

## Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 205: The Somali Crisis: Time for an African Solution

March 28, 1994

George B. N. Ayittey

George B. N. Ayittey is an associate professor of economics at the American University and president of the Free Africa Foundation. His most recent book, *Africa Betrayed* (Cato and St. Martins, 1992), won the Mencken Award for best book of 1992.

### Executive Summary

Somalia's societal breakdown and the famine that accompanied it were results of political and economic problems common to most sub-Saharan African countries. The U.S. and UN interventions in Somalia are unlikely to resolve the country's crisis because they do not offer solutions based on African initiatives. Indeed, dozens of UN and U.S. troops have already been killed by Somalis angry with those forces for trying to impose a settlement to Somalia's complex political disputes, and hundreds of Somalis have been killed in clashes with the occupying forces. That should not be surprising since outside attempts to resolve Africa's problems have regularly proven ineffective and even counterproductive.

The chronic crises in Somalia and sub-Saharan Africa in general have been caused by a succession of repressive regimes and their disastrous domestic policies. Flawed economic and political models have led to dismal growth in per capita income, falling rates of food production, periodic famines, systematic disregard of basic liberties, institutionalized corruption, and ongoing civil wars.

A long-term solution to those problems can come only from Africans themselves, not from well-meaning occupying powers or grandiose nation-building schemes of the United Nations. Traditional African systems of participatory government and free markets should serve as the model for the region's societies. The transition to such systems may not be easy, but it is the only way free and prosperous societies will emerge and thrive in Africa. The United Nations and the United States must allow Africans to work out their own destiny.

### Introduction

For much of 1992 most of Somalia lay in ruins--effectively destroyed. It had no government, no police force, nor even basic services. Armed thugs and bandits roamed the country, pillaging and plundering, and murderous warlords battled savagely for control of the capital, Mogadishu. The carnage and the drought claimed over 300,000 lives, and heartbreaking spectacles of emaciated bodies of famine victims were daily visited upon the public by the Western media.

During 1993 Somalia was occupied by U.S. soldiers providing humanitarian assistance and by UN peacekeeping troops attempting to establish order in the country. The U.S.-UN intervention, of course, was prompted by a desire to end the hunger and violence. Although the goal of the humanitarian mission was quickly achieved, the United Nations found itself dragged into the Somalis' battles, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of UN peacekeepers and hundreds of Somalis at the hands of U.S. and UN forces. Even the United States has suffered casualties in its efforts to impose

stability in Mogadishu. When 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in October 1993 during a Somali-U.S. confrontation, it became apparent to U.S. policymakers that establishing a functioning society in Somalia was more complex than they had thought.

Although the United States has refrained from committing itself further to nation building in Somalia and has promised to withdraw from that country by March 31, 1994, the United Nations has pledged to remain there to work out a political settlement--a strategy likely to end in failure, since disputing factions now regard the United Nations as an obstacle to peace and "an occupying force." Indeed, the violence aimed at the United Nations has been due precisely to many Somalis' resentment that the solutions to their problems would be dictated from outside and to suspicion about the United Nations' political agenda.

Somalia's problems are characteristic of those of many African nations. Unfortunately, as has been the case in other African countries, outside forces will probably not provide an enduring solution to Somalia's difficulties. After all, despite massive economic assistance from the West, famines have been occurring with depressing regularity in Africa in recent years, and African economies have been in dismal shape. Although droughts have played havoc with agricultural production, the food supply has been far more threatened by never-ending armed conflicts.

It is true that external factors, including the colonial legacy, the Cold War, and other foreign meddling in African affairs, have played a role in creating the region's problems. But the primary causes of Africa's crises are of internal origin: misguided political leadership, corruption, capital flight, defective economic systems, senseless civil wars, and military vandalism. Although foreign powers can help with the resolution of Somali-type conflicts, it should be recognized that Africans themselves bear the ultimate responsibility for solving their problems. Indeed, they are the only ones capable of providing a lasting solution.

### **The Reign of Terror in Somalia**

Somalia's descent into chaotic lawlessness did not occur overnight and could have long been predicted. Though the Somalis are ethnically homogeneous, their plight under and after colonial rule bore testimony to the capriciousness of colonial boundaries. The Somali found themselves in five jurisdictions: British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, Ethiopia (in the Ogaden), Kenya, and Djibouti. The nation of Somalia was formed and granted independence in July 1960 when the British protectorate and the Italian trust were joined and the rest of the Somali people were abandoned in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya.

The civilian administration that assumed power after independence became hopelessly corrupt and incompetent. On October 21, 1969, it was overthrown in a bloodless coup by Maj. Gen. Mohamed Siad Barre, who adopted the socialist model and the designation "Jalle," or "Comrade." Government was centralized under a "supreme revolutionary council," and Somalia turned to the Soviet Union for tutelage during the period 1970-77.

The break with Moscow came when the Soviets refused to support Barre's grand scheme of uniting the Somali in one "Greater Somaliland." Both Somalia and Ethiopia were Soviet allies in the Horn of Africa, and the Soviets were unwilling to support military incursions into Ethiopia. Although Barre seized the Ogaden in southern Ethiopia in a successful military campaign in 1977, he was routed and expelled by Ethiopian forces with help from Moscow in March 1978.

### **The West Compounds Somalia's Problems**

Barre then turned to the United States. The Carter administration promised to help if Somalia would cut ties to Moscow. Barre did so, and on August 22, 1980, Somalia and the United States signed an agreement that permitted the United States to use military facilities at the port of Berbera. In exchange, Washington agreed to provide Barre with \$20 million in credits for the purchase of military equipment, \$5 million in budgetary support, and \$20 million in general credits that year. But the change in its geo-political alignment did not save Somalia, which was already beyond redemption.

