby Force: An Update on Progress*, ISS paper 160, March 2008, p.1.

The purpose of this argument is not to criticise the ASF, or any of the schemes which preceded it. It is rather to point out that the ASF only makes sense under certain defined circumstances, and if certain analyses of Africa's problems are broadly correct. The ASF is fundamentally a western-style concept, and it is thus not surprising that, in several regions, "officers seconded from donor countries" are "rapidly outnumbering their African counterparts". Moreover, these advisors have access to funds and influence beyond anything the locals can muster, and so "it is not uncommon to find middle ranking expatriate officers from European countries effectively in control of ASF preparations, and exerting considerable influence on the concepts, standards and decisions taken at every level."[17] A cynic might wonder whether, a century after they were first raised, the King's African Rifles are not staging a return.

It is also assumed that the ASF could be deployed as an intervention force to "to pre-empt or bring to halt a genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes"[18] This is not only another reflection of the western obsession with ethnicising African conflict, but also an instance of the recurrent western fantasy that a well-timed cavalry charge can bring the ungodly to justice and resolve a political crisis. The idea that African conflicts are *not* the result of deep-seated and complex issues, but rather manufactured by ethnic entrepreneurs who can be picked up in a special forces raid, is fundamental to this kind of thinking, and of course it is false; There are cases where individual political ambitions have kept conflict going in Africa – Jonas Savimbi and Charles Taylor come to mind. But these were unusual circumstances, and, in any event, both leaders were able to appeal to legitimate grievances and did draw genuine support from parts of the population. A more typical case would be Sierra Leone, where the Revolutionary United Front, for all its lurid reputation, was more than just a bunch of thuggish limb-choppers, and more than just a vehicle for the personal ambitions of Foday Sankoh. It reflected and benefited from very real anger and disgust at the corruption, incompetence and cynicism of successive governments since independence. The British intervention in 2001 – the model which stands silently behind much of this literature – dealt the final blow to the rebels militarily, but by definition could not address the wider problems of the country.[19] There is little sign that they are being adequately addressed even today, and so it is not clear whether the current peace will endure.

It also reflects the traditional western obsession, which has varied only in detail since the nineteenth century, with turning complex African problems into brightly-coloured moral lessons, like those in missionary school-books, with clearly distinguished Good Guys and Bad Guys. It's not clear that this reductionism actually has ever helped the resolution of African security problems in the past, or will in the future.

---

[17] *Ibid*, p.18
[18]   Policy Framework for the establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee. Assembly of the African Union, Third Ordinary Session, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6-8 July, p.17.
[19] On the background to the fighting see Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest ; War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford, james Currey, 1996.

Sierra Leone was not an ethnic war, and violence was used as a tool to terrorise populations that could not be controlled otherwise. The same holds true for many other African conflicts. Nonetheless, western ethnicisation of African conflicts shows no signs of coming under control, and continues to influence thinking about African security issues. In particular, the shadow of Rwanda in 1994 falls heavily over all recent attempts to develop more capable African forces; so it is worth looking for a moment at what a hypothetical ASF brigade deployed in, say, early 1994 would actually have encountered. At that date, a brutal war between the invading Rwandan Patriotic Front/Army and the government *Forces Armées Rwandaises* had been in suspension for some months. An ASF brigade would have been deployed into a country where the two sides fielded perhaps ten times as many men, battle-hardened, better armed and probably better trained. Moreover, the mass killing of the French-speaking indigenous Tutsi was carried out less by the FAR – who were fighting and losing to the RPA - than by police and civil society groups, including thousands of women and children, using machetes and, in some cases, vehicles to kill their victims. Few of these groups had uniforms or were distinguishable from their Tutsi neighbours. It is hard to imagine what, in practical terms as ASF brigade might have accomplished. Securing a point of entry and separating the combatants – two missions which have been proposed as part of an intervention operation – would clearly have been difficult.

The ASF itself is part of a wider background – the progressive establishment, over the last few years of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).[20] Some progress is being made in putting this architecture together, and it is not my purpose here to evaluate it. Rather, it is interesting to put it into its historical context, and to ask, once more, what factors would have to be true if it is to be effective.

