External Relations and Africa

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The Global Context

In a world of globalisation and with the passing of the stark ideological differences that defined the Cold War, a number of different trends are emerging. Eight are highlighted below:

First, power structures between states have altered reflecting changes in the external environment, notably from the end of the Cold War where states are no longer propped up in spite of their internal politics and policies, and are today no longer able to hide behind ideological walls. There is also an increasing awareness of the value of self-determination in international relations, which has broad implications for the construction of African states.

Second, the power relationship between states and markets has changed, where markets are increasingly important in evaluating their success (or not). Markets can bring down rulers (Suharto in Indonesia for example). Financial markets are arguably a better friend and a tougher opponent in today's world than military allies or foes.

Third, related to this last point, there is no longer an assumption that big states are necessarily better states. In Africa, for example, the more important states are not necessarily the bigger ones. Indeed, Ghana, Uganda, Mauritius and Botswana have been steady if imperfect recent performers. States are no longer valued in terms of territorial or population size, but rather their economic health. Who, for example, would claim that the DRC is more important than Singapore? And indeed, it may well be that smaller is often better in Africa, in particular, given the difficulties in extending governance capacity and consolidating rule.

Fourth, the balance between people and states has also altered, where the current technological and communication system gives more power to individuals to influence both markets and nation-states (both positively through trade; and negatively through terrorism and crime). Individuals are able to assume a position of relative strength through the media and NGOs, and also through the spread of democratic values and systems. Globalisation has been described in this respect as an "incredible force-multiplier" for individuals.[1] This is why Al-Queda can mount the sort of operations it has done with relatively little money; or how a single individual can establish an e-mail campaign to set in motion a global ban on landmines; or how single traders can wield enormous power and influence in global markets instantly.

Fifth, although everyone in the world is directly or indirectly affected by globalisation, and it is clear that it has benefited most, clearly some are

[1] See Thomas Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes*. New York: Anchor, 2003.

benefiting faster than others. Because of the vagaries in the way in which states have responded to globalisation and its challenges and opportunities, we today live in a world of extreme (and widening) inequality, where Africa is stagnating. In 1820, the United Nations reminds us, Western Europe's per capita income was 2.9 times that of Africa; in 1992, this had widened to 13.2 times. "Almost across the board", the UNDP says, sub-Saharan Africa "is being left behind". "Economies have not grown, half of Africans live in extreme poverty and one-third in hunger, and about one-sixth of children die before age five – the same as a decade ago".[2] Moreover, because of population increases, the number of people in poverty in Africa actually increased substantially in the 1990s.

Simply, those that can trade more will benefit more. And those that are able to trade more are generally those with a formula of deregulation, privatisation, and improving productivity (which relates to health systems, education, labour laws and so on). Of course, the fact that some are benefiting more than others has produced a backlash, notably at international summits such as those of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and G-8.

Sixth, paradoxically, the worm is turning in terms of the balance of power with regard to international trade arrangements between the developing world and developed societies. The developing world (including India and China) has more clout at the international trade table. Also, post-9/11 there is a widespread sentiment of the need to improve the opportunity and dignity of those in the developing world, reducing the political as well as economic divides between the haves and have-nots. Trade is seen as an important element in drawing countries more deeply into a global web of capitalism and democracy, without which the international community, and the West and the US in particular, runs the risk of alienation and radicalism and their effects.

Seventh, globalisation and the success in particular of Asian economies shows that there is no cultural or geographic reason why countries cannot succeed. South Korea, for example, like Malaysia, was always held up as a basket case for the international community in terms of development. Ghana, the first British African colonial state to acquire independence in 1957, then had a higher GNP per capita than South Korea: today the average income of Koreans is around 20 times that of Ghanaians. When Malaysia gained independence in 1957, it had a per capita income less than that of Haiti. Whereas Haiti was, at the end of the 20th century, the poorest (and probably the most unstable) country in the Americas, Malaysia has a standard of living higher than that of any major economy in that region save for the US and Canada. And despite the 1997 crisis, regional economic growth has quickly recovered in East Asia, with most countries proving more resilient and adaptable than many expected. With average GDP growth rates in the five percent margin for Malaysia and Thailand, and touching 10% for South Korea, the East Asian success story is not a mirage but a reality, if an imperfect one,

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[2] UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2003*. New York: UNDP with Oxford University Press, 2003, p.39.

and one that Africa can take heart from as it searches its own formula for growth and success.