In July 1976 the Revolutionary Council was disbanded and replaced with the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the sole legal party. Socialist policies, however, failed to engineer economic development. Although Somalia did become a

major supplier of bananas, the economy was in tatters by 1979. The International Monetary Fund, summoned in 1980, called for market-oriented economic policies, devaluation of the Somali shilling, and sale of unprofitable state enterprises. After eight years of government policy zigzagging and posturing, in June 1986 a frustrated IMF pulled out, declaring Somalia ineligible for further borrowing.

Over the period 1965-87 living standards remained stagnant. Even though Somalia received substantial amounts of foreign aid, its gross national product per capita grew at a miserable 0.3 percent a year, earning Somalia the title "the Graveyard of Aid." [1] Over \$800 million poured in from the United States during that time.

Between 1981 and 1990 Italy alone spent more than \$1 billion to sponsor 114 projects in Somalia. According to Wolfgang Aichtner, an Italian journalist, "With few exceptions, (such as vaccination programs carried out by NGOs [nongovernmental organizations]), the Italian ventures were absurd and wasteful." He wrote:

Approximately \$250 million was spent on the Garoe- Bosaso road that stretches 450 kilometers across barren desert, crossed only by nomads on foot. More than \$40 million was spent to build a brand new hospital equipped with sophisticated machinery and operating rooms, in Corioley, south of Mogadishu. Since the Somalis were unable to run it, the hospital was allowed to fall to pieces. The Italian government paid about \$95 million for a fertilizer plant in Mogadishu that never became operational. The Italians even established a University of Somalia--despite the fact that 98 percent of the population is illiterate. The Italian professors received salaries between \$16,000 and \$20,000 per month. [2]

Piero Ugolini, an agronomist who worked for the technical unit of the Italian Embassy in Mogadishu from 1986 to 1990, revealed that a majority of Italian cooperative projects were carried out without considering their effects on the local population. "[The] Italian aid program was used to exploit the pastoral populations and to support a regime that did nothing to promote internal development and was responsible for the death of many of its people," Ugolini said. [3]

Corruption increasingly became a problem, and foreign aid simply went to replace capital outflows. In 1984, for example, \$15 million flowed out of Somalia. Misguided socialist policies did not help food production, either. It declined by 2.7 percent per capita over the 1975-80 period and a further 1.3 percent from 1980 to 1985. By 1987 consumer prices had risen 1,000 percent over their 1980 level.

### Barre's Brutality

As Barre's regime became increasingly corrupt and unpopular, it resorted to force to crush all opposition. Torture, mass executions, pillage, and carnage were the regime's signatures. So paranoid was Barre's military regime that it declared war on its own people. In May 1988 it dropped bombs on Somali citizens after they demonstrated against Barre's 20-year despotic rule. Hundreds of thousands of innocent people were put to death or imprisoned without the benefit of legal procedures.

Many politicians, businessmen, religious leaders, and young students simply vanished or were butchered. For example, on July 16, 1989, in the early hours of Eid al-Adha, a Moslem holy day, government forces swooped down and arrested six prominent imams after morning prayers. Whole sections of the crowd of worshippers were gunned down. Innocent people were rounded up by the hundreds, and many were murdered and buried on the Jasira beach. Over 1,000 died that day.

In March 1990 Africa Watch, a New York-based human rights organization, charged Barre's regime with "responsibility for the deaths of 50,000 to 60,000 civilians since hostilities broke out between the government and rebels from the Somali National Movement." [4]

### Warlordism Replaces the Barre Dictatorship

Two rebel movements--the United Somali Congress and the Somali National Movement--set out to overthrow Barre. In January 1991, the same month the Persian Gulf War erupted, they succeeded in driving Barre from power. After his ouster, however, internecine rivalry erupted between the rebel groups. The USC controlled the south, including Mogadishu, while the SNM controlled the north. In March of that year the north seceded to form the Republic of

Somali- land. Then factionalism emerged within the ranks of the USC.

One faction was led by interim president Ali Mahdi Mohamed and the other by Gen. Mohamed Farah Aidid. Mogadishu became a divided city, as the two battled for control. Aidid controlled most of the southern sector, while Mahdi's stronghold was the Kaaraan district and other northern areas. That turn of events shocked many. The country, in the process of removing Barre, had already been devastated-- reduced to an ash heap of charred buildings and burned-out vehicles, with decomposing bodies littering the streets. Yet "educated" barbarians were waging a fierce battle to determine who should be president, totally unconcerned about the plight of their people.

There was more ammunition in Somalia than food and medicine. Africa Watch affirmed that "the level of discipline among the troops [was] so low, the number of free guns so high and the need to loot for food so great that firefights [would] undoubtedly continue." [5] Between November 1991 and March 1992 an estimated 41,000 people were killed. Most of the victims were civilians, half of them women and children.

### **Postcolonial Africa's Political and Economic Disaster**

Unfortunately, the excesses of the Barre regime are not the exception in Africa. In the late 1980s many African governments, including those of Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Sudan, Togo, and Zaire, declared war against their own citizens in their mad obsession with political power. In Mozambique, for example, ragged government troops and a shadowy guerrilla army took turns terrorizing villages and stealing their meager crops. Entire units stooped to banditry. For many people, guns became a source of income. Mozambican soldiers have been known to hire out their weapons to criminals for a fee or a part of the loot.