First, the concept itself is based on a European example. The idea of a Peace and Security Council, of a Common Defence and Security Policy, and of a mutual security guarantee, are all taken from the history of the development of the European Union. Logically, therefore, the security situation in Africa today must be sufficiently close that of Europe after 1945 for these experiences to be relevant and transferable. It is not clear that this is this case. In particular, Europe had a long history of wars between powerful nation states disputing territory which was economically developed and heavily populated. The European integration process was seen as the only escape from nationalist conflict, and was built on a common linguistic and cultural heritage. The security problems of Europe had historically been those of inter-state wars and the competition for dominance between Germany and France. None of this is to be found in the history of Africa.

---

[20] On the APSA see for example " *Stephan Kingebiel* "Africa's New Peace and Security Architecture: Converging the Roles of External Actors and African Interests" *African Security Review* Vol 14 No 5, 2005.

Second, is the assumption that a strong organisation can be created on the basis of weak states. The states which formed the European Union in 1992 were strong and wealthy, and capable of providing their citizens with security in their daily lives. Yet whilst it is true that an international organisation is more than the sum of its parts, it is also less. International organisations like the EU have more resources than individual states, and they may also have more political legitimacy in certain cases. But they also have difficulties of coordination and consensus, and the larger the organisations are, the bigger are these problems. The EU, for all its virtues, is necessarily often less effective overall than the average European state, because of the problems of reconciling the different views of 27 nations. It is not clear that Africa can escape this problem.

Third, the APSA also assumes a surplus (or at least no deficit) of capable and experienced diplomats, military officers and civilian specialists who can be seconded from national governments to work in the more complex and demanding environment of the AU and the Sub-regional organisations. The success of these bodies will mainly depend on the quality of their staff. As everyone who has worked in an international organisation knows, getting capable staff is never easy. Some governments play the game and send their best people, others are mainly interested in the political benefits of securing this or that post, still others send people they want to get rid of. It is unlikely that the APSA bodies can escape these problems entirely, and it begins from a situation where most African governments have too few trained and experienced people in the first place.

It may be, of course, that the European model will be smoothly transferable to Africa, and that the APSA will attract the good quality people it needs to make it work. One must hope so. And it would not be fair to treat the APSA simply as a carbon copy of its European original – the Panel of the Wise, for example, is an interesting idea that owes nothing to any European model. But it is faithfully in the long line of imported western schemes, based on the European nation-state concept, and is in many ways a logical development of the acceptance by Africans nations on independence of the nation-state model for their continent.

Nations-states need armies, and in the peaceful transitions, the departing colonial powers turned over their internal security forces as the nucleus of the armies of the new states. These forces were, of course, organised on the European model, and some of the European officers who had commanded them stayed on for several years after independence. The organisation and structure of these new armies only really made sense if one believed that the security problems of Africa after independence would be approximately those of Europe in the middle of the last century, and so needed to be dealt with similarly. This assumption was demonstrated in African constitutions (essentially written by Europeans), which defined the principal task of the new armies as the defence of the nation, according to the classical European model. This is what we find in Chapter XVII of the Constitution of Ghana, for example, and we would therefore expect to see the Ghanaian military frequently practising defensive tactics against a possible

foreign invader. In fact, of course, the main *actual* role of the Ghanaian Army (formed after independence from the Gold Coast Regiment of the Royal West African Frontier Force) has been UN Peacekeeping, at which it has performed very well.

Part of the assumption of the "continent without a history" was that there had been no proper wars and no organised armies before Europeans came. Like everything else, the military could be organised from scratch along European lines. We know better now, but we also know that traditions of warfare in Africa were very different from those in Europe. In particular, given the very low population density, capture of territory has always been pointless, not least because of the impossibility of garrisoning it. The objectives of traditional African warfare were "to take women, cattle and slaves;" The latter, in particular, "should be seen as part of the process by which African states grew: by capturing people rather than by gaining control over territory"[21]

States were therefore formed in Africa not through territorial conquest, but by assimilation and forcing other groups to pay tribute. As a result, African political history, before and after the colonial period, has almost nothing in common with general concepts of state formation (which tend to be based specifically on the European experience), or for that matter on standard International Relations theory.[22] In the post-colonial period, wars of territorial aggression have been very rare because there has been little point in fighting them. Tanzania invaded Uganda in 1979 to oust the Amin government, not to take over the country. Rwanda and Uganda invaded what was then Zaire in 1996 to install a puppet ruler in Kinshasa, and re-invaded several years later when that puppet refused to behave. Subsequently, the two nations looted the east of the country in traditional style, before falling out and fighting each other through surrogates, again in traditional style.