Eighth, finally, there is greater stress today on regional organisation as a way of improving trade and deepening integration between states. The trend has been of increasing intra-regional trade as a percentage of both world trade and regions' overall trade. There are a number of explicit advantages to regional groupings, including increasing market access of third parties, improved labour and skills mobility, the promotion of domestic deregulation, increased bargaining power in international negotiations, and regional conflict resolution. Since 1970, free trade areas have increased from four to more than 160, of which the North American (NAFTA), Mercosur in Latin America, Asian (AFTA), EU, and South Asian (SAPTA) are among the better-known multilateral initiatives, and the SA-EU, EU-Mexico, EU-Israel, Singapore-US, Japan-Singapore, Singapore-New Zealand, US-Chile and EU-Morocco examples of the burgeoning number of bilateral agreements.

These developments have a number of implications:

- One this puts more weight on local leadership to determine and shape their own future. For example, in Africa, there is an awareness now, as the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) illustrates, of the need for Africans not only develop their own programmes, but also to police them in terms of peer review, setting examples, and also in terms of African peacekeeping efforts.

- Second, this stresses the alternative ways in which states create and maintain their international relations, and the bodies that they seek to employ in this regard and to link up with. The latter obviously calls for a focus of government relations, both within and without states, on business; the techniques that they employ to achieve this, using diasporas, modern communications technologies and so on.

- Finally, this should not be taken as meaning that states are by any means less important. Indeed, there is a body of literature illustrating how important a strong state is for development. And the role of states in ensuring security has been given prominence recently by the events following 9/11, which has strengthened sovereignty in terms of the need for states to provide security for their citizens.

Past and Current Trends in External Engagement

Five sets of issues stand out apropos external relations with Africa in the post-Cold War context:

First, aid has been less than successful in spite of the volumes of aid transferred to the continent (around US$13 billion in ODA was transferred to sub-Saharan Africa in 2001). The fact that Africans are poorer on average today than 30 years ago is an indictment of the aid regimes that have been pursued, and of the scale of the African challenge.

Second, while there remains high concern over the number and scale of African conflicts, international peacekeeping efforts have shifted in scale and nature from the extent of involvement of the mid-1990s when there were 78,700 deployed at the 1993 peak to 43,500 troops, military observers and police at the end of 2003. Of these, by the end of 2003, about 30,600 are in Africa alone – in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Western Sahara and on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This reflects both a change of heart (and lack of fortune) especially following the Somali mission, but also a recognition that external peacekeeping does little to solve core problems and address problems of African capacity. Hence today's so-called 'resurgent' stage of peacekeeping, which focuses more on self-help peacekeeping missions (especially in Africa), informed more about the challenges of peace-building, reflecting, for example, the outcome of the Brahimi report) and commencing with the Nigerian-led ECOMG operation in Liberia.

Third, the perception and the cost of doing business in Africa remains high – too high to address the funding gap between current levels of saving and foreign investment and aid and the level required for 7-8% growth, a gap of around US$30 billion annually. Much investment tends to remain in energy/commodity and tourism sectors where Africa has a dramatic or unique competitive advantage. Currently the US, for example, imports two-thirds of its oil needs, and 15% of this comes from Africa. This figure could increase to 25% by 2015. Angola is at the centre of the oil boom, with its output increasing from 722,000 barrels a day in 2001 to 930,000 in 2003. By 2020 it is expected to reach 3,28 million barrels a day. Nigeria's out will double to 4.4 million barrels a day by 2020. Today's minor oil producers – such as Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Sudan – could more than treble their output given this demand.