The plight of Somalia encapsulates the experience of most black African nations: years of colonial misrule, the establishment of arbitrary state boundaries, independence, repressive governments, violence, and widespread hunger or famine. Somalia's latest crisis only makes it more urgent to examine the region's bitter history to help prevent similar developments elsewhere.

In the 1960s when Africa gained its independence from colonial rule, its people were euphoric. "Free at last!" they chanted. The colonial "infidels" had been driven out of Africa, and Africans no longer had to submit to the indignities of foreign domination. Africa was capable of charting its own course in its own image, not that of the "racist" colonialists. Today the optimism and euphoria of the 1960s have been replaced by a deep sense of disappointment, anger, and betrayal.

Independence did not herald the era of freedom and prosperity trumpeted by the nationalists. Three decades of independence and "freedom" have witnessed a steady increase in the incidence of hunger and a systematic deterioration of living standards across Africa. More perfidious, the economic exploitation and political oppression of the African people have intensified--at the hands of the same elites and nationalists who denounced the colonial powers for exploiting Africa to develop their European countries. With few exceptions, the nationalists who took over were worse than the departing colonialists.

### **Deteriorating Economic Conditions**

From 1965 to 1987 Africa's annual rate of growth of GNP per capita averaged a dismal 1.1 percent. [6] Agricultural growth was negligible, with output growing at less than 1.5 percent after 1970. Food production failed to keep pace with population growth. Food production per capita fell by 7 percent in the 1960s, 15 percent in the 1970s, and continued to deteriorate in the 1980s. In 1987, for example, it dropped by 4.9 percent. [7]

In sub-Saharan, or black, Africa, the crisis has been particularly trenchant. The decline has been especially calamitous in Nigeria, which could not translate its oil bonanza into sustainable economic prosperity. According to the World Bank:

Sharply rising oil prices boosted exports from \$4 billion in 1975 to \$26 billion in 1980, while GNP per capita rose from \$360 to more than \$1,000. Rising public expenditures fueled by oil revenues shifted production from agriculture to services. When the price of oil collapsed, so did Nigeria's export receipts. By 1986, they were down to \$6 billion,

while external debt rose from \$5 billion in 1980 to \$25 billion in 1986. Real imports contracted at an average annual rate of 20 percent. Growth rates turned sharply negative, and GNP per capita fell to \$370.[8]

Though net foreign direct investment in Africa as a whole has fallen, the drop has been sharpest in black Africa. Foreign investment dropped dramatically from \$1,222 million in 1982 to \$498 million in 1987. The French seem to have been especially disillusioned. "French direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa ran at \$1 billion a year in 1981-83; by 1988 that had translated into a net outflow of more than \$800 million." [9]

Table 1 Growth of Real GDP per Capita, 1965-2000 (Average Annual Percentage Change)

	Projection (million) for the 1989	1965-73	1973-80	1980-89	1990s	Percentage Change	Population
Industrial countries	773	3.7	2.3	2.3	0.8-2.5		
Developing countries	4,053	3.9	2.5	1.6	0.2-2.9		
Sub-Saharan Africa	480	2.1	0.4	-1.2	0.3-0.5		
East Asia	1,552	5.3	4.9	6.2	4.2-5.3		
South Asia	1,131	1.2	1.7	3.0	2.1-2.6		
Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa	433	5.8	1.9	0.4	1.4-1.8		
Latin America and the Caribbean	421	3.8	2.5	-0.4	1.3-2.0		

Source: World Bank, World

Development Report 1991 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 3.

The overall picture is even more distressing when compared with other regions of the Third World. Social and economic indicators of development, such as growth of output, health, and literacy, have shown the weakest performance in black Africa. Table 1 gives rates of growth of gross domestic product per capita by region.

### Political Repression

As their economies deteriorated, Africans also saw their political rights sharply curtailed and themselves subjected to extremely cruel systems of government. Africa has more dictators per capita than any other region in the world. The most damning fact of the past 30 years is that, until 1990, no independent country on the African continent replaced its leaders in a free and fair election. Since 1957 there have been more than 160 African heads of state, but only 6 in the history of postcolonial Africa up to 1990 relinquished political power voluntarily, and 4 of those did so after 14 or more years in power.[10] The rest looted their treasuries and mismanaged their economies until they were overthrown or assassinated in military coups.

After independence, two social classes emerged in Africa, the elite and the peasants. Although the peasants constituted over 90 percent of the population, they exercised no political power. There are 53 African countries, including South Africa. Two (Morocco and Swaziland) are monarchies. Only 13 of the others (Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gambia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tomç and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, and Zambia) are democracies that allow their people the right to elect their leaders. Six of those 13 (Cape Verde, Madagascar, Mali, Sao Tomç and Principe, Seychelles, and Zambia) are recent additions to the tiny democratic club. Twenty-four are military dictatorships, and the rest are farcical "democracies" where one person runs for president under a one-party state system and typically wins 99.99 percent of the vote.

Many modern African leaders justified the imposition of autocratic rule by claiming that democracy was alien. They declared themselves "presidents for life" and their countries "one-party states." The leadership that emerged in postcolonial Africa was given to schizophrenic posturing and arrant sloganeering. "People's Revolution! People's Power!" they chanted. But they never dreamed of giving their own people the power to remove an incompetent government they did not want. "Freedom for the blacks in South Africa!" they rightly demanded. But not for their own black people in their own black African countries. "Only socialism will save Africa and check the evil machinations of neocolonialism, imperialism, and capitalist exploitation," African leaders argued. It would have been bad enough had they actually believed in that misguided economic philosophy, but the socialist rhetoric was often merely a facade for rampant corruption.

