Conflicts in Africa, 1960- 2020

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Abstract

Many attempts have been made to explain conflicts in international relations by revered scholars. It is also a fairly settled fact that conflicts as a consequence of interactions between state entities in the international space are inevitable because of the pursuit of National Interest. Therefore, man has no choice than to accept conflicts as part of our world system. States in Africa are by no means insulated from conflicts. The paper examines conflicts in Africa, tracing the nature and concept of conflicts in Africa from precolonial, colonial to post-colonial times till. The immediate objective of the paper is to put conflicts in Africa in a proper perspective. The paper concludes that conflict in Africa andemic; following the trends in the world Economy and other world situations. The dynamism of world societies is reflected on the nature and frequency of conflicts in the continent. The Historical research method of data generation and analysis was adopted. The paper discovered that in contemporary times, conflicts in Africa are mainly orchestrated by foreign influences and activities, and posits that Africa must develop home grown solution to the issues of incessant conflicts by forging a close union among states of the continent since conflicts seem to be endemic in the Africa.

Keywords: Conflicts, National Interest, Colonialism, World Economy, Home Grown Solution.

Introduction

Virtually all relationships in the world stage contain characteristics of conflict. This is so because even in most collaborative enterprise between governments some areas of disagreement still.

Conflict leading to organized violence emerges from a particular combination of parties' incompatible positions over an issue, hostile attitudes, and certain types of diplomatic and military actions. The parties to any international conflict are normally, but not necessarily, the governments of states (obvious exceptions would include the various Palestinian guerrilla bands and the secretary-general of the United Nations). Parties seek to achieve certain objectives, such as additional or more secure territory, security, control of valuable resources, access to markets, prestige, unification with neighboring ethnic groups, world revolution, the overthrow of an unfriendly government, and many other things. In efforts to achieve or defend these objectives, their demands, actions, or both will run counter to the interests, ideals, and objectives of other parties (Holsti, 1995)

An issue field or stake is the subject of contention between the parties and includes the positions they are attempting to achieve. Conflict behaviors (attitudes and actions) are likely to result when party A occupies a position that is incompatible with the wishes, ideas, or interests of party B and perhaps others. The critical condition is thus one of scarcity where a move in an issue field by one party is seen to be at the expense of the other party's position. This is often called a *zero- sum* situation: One's gain is the other's loss (Holsti, 1995).

The term tensions refer to the set of attitudes and predisposition - such as distrust and suspicion that populations and policy makers hold toward other parties. Tensions do not by themselves cause conflict but only predispose parties to employ or manifest conflict behavior should they seek to achieve incompatible objectives. The Israeli and Syrian governments display distrust, fear, and suspicion toward each other, but incompatible positions on an issue, such as control of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, must arise before these predispositions or attitudes lead to diplomatic or military actions. In other words, antagonism, distrust, suspicion, and the like are not sufficient conditions for the occurrence of conflicts (Mitchell, 1981).

Finally, conflict includes the *actions* - the diplomatic, propagandist, commercial, or military threats and punishments that the contending parties take toward each other. We thus distinguish the issues created out of incompatible collective objectives, the attitudes of policy makers that predispose them to make threats and carry out punishments, and the actions taken. Tensions are only a part of conflict, the underlying psychological dimension. What, then, is a crisis?

A crisis is one stage of conflict; its distinguishing features include a sudden eruption of unexpected events caused by previous conflict. A conflict, such as the fate of the Palestinians or sovereignty over Taiwan, may continue for decades, but occasionally, sudden and unexpected hostile actions by one party will raise tensions and perceived threat to such a point that policy makers of the responding state feel compelled to choose between extreme alternatives, including making war or surrendering. From the policy makers' point of view, the hallmarks of crisis are (1) unanticipated (surprise) actions by the opponent; (2) perception of great threat; (3) perception of limited time to make a decision, or response and (4) perception of disastrous consequences from inaction (Hermann 1969). None of these events or perceptions is likely to occur unless there has been a preceding conflict.

