

African Foreign Policy: A Question of Methodology

by

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Abstract

Political and economic challenges and opportunities lie ahead of the people, and the leaders of Africa, and conversely, the increase in oil revenue, foreign investment and trade relations with China and India represent challenges as well as opportunities for the continent. Thus, what will guide the decisions of Africa's leadership during this critical period, and what course of action will lead to an African political consensus? Thus, in this article I advance a methodology for a united African foreign policy applied to two of Africa's most urgent foreign policy challenges, the U.S. establishment of the African Command (AFRICOM), and the rapidly growing economic and political engagement with China.

Introduction

What role can methodology play in the political world as it provides people with the paradigms, theories and models that help them chart a course of action? Second, what methodology will guide Africa's foreign policy for the next century, and last, what guiding framework will guide African leaders' selection of a unified course of action? The answers to these questions are of critical consequence to the masses of people in Africa, and in its vast Diaspora. Hence, methodology influences the selection of objectives, the selection of allies, how national interests are prioritized, how economic and political conditions are interpreted and explained, and the course of action taken in light of the answers to those questions (two different countries may have very similar demographics, geography, and socio-economic conditions). However, depending on the methodology that guides leadership, they may identify different objectives, select different allies, prioritize their challenges differently, interpret their strengths and weaknesses differently, and take difference courses of action. In this essay I will describe the philosophical basis for a united African foreign policy methodology, and subsequently explain the significance of the formation of the African Command and the increasing trade relationship between Africa and China in light of the proposed methodology.

Africa has historically been forced, coerced and manipulated into adopting a foreign political methodology that has resulted in its underdevelopment, and general integration into the lower levels of the global economic and political network, despite its wealth of potential. Yet, Africa has also seen impressive post independence growth with some progressive leaders; but unfortunately their cohort also consists of a class of cleptocratic and opportunistic leaders who have been of far greater benefit to themselves and foreign private industry than to the masses of the people, to whom they owe their official commitment.

Correspondingly, the world's leading multilateral economic institutions have sponsored structural adjustment programs and development projects for years. However, to accept uncritically and adjust completely to the conditions and agenda of multilateral economic institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organization and Paris Club would be to participate in an development paradigm that has resulted in the growing gap between wealthy and poor nations, and the growing gap between the rich and poor. Similarly, it would be just as ill advised to accept uncritically the conditions and agenda of non western growing economies such as China and India. Thus, Africa cannot afford the absence of ideology, and the market can no longer be allowed to serve as the methodology guiding Africa's development, because it has led many African nations to positions in the lower levels of the global economy and the international trade supply chains report that Africa represents a mere 1.6% of world trade, therefore, economics cannot be allowed to trump culture in the shaping of development in Africa.

Diopian Methodology: Cultural Unity

In advancing a methodology to guide Africa's foreign policy, I involve a Diopian cultural renaissance, hence an Afrocentric paradigm of analysis (Mazama, 2003), an Ubuntu guided philosophy of engagement, and an Afrocentric agency directed toward victory. And in this context, the work of historian, physician and political scientist Cheikh Anta Diop who dedicated a segment of his scholarship to research based on the cultural unity of Africa which suggest that amid the tremendous and invaluable diversity of African people, there is also a set of cultural commonalities (Diop, 1989), is of assistance in advancing a cultural unity methodology to guide African foreign policy decisions. However, historically, one of the weaknesses that colonialists were able to successfully exploit was the fragmentation and lack of centralized political unity on the African continent (Karenga, 2002).

Nevertheless, the former South African president Thabo Mbeki has recognized the need to call for a cultural renaissance, 'the African Renaissance', and in the tradition of Diop (1989), working to establish and synthesize the values, beliefs and ideologies that are most common to African people so imperative in building sustained political and economic unity, thus via foreign policy, cultural unity is a pretext for political unity, and perhaps the pretext for settling ethnic tensions on the African continent that are so often irritated by poverty, corruption, foreign investment and exploitation.

Therefore a Diopian cultural renaissance would provide a foundation for a collective agenda that the African Union is best suited to call for in the mobilization of Africa's scholarly and political community in a request to study promote and celebrate the cultural dimensions shared amongst many African people, as well as the unique characteristics that distinguish them. In addition, it would encourage African people to see the commonalities they share, and also a cultural renaissance that would promote African people in meeting the demands of modernity and the contemporary challenges with a problem solving methodology, created in its own image and cultural context.

Thus, culture is best qualified to highlight a people's commonalities. According to Nobles (2006), "the destruction of a people's indigenous culture is the necessary requisite to the effective colonization and political domination of the people" (p.165), and juxtapose Nobles' assertion that culture similarly plays a fundamental role in achieving political and economic self determination. Consequently, a cultural renaissance is an important aspect of Africa's domestic policy and its importance is found in the logic that cultural grounding will provide the positioning or location from which African countries will engage other countries. Therefore, the countries with which African countries share the most cultural commonality in terms of values, beliefs, and traditions should be their natural political allies; and those countries with which African countries share the most cultural commonality should receive priority in forming multinational developmental initiatives, economic communities, and technology sharing.

Afrocentric Development

African foreign policy must be *Afrocentric* in that it should prioritize the needs and concerns of African people first, and consider the long term implications of any foreign policy for the masses of African people (Asante, 1998). Any African foreign policy must also be Afrocentric in its objectives, given that the major objective of Afrocentricity is African development *on African terms*. Third, emphasis must be placed on the fact that African development must take place on African terms because the concept of *development* itself has been colonized and defined on Western terms. Besides, the notion that development is a one way road leading to a reproduction of western society in developing countries is dangerously misguided, and has the potential of locating Africa's development on the margins of a foreign political and economic paradigm (the western idea of development was part and parcel to the language of colonialism).

Hence, colonialism was the European foreign policy methodology for feeding its own economic growth and exploiting not only the material reality, but also the humanity of indigenous populations under the more digestible auspices of bringing non European countries into 'modernity, civilization and human progress'. However, the 20th century ushered in the language of "development" which skirts the negative and imperialistic connotation attached to the term *colonialism* (Sachs, 1992). Therefore, it is incumbent upon African leaders not to allow the change in language to skew their discernment between appropriate and inappropriate political relations.

Furthermore, Afrocentricity includes a conceptualization of the African world as Africans on the African continent and in their diverse circumstances and locations around the world. Conversely, one of Africa's greatest resources lies in the fact that the African world extends to all of the non African countries that Africans have been dispersed to over the centuries, voluntarily and involuntarily. Consequently, forming strategic relationships with these populations and harnessing the human resources of Africans across the 'African world' will be critical to Africa's future development. And moreover, the African Union has accepted and begun to act upon these highly valuable populations of African people.

Ubuntu: African Conceptualization

Ubuntu is an aspect of African philosophy best suited to moderate the relationship between African countries and non African countries. Hence, Ubuntu is a term that embodies the African conceptualization of the universe that refers to the incessantly unfolding and manifesting essence of humanness or human beingness from an African perspective and places emphasis on its continuous action which is why it has been referred to as a verbal noun (Ramose, 2002) Furthermore, Ubuntu has implications for the relationship between human beings and humane dispositions towards others with implications for the relationship between nations.

Specifically, Ubuntu originates from the Nguni people of southeast Africa, and refers to the philosophical idea that the universe is interconnected, interdependent, collective, and that being human means to affirm the humanity in others. Thus, Ubuntu is embodied in the Zulu proverb, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means 'a person is a person by means of the people' and therefore the nature of human beingness in African philosophy is concerned with being interdependent and collective realizing that human beings may only reach their highest potential through maintaining harmony, balance, and order between themselves, other human beings, and the universe. And according to Bishop Desmond Tutu:

"Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language. It speaks to the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, "Yu, u nobuntu"; "Hey, he or she has ubuntu." This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life." (Tutu, 1999, pp. 34-35)

Accordingly, Ubuntu transcends the realm of foreign policy; however for African people, all human thought and activity, including foreign policy must be the outgrowth of Ubuntu to sustain a healthy human society and is best suited to shape the ethic of governance between Africa's leaders and her citizens. Yet, in many cases, the market driven pursuit of profit and material acquisition is not always compatible with human development, or more specifically with *African* development on African terms; and in many cases the ethic of the market can drive a wedge between Africa's leaders and her citizens, in the form of corruption. And consequently, with Ubuntu in the forefront, the methodology of African foreign policy must include victorious political agency component.

Hence, a victorious political agency involves victories consciousness and agency, two key terms in the Afrocentric paradigm(Mazama, 2003). The first imperative, victorious political agency requires that Africa be proactive in its formulation of institutions and policies to moderate its relationships with non African countries. For example, the mere existence of the Bretton Woods system of monetary management to establish rules and financial links among the world's major industrial nations, does not mean they should also control African economic development. Because, if the African Union is to become the United States of Africa as declared in the Accra Declaration of 2007, it must be robust enough to moderate and filter it most important relationships through its own institutions and organizations, and in either case, this requires proactive self conscious institution building and collective policy formulation. History has demonstrated that exploitative policies have resulted in Africa's underdevelopment, therefore the second imperative of victorious political agency is to identify and neutralize anti African policies that exist in African trade policies and relationships with other countries; thus policies that facilitate African development on African terms cannot exist concurrently with anti African institutions and policies that are not consistent with African development on African terms.

AFRICOM

In light of the above, it would be informative to engage some of the current challenges the African continent is confronting as a whole. One of those challenges is the formation of the African Command, the U.S. region of command assigned to Africa announced in February 2007. Nonetheless, Africa's cultural, political and economic future will not be secure unless it finds its own solutions to the challenges of the globalized world as the continent has recently fallen under several designated U.S. regional military command structures because of its strategic importance to the U.S. and other world political economies (Ghazvinian, 2007). Thus, it is absolutely critical that the establishment of this singular military command structure dedicated to carrying out the US security agenda on African soil be evaluated using an appropriate foreign policy methodology considering that the U.S. security agenda transcends defense alone and therefore has the capacity to impact society at the level of politics, economics as well as culture (this foreign policy has the capacity to influence African development). The pertinent question to ask here is will it aid in the promotion of African development on African terms as it serves two primary purposes for the United States outside of the humanitarian and anti-terrorism objectives that are so often publicly espoused by the current administration to secure the sustainable exploitation of Africa's resource wealth, and to displace Africa's continental security agenda with the security agenda of the United States which echo a militarily and commercially guided foreign policy toward Africa consistent with western domination and past colonial approach to the culture, people and land of Africa.

To secure the sustainable exploitation of Africa, the US has found it necessary to further militarize its relationships. It is well known that Africa is a fast growing supplier of fuel minerals (crude oil, gas), as well as strategic non-fuel minerals (copper, platinum, manganese, cobalt etc.) to the United States and other growing economies. To secure its investment, the U.S. is becoming a growing military presence in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea in particular. Securing the uninterrupted flow of resources to the US economy\industry, and military industrial complex are two of the primary, yet underreported reasons for the establishment of AFRICOM. However, AFRICOM cannot be successful without the complicity of African leaders who are willing to actively participate in their own exploitation by outsourcing African military sovereignty to the United States, and facilitating the further militarization of Africa.