Under African "socialism," the bourgeoisie riding about in Mercedes-Benzes were socialist party hacks and functionaries. A minister in Robert Mugabe's cabinet gave this definition: "In Zimbabwe, socialism means what is mine is mine but what is yours we share." The "socialism" instituted in Africa was a peculiar type ("Swiss-bank" socialism) that allowed the heads of state and phalanxes of kleptocrats to rape and plunder the national treasuries for

deposit in foreign banks. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania was perhaps the only true practicing socialist, but even his Party of the Revolution was hopelessly riddled with corruption. Even Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, generally regarded as the "father of African socialism," apparently stashed millions away in Swiss and other foreign banks, according to the Ghana Government Commission of Enquiry, set up in 1967 to probe Nkrumah's assets. According to David Lamb:

Though [Central African Republic president Jean- Bedel] Bokassa's regime was as nonsensical as any in Africa, it should not be viewed in isolation. Its absurdity was the tragedy of all Africa, a continent that suffers so much at the hands of misguided leadership. Never has Africa been more in need of men with reasoned voices and clear visions, and never has the honor roll of leadership been so barren.[11]

It is imperative to draw a clear distinction between the African people (primarily the peasants) and their modern leaders, the elites. Failure of the elites is not synonymous with failure of Africans as a people. The modern leadership, with few exceptions, has turned out to be intolerant, stubborn, and brutally repressive. After independence, African leaders, who had vowed to bring freedom to their people, suddenly turned their guns on them. The socialist state, with its coercive powers, became an instrument of oppression and exploitation. Those who expressed views different from the party line had their lives abruptly disrupted and were thrown in jail. With no political rights, the peasants had no channels through which to seek redress of their grievances. The police and the army, which were supposed to protect them, instead perpetrated crimes against them. Uganda offers a classic example. There, more than 800,000 people perished at the hands of Idi Amin, Milton Obote, and Tito Okello--all Ugandan heads of state. Yet when Amin was killing peasants at the rate of 150 a day, the Organization of African Unity did nothing.

Amin's reign of terror and slaughter is well known. Less well known but equally horrible was the regime of President Marc as Nguema of Equatorial Guinea. In 1972, just four years after his country won its independence from Spain, Nguema declared himself president for life. Backed by Cuba, he pursued a policy of systematic extermination of anyone who stood in the way of his attaining absolute power. By the time he was overthrown by a coup in 1979, he had massacred an estimated 50,000 people, or one-seventh of the country's population.

Sadly, little has changed since the days of Nguema and Amin. Serious violations of civil rights and recent detentions and massacres of civilians in Uganda, Ethiopia, Liberia, and other African countries reveal the extent of the continuing repression. Clearly, that is not the "freedom" Africans fought for.

### **Why Things Went So Wrong**

After independence most African states assumed a primary role in economic development. The degree of state interventionism varied from the relatively superficial (in Botswana, Cameroon, and Mauritius) to the massive (in Algeria, Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Zambia). The rationale for dirigisme emanated from two sources.

The first was ideological, a product of the misconceptions that emerged from the liberation struggle against Western colonialism. Colonial rule was judged "evil and exploitative." Abhorrence of colonialism transformed itself into an ideological aversion to capitalism on the premise that, because the colonialists were capitalists, capitalism, too, was "evil and exploitative." That kind of syllogistic reasoning characterized the pronouncements of such African leaders as Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keita of Mali, Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and Mugabe of Zimbabwe. According to those leaders, free markets, free trade, private enterprise, and the parliamentary system of democracy were all Western capitalist institutions that should be rejected by Africa. For example, Nkrumah warned Africa against an insidious dogma propagated by the imperialists: "that Western democracy and parliamentary system are the only valid ways of governing; that they constitute the only worthwhile model for the training of an indigenous elite by the colonial power." [12] Highly centralized and interventionist socialist systems were established by Nkrumah and other African leaders to spur development.

The second factor was coincidental and faddish. Received orthodoxy, prevalent in much of the Third World at that time, upheld the necessity of centralized planning and control for pragmatic reasons. The efficiency of markets was conceded, but they were supposedly either nonexistent or underdeveloped and could not possibly serve as a guide to investment decisions. Even where markets existed, it was argued, prices were often distorted by structural rigidities and inelasticities of supply and, therefore, provided unreliable signals to economic actors. In Africa organized capital

markets had long been absent, and commodity markets could be cornered by powerful commercial interests. Only the state could marshal the resources required to undertake large-scale development projects. Furthermore, structural impediments and infrastructural bottlenecks could be removed only through state planning and action. The U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S. AID), the World Bank, and the IMF all supported the statist approach with large funds.

### **The Expanding Role of the State in Economic Affairs**

Accordingly, wide-ranging powers were conferred upon the state, and those powers eventually became concentrated in the hands of a single individual (the head of state) because there were few or no countervailing checks or safeguards. Development plans of various terms to maturity proliferated across Africa in the 1960s. It was more than fashionable for African governments to brandish those plans; in fact, it was deemed economically suicidal for a government not to possess one. Its possession demonstrated to donors of foreign aid an African government's commitment to the alleviation of poverty and its need for development assistance.

To help achieve the objectives of those plans, a plethora of legislative controls was imposed on imports, exports, prices, rent, interest rates and flows of money, credit, and foreign exchange. Import and exports controls, for example, were deemed necessary to conserve scarce foreign exchange. State enterprises were established and given exclusive franchises to shield the country from the avaricious propensities of foreign multinational corporations. Detailed controls over prices and the flow of money and credit ensured large-scale transfers of resources to the state. But African leaders and elites misconstrued the notion of "development," equating development with industrialization and castigating all things native as "backward and inferior."

