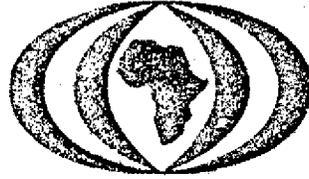


DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Jan Smuts House/-Huis
1 Jan Smuts Avenue/Laan 1
Braamfontein, Johannesburg
Tel. 724-9459/50/79



P.O. Box/Posbus 31596
2017 Braamfontein
South Africa/Suid-Afrika
T.A. 'Insintaff' Johannesburg

BRIEF REPORT

no. 2

THE 14TH OAU SUMMIT CONFERENCE AT LIBREVILLE, GABON JUNE/JULY 1977

The Charter

Every year the crises facing the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) are different, increasingly complex and more difficult to solve. Current issues will again challenge, as never before, the OAU's survival and its very *raison d'être*. This organisation, a product of the Pan-African ideal, was established in 1963 primarily to assert Africa's independence and to assist in the liberation of white ruled Southern Africa. In the words of the OAU Charter, the organisation is committed -

- (a) to promote the unity and solidarity of the African states;
- (b) to co-ordinate and intensify their co-operation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa;
- (c) to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity and independence;
- (d) to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and
- (e) to promote international co-operation, having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The OAU Charter indeed reflects some of the basic Pan-African principles such as socialism, anti-colonialism, racial equality, non-alignment and restricted federalism. More important, it also emphasizes the desire of the African states to speak with a concerted voice in international politics.

Some Actual and Potential Conflict Issues

In spite of the praiseworthy ideals, the OAU has had to struggle to contain bitter and occasional bloody disputes between its member states and to prevent them from splitting the organisation. The 14th OAU Summit Conference of African Heads of State and the preceding meetings of the

Council of Ministers in June/July 1977 were no exception. In order to retain at least an outward show of unity, compromise steps were taken at Libreville on some of the following conflict issues, while others were not dealt with -

- (a) In an effort to avert potential conflicts in the Horn of Africa, where Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan are arming at an alarming rate, the disputes between Ethiopia and Sudan on the one hand, and between Ethiopia and Somalia on the other, were both referred to conciliation committees. (In the latter case, the committee also has the additional brief to investigate mass killings in Ethiopia resulting from the actions taken by the government in Addis Ababa to counter Sudanese and Somali-backed guerilla operations.)
- (i) Sudan recently launched a campaign to have the OAU headquarters moved from Addis Ababa "because of the horrible crimes committed by the ruling military junta" of militant and pro-Soviet Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. The staunchly anti-communist Sudanese leader, President Jaafar Numeiry, is openly backing the 35 000 strong guerilla army fighting for the secession of Eritrea. He is also aiding the guerrillas of the Ethiopian Democratic Union, another anti-Mengistu insurgent movement.
- (ii) Somalia's claim to the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, including territory to within 100 km south of Addis Ababa, is said to date from before the colonial partitions of Africa and was not therefore subject to the 1964 Cairo territorial agreement which validated existing boundaries. The dream of "Greater Somalia" furthermore also includes the new Republic of Djibouti and the north eastern districts of Kenya. Political instability in Djibouti could lead to an excuse being given to Mogadishu to incorporate at least that part of the fledgling republic inhabited by the Somali speaking Issa, which also includes the very important and strategically located port of Djibouti. Should this eventuate, it would effectively cut off Ethiopia from its only reliable access to the sea and this would inevitably lead to a major conflict between these two powers - a very awkward situation for the Soviet Union, seeing that both governments could be described as Marxist orientated (and therefore militant and revolutionary) and strongly pro-Soviet. (In regard to this issue see also the Institute's *Brief Report*, dated 28 June, 1977, "Djibouti Independence. Background and Outlook".)
- (b) The Somali claim to large areas of north eastern Kenya is also a longstanding one, and sporadic clashes have erupted over the years. Although an armed incursion was launched from the Upper Guiba Province of Somalia into the Mandera

district of north east Kenya shortly before the OAU Council of Ministers met in Libreville, the matter was not pursued by Kenya.