Fourth, while trade access is recognised both internally and externally as critical to addressing poverty, with continued focus on preferential (African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) I, II and, potentially, III; Lomé/Cotonou) and asymmetric free trade regimes.

Fifth, military engagement has shifted from direct support of proxy regimes or movements during the Cold War to a combination of capacity-building and, especially post-9/11, direct American military involvement in basing areas such as Djibouti. There are concerns about terror networks especially in Eastern Africa and along Saharan routes linking Arab nations in North and West Africa.

Future Trends in External Engagement with Africa?

In the light of the above, ten emergent trends in terms of external engagement with Africa can be identified:

- First, an increasing external concern with failed, failing, weak African states as sources of insecurity, and a related concern over the rise of Islamic fundamentalism given the large number (250m) of African Muslims and their living conditions.
- Second, an increasing external willingness to listen to African assessments of their development and security challenge (such as at the G-8 meetings), but which is not matched by a concomitant increase in aid disbursements.
- Third, a more focused aid regime on issue-specific areas (governance, HIV-Aids, capacity-building). Related to this, there remains a focus on debt relief in exchange for poverty-alleviation 'good governance' strategies. Africa's external debt stands at US$300 billion. Over 80% of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) are in the region, and the continent's total debt service ratio in 1999 (debt as a percentage of exports of goods and services) was 13.9%, uncomfortably close to the 15-20% mark that is considered unsustainable. Around US$40 billion in debt has already been forgiven under the HIPC initiative. Paradoxically, Africa has lost an estimated US$150 billion in capital flight, with around 40% of private wealth held outside the continent, a higher percentage than in any other region
- Fourth, increasing military engagement by external powers – partly driven by 9/11, partly by the Rwandan genocide, and partly (Sierra Leone) by personal and colonial (Cote d'Ivoire) connections.
- Fifth, the increasing importance of the oil sector in especially but not exclusively US policy calculations on Africa. Importantly, most of Africa's oil producers are not OPEC members – notably Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo-Brazzaville and Cameroon.
- Sixth, the rise of other powers such as China, which has both positive and negative implications for Africa in terms of the draw-card effect of China on global FDI and the impact of its manufacturing sector on Africa's, and more positively as a destination for African commodity exports.
- Seventh, while trade access remains preferential and asymmetrical (i.e. that the developed world opens up faster than Africa is required to do so), there is a move towards greater reciprocity, such as through the various free trade agreements (EU-SA, US-Morocco, SA-US) and the European Union's regional economic partnership arrangement scheme.
- Eighth, a focus on so-called 'pivotal' states in the hope that these countries might be able to influence their regions in a positive manner. The need to stabilise Sudan and the DRC is often mentioned in this respect given their potential as African growth 'poles'. However, the reality is rather that these states, far from being sources of dynamic regional integration, have long been reasons for regional insulation from their problems. The smaller states in Africa have done comparatively well in per capita GDP growth terms over the past two decades, while it is the larger states including Nigeria, the DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan and Angola, that have performed

comparatively badly with a per capita GDP of under US$200 less than half the continental average. In addition, despite their advantages for growth, their sheer size and related complexity has made the idea of intervention daunting.

- Ninth, a focus, too, on support for and capacity-building in various African-led initiatives, notably the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.
- Tenth, an increasing focus on engagement with the African diaspora. It is estimated that 60,000 doctors, engineers and university staff left Africa between 1985-90, and that since 1990 this figure has been 20,000 per year. The gap created by this loss has had to be filled by expatriates.

Likely Drivers

In summary, a number of drivers stand out in terms of shaping both Africa's relations with the international community and the continent's destiny.