There was a pervasive belief among the nationalists and elites that Africa's own indigenous institutions could not be used for the rapid development and transformation of Africa. Perhaps ashamed to be thought "backward," the elites embarked on a program of development that imitated foreign systems and placed obtrusive emphasis on heavy industry, with a view to changing Africa's image. No longer should Africans be relegated to the "inferior" status of "drawers of water and hewers of wood." The overemphasis on heavy industry led to the neglect of agriculture and other primary activities.

Thus, the development that occurred in postcolonial Africa can be described as "development by imitation." Grandiose projects and schemes were copied from abroad and transplanted to Africa. American farmers use tractors and chemical fertilizers; so too must we in Africa. New York has skyscrapers; so too must African cities. London has doubledecker buses; so too must Accra and Lagos. The Soviet Union has state farms; so too must Africa. In 1964 Nkrumah demanded a bylaw requiring all advertisements in Accra to be lit by neon so that the streets of the capital would resemble Piccadilly Circus in London. France once had an emperor, so Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic spent \$20 million in 1976 to crown himself emperor. Rome has a basilica; so too must Ivory Coast. The United States has two political parties; so too must Nigeria. Accordingly, the military regime of President Ibrahim Babangida created two political parties: the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention.[13] To add more insult, the military regime also wrote the party manifestoes. The list of examples of that type of unimaginative imitation in Africa is endless.

Many African governments not only nationalized European companies--ostensibly to prevent "foreign exploitation"--but also turned their wrath on their own people, barring them from many economic fields. For example, after Ghana gained its independence, European companies were taken over by the state. Mining operations were monopolized by the state and private gold mining declared illegal. Furthermore, "Anyone caught indulging in illegal gold prospecting, popularly known as galamsey (gather them and sell), will be shot, a PNDC representative announced to a workers' rally in the Western Region." [14]

In many other African countries, the native populations were squeezed out of industry, trade, and commerce while the state emerged as the dominant, if not the only, player. Indigenous operators were not tolerated. Indeed, there was a time when the director of the Club du Sahel, Anne de Lattre, would begin her meetings with the frightening remark, "Well, there is one thing we all agree on: that private traders should be shot." [15]

### **Under SÇkou Toure's nonsensical program of "Marxism in African Clothes," in Guinea,**

unauthorized trading became a crime. Police roadblocks were set up around the country to control internal trade. The state set up a monopoly on foreign trade and smuggling became punishable by death. Currency trafficking was punishable by 15 to 20 years in prison. Many farms were collectivized. Food prices were fixed at low levels. Private farmers were forced to deliver annual harvest quotas to "Local Revolutionary Powers." State Companies monopolized industrial production.[16]

Other African governments also adopted price controls and various legislative instruments for the systematic exploitation of the peasants. Prices of agricultural produce were fixed to make food cheap for the urban elites--the basis of political support for African governments. The prices peasants received for their produce were dictated by governments, not determined by market forces in accordance with African traditions. (African chiefs did not fix prices. Bargaining remains the rule in all village markets, even today.)

Under an oppressive system of price controls administered by the elites, Africa's peasants came to pay the world's most confiscatory taxes. In 1981 the government of Tanzania, for example, was paying peasant farmers only 20 percent of the free-market price for their maize. According to the International Labor Organization, Sierra Leone taxed an average of 30 to 60 percent of gross income in the agricultural sector.[17] In 1984 cocoa farmers in Ghana received less than 10 percent of the world market price for their crop. In Ethiopia, Guinea, Tanzania, and many other African countries, peasant farmers were forced to sell their produce or quotas only to state produce-buying agencies. When Zambian traders refused to sell their produce at government-dictated prices in 1988, authorities raided the markets. They arrested hundreds of people; took their money; tore down market stalls; and seized sugar, detergents, salt, maize meal, soft drinks, candles, flour, and clothing.

### **Improvidence and Corruption**

Resources, extracted from the rural areas through various legislative devices and controls, were never used for development for the peasants. The elites used them to develop only the urban areas and built statues of and monuments to themselves. In his 1989 New Year's address, President Fçlix Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, for example, disclosed that "the country's peasant farmers had over the years parted with four-fifths of the value of what they produced to enable the government to finance economic development." [18] But over 80 percent of Ivory Coast's development was concentrated in Abidjan for the benefit of the elites, not the peasants.

By the early 1970s an economic crisis had emerged throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The ruling elites demanded more foreign aid to cure Africa's ills. And foreign aid did pour into Africa--from the West, in part to support Cold War allies and in part to soothe Western collective guilt over the injustices of slavery and colonialism. More than \$300 billion in aid and various forms of credits and financial assistance have been pumped into Africa since the 1960s. In fact, according to Jennifer Whitaker: "Even in 1965, almost 20 percent of Western countries' development assistance went to Africa. In the 1980s, Africans, who are about 12 percent of the developing world's population, were receiving about 22 percent of the total, and the share per person was higher than anywhere else in the Third World--amounting to about \$20, versus about \$7 for Latin America, and \$5 for Asia." [19] Between 1980 and 1988 sub-Saharan Africa received \$83 billion in aid. Yet all that aid failed to spur economic growth and to arrest Africa's economic atrophy or promote democracy. Africa is littered with a multitude of "black elephants" (basilicas, grand conference halls, new capitals, and show airports) amid institutional decay, deteriorating infrastructure, and environmental degradation.