The historical style of African warfare produced very different military organisations from those in Africa today, even though the strategic fundamentals have not changed that much in the last few centuries. Although we must be careful not to over-generalise, it seems that pre-colonial Africa had little experience of professional armies. A rudimentary aristocratic officer class existed in some parts of the continent – as it did in Europe at the time – and some kingdoms used a form of conscription for war. But in many cases going to war was just part of life for young men, who might otherwise be herders or cultivators of crops. (The same was true in other parts of the world also). The military systems of Africa in those days developed naturally from the organisation of societies do therefore seem to have been well suited to the needs of the time.

If the above appears critical, it is no more than to say that there is an apparent mismatch between the reality of Africa's contemporary security problems on the one hand, and the assumptions that obviously lie behind

---

[21] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp; 21-1.
[22] See for example Assis Malaquias, "Reformulating International Relations Theory: African Insights and Challenges" in Kevin C. Dun and Timothy M. Shaw (eds.) *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, p.13.

recent initiatives by the West to address them, on the other. This is not deliberate – it is not that either side positively wishes to address the wrong problems. But both westerners and Africans are to some extent prisoners of history, and of historical patterns of intellectual dominance and subservience. Africans have no history of collectively being able to impose ideas on the West, or resist the imposition of western ideas upon them. If anything, Africans have been more open to western influence and less confident of their own judgement than any other civilisation the West has ever encountered. Westerners, for their part, have commendably begun to ask Africans what they want, and to promote African "ownership" of security issues. But the historical legacy of western intellectual domination in Africa is such that Africans tend to articulate ideas which – whatever their intrinsic merit – often resemble those of the West. Like a priest conducting a catechism, the West can therefore find itself effectively talking to itself. Moreover, the difficulties of coordination in a large and diverse continent of weak governments are such that answers to western enquiries do not always come quickly. In the interests of making progress, the West suggests, perhaps, that *this* may be a good idea, and the historical pattern of domination and subservience is renewed. Is here another option?

One way to address the problem is to ask what would happen if we took, as an experiment, some of the objective factors about African security which have been reviewed above, and tried to construct a security paradigm based on them. To begin with, we could take the fundamental difference between *defence of* territory and *control over* territory. The former is seldom necessary in Africa; the latter is essential.

If this is indeed the problem, then it would be logical to suggest that one solution would be to increase the *size* of African security forces, since ability to control territory is partly a function of numbers. This does not necessarily mean that existing armies must become bigger, though. An alternative would be to have larger but lighter forces, organised predominantly on a part-time basis, or through compulsory military service. In effect, these would be militias. It is interesting that militias appear almost immediately in African conflicts. The western professional military model, which has no roots in Africa, often breaks down during conflict, as communities turn to protect themselves in the face of government's inability to do so. Conventionally, the militias are seen as a bad thing, and large Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration exercises have been mounted to break up militias after a conflict and disarm the members. DDR can have a useful role to play, but it is increasingly clear that the problem in Africa is not the number of weapons as such, but control of those weapons. A militia with a cadre of professional officers and NCOs would be a way of extending and maintaining control over territory in a way which is not currently possible. It would also be closer to African traditions than the current model.

In the end, the problem is not that the West is consciously and deliberately trying to dominate thinking about security in Africa, nor is it that Africans are failing to take the intellectual lead when they should be doing so. It would be much simpler if that were the case. The problem is really the

absence of an indigenous modern African tradition of security analysis which does not take western ideas and experiences as a starting point. Who controls the past controls the future, said George Orwell in *1984*, and who controls the present controls the past. The West controls Africa's present, as it has controlled its past, even if neither westerners nor Africans quite understand why or how. But whether the efforts of foreign military trainers today will be any more productive and enduring than the efforts of missionaries and colonial administrators a century ago is very open to question.