- Aids and disease, including the impact on Africa's militaries.
- Terrorism, including inter-regional links and counter-terrorism strategies, and the linkage with Islamic movements.
- Regional integration and rationalization.
- NEPAD and its role in African success.
- Borders and their potential reconfiguration.
- Failed/weak states and what to do with them.
- Urbanisation and urban-rural development inequalities.
- Water shortages and related regional tensions.
- Youth expectations and the ability to meet them.
- Refugee flows and emigrant skills exodus.
- Commodities, and commodity prices.
- Organised crime, and the terrorism linkage especially through money laundering.
- Distractions elsewhere (such as the Middle East) and the impact especially on aid flows.
- Trade access, and its impact on poverty alleviation.

There too are a number of 'wild cards', which could fundamentally alter the nature of the external relationship with Africa. These include:

- The emergence (and recognition) of new states. Could, for example, recognition of Somaliland set a precedent?
- The impact of increased terrorist links/activities (and external intervention to deal with this).
- The success of NEPAD (and the flow of investment).

Conclusion: Likely Directions

Overall there are three major external factors that will likely dictate external terms of engagement with Africa and a number that are Africa initiated/driven/dependent.

- The threat Africa poses in terms of migration, terrorism and social instability, including the ripeness for Islamic fundamentalism within Africa.

- The intensification of a global struggle for scare resources including oil, minerals, timber, and gems – this will likely intensify, related to the emergence of the PRC's 'mega-economy' and expected economic and industrial development of East European countries (who will increase their productive capacity and thus need for resources).

- The ebb and flow of ideological and political weight both in and between Washington and Brussels (increasingly, potentially, Beijing) and thus "concern" if not commitment to human development issues in Africa (and this goes to questions of ODA and, indeed, support for multilateral agencies such as the UN, IMF, World Bank etc).

Africa does not face military threats from outside the continent. The security threats faced by African states are by-and-large internal. Where external grievances exist (i.e. from neighbouring countries), these are often a product of the failure of governments to extend their authority and governance to their legal geographic extremities. This reflects the core insecurity facing Africa today – a combination of weak and unresponsive government, limited resources, and political systems that centre on patronage and hierarchy rather than liberal free-market competition and bottom-up 'people's power'. Africa has also been blighted by poor leadership, reluctant until now of taking a firm stance against fellow leadership, this reflecting, at least, the personal and polity trauma of colonialism, the failure of post-colonial regimes and consequent collapse of expectations, and the damage done from Africa being a proxy playground for the excesses of Soviet Marxism and its ideological counterpart, US-led anti-communism. Taken together the resultant paradigm of much of Africa's leadership has been to simultaneously cock a snook at the West while turning to the external community for the answers to unlock its depressing cycle of poverty and instability. This schizophrenia is compounded by the West's hesitance sometimes to calls things as they are in Africa, with policy positions too often influenced by direct interests, former colonial connections, or the need to excuse African leadership's excesses and failings given the understandable imperative instead to look towards the brighter whole of African development progress. But in so doing, it may be poisoning the very well it is trying to bring to life.

Yet a major hope for Africa lies paradoxically in a new generation of pragmatic, ideologically neutral, or broadly liberal democratic African leader (such as Mbeki, Mogae, Kufuor, and Kibaki) who may be able to deepen democracy and enhance development. This generation compares favourably to the ideologues of Verwoerd, Mengistu, Nkrumah, Nyerere and the last of their generation, Mugabe. One issue critical to their success is, however, the degree to which Western democracies are prepared to invest in these countries and governments to enhance their chances of sustained reform and delivery.

In this regard, there will be nothing more powerful for African states, their leadership and indeed the populace (given the increasing power of telecommunications in Africa) than the ‘global and continental demonstration effect’ of successful African economic ‘tigers’ or, more accurately, ‘lions’. If NEPAD is to achieve nothing else then it has to achieve – or help to achieve – successful case studies: here SA, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Egypt, Morocco, Ethiopia, Ghana, Botswana, Senegal, and Angola stand out as possibles.

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