

America's Global Hegemony since the Collapse of the Soviet Union: Implications for Africa's Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines America's global hegemony since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its implications for Africa's development. It contends that the disintegration of the Soviet Union which ended the Cold War saw the emergence of the United States of America as a global hegemonic power. The changes in global power equation was accompanied by the rise of neo-liberal ideologies as the standard for the conduct of global governance. Also, Africa's relevance in Western strategic calculation which gained currency during the Cold War diminished. These dramatic changes deepened Africa's socio-economic malaise and provided the incentives for most of the internal armed conflicts that were fought since the beginning of the 1990s. In spite of these crises, Africa continued to survive as a continent; and developed indigenous capabilities especially in conflict intervention and management as exemplified by the successes of ECOMOG in West Africa.

Keywords: *American hegemony, USSR, Africa's development, Cold war, Global peace.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the 1990, the world began to witness the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), otherwise called the Soviet Union. The eventual collapse of the Soviet Union was marked by the receding of the Cold War and the concomitant rise of the United States of America (USA), as the single most powerful state in the global political arena. The tectonic configuration in the world power calculus produced a new international political order which has been described by many scholars as the “unipolar order” under the global hegemonic dominance of the United States of America.

Charles Kruathammer, for instance, in his article entitled “the Unipolar Moment” published in 1991, disagreed with the widespread assumption that a multipolar system was forming to replace the anticipated end of bipolarity. “The immediate post-Cold War world is not multipolar” he observed. “It is unipolar”. The centre of world power is the unchallenged superpower, the United States (Rourke, 2007). Concurring with Kruathammer, Joseph Nye succinctly alluded that not since Rome has one nation loomed so large above others (Rourke, 2007). Similarly, Kenberry, argued that “for the first time in modern era, the world most powerful state can operate on the global stage without the counter-balancing constraints of other great powers. We have entered the American unipolar age” he concluded (Rourke, 2007).

The hegemonic rise and dominance of the U.S. in world politics following the end of the Cold War (1945-1990), ushered in a peace euphoria in terms of the prospect for international peace, security and order. This was expected to catalyze economic development and progress across the world (Fukuyama, 1992; Wohlforth, 1999; Kagan, 2000). Specifically, Wohlforth (1999) argued that the refusal of the United States to play such a hegemonic role will lead to a ‘power vacuum’ that would enthrone a ‘dark age’ characterized by endless anarchy and carnage.

Unfortunately, since 1990, Africa has witnessed steady decline in economic prosperity characterized by rising poverty, development failures, underdevelopment, escalating internal armed conflicts, failed and collapsing states. The amalgam of these crises, has relegated the continent to an unenviable height of global development backwaters. Thus, the neo-liberal obsession and overstated optimism about U.S hegemonic regime ushering unipolar peace became a distant reality for the inhabitants of the African continent. This gave credence to Huntington (1996) prediction that the new world order would lead to clashes of civilization that would shape future conflicts in the world. Similarly, Immanuel Wallerstein forecasts a global system of crisis induced by uneven development (Volgy and Bailin, 2005) and perhaps even more relevant is Paul Kennedy prediction that there would be rising conflicts promoted by technological changes and uneven development, leading to possible chaos in the system (Volgy and Bailin, 2005).

These views describe more apt and realistically the international atmosphere and the African context of the American global hegemony. This paper examines America’s global hegemony since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its implications for Africa’s development

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL EXPOSITION

The term hegemony has been defined by Mark Rupert as the holding by one state of a preponderance of power in the international system so that it can single-handedly dominate the rule by which international political and economic relations are conducted. Such a state is called a hegemon (Goldtein, 1999). Usually hegemony means the domination of the world, but sometimes it refers to regional domination. By extension, such a meaning in International Relations refers to the hegemony of ideas such as democracy and capitalism and to the global predominance of United States culture (Goldtein, 1999). According to Antonio Gramsci these complex ideas are

necessary to enable the hegemonic power to ensure loyalty, subservience, and to foster and maintain the hegemon's legitimacy to rule (Gramsci, 1959).

Thus, in this paper the term American hegemony refers to the unequivocal global dominance and supremacy of the United States, politically, economically and culturally since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. The U.S. hegemony is further buttressed by her imperialistic foreign policy across the world, supported by its strong military and economic power as well as the will and capacity to pursue and achieve its objectives irrespective of opposition. America, since the collapse of the Soviet Union to a greater extent has played this role effectively in all parts of the world especially, in Africa, as she is able to determine who get what, when and how as well as reprimand or sanction "erring nations" and reward "friendly countries".

So many meanings have been assigned to the term development so much so that they have tended to reflect the philosophical, ideological and environmental standpoint of the commentator. According to Idowu (2008) the concept of development means a gradual advance or growth through progressive changes. It involves increased economic efficiency, expansion of national economic capacity and technological advancement (McClean and McMillan, 2003). In the context of this paper, the term Africa's development means a process involving the generation of ideas, principles and activities leading to the accumulation of greater economic wealth, technological breakthrough and political influence for the purpose of satisfying Africa's economic goals and increased capacity to realise set objectives of its member countries within the overall international system.

The dynamics and essence of hegemonic behaviour can best be appreciated and contextualised within the theoretical worldview of classical realism. The intellectual root of realism can be traced to the works of Thucydides (c. 460-406 BC), Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) (Dunne and Schmidt, 2008). The classic theory is based on the assumption that man by nature is selfish, self-centered and self-aggrandizing and always in a ceaseless struggle and competition to acquire power and dominate his fellow men. This by extension relates to the behaviour of states in pursuit of imperialistic ambition. Neo-realism, a recent variant of realism recognizes the state as primary actors in international politics and argued that the international system is anarchic. Unlike the national political systems which have monopoly of the instrument of coercion to ensure conformity and order, there is no supranational authority that can enforce agreements between states at the international level. Thus, every state must look out for its own well-being and survival (De Mesquita, 2006). According to Zakaria, because "there is no authoritative, impartial method of settling international disputes (i.e., no world government), states are their own judges, juries and hangmen, and often resort to force to achieve their security interests" (Rourke, 2007).

A leading realist scholar Hans Morgenthau contended that international politics like all politics, is a struggle for power (Dunne and Schmidt, 2008) as Kautilya, minister to the first Maurya emperor of India, wrote "the possession of power in a greater degree makes a king superior to another; in a lesser degree, inferior; and in an equal degree, equal. Hence a king shall always endeavour to augment his own power" (Rourke, 2007). This, perhaps, explains America's imperialistic ambitions throughout the world and particularly in Africa and the rest of the Third world. Therefore, in pursuit of power, states employ all instruments of their national power such as the military strategic installations, economic wealth, and technological advancement, among others, to maximize their national interests at the expense of others, irrespective of moral issues involved.

Although, international political development and the growth of international legal jurisprudence, particularly since the end of the Second World War, has tampered on the extent to which states exercise their powers in relations to other states in the international system, realism still find expression in inter-state relations. Therefore, it is from the realist perspective that we can understand the hegemonic role of the United States since the fall of

communism including her influence and dominance in Africa. It suffices to say that America's dominance in international politics is predicated on her military capability as well as her strong and flourishing economy adjudged to be the biggest in the world. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, American power became unrivalled which means she is able to unilaterally determine the rules of international conduct, reward friendly nations and sanction erring ones. The faith of Africa in this context can be understood from the fact that since the international system is anarchic with nations in competition to maximize their national interest, African countries with relatively weak elements of national powers are less likely to realize their foreign policy goals, especially when such objective conflicts with those of the United State. This matrix explains why America is able to achieve her foreign policy objectives without much challenge.

3. AMERICAN RELATIONS WITH AFRICA BEFORE THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

Though, American interests in Africa predates the American war of independence, the contact remained mercantilist in nature until the emergence of the Cold War. The acquisition of Liberia colony was only intended to dump the liberated slaves (Ochefu, 2003). Modern American relations with Africa particularly since the attainment of political independence in the 1960, has been driven mainly by the need to contain Soviet expansion and to gain and control access to strategic mineral deposits and exploit them for the furtherance of her national wellbeing and global hegemonic ambition.

Most African countries were born into the Cold War scenario. Thus, the period between 1945 and 1990-when the Soviet Union collapse was characterized by an international ideological struggle and rivalry between Socialism represented by the Soviet Union and her allies; and Capitalism represented by the United States and her allies. American relations with the rest of the world was dictated by the prevailing international order. The United States became the champion of western imperialism, leading countries like France, Portugal, Germany, Belgium and Spain against Soviet penetration of Africa during the Cold War (Ochefu, 2003).

During these period, Africa became the theatre for superpower squabbles and proxy wars as Toure (2006) rightly notes, "from the 1960s to the early 1990s the United States, leading the Western bloc, viewed and treated Africa as an ideological and political battleground within the Cold War contestation with the Soviet Union. African countries under the Cold War became major receivers of largesse in terms of foreign assistance and aids from the cold war belligerents for the purpose of making them willing tools of European conflicts. The United States in particular provided massive financial and military support to loyal African governments, and those regarded as communist regimes were subjected to international criticism as being dictators with poor human rights records. Throughout the Cold War, what determine African regime's image favourability or otherwise to the United State was whether such a government was pursuing communist or anti-communist policies; and African leaders classified as communist paid heavy prices.

During these period, the United States, made spurious interventions in virtually all spheres of African society, including military, the economic and trade relations. Democratic regimes were overturned in favour of surrogates (Ochefu, 2003). The United State, for example, was complicit in the assassination of the former President Patrice Lumunba, leading to the ascendance of the corrupt and authoritarian regime of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire now Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R. Congo). In this period, the United States assistance to African regimes were mostly intended to expand and establish its strategic interests in order to control African resources and politics (Ochefu, 2003).

America entered military agreements with countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Senegal and Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo. Also, agreements for the establishment of military Bases with Egypt, Morocco, Somalia and Kenya (Obasi, 1998) were sealed. The motive really was not the protection of African people, but to prevent the emergence of regimes that are friendly with Moscow. They instigated conflicts between or within African countries and provided massive military and financial support to African regimes to prosecute them.

In Angola, for example, the United States supported the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in a protracted civil war against the Soviet backed the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) regime. The United States was also involved in other flashpoints of Conflicts elsewhere in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and the Somalia-Ethiopian war. The United States equally maintained a sustained support for the racist Apartheid regime in South Africa. The United States interventions in African conflicts often exacerbate and prolong the crises; making their resolution extremely costly in human and material terms. According to Mandani, a key objective of the massive destruction of infrastructure and other social and economic targets in the region was to create traumatizing horror both physically and psychologically in order to maintain the racist position that Africans on their own cannot rule themselves without the so-called tribal conflicts (Toure, 2006).

Economically, the United States have always exploited Africa's economic weaknesses to orchestrate its penetration of the continent through various mechanisms of foreign direct investment, foreign development assistance, aid and multinational corporations. Africa was used as test ground for the experimentation of western development blueprint through the agency of the U. S. controlled international banking and financial institutions- the World Bank and IMF. In the early 1980s, unpalatable international economic crisis which rocked commodity producing countries led to the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), in many African countries. The SAP policies were by and large, based on neo-liberal development models which advocated free trade, deregulation, commercialization, currency devaluation, withdrawal of subsidies, and retrenchment, among others. By the mid-1980s, many states have sunk into deeper crises through the implementation of neo-liberal reforms. Many workers, peasants, women groups, students, academic, farmers and professionals became increasingly restive throughout Africa (Toure, 2006). Thus, by the end of the decade of 1980, when the Soviet Union was disintegrating, many of the crises on the continent were at different stages of manifestation, the emergence of the United States at the beginning of the 1990s as global hegemony acted as catalyst that accelerated them into maturity.

4. AMERICAN HEGEMONY SINCE SOVIET COLLAPSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

The rise of American hegemony in the 1990s, saw a corresponding rise in Western values and ideologies of democracy, good governance and the rule of law, human rights, economic liberalization and commercialization, gender equality, among others, to a status of an international norm. These Western values became a standard by which the behaviour of non-western states are measured and qualified as "friendly," "civilized" nation or otherwise. They also became the yardsticks for Western technical support, foreign development assistance and aid. Consequently, these Western values became the golden rules around which African countries and indeed other peripheral nations must construct their foreign policy objectives under the watchful hegemonic vigilance of the United States and her western allies.

Chomsky, writing in 1999, observed that to defy the dictates of the hegemonic power was the criterion that qualifies a country for being classified as a rogue state (Toure, 2006). The U.S. which was noted for installing and supporting unpopular regimes in Africa throughout the period of the Cold War radically changed her foreign policy

orientation, insisting that African regimes must democratize and open up their economies. This became precondition for debt rescheduling, grant of foreign aid, foreign direct investment, and military assistance under what it call the “Washington Consensus”. The U.S. foreign policy posture was an important enigma in accelerating globalization process (Thomas, 2008) in the 1990s.

This global situation led to the implementation of improvised and often hasty democratization process in Africa, which have been described as the “Third Wave of Democratization.” The democratization process was often accompanied with the adoption of exogenous neo-liberal economic models which insisted on market-openness, irrespective of the status of local production capacity of the African economies. The result of this unequal competition and exchange intensified African economic crisis and quickened the continents’ infamous economic decline. Hence, African countries became increasingly unable to provide employment for the growing and mostly, uneducated, unskilled and subsistent labour force, decay in infrastructures and generally high level of poverty, ignorance and disease increased. This situation eroded the credibility and legitimacy of most African governments leading to local agitation for political reforms that led to the eruption of intra-state conflicts on the continent.

The end effect of the experimentation of these Western tailored political and economic models in Africa was a dramatic downturn in the economic and political fortunes of the continent.

The hasty democratic transition foisted under unrealistically severe economic hardship, poverty and developmental crisis proved impracticable and unworkable. The neo-liberal economic system constructed around mono-culturalism, imperfect market system, weak industrial and technological base, highly unequal and unfair competition, skyrocketing external debts and unrealistic debt servicing obligations further paralyzed African economies. These factors combined to challenge the capacity of the various African governments to effectively respond to the growing social and welfare needs of their citizenry and their consequent trap in legitimacy crisis that fueled local agitations for political reforms resulting in the explosion of conflicts across the continent since 1990.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990 and the rise of the United States as the global hegemonic power not only ended the long standing ideological feud between Western and Eastern Europe but also ended the erstwhile cold war alliances between the United States and peripheral nations. At the peak of the Cold War conflicts in Africa, it was a common practice for America to install and maintain surrogates regimes in power in order to prevent communist incursion. With the end of the cold war and the neutralization of all form of superpower challenge to the United States, Africa which during the Cold War was important to the United States lost its strategic value. This point was expressed in 1995 by an official of the U.S. Defense Department, that the country had “very little strategic interest in Africa” (Gilbert *et al.*, 2009). Africa’s reduction in strategic importance was accompanied by the withdrawal of economic and political support hitherto enjoyed by African regimes during the Cold War. For example, the United States, which had supplied hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Mobutu Sese Seko since 1965 cut direct military and economic assistance to Zaire (Locke, 2010). The withdrawal of superpower support as well as the pervading Western ideological influence in the post 1990, were among critical causes of many of the internal armed conflicts on the continent.

Conflicts in African since the 1990s, particularly those that occur in regions where America have little or no serious strategic interests, received little or no attention from the United States and its allies. In cases where interventions were made, it is usually belated. Thus, in spite of the great human carnage produced by the spate of conflicts on the continent and the high scale of humanitarian crisis, no serious commitment were made by the U.S. and its western allies to restore peace and stability to the African continent, a situation many analysts described as intervention fatigue in Africa conflicts.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire), for example, where conflict broke out in 1994, it was not until 1999 that the United Nations established the UN Observer Mission in D.R. Congo (UNOMIC). In the case of the Civil Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, no immediate attention or action was taken by the U.S. Although, there were occasional expression of concern and urge for restraints by the US and its allies, but no practical commitment or measures were made until the Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS), took the initiative under the auspices of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). An effort that has since became a model for sub-regional conflict intervention and management.

In Rwanda, where conflict broke out between the dominant ethnic Hutus and the minority Tutsi's, again, like in many other conflict situation in Africa, the United State did not show much concern except of course for a brief expression of concern especially at moment when the tempo of conflict have escalated. The total lack of interest in the Rwandan conflict is not unconnected to the fact that the landlocked country offers little or no strategic relevance to US interests. As Shively (2008) rightly notes "Rwanda was not of great economic importance, lacked natural resources such as oil, and was not strategically located with regards to shipping lanes or to international conflicts". In fact, the lack of Western interest in addressing the conflicts in Rwanda is revealed by the fact that "until the horrendous genocide of 1994, the media in the United States consistently show more concern for the mountain gorillas of Rwanda (which had been filmed in the popular movie *Gorillas in the Mist*) than in the people of that unfortunate country" (Shively, 2008). As the conflict continued in Rwanda, some magazine like the *New York Times*, *News Week*, *Houston Chronicle*, and *Reuter News Service* coverage had consisted of warning that Dian Fossey's Camp (featured in the movie) was threatened by war (Shively, 2008).

When the U.S. eventually intervened, it limited itself to provision of logistics and refrained from contributing troops. Since 1990, Western European nations under the hegemonic leadership of the United States have demonstrated little or no interest in mediating African conflicts especially when it involves the commitment of contributing troops to such a peace effort. The United States commitment in African conflicts situation has been limited to a paltry of logistic support leaving the actual exercise of field soldiering to African countries. Although, this situation has spurred Africans to develop lofty indigenous ideas and capacity for conflict intervention and management, it has showed that the extraction of African resources and fortunes is the overriding interest of the United States in Africa.

In essence, from the decade of the 1990 to the 21st century, an era of preponderant U.S. global hegemonic dominance represented a period of acute economic crisis for the Third World, particularly Africa. The gulf in the global inequality between the advanced industrial countries and Africa became increasingly deepened. The African continent continued to be increasingly excluded from the benefits of globalization. African countries entered the [21st century] more heavily indebted than they had been [three] decades earlier (Thomas, 2008). Thus, by the end of the century not a single African country had joined the ranks of the first world or second world countries in a meaningful sense.

5. CONCLUSION

The ascendance of the United States of America as the single world's most influential hegemonic power after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 has not proved beneficial to the African continent in terms of development. Almost three decades of American international hegemonic regime represented the worst and most traumatic era in African post-colonial history. In terms of economic development, African economic bankruptcy and misfortune was accelerated and became the most marginalized in a fast growing and increasingly globalize world system. Africa also became a host to some of the deadliest conflicts and human carnage in the world after the Second World War

with mainly civilians and non-combatant as targets. These conflicts also produced some of the horrible and unimaginable humanitarian crisis in terms of scale human death toll, refugee crisis and internally displaced persons. Diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, Malaria and other environmentally related natural disaster became daily companion of African people as the continent became synonymous with conflicts and disaster. The amalgam of economic and political crisis turned a number of African countries into territories occupied by different faction of armed combatants and without central government. Since the 1990, no fewer than 7 states in Africa had collapse or at different level of collapsing. With the probable exception of South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, and Seychelles, African countries in the decades of the 1990 through the 21st century, have appeared more economically weaker than they were 2 to 3 decades earlier. Most of this misfortune can be blamed on the emergence of the American unipolar moment and the fissiparous experimentation of neo-liberal economic policies of structural adjustment on the continent. Indeed, in spite of these, Africa had developed internal capacity for conflict intervention and management. This means that if only African countries can look inward to provide good leadership, harness untapped potentials, minimize wastage and engage available resources in the most prudent and efficient ways, Africa could be on a good side of history in terms of socio-economic development.

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