- (c) The territorial dispute between Libya and Chad over Tripoli's claim to a strip of territory near the Aozouan oasis in the Tibesti region of northern Chad, which has confirmed uranium deposits, was referred to another conciliation committee.
- (d) The major problem of the phosphate rich, former Spanish territory of Western Sahara, now divided between Morocco and Mauritania, with the armed internal opposition of the Algerian backed Polisario Front, was shelved for the time being. In this case the issue is to be discussed by an extra-ordinary summit meeting of the OAU to be held in Zambia during the first half of October. It was, however, not explained why an extra-ordinary summit on the problem, decided on at last year's summit conference in Mauritius, was never held.
- (e) It was recommended by the political committee of the Council of Ministers that an investigating team be sent to the Canary Islands, where residents seek a degree of autonomy but identify much more closely with continental Spain than with Africa. This Spanish archipelago is troubled by the terrorist activities of the Algerian backed movement for self-determination and independence of the Canary Islands.
- (f) President Omar Bongo of Gabon, the new OAU chairman, was asked to make representations to France about the continued French occupation of Mayotte Island in the Comoros. This island preferred to remain a French dependency when the rest of the Comoros archipelago voted for independence from France. (The Comoros became independent in December, 1975, and is now a member of the OAU.)
- (g) Requests for increased aid from African countries to Mozambique to enable it to play a more active role as a frontline state against Rhodesia were referred to a special OAU Commission.
- (h) No resolution was passed on a proposed convention on mercenaries, the major purpose of which would have been to define precisely who were mercenaries.
- (i) Zaire accused neighbouring Angola, as well as Cuba and the Soviet Union, of being behind the invasion mounted by former Katangese gendarmes into Shaba Province earlier this year, which had to be suppressed with the help of Moroccan troops and French logistical support. President Mobutu Sese Seko accused the OAU Secretary-General, Mr William Eteki Mboumoua, of "intellec-

tual dishonesty" for saying it was difficult to see the Shaba incident as anything other than an internal affair.

- (j) Kenya alleged that Tanzania closed their joint border to sabotage Kenya's trade with Central Africa. This has already led to Kenya's withdrawal from the East African Community, which is now defunct in almost every respect but name.

The OAU and the Issue of Non-Interference in Internal Affairs

Underlying at least some of the above issues has been an apparent determined stand by the "moderate" OAU countries against growing communist encroachment into African affairs and its consequent threat to the independence of the continent. Significantly the summit carried a Senegal resolution (formulated in close consultation with other states such as Egypt, Morocco, the Ivory Coast, Sudan, Zaire and Togo), which simply condemns all foreign intervention in African affairs, but is in fact aimed at curbing the spread of communist interference in Africa.

President Jaafar Numeiry of the Sudan emerged as the principal African opponent of Soviet designs on the continent. He condemned the Kremlin for its "ambition to take over the role of the old colonialists and imperialists.... They are aspiring to fill the vacuum. Their strategy is 'to take all' in Africa".

Prior to the adoption of this general resolution and during the OAU Ministerial Council meetings, proposals put forward by Senegal and Algeria, respectively, illustrated a profound split amongst member states. West African French speaking countries especially, as well as some others, are resentful of the domination of the OAU by the progressive and militant nations. The former countries regarded the Libreville conference, in the words of Ivorian President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, as "the opportunity for the voice of the silent majority to be heard". A strong move was launched by some "moderate" states urging non-interference by outside powers in the continent's affairs, for the sake of "security and stability in Africa". This reflected the growing concern of many member states at the spread of outside interference in Africa since the Cuban involvement in Angola.

Mediation Commission

One of the few decisions emanating from the Libreville summit was to endorse a Nigerian sponsored resolution calling for the setting up of a mediation commission to deal with inter-African disputes. The Nigerian leader, General Olusegun Obasanjo told delegates to the summit that Africa was witnessing increasing tension between OAU members. He claimed that conflicts arose fundamentally from "the machinations of our so-called friends from outside". Calling for drastic action to devise more effective machinery for settling inter-African conflicts, he recommended the creation of a standing committee to "help defuse and neutralise situations which could bring countries to the brink of armed conflict". He referred to a vast stockpile of arms and ammunition in Africa and urged member states to make some of this available to "liberation fighters" rather than use them in fratricidal wars against each other. General Obasanjo warned that the number of inter-African quarrels now constituted a real threat to peace and harmony on the continent.

Previously the Secretary-General of the OAU, Mr William Eteki Nsoamoua, urged delegates to the Ministerial Council meeting to set up a combined defence force that could intervene against aggression emanating from the white ruled states of Southern Africa. He declared that "most serious consideration should be given to the necessity and the urgency of establishing a mechanism which would permit the mobilisation without delay of a collective intervention force in cases of aggression against an African country". There has, however, been little response from OAU members in the past when this has been suggested.

The OAU and Southern Africa

The only really major decision of the conference was the somewhat unexpected approval of moves led by President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia to channel all future aid for the Rhodesian liberation movements to the Patriotic Front of Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe, and to regard this movement as the "sole authentic representative of the peoples of Zimbabwe". The Zambian president furthermore expressed the opinion that the new Zimbabwe could only grow from "the barrel of a gun".

The resolution adopted urged all member states to refrain from actions that could be construed as support for individuals "thus running the risk of creating more than one army for the liberation and defence of an independent Zimbabwe", although the wording was so ambiguous that Mr Peter Onu, principal spokesman for the OAU, was uncertain whether it meant the de-recognition by the OAU of the UANC led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa. However, it was clear that the OAU emerged from the Libreville summit bent on a new, strongly co-ordinated and violent offensive against Rhodesia. Said OAU spokesman Onu: "We have had enough of talking... now it is time for action".

Announcing the establishment of an *ad hoc* committee which would act as a "defence commission" and recommend to the presidents what actions should be taken to provide "all support" to Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia, Onu indicated that the assistance would be military and could possibly include the formation of an African expeditionary force. In effect, what was proposed by Nigeria envisaged a combined military and diplomatic offensive which might, conceivably, put Nigerian troops into front-line positions along the Rhodesian border. Nigeria's militant stand against Rhodesia - it provides greater assistance to Zambia than any other African state - may indicate a preparedness to become militarily involved in Mozambique.

Other discussions relating to Southern Africa were the usual condemnation of apartheid and a call for tougher sanctions; a condemnation of the South African government; and demands for more Western aid for Black Africa's struggles. Member states were again called on not to recognise Transkei or any other "bantustan" set up by the South African government.

On the question of SWA/Namibia the political committee of the Council of Ministers decided that attempts by the contact group of five Western powers to find a peaceful solution should be encouraged. This has been interpreted as a setback for SWAPO, which is recognised by the OAU as the "sole authentic representative" of the people of SWA/Namibia, for UN bodies like the Council for Namibia, and for a number of radical African governments which have all indicated opposition to all or part of the West's proposals, claiming that

they do not provide an acceptable solution to the dispute over the territory. An African diplomat at the UN is reported to have said, after the OAU decision: "It seems that Africa is at last losing faith in the doctrinaire radicals, the posturing Marxists and what the Americans might call the knee-jerk militants".

Some Prospects for the Future

The results of the Libreville summit meeting of the OAU show that Gabonese President Omar Bongo's hope for a "conference to salvage unity" was not realised. President Bongo's concern for the future of the OAU and his fear that it could break open at the seams as the tensions within it grow, were manifested in his attempts to turn attention outward by warning that the dangers facing Africa now were those of "new imperialists and neo-Colonialists". This statement could be seen as an indication that his year as OAU Chairman may be marked by a strong anti-Soviet line - and for that matter against any "foreign intervention in African affairs". The new OAU Chairman is known for his anti-communist stance (and he has growing links with Arab states; he is reported to have said: "The Soviet Union is causing all the trouble in Africa". Furthermore, he counselled the black nationalists in Southern Africa, at the opening of the Council of Ministers meeting, not to hurry into an armed struggle, but to pursue the course of dialogue first.

DENIS VENTER

Assistant Director
S.A.I.I.A.

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