Much of the aid was misappropriated by elite bazongas (raiders of the public treasury) and never reached needy peasants. In 1986, for example, the U.S. General Accounting Office found that \$16.5 million in food assistance funds had been embezzled by Liberian authorities. In September 1989 the Nigerian government discovered to its utter dismay that over \$4 billion of its foreign debt was "fraudulent and spurious." [20] In other words, there was nothing to show for that amount, suggesting embezzlement. As the Paris newspaper *Le Monde* complained bitterly in March 1990, "Every franc we give impoverished Africa comes back to France or is smuggled into Switzerland and even Japan." [21]

The manager of the failed Banque Commerciale de Benin put it succinctly:

The basic problem here, beside a lack of competence, is total corruption. The top people line their pockets through



political influence. The president's (Mathieu Kerekou's) adviser, Cisse, called le Marabout--"the priest"--stole 5 billion CFA (about \$14 million) from this bank. We've traced it to Switzerland, London and Monte Carlo. . . .

The chief bandit is the president, along with his associates in the politburo. The chief prosecutor is the next biggest bandit. Another is the minister of justice: all court decisions are determined by bribes. I went to the presidential palace along with a representative of the World Bank. We were asked when the stolen money would be recovered. It was rather difficult to answer, "Mr. President, you have the money." . . .

The top men will have 10 or 15 mistresses who used to run up big debit accounts here, and then go to the Palais and say, "You've got to straighten me out with the bank."

The rulers now admit that they never understood Marxism, and as a sop to opinion a few people have been jailed. But new marabouts have been brought in, and are still at the center of the decision-making.[22]

Data on such illegal activities are difficult to come by except when a disgruntled ex-official squeals. Even then, it is difficult to establish the veracity of such allegations. Nevertheless, there have been numerous published accounts. In Ivory Coast, for example, "the central bank calculates that some CFA 130 billion [or \$456 million] are spirited out of the country illegally each year." [23] In London's Guardian Weekly Paul Webster claimed that Houphouet-Boigny "was siphoning off French aid funds to amass a personal fortune as high as 6 billion pounds sterling." [24]

By the late 1980s Africans themselves were identifying the state as the problem. Nigerian scholar Claude Ake explained:

Most African regimes have been so alienated and so violently repressive that their citizens see the state and its development agents as enemies to be evaded, cheated and defeated if possible, but never as partners. The leaders have been so engrossed in coping with the hostilities which their misrule and repression have unleashed that they are unable to take much interest in anything else, including the pursuit of development.[25]

In a similar vein, Akin Mabongunje argued, "It is generally agreed that the false start in all African countries has been due largely to the high level of governmental and bureaucratic domination of the economy with its consequences of inefficiency, profligacy and inappropriate control." [26]

Many of Africa's corrupt tyrants and Swiss-bank socialists were subsequently booted out or assassinated in military coups. But the soldiers who replaced them were often even worse. They were brutal to their people, systematically ruined one African country after another, and looted national treasuries with military discipline--in Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Zaire, and other countries.

### **How Africa Could Have Avoided Tragedy**

Somalia's tragedy and the crisis in sub-Saharan Africa could have been avoided if African leaders and elites had used, to put it bluntly, their common sense. Development deals with people. In Africa the people are the peasants-- the majority in every African nation. Development does not take place in a vacuum but in an "environment." The environment for development is the people's socioeconomic and political setup, that is, the whole gamut of their social, economic, cultural, and political institutions as well as policies and actions of the government in power that affect Africans at the grassroots level. That environment has to be conducive to development. Some minimum level of stability, peace, order, civil society, and respect for civil liberties is necessary for productive activity.

Economic development does not mean the wholesale and blind acquisition of the symbols and signs of modernity. Nor does it mean that everything about indigenous Africa must be rejected in favor of alien systems. In fact, the true challenge for development personnel is to use existing institutions to generate economic prosperity. Africa's peasants can never be alienated from those institutions. They are part of their culture. One cannot expect peasants to suddenly renounce their age-old traditions and ways of doing things. Nor is such abjuration absolutely necessary, as demonstrated by the stupendous success of the Japanese. The Japanese did not have to become "Americanized" or "Sovietized" in order to develop.

Development simply means improving existing ways of doing things to make the processes more efficient and productive than before. By productivity is meant producing more from the same or even fewer resources or, alternatively, producing the same amount by using fewer inputs. In the African context, development means using the same indigenous system to produce more output. The principal beneficiaries of economic prosperity ought to be the peasants, not the elite minority that constitutes less than 10 percent of the population of any African country. The real development solution lies in returning to Africa's own roots and building upon its age-old traditions of participatory democracy, free markets, and free trade. Those are the structures and institutions African natives operated by for centuries before the Europeans arrived.

An increasing number of Africans agree on that point. Professor Ali Mazrui of SUNY (Binghamton) noted, "The continent has much in its indigenous past to form the foundation of its democratic future." [27] Ben Kwame Fred-Mensah of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University added:

There is a growing consensus among some African and Africanist writers, development experts, and the donor community that indigenous institutions, values, and practices are the motor of grassroots participatory development strategies. Consequently, there is a growing call for not only the utilization of indigenous institutions, but also for their rationalization and formalization. [28]

## **Indigenous Africa**

In Africa's indigenous system of government, the chief was typically chosen or appointed by a queen mother with the full approval of a council of elders. [29] He did not appoint himself. If the chief did not govern according to the will of the people, he was destooled (removed) by his people. In many cases, the people simply voted with their feet and moved elsewhere. The history of Africa is full of migrations. If the chief acted despotically, the West African Yoruba had a unique way of removing him by a process known as kirikiri. A mob of angry peasants would surround his hut and pelt it with rocks, loudly abusing him. He would be given three months to leave the village. If he failed to do so, a group of strong men seized and disposed of him. The Gikuyu of Kenya removed their king by a process known as itwika, which means breaking away.

