



# REALITY CHECK

DIVERSE VOICES ON INTERNAL CONFLICT

The Fund for Peace

*“Building Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”*

NUMBER 1 JUNE 2001

*In 1991, General Ahmedou Toumani Touré had to make a difficult decision when the Mali government violently suppressed pro-democracy demonstrations in which at least 106 protestors were killed. General Touré led a group of 17 military officers who arrested the president and suspended the constitution. He then formed a transitional government that undertook to hold multi-party elections and return the country to civilian rule. In June 1992, General Touré handed over power to President Alpha Oumar Konare and a civilian government. More recently, General Touré led the Carter Center campaign to eradicate guinea worm in Mali and oversaw the initiation of similar programs in 15 other African countries. In 1993, he founded the Children’s Foundation, which has launched programs to improve nutrition, education, and environmental protection. He has worked as a facilitator to resolve the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa.*

**fFP: You made a tough decision in 1991. Was it a decision that you made over time or was it a decision you took because of one particular incident?**

First of all, that decision was not taken as a direct result of events nor was it truly calculated. As undesirable as such an event might be, we were in fact inspired by the coup d’état, since Africa has, after all, experienced quite a few coups. Two such events were noteworthy for my generation. The first was [Jerry] Rawlings’ coup in Ghana (1979) although we did not agree with such brutality. We have also been influenced by the 1983 revolution of our neighbors in Burkina Faso, the rebellion led by Thomas Sankara and [Blaise] Compaoré. What we agreed with in Burkina were the moral values, the order, the discipline and the competent management of state resources. But we did not approve of the folkloric nature of the revolution. Many discussions took place amongst Malian officers, as we were not satisfied with the clannish and oppressive management of our country. Furthermore, we did not agree with the surrounding financial corruption and fraud. I will admit that the 1991 events provided us not only with a reason but they also made it easy for us to



**General Ahmedou Toumani Touré**

intervene. Unfortunately, things did not go as anticipated. Everybody was overtaken by events. The Army had to step in as an arbitrator to quell the violence, arrest the President of the Republic and undertake a joint transition process. It was probably the first time in Africa that the army assumed authority through a civil insurrection and then called on civilians to help establish joint legislative and governmental powers, composed of both military personnel and civilians. We set up a National Conference to draft the Constitution of the new Republic. We prepared elections in which we decided not to be represented. We essentially set up all of the national institutions of the new Republic before turning the power over and

returning to our barracks. To this day, I am an on-duty military general. We promoted a democratic environment through privately-owned radio stations and fostered civil society and governing bodies. We also signed a peace agreement with the Tuaregs.<sup>1</sup> These are some of my recollections from 1991.

**FfP: You have said that in order to globalize, Africa must regionalize. Could you explain what you mean?**

It is probably through music that Africa has been the most successful in terms of globalization. Here in the States, people know Youssouf N'dour or Manu Dibango. Salif Keita is well known in Japan. Yet, given Africa's meager involvement in the global market, I am convinced, as are many Africans, that regionalization is a necessary step towards globalization. Contrary to popular belief, African populations are much better integrated than governments. The free flow of goods and the free movement of people were established long before integration was discussed.

**FfP: How quickly is integration moving?**

I can attest to the very rapid progress of integration. Since Mali has been entrusted with the presidency of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), we have achieved a lot more than in the previous three or four years. The shift of political power in Nigeria has resulted in better relations with the Nigerian government, which hosts ECOWAS and the bulk of our subregional organization. Some regional stock exchanges have been put in place. Furthermore, some organizations such as the European Union are really helping to support these regional projects. We have enjoyed a common market with the West African Monetary Union (WAMU) for nearly a year now and most of the customs barriers have been eliminated. Both the WAMU and ECOWAS have their own parliament. The WAMU even benefits from its own judicial tribunal. We have made more progress within the last three years than in the previous fifteen years. What used to be political rhetoric is now reality.

**FfP: What about security integration?**

On security issues, we must first focus on Africa as a whole. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) established a central body following the meeting of all Heads of State in Egypt around 1993. Actual results in conflict prevention and management have been somewhat lukewarm. They come more in observation than in actual conflict resolution. By contrast, organizations such as the South African Development Community (SADC) and ECOWAS, with which I am very familiar, have achieved more significant

results. In spite of existing obstacles, the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has been able to reinstate constitutional power in Sierra Leone.