Accordingly, it appears that the United States is using its military to compensate for its vulnerability in the arena of economic competition in Africa, which it faces from China, India and other countries with growing industries. Second, AFRICOM is very likely to be a costly undertaking for African countries who cooperate, in several critical ways: 1.) Africa is likely to become a proxy battleground for the U.S. war against *radical Islam* today, as it was made the proxy battleground for the U.S. war on communism in the 1950's through the 1980's. And with this threat, comes the risk of further exacerbating divisions between African people along religious and ethnic lines. 2.) African countries risk increasing the economic gap between the rich and poor within countries, a truism evident in a IMF annual *Economic Outlook* report which explains how the policies of dominant western countries and multilateral development agencies toward developing countries including those in Africa, have led to increased income gaps between African political and economic leaders and the majority of African people (plus, enhanced western private investment is likely to result from the more "inviting" commercial\business climate that will be provided by the security umbrella established by AFRICOM). 3.) African countries risk, not only, increased dependence on the U.S. economic agenda, but the added element of military dependence on the U.S. which does nothing to promote African agency toward victory. 4.) The citizens of Africa risk unjustified shootings, detentions and humanitarian violations that may ensue due to an increased presence of U.S. based private militaries that are often not subject to the same rules as state militaries or domestic laws, as witnessed in Iraq. And any additional private military presence would only compound the already existing French, British, and American private military presence on the continent by such firms as: ALGIZ Services Ltd, Defensecurity, BroadBridge Wraith and others. Thus, it would be ill advised for African nations to outsource the handling of their regional security matters to dominant western countries, and furthermore enhancing African countries' ability to address military matters on the continent does not have to come as a result of a series of bilateral military efforts with the United States, but; *African led* operations *supported by* the international community.

Although the State Department contends that it does not intend to station any large numbers of American troops on African soil, the more ominous aspect of AFRICOM is the risk of African nations adopting a security agenda defined by Washington. Hence, African heads of state must demonstrate their *agency* by firmly taking the lead of finding their own long term solutions to issues like those occurring in Darfur, Somalia, and Zimbabwe, outside of being an appendage to a non African security agenda.

Above all, how does Africa demonstrate it's agency toward victory in this situation as some countries such as Libya, Morocco, Algeria, and those countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and (ECOWAS) have made it clear that any attempt to over exert U.S. military and economic agenda on to the African continent must be rejected? Undoubtedly, there is no clear answer; however African countries cannot seek to address their legitimate economic and military concerns by subordinating themselves to the military and fiscal agenda of the United States or select European countries. Consequently, African leaders must remain at the lead of all problem solving efforts on the African continent and therefore emphasize a common African foreign policy agenda that can bring together factions and oppositions groups to negotiate solutions that prioritize the equitable distribution of resources and political representation for historically marginalized groups (previous peace agreements that have not considered the aforementioned priorities have proven empty). Thus, such initiatives should be implemented *in addition to* the African led military presence needed to prevent the death of innocent people in locations such as Somalia and Darfur. And I contend that *African* countries are in the best position to create new policies and enforce those policies with international *support and cooperation*, and of course, the African Union must not accept the unilateral decrees of any country or power that is foreign to the African continent.

Trade with China

Like the United States, the growth of China's political/industrial economy has also become increasingly dependent upon foreign sources of critical materials. China is modernizing its industries at a rapid pace, and has a growing middle class with rising income and purchasing power (Broadman, 2006). Therefore, their economic growth is not secure unless their access to these critical materials is secure. As of recent, China became the second largest energy consumer in the world, behind the U.S. (Ghazvinian, 2007), consuming 9% of the world's crude oil (expected to increase to 20% by 2030) and importing approximately 45% of it from foreign sources (Klare, 2008). From 2000 to 2007, trade between China and Africa jumped from \$10 Billion to \$70 billion, whereas China has passed up Britain and France to become the second largest trading partner with Africa, and by 2010 it will likely overtake the U.S. to become Africa's largest trading partner (Michel, 2008). And since China receives 30% of its imported oil from Africa it is arguable that China is more dependent upon Africa for energy than the U.S., because the U.S. only receives 17% of its imported oil from Africa (Fues, 2006).

Therefore, what are the major factors influencing China's growing interests in the African continent? The *first* factor is China's own economic growth, it is experiencing one of the strongest economic growth rates in the world at 10% which includes the necessity of acquiring energy and other natural resources it takes to sustain that economic growth. (Taylor, 2005) The *second* factor is Africa's economic growth potential as one of the highest population growth rates, which usually leads to economic growth. (Taylor, 2005) Third, the economies of Africa have not grown as large as the west, which makes African countries more receptive to cheaper or inexpensive Chinese goods (Taylor, 2005). Thus, for China, Africa represents a major market for its low cost manufactured goods, as well as an opportunity to maintain sufficient levels of employment for Chinese nationals (Le Pere & Shelton, 2007). And *lastly*, is Africa's abundance of natural resources, especially the most important and internationally sought crude oil (Taylor, 2005).

In this scramble, many political analysts argue that China is a far better trading partner for African countries than western countries for various reasons: some argue that China's values are closer to African values; others promote the fact that China's products are much cheaper than western imports, making them more accessible to the poor; China and Africa's common legacy of struggle against colonialism (China provided many African nations with support in their struggles for liberation in the form of training, weapons, finance, etc.), and China also provided many of the infrastructural projects that Africa can benefit from most like roads, rails, schools and hospitals without the imposed conditionality structures of the IMF or the World Bank. And certainly, China's political accomplishments in many African countries can't be ignored such as: writing off and forgiving overdue debt, providing interest free loans (between 2005 and 2008 US\$10 Billion was provided in concessional loans and preferential- export buyers credit to developing countries, targeted at infrastructural development), providing development assistance in public health through assisting with the provision of drugs and medicines thus advancing medical facilities, and in the training of medical staff. And notwithstanding, politically, Le Pere and Shelton (2007) assert that it would be of benefit for Africa to enhance its political and economic relationship with China to ease dependence on the west, and to make their voices heard on the UN Security Council.

However, a more critical foreign policy methodology would require that Africa's relationship with China be subject to more scrutiny, because Africa's development depends on it. And although China has a history of struggle against colonialism, it is quite clear that China's current interest in the African continent is far more commercial than it once was, despite China's history of support for liberation struggles on the African continent. Therefore China's historical legacy should not be enough to win immunity from close and critical examination. First, it has been established that China needs resources, but why has it intensified its search in Africa so rapidly? Because, one third of the world's newest oil discoveries since 2000 have been found in Africa (Ghazvinian, 2007), and in 10 years Africa's oil productions levels have increased by 36% while the rest of the world's production levels have increased by only 16% (Servant, 2003).

Additionally: 1) the Department of Energy estimates that “The Combined oil output by all African producers is projected to rise by 91% between 2002 and 2025, from 8.6 to 16.4 million barrels per day.” (Klare and Volman, 2006, pp. 611); 2) Africa is one of the only places in the world that the rate of oil output (91%) is actually increasing at a higher rate than oil consumption (35%) (Klare, 2004, pp. 121); and Africa’s oil is also attractive because it tends to be “sweet” or low in hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide making easier and cheaper to refine (Klare and Volman, 2006). And important in this, the region of particular interest in Africa is the oil located in the countries that border the Gulf of Guinea and off shore in the Gulf itself where it is estimated to hold 24 billion barrels of oil, hence one of the most productive offshore oil productions centers in the world (Servant, 2003).

Contextually, it should be noted in this discussion of energy resources that one of the goals of Pan Africanism is for Africa to engage in more manufacturing and export diversification instead of simply supplying raw materials. Thus, Africa could engage in the production of food crops, leather products, not just coffee beans, but coffee. Yes, the economic value of Africa’s trade with China is tremendous, but it must not simply be evaluated based on its quantity of trade, but its quality. China’s investment in Africa does not do much to promote African export diversification because it is mainly interested in raw materials from Africa, mainly oil and iron-ore. As a result, African countries risk being stuck in the vicious cycle of being primary providers of raw material which reach their economic potential in foreign countries. For example, Africa south of the Sahara is one of the only places in the world that has not had an increase in their non oil exports in the past 20 years (Broadman, 2007). Yet, oil and gas account for 62% of Africa’s total exports to China (Broadman, 2007).

Overall, the Africa-China equation is unbalanced and to continue this foreign policy formula with China in its current form would contribute to the perpetuation of African economic dislocation with African goods reaching their highest manufactured product value on foreign shores. In addition, while China has lowered or removed tariffs on the oil and iron ore it imports from Africa, it has raised tariffs on the non oil and ore products it imports from Africa (Broadman, 2007). And ironically, China has higher taxes on some of Africa’s leading exports like cocoa, coffee and cashews than the U.S. or the U.K. (Broadman, 2007). This challenge does not help the growth of manufacturing in Africa, and thus constrains growth as China’s high tariffs curb Africa’s exports to China in favor of raw materials which prolong Africa’s situation of being trapped in the role of a global raw material supplier (Broadman, 2007, p.182). And coincidentally, China’s exports to Africa are far more diversified than Africa’s exports to China in large part due to China’s much larger pool of skilled labor and therefore the threat of a trade deficit looms as China’s exports to Africa grow at a rate higher than its imports from Africa.

Indeed, the affects of the China-Africa foreign policy has left its footprint on Africa's textile industry as well. The flood of low cost Chinese textiles and apparel into Africa has had the affect of putting many African manufacturers out of business which has sparked protests and harmed local industries in Lesotho, Swaziland, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia and Morocco; factories have been shut down in many countries and it is estimated that 250,000 jobs and 37% of Africa's textile capacity has been lost (Shinn, 2007). Yet, in recent years, China's exports to South Africa have increased by 80% accounting for 80% of China's total exports to South Africa, at the expense of thousands of local textile jobs (Wenping, 2007, p.26). However, responsibility for this impact cannot be assigned only to China's aggressive trade orientation, but also to Africa's lack of a large skilled labor force.

As of late, China's policy of non interference has taken a sharp turn in several African countries, especially Zambia, because Zambia possesses much of the copper China needs. For example, in 2005, the Chinese strictly prohibited African miners from joining unions, and warned of severe punishment for any Zambian miners caught being involved in union activity (Trofimov, 2007). Furthermore, the Zambian copper miners were only being paid less than the minimum wage of \$67 per month (Trofimov, 2007), and as a result, they complained about their low wages and the poor working conditions in the mine. Second, in the same year there was a major explosion at the copper mine in which 46 mine workers were killed, hence the absence of union oversight was seen as a factor that could have prevented the blast. Then again in 2006, workers gathered in front of the mine and protested their poor working conditions, and the fact that they were not paid their wages on time, thus they began to throw rocks at the Chinese guards who subsequently opened fire on the unarmed crowd, killing five people (Trofimov, 2007).

This killing was reported around the world, and undoubtedly many were shocked, Chinese guests in Africa shootings protesting Zambian copper miners in Zambia. And as much as African countries will benefit from investment in their mineral resources, especially from China, Africa has to realize that China like many other countries has its own domestic issues around worker safety and environmental degradation, and Africa cannot afford to allow any country to export its domestic problems to African countries.

Pointing out these challenges in the Africa's foreign policy relationship with China in not presented to promote Africa's distancing from China, just as advocating for emissions standards and ethanol use is not intended to stop people from driving vehicles. Africa should have a relationship with China, it represents a tremendous opportunity. However, that relationship should be moderated by a methodology of foreign policy that ensures long term African development on African terms. Thus, African nations need to establish the structures and practices that will allow for a more beneficial relationship with China and other developing regions.

South Africa, for example, has done so by agreeing to set controls on the quantity of Chinese textiles entering South Africa while generally, African countries must increase their pool of skilled workers so that they may take advantage of the manufacturing jobs when they become available. And last, if the African Union is ever to become the United States of Africa as per the Accra Declaration of 2007, it needs to assume the responsibility of developing mandatory minimum labor standards, product safety standards and environmental standards, as well as corresponding penalties for the violation of those standards; it is my position that these regulations must be continent wide and filtered through the African Union, as it moves along the path to become the United States of Africa constructed around a methodically united African centered African foreign policy.

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