In each African village, extended families chose their heads. If there were 10 extended families, there would be 10 such heads who would together form a council of elders. Without that council, the chief was powerless. He could not make any law without its approval. Even the powerful Zulu king could not dictate a law without the approval of the ibandla, or state council. Council positions were hereditary, which meant that the chief could not remove the councillors and pack the assembly with his own appointees. The council was an independent organ of government.

The chief and the councillors had to reach unanimity on all important matters. Any adult could participate in the council meetings, called ndaba by the Zulu and kgotlas by the Botswana. In Senegal, even slaves, djam, sent their representatives to the king's court. The Angolan king Alfonso allowed the Portuguese merchants to send their representative, Don Rodrigo, to his court.

Traditional African political decisionmaking was noted for its protracted debates. If the chief and the elders were deadlocked on an issue, a village meeting was called and the issue put before the people for debate until a consensus was reached. Those village meetings, usually held under a big tree at the village market square, are variously called pitso by the Xhosa, asetena kese by the Ashanti, and shir by the Somali.

The indigenous African system of government was open. No one was locked out of the decisionmaking process. One did not have to belong to a particular political party or family to participate. Note that the chief did not declare the village a one-party state and impose an alien ideology on his people.

In the economic sphere, the means of production were owned by the African people, not by their chiefs or tribal governments. Even land was not owned by the chief. It belonged to the ancient ancestors, and the chief merely acted as custodian. What was grown on the land was private property, belonging to the farmers, not to the chief. Peasants were free to choose whatever occupation they wished. They did not queue in front of the chief's hut for permission to engage in trade.

Precolonial Africa was characterized by considerable freedom of movement of people and goods. The continent was crisscrossed by a dense web of trade routes (for example, the Trans-Saharan) along which the natives moved freely and engaged in trade. Africans have long had an ingrained cultural propensity to trade. Throughout their history, they traveled great distances to purchase goods from "strangers" at cheaper prices to sell at higher prices to make a profit. Much of that activity was free from state controls and regulations. State intervention in trade, commerce, and markets by Africa's traditional rulers was the exception rather than the rule. There was no native African law that forbade Africans to enter into businesses if they wished. By nature and tradition, Africans have always been free enterprisers. Markets were the nerve centers of traditional African societies, and market activity was dominated by women.

## **The Colonial Experience**

When Africa was colonized, the colonialists sought to control indigenous economic activities to their advantage. Africa's colonial history is replete with successes and failures of those policies. For example, on the Gold Coast (now Ghana), European mining companies sought, without success, legislative curtailment of indigenous mining operations. The two operated side by side throughout the colonial era.

Notably absent during that era were state or colonial government enterprises. A few large European firms and companies dominated, but no indigenous economic activity was reserved exclusively for the colonial government or European companies. Nor would the colonial administrations have been successful had they attempted such repression. It would have entailed an extraordinary expenditure of resources because Africa had not then developed the communications and transportation networks needed for effective control of the inhabitants and their economic activities. Cost was one reason the British adopted the policy of "indirect rule"-- administration through the chiefs.

For the most part, the natives were free to go about their economic activities, although there were some restrictions on their movements and places of residence in some colonies. The natives could open shops and compete with the European firms. Many did and were successful. There were rich African shopkeepers as well as timber merchants, transport owners, and farmers during the colonial period.

Africa's indigenous institutions did not vanish completely under colonialism. The village market, for example, survived and still exists in many places today. One well-known one is the Dantokpa market in Cotonou (capital of Benin); another is Kodjoviakope market in LomÇ (Togo). West Africa described the Dantokpa market as "the nerve center of Cotonou."

Animated from early morning to late at night, scores of small retailers line its vomms, or streets. Mobylette repair shops, dressmakers, millers preparing corn flour and cabinet-makers carving red wood ply their trades next to traditional healers patiently waiting for clients. Vendors of pimento, peppers, spices and vegetables with piquant odors stand behind their stalls, while itinerant peddlers are everywhere selling dried fish, potato-fritters and corn flour.

Near the old port are the stands selling textiles, the domain of the "Mama Benz." These vigorous business women usually ride in shining Mercedes cars, hence their name. Impressive by their girth and the sumptuous cloth they wear, their spectacular success has been built on the sale of colorful textiles, most of which they import from the Netherlands.

In the port, the fishmongers selling whole fish are doing a brisk business. . . . The fishermen get to the open sea in their dugout canoes that are decorated with brightly painted or intricately carved designs.[30]

Colonialism weakened, but did not eradicate, Africa's indigenous institutions. The restrictions colonial powers placed on the traditional activities of Africans still allowed them to pursue many of those activities alongside European ventures. Worse repression occurred after independence, when most African leaders rejected indigenous forms of voluntary association and imposed statist models on their people. The resulting dismal economic performance and abuses of political and human rights have characterized black Africa ever since.

## **Toward a Real Solution**

Not all sub-Saharan nations have experienced political repression and economic stagnation since the end of the colonial era, however. The case of independent Botswana provides useful lessons on how to draft long-term solutions to the problems facing the rest of black Africa.

## **Lessons from Botswana**

Botswana is the only black African country that returned to its roots and built upon its indigenous institutions in a comprehensive way. Most people in the West have not heard of Botswana, but those engaged in the noble efforts to save Somalia should examine the Botswanian experience and learn some appropriate lessons.

About 75 percent of Botswana's 592,000 square kilometers is in the Kalahari Desert, and drought has always threatened its economic security. The most serious recent threat occurred during the seven years from 1981 to 1988. So scarce is water that Botswana named its currency the pula (rain).