**FfP: What are the obstacles that have prevented the OAU from becoming more effective ?**

First and foremost, expertise. I have not been able to identify state-of-the-art expertise in the fields of conflict mediation and prevention within bodies of the OAU.

**FfP: They are present in the sub-regional bodies ?**

More refined certainly. But there is also a political problem. The decision-making process is more removed within the OAU than it is within sub-regional organizations. Sub-regional Heads of State are closer to and more attuned to the issues. People are more aware of sub-regional instability and consequently of the eventual destabilization of their own country. Another factor is the lack of funding to launch peacekeeping operations. I took part in an operation in the Central African Republic, which involved a mission composed of 800 individuals from six countries with French logistics support.<sup>2</sup> The monthly cost of that force was one million dollars and we completed that mission successfully. We were then replaced by the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) force of 1300 members at a monthly cost of seven million dollars. This may show that lack of funding might be the root of the problem rather than the incompetence of African forces.

**FfP: Can you talk a little more about ECOWAS? Are there divisions along language lines or between bigger and smaller powers?**

Honestly, I am not aware of any such divisions. Personally, I have not witnessed any linguistic divisions. Both French-speaking and English-speaking countries have collaborated on peacekeeping missions. At the ECOMOG level, we have worked with Nigeria, Mali, Ghana and Gambia and there has been no basic problem from that point of view. I also do not think that a problem exists between big and small powers. The fundamental difficulty with ECOMOG lies in the overwhelming representation of Nigeria.

**FfP: How so?**

They can invest more financially and consequently have more influence on the decision-making process. That situation has now somewhat improved with [President Olusegun] Obasanjo at the helm. Nigerian internal problems are also worrisome and undermine its effectiveness.

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### **FfP: What about Nigeria's role in ECOMOG?**

The first issue was the way in which Nigeria tried to impose its view. For example, [former President Sani] Abacha asked others to collaborate after having unilaterally decided to reinstate constitutional order in Sierra Leone. That is not the proper way of going about it.

### **FfP: There was no consultation ?**

He himself came to power following a coup d'état. People did not appreciate his way of operating. The second key element lies essentially in the different ways countries pursue troop intake, organization and mobilization. Some countries must follow a strict parliamentary procedure in order to deploy troops whereas, in other cases, the Head of State alone makes that decision. Some opposition parties oppose intervention, and then the President has to respect the national law.

### **FfP: So domestic law is a factor.**

The harmonization of laws and regulations has become a necessity. It has a fundamental impact on the issues that you are raising. Some subjective issues also remain. If you must intervene in a country, which benefits from stronger ties with a third country, this third country will be hesitant to join in. Some situations are extremely sensitive. Take Mali for example. Many of our nationals are living in Sierra Leone and in Liberia. Should we embark on a peace enforcement mission, our fellow Malians abroad might be targeted. It is much easier in the context of peacekeeping operations following a specific peace agreement. Peace enforcement generates disagreements and therefore obstacles. Such was the case in Sierra Leone and it also caused divisions between Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

### **FfP: Who should determine the framework?**

It should be based on principle and involve regulations. Unfortunately, we observe the existence of a double standard. It seems that in Africa the conflicts to be quelled are subject to a certain kind of selection process.

### **FfP: You mean internationally ?**

In the international community, and even in some African countries too, they select their conflicts. In reality, if decisions were reached on a clear objective basis, everybody would agree with the intervention process in a peacekeeping context.

### **FfP: In a situation where the UN is unable or unwilling to act but there is agreement among ECOWAS countries, should ECOWAS have the authority to intervene?**

Whether one agrees or not, the Security Council has the monopoly on intervention matters despite the fact that we are able to intervene at the sub-regional level. Recently, ECOMOG forces intervened in Sierra Leone along with participating countries such as Mali. These countries suffered human losses. We can only proceed with moral recognition or due authorization from the United Nations. Any intervention must be legitimized through the famous chapters six or seven of the UN. I have a comment about financial means. It would appear that when it comes to

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UN peacekeeping efforts, people are allocating progressively fewer resources. For example, having pre-financed efforts on two previous occasions, Nigeria is now unwilling to get involved in such an exercise. There is another difficulty. I have witnessed a country being blackmailed by another (which shall remain nameless) after it requested the involvement of a peacekeeping unit. The applicant was told by a permanent member of the Security Council that it had to first sever its diplomatic relations with a specific state entity. Otherwise the member country was threatening to use its veto. The applicant country eventually did sever its diplomatic ties prior to the deployment of the peacekeeping force. Even though they remain undisclosed, such politics do come into play in the Security Council.

### **FfP: What if the Council fails to act?**

Let me give you another example. We did it all ourselves in Bangui [Central African Republic]. Only afterwards did we go see the Security Council. I myself led that mission. The mediation was initiated in Bangui in December 1996 and agreements were reached in January 1997. We made all the peace agreements and got written support from the Heads of State. The case was put before the United Nations in July and only then were we recognized by the United Nations. Reaching a decision is essential but we must never rely solely on an inflexible legal process. Mind you, it should not turn

into what we in Africa call a "western" or what you might call a free-for-all. A middle ground should be agreed upon. There will always be time to legitimize the situation.

**FfP: If each region came up with criteria for intervention, would Africa's rules be different from other regions' rules?**

I think that would be jumping the gun. Whether one agrees or not, caution lies with working with the Security Council. I strongly favor delegation of powers since it may bring universal conflict resolution. As far as I am concerned, the delegation of powers remains the right solution until circumstances have improved. Unfortunately, if the conflict is handled at a sub-regional level, there is no arbitrator, especially for monitoring purposes.

**FfP: You talked earlier about an actor on the Security Council following its own national interests rather than the interests of collective security.**

We are a long way from making collective security a reality. It stems from the fundamental human representation of members of the Security Council. Whatever the assets of the Security Council might be, democracy is not one of them. Ironically, it might be the best we have for now.

**FfP: How can the United States help?**

People interpreted President Bush's failure to include Africa within U.S. priorities as a marginalization if not downright desertion by the American government. Overall though, I appreciate the policy described by the National Security staff member today.<sup>3</sup> Education is the only item that I would have added. Taking care of diseases and curing them are not enough. I collaborated with former President Carter to educate communities about Guinea worms. Eradication currently stands at 97 percent. American aid and the Peace Corps played a key role in that mission. However small and despite the fact that it may not have been a priority, that mission was successful. A very

important fact in international affairs nowadays is that when the United States deems something necessary, it has a chance of becoming reality, at least in Africa.

I would add one piece of advice. I have always been wary of people who present themselves as experts on African matters. There are some things that we Africans can sense that will elude others. In spite of differences, the fact that Americans have included us and, as they are doing at this conference, are willing to discuss Africa, bears witness to the progress made.<sup>4</sup> Two additional and pivotal factors also have an impact: leadership and perception. Take for example the Democratic Republic of the Congo. More was accomplished in the two months following [Laurent] Kabila Senior's departure and [Joseph] Kabila Junior's coming into office than in the previous three years. The change came at two levels. First, Kabila Senior's departure and then the Western perception of the conflict. These are two key elements. A limiting single-minded vision, or sticking to preconceived ideas cannot form the basis of analysis. Given their dynamic nature, conflicts do evolve. Consequently, each step requires proper analysis and a renewed vision. Sudan, for example, has evolved in the last three years. The fact that there is now a new U.S. administration could bring about new dynamics and play a key role.

-- Washington, D.C., May 9, 2001

<sup>1</sup> Tuaregs, desert nomads related to the North African Berbers, have traditionally opposed the Mali central government. Starting in June 1990, armed attacks in the North by Tuaregs seeking greater autonomy led to clashes with the military. In April 1992, the government and most opposing factions signed a pact to end the fighting and restore stability.

<sup>2</sup> In 1997, President Ange-Felix Patasse of the Central Africa Republic invited a force composed of troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Mali, Senegal and Togo to monitor the implementation of the Bangui Agreements between the government and rebelling sectors of the armed forces.

<sup>3</sup> General Touré had just come from a meeting, on May 9, 2001, in which Jendayi Frazer, Senior Director for Africa Affairs at the National Security Council had outlined U.S. policy toward Africa.

<sup>4</sup> General Touré was attending a two-day symposium sponsored by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.

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