If we adhere to these definitions of conflict and crisis, we can eliminate some situations that are frequently classified as conflict. First, situations in which private citizens become involved with another government or with citizens of another country over some contentious issue and subsequently call upon their own government to provide them with protection or redress can be called "disputes." We will exclude them from most of the ensuing discussion because, in most cases, they do not involve the collective objectives of governments. To cite some examples: the accidental shooting of farm animals near the frontier by the border police of a neighboring state; the violation of an international frontier by a group of armed bandits; and frontier guards shooting at each other, where such an incident was not organized and commanded by a government. Such incidents and the ensuing disputes may lead to conflict and even war if there were earlier tensions and other conflicts between the two states. In most cases, however, they are dealt with through legal or administrative procedures and have little bearing on relations between governments (Gurtov, 1994).

Second, our definition of conflict and crisis excludes what may be termed international competition. Recall that the perception of scarcity is a central ingredient of conflict, where a move of position by one state on an issue field is considered a loss or threat by the other party. In a conflict, the issue field, like a pie, is usually of a fixed size. If state A obtains a

larger piece, state B perceives it will necessarily receive a smaller one. In competition, however, the size of the pie varies. State A may try to achieve some objective or increase some value, but this effort means neither that state B's share of the value will decrease nor that it will be totally excluded from sharing in that value. In the heydays of European and American imperialism during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Western states could compete with each other for colonies and markets as long as the territory available for colonization and commercial exploitation kept expanding. However, once all the non-Western areas of the world had been carved up between the imperial nations, none could gain more except at the expense of some other imperial power Thus, competition changed to conflict (Rourke, 2003).

Having taken precaution of the necessary usage of the term conflict, we shall now turn to conceptual clarification, nature and concept of conflicts, conflict and states of Africa, historical background to conflicts in Africa: pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial eras among others. We shall however limit our discussion to the 1950s to date. This is because of the mutating nature of conflicts in Africa. The choice of this period is apt because 1950s is the high water mark of the clamor for independence by most states of African and the concomitant changes in the nature of conflicts in the continent.

Conceptual Clarification

Conflict is a broad concept that becomes particularly confusing when we use ambiguous language like trade wars, bloody disputes, and regional conflicts, to discuss it. Many people use the word conflict" to mean any and all difference: quarrels, political struggles, economic or social differences, coups d'etat and wars. Like the Red Queen in ALICE in Wonderland, where words mean what people say they mean, people turn out to have in mind a broad spectrum of differences, starting with simple arguments and ending with wars. For instance, many analysis define wars" as conflict entailing at least 1000 deaths. If we use that criterion, we can point to 62 major conflicts and 101 minor conflicts since Late 1980s (Asimiea, 2005).

Political differences of any kind invariably start with a dispute- a quarrel about something, whether it is borders, race, language, religion, territory, or who is to govern a specific piece of real state. A conflict begins when one or both or all sides begin to consider settling the dispute with force; that is, one or another party begins to seriously arm, or import offensive weaponry, or limited or symbolic forms of violence. It becomes a conflict when it starts to feel like something potentially more violent than a simple political difference.

When actual fighting breaks out, it is called hostilities. This does not just mean a political assassination, car-bombing incidents (as was replete in Iraq), or border skirmish, which are frequent features of non-hostilities conflict situation. Hostilities imply out right, recognizable warfare involving organized military units and generating significant casualties as in the Russia – Ukraine War, whether the number is 1000 or 500 or 1,500. The parties probably wear different color of uniforms, as in the Persian Gulf, or they may wear black Pyjamas as in Vietnam. The point is that a shooting war has started (Rourke, 2009). Having advanced the necessary cautions about loose usage; in the following discussion we will for convenience occasionally use the word "conflict" genetically to save time and the reader's patience.

For the purpose of our present work, "Conflict" can be described as "an encounter with arms; a fight; especially a prolonged struggle, a dashing together of physical bodies, to do battle, to come into collision or to be incompatible. As a mere word "conflict" has multiple ranges of references and meanings. These may include a struggle, trial of strength, disagreement, to be at odds with, to be inconsistent with, among others.

It is a widely accepted view that conflict is inherent in world society. According to Burton (1974:186)) "some historians take the view that, like road accidents political clashes are bound to occur". And that, in addition to the nature of man and the competitive structure of states, there are personal and local factors that make conflicts inevitable and unpredictable. Conflict and its adjustment among groups of people who acknowledge no common supreme authority is "the substance of international politics" (Asimiea, 2005:74). Conflict is an essential creative element in human relationships, because it is the means to change.

In a nutshell, civilization affirms conflict between groups and persons as a corollary of individual liberty, and therefore accommodates it also as an attribute of organized political life. The present day international system is characterized by conflicts; some examples of these are Iraq- Kuwait conflict, Israeli Palestinian War, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia-Ukraine to mention a few.

Basically, whatever the cause immediate or remote, or the magnitude and the consequence, the bottom line is that, the status quo is shaken. The very eruption of crisis, suggests that the existing pattern has been "significantly disturbed" and that the relationship between the adversaries had become politically fluid. This was largely the case in Bonny/Kalabari (1871), Okirika/Kalabari (1876), Nembe/Bille, (1770) Okirika/Ogoloma (1879), Israeli/Palestine (1948), Congo Crisis (1960), Nigerian Crisis (1966), Cambodian Crisis

(19781, Syria/Israel (1987), Liberia (1989), Iraq/Kuwait (1990), Somalia (1993), Rwanda (1994), Russia-Ukraine (2022). It should be added that, as in the case of "Conflict" that could metamorphose into full scale Hostilities, crisis often climaxed in large- scale conflicts and wars. Conflict over valuable resources - and the power and wealth they confer has become an increasingly prominent feature of the global landscape. Often intermixed with ethnic, religious, and tribal antagonisms, such conflict has posed a significant and growing threat to peace and stability in many areas of the world.

These struggles were under way, long before oil was discovered in Africa. For centuries, local tribes and kingdoms fought over the rivers, ports, and oases of the greater Gulf area. Typically, these conflicts combined religious antagonisms with more worldly concerns, such as access to vital streams and wells. But the discovery of oil in the late nineteenth century added a new dimension to this violent panorama: from that point on, major outside powers acquired Interest of their own in the region and periodically employed military force to this new interest. First to start were Great Britain and Czarist Russia, later joined by France, Germany, and the United States. By the end of the twentieth century, safe-guarding the flow of oil from Africa had become one of the most important functions of the World powers.

Conflict and States of Africa

The African continent, in the main, is an embodiment of states which are the results of boundaries that were drawn earlier; sometimes arbitrarily by colonial powers, which took in people of different tribal and ethnic nationalities. The former colonies often do not contain a single cohesive nation, and the diverse cultural groups find little to bind them to one another once independence has been achieved as in states like: Nigeria, Somalia, Cameroun, Rwanda, Burundi among others, which have often set them against one another.

Take for instance, Rwanda and Burundi are neighboring nations in which Hutus and Tutsi people were thrown together by colonial boundaries that with independence became state boundaries. The difficulty in the circumstance is that, the primary political identifications of these people have not become Rwandan or Burundian. They have remained Hutus and Tutsis, and that has led to repeated, sometimes horrific violence and conflicts (Rourke, 2003). This, to an extent is the conflict prone nature of nations in multiethnic states of the African continents.

This already tensed situation is fuelled by the modem day twin concepts of 'Interdependence and National Interest' in the world stage. This is the endemic nature of

conflicts in Africa. We shall now turn to a brief background (Historiography) of conflicts in Africa.

Historiography of Conflicts in Africa

Conflicts in Africa have manifested in phases. These are pre-colonial era (when conflicts were minimal and limited), colonial era (when conflicts were more common placed following trade routes skirmishes, introduction of firearms and other conflicts as a result of resistance from African kings, chiefs and clan heads against colonial rules) and conflicts in Post-colonial era even up to contemporary times.

In the space of twenty years from 1815, and the scramble for Africa, mainly in the hope of gaining economic benefit and for reasons of national prestige, European powers claimed possession of virtually the entire continent. Europe's occupation precipitated wars of resistance in almost every part of the continent. Scores of African rulers who opposed colonial rule died in battle or were executed or sent into exile after defeat. In the concluding act of partition, Britain, at the height of its imperial power, provoked a war with two Boer republics in southern Africa, determined to get its hands on the richest goldfield ever discovered, leaving a legacy of bitterness and hatred among Afrikaners that lasted for generations.

By the end of the scramble, European powers had merged some 10,000 Africa polities into just forty colonies. The new territories were almost all artificial entities, with boundaries that paid scant attention to the myriad of monarchies, chiefdoms and other societies on the ground. Most encompassed scores of diverse groups that shared no common history, culture, language or religion. Some were formed across the great divide between the desert regions of the Sahara and the belt of tropical forests to the south, throwing together Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in latent hostility. But all endured to form the basis of the modem states of Africa.

Colonial rule brought myriad of changes. Colonial governments built roads and railways in an attempt to stimulate economic growth and make their territories self-supporting. New patterns of economic activity were established. African colonies became significant exporters of agricultural commodities such as cotton, cocoa and coffee; in the highlands of eastern and southern Africa, European settlers acquired' huge landholdings, laying the foundations for large- scale commercial agriculture. But what attracted most attention was Africa's mineral wealth. The mineral riches of Katanga (Congo), when first discovered, were described as 'a veritable geological scandal'. Africa was found to possess not only a

profusion of gold, diamonds and copper but a host of other valuable minerals including oil.

Colonial rule was expected to last for hundreds of years, but turned out to be only an interlude in Africa's history; lasting for little more than seventy years. Facing a rising tide of anti-colonial protest and insurrection, European governments handed over their African territories to independence movements. The colonial legacy included a framework of schools, medical services and transport infrastructure. Western education and literacy transformed African societies in tropical Africa. But only a few islands of modem economic development emerged, most of them confined to coastal areas or to mining enterprises in areas such as Katanga and the Zambian copper belt. Much of the interior remained undeveloped, remote, cut off from contact with the modern world. Moreover, while European governments departed, European companies retained their hold over business empires built up over half a century. Almost all modem manufacturing, banking, import-export trade, shipping, mining, plantations and timber enterprises remained largely in the hands of foreign corporations. As the end of colonial rule approached, Europeans followed the old adage: 'Give them parliament and keep the banks"

The independence era, beginning in the 1950s, prompted much jubilation and enjoyed the world's applause. Africa seemed to hold so much promise. African leaders stepped forward with energy and enthusiasm to tackle the tasks of development. The honeymoon, however, was brief. The new states of Africa were not 'nations'. They possessed no ethnic, class or ideological cement to hold them together.

Once the momentum to oust colonial rule had subsided, older loyalties and ambitions came thrusting to the fore, often exploited by politicians for their own ends. African leaders became preoccupied with gaining a monopoly of power, preferring to rule through systems of patronage to enforce their control. Ruling elites seized every opportunity for self-enrichment, looting state assets at will. Decades were lost in internal conflicts, mismanagement and corruption.

Despite the high level of risk and hassle, the lure of Africa's riches remains as strong in the twenty-first century as in the past. As well as the activities of Western corporations, new players have entered the field. The rising economic might of China and other Asian countries has stimulated a boom in demand for Africa's oil and mineral resources. Land too, has become a prized commodity once more. To secure food supplies, foreign corporations have acquired huge landholdings in Africa, just as the Romans did.

But much of the wealth generated by foreign activity flows out of Africa to destinations abroad. Africa's ruling elites further drain their countries of funds, stashing huge sums in bank accounts and property overseas. The World Bank estimates that 40 per cent of Africa's private wealth is, held offshore. Africa thus remains a continent of huge potential, but limited prospects (Meredith, 2014).

Conflicts in Pre-Colonial Africa

As it is found in all human societies, conflictive interests are not alien to Africa. Conflict over territory, farming and fishing rights, chieftaincy and boundary disputes are not new to the Africa. It is a widely accepted view that conflict is inherent in world society. Indeed, some scholars take the view that like road accidents, political clashes are bound to occur (Spanier, 1972), and that in addition to the nature of man, and the competitive structure of states, there are personal and local factors that make conflict inevitable. Further, conflicts mutate according to trends in the economy and other extraneous factors. Such was the case with nations and groups in pristine Africa (Asimiea, 2020).

However, the scope and frequency of conflicts in pre-colonial Africa were minimal. This was because guns and other armaments of war have not been introduced to the sub region, and the people were heavily guided by their gods and deities, therefore false claims were minimal and near absent for fear of the wrath of the gods. African morality was high and checked. As a visitor to Mali (West Africa) in the mid fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta in Nkrumah, (1963:3) wrote of pre-colonial Africa:

> *"They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. Their sultan shows no mercy to anyone who is guilty of the least act of it. There is complete security in their country... "*

Certainly this could not be said for their European contemporaries of that time. Thus, was the picture of pre-colonial Africa, as Hopkins (1973) refers to Africa in the era as "Golden Age"

Conflicts in Colonial Africa

European incursion in Africa happened in stages (Onwuka, 1956) first, as subservient explorers, merchants, missionaries and finally, as colonial lords, it's true that the Europeans must have been motivated by the pursuit of economic interests and national prestige while the scramble for Africa lasted. But, new dimensions of conflict were introduced, under the colonial era. To begin with, there was vehement resistance to colonial rule from the native kings, chiefs and clan heads of nations in Africa. Thus, conflicts were common placed.

The era witnessed the transformation of the African from a simple subsistence farmer of food crops to a farmer of cash crops; as the African was introduced to the capitalist world economy, he was hardly prepared for (Ake, 1980).

This was how the Africans were initiated into a fierce competition amongst themselves. Guns were introduced by the Europeans in the process into the body polity of states of Africa. Age long animosity and tribal differences were resurrected. The issues of morality took back seat. While reverence for the gods and deities fettered. Thus, Africa was introduced to yet another genre of conflicts. Further, having delineated the nations and groups into states boundaries conflicts were instigated between and among states of the continent.

In this circumstance, conflicts in Africa mutated as the Europeans schemed to set nations and groups against themselves, while they (Europeans) plundered the African continent. Colonial rule in African was projected to last hundreds of years. This was not to be as colonialism in Africa was short lived following national consciousness that took root among Africans.

Returnees from World War II came with the concept of nationalism, and the struggle for self-governance. The result was the birth of several nationalistic movements and agitation for independence for states of Africa beginning in the 1950s which marks effectively a new brand of conflicts. In sum, there are many factors responsible for conflicts in Africa. In the horn of Africa for instance, the trade roots of the Sahara region were responsible for several conflicts. This however, gave way for faith based conflicts as in Egypt, Tunisia, and Lybia during the Arab invasion of North Africa (Nkrumah, 1965). In southern Africa the scenario was different. It started with the search for Gold and the quest for the domination of the gold trade, which led the British to provoke a war with two Boer republics in southern Africa, leaving a legacy of bitterness and hatred among Afrikaners that lasted for generations (Meradith, 2014). The situation in West Africa is the unfinished matter of the balkanization of Africa that pitched several West African tribes against themselves. Examples here are the Nigeria/Cameron conflict over Bakassi peninsular, the ongoing conflict between Cameroon and Ambazonia, Nigerian civil crises, Ghananism war among others.

This is however, different from resource based conflicts in contemporary Africa, which in the main, is at the heart of conflicts in post colonial Africa.

Conflicts in Post Colonial Africa

As we have hinted above conflicts in contemporary Africa are dominantly resource based. The discovery of petroleum and allied minerals and the effect of same on conflicts in Africa, renewed foreign interest on the continent and concomitant conflicts, neo-colonization and undercover (Intelligence) operations as an instrument of conflicts in Africa among others will be discussed presently.

The Europeans never actually left Africa. Independence was mere parliamentary but the Banks and almost all the modem manufacturing, import - export trade, shipping, mining, plantations and timber enterprises remained largely in the hands of foreign corporation. Despite the high level of risk and hassle, the lure of Africans riches remains as strong in the 21st century as in the past. As well as the activities of western cooperation, new players have entered the field. The rising economic might of China and other Asian countries has stimulated a boom in demand of Africa's oil and mineral resources. Land too has become a prized commodity once more. To secure food supplies, foreign corporations have acquired huge landholdings in Africa. These networks of activities have pitched African states against one another in conflicts. For instance, the conflict over Bakassi was because of the crude oil resources of the peninsular; and the control of same will give France an economic edge in the international oil market. It is no longer a conjecture that conflicts in Africa in contemporary times are orchestrated by foreign influence and activities.

The neo-colonization of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage. In the past it was possible to convert a country upon which a neo-colonial regime had been imposed - Egypt in the 19th century is an example - into a colonial territory. Today, this process is no longer feasible. This is because once a territory has become nominally independent it is no longer possible, as it was in the in the 20 century to reverse the process. In place of colonialism as a main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965).

The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is in theory independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, however, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.

The methods and forms of this direction can take various shapes. For example, in an extreme case the troops of the imperial power may garrison the territory of the neocolonial state and control the government of it as in the case of Cameroun, Togo and several Francophone countries. We are aware that more often, however, neo - colonialist control is exercised through economic or monetary means. The question is one of power. A state

in the grip of neo-colonialism is not a master of its own destiny. It is this factor through which neo colonialism breed conflicts in Africa, and threat to world peace. The certainty of power blocs threatening the others with the possibility of a world-wide war, and military conflict has thus become confined to 'limited wars'. Limited wars provide breeding ground for neo-colonialism as such wars can take place in countries which are not neo-colonialist controlled. Indeed, their object may be to establish in a smell but independent country a neocolonialist regime.

The evil of neo-colonialism is that it prevent the formation of those large unite which would make impossible limited wars. An example of this is that if Africa was united, no major power bloc would attempt to subdue it by limited war because from the very nature of limited war, what can be achieved by it is itself limited. In a nut shell, it is the sum total of these modem attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about freedom which has come to be known as neo-colonialism. To say the least, as long as the activities of these neo-colonialists led by the United States remains, the multi - facetted conflicts are likely to remain in Africa as elsewhere in the globe (Nkrumah, 1965).

Conclusion

One may not dabble into the dark world of "intelligence for national interest". But, it suffices to note how much conflicts 'The Invisible Government' has instigated in Africa. This is not limited to the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency, although the C.I.A is at the heart. Nor is it confined to the nine other agencies which comprise what is known as the Intelligence Community: the National Security Council, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, Army Intelligence, Navy Intelligence and Research, the Atomic Energy commission and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), among many other units and agencies as well as individuals. The nuisance of horrific conflicts in Africa is multi-dimensional; and they are not likely to abate in the near future as long as National Interest and Globalization continue to trend in our contemporary world. States of Africa must therefore forge a closer union as a panacea to incessant conflicts.

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