When Botswana gained its independence from Britain in September 1966, doomsayers gave the country (formerly Bechuanaland) less than five years to implode and evaporate. It possessed all the ingredients for another postcolonial black African economic disaster. The rate of illiteracy was 80 percent, and the population was made up of nine ethnic groups, raising the possibility of interminable ethnic strife. (By contrast, Somalia is ethnically homogeneous.) In addition, Botswana's endowment of natural resources was poor: spartan deposits of low-grade coal, platinum, gold, silver, diamonds, iron, potash, manganese, chromite, and uranium. Moreover, the country lacked the technology to develop the resources it did possess.

Landlocked Botswana was dependent on hostile neighbors (Namibia, South Africa, and Rhodesia) for the transshipment of its exports and imports. South Africa, which also held Namibia illegally, and Rhodesia, then ruled by white supremacist Ian Smith, exacted a heavy geopolitical price.

Wars of liberation in neighboring countries sent refugees pouring into Botswana. But the humanitarian provision of sanctuary for those refugees earned the ire of both Botswana's white supremacist and its Marxist neighbors. Botswana became the target of economic blackmail, intimidation, and sabotage. In 1985, for example, South Africa accused Botswana of harboring guerrillas of the then-banned African National Congress and launched a series of raids and destructive destabilization campaigns against Botswana's capital, Gaborone.

In spite of those problems, Botswana managed to register an impressive rate of economic advance, astonishing by any African standard. From 1966 to 1986 Botswana's economic growth averaged an astounding 8 percent a year; the South African economy limped along at a miserable 1.5 percent per year between 1965 and 1985, and most other African countries produced even worse performances. In 1983 the rate of growth of real GDP in Botswana was a dizzying 26.3 percent, and GDP per capita exploded from \$786 in 1980 to \$2,049 in 1990. In 1990 Botswana's foreign debt was about \$324 million and its reserves stood at \$2.7 billion--one of the highest in the world on a per capita basis. Botswana did not starve, but Somalia and other countries did.

The foremost reason for Botswana's success has been the absence of civil and political strife. Second, Botswana enjoys political stability, which was not engineered by a military tyrant or by declaring the country a one-party state. Botswana is a multiparty democracy. Third, the Botswana government has pursued strikingly prudent economic policies, allowing pragmatism, rather than emotional rhetoric, to guide its development. It did not adopt "African socialism" or hurl invectives at business. Nor did Botswana pursue anti-market policies. Free markets were established and foreign businesses welcomed. Judicious fiscal management was another factor. During export boom years, Botswana saved the windfall, avoiding excessive government spending. Those savings provided the cushion to ride out the lean years.

By contrast, Nigeria did not invest wisely. When sharply rising oil prices boosted Nigeria's exports from \$4 billion in 1975 to \$26 billion in 1980, it went on an import binge. The government splurged on prestigious projects, including a \$23-billion new capital at Abuja, while politicians illegally transferred as much as \$15 million a day out of the country. Nigeria even neglected agriculture, preferring to use cheap oil dollars to import food. The booms in coffee, cocoa, and copper prices in the 1970s elicited similar extravagant spending by Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Uganda, Zaire, and Zambia.

Fourth, Botswana did not ignore its indigenous roots. It built upon its native system of kgotlas. In fact, cabinet ministers are required to attend weekly kgotlas to inform and consult the people. In 1991 the government tried to explain a \$25-million Okavango River irrigation project to the villagers at a kgotla in the northern town of Maun.irate villagers vented their rage.

"You will dry the delta! We will have no more fish to eat! No more reeds to build our houses!" a village elder screamed.[31] For six hours the villagers excoriated government officials for conceiving such a dastardly project. Buckling under the wrath of the people, the government canceled the project. Only in Botswana could that happen, giving true meaning to such terms as "participatory development" and "bottom-up development."

### **Lessons from the Rest of Black Africa**

Governments in Somalia and the rest of black Africa did not follow the same path. Development projects were drawn up and dumped in the laps of the local people without consulting them. The indigenous system was ignored. Yet in Somalia it endured while the modern system completely collapsed. Foreign relief workers say the traditional leaders--clan elders--were far more effective than outsiders in the distribution of relief aid during the 1991-92 crisis. The "modern" leadership, by contrast, degenerated into thugs, bandits, and feuding warlords.

Large parts of modern Africa have now been transformed into arms bazaars, and endless conflicts have reduced prime agricultural land to desolate wastelands. Civil wars rage in at least 16 African countries today. Though many factors impinge on Africa's ability to feed itself, civil strife has been the chief among them.

Back in the 1960s Africa fed itself. Since then food production per capita has fallen dramatically, forcing Africa to rely more and more on food imports to supply about 35 percent of its needs today. Africa's peasant farmers now see their lives and livelihoods recklessly disrupted by "crocodile liberators" who leave much devastation, carnage, and human debris in their wake.

Africa's conflicts have been about political dispensation--about greater freedom and autonomy from a repressive militarized state. And the peasants suffer the most. Often accused of collaboration, they are massacred or starved into submission. Over 6 million Africans--mostly peasants--have perished in various conflicts since 1960. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, Africa's refugee count reached 5.4 million at the end of 1990, including 783,000 from Sudan and Somalia in Ethiopia; 900,000 from Mozambique in Malawi; 371,000 from Angola in Zaire; over 700,000 from Ethiopia in Sudan; and over 350,000, mainly from Ethiopia, in Somalia. Those figures do not include internally displaced people, estimated to exceed 13 million.

### **The Role of the Organization of African Unity**

Africa has a regional organization, the Organization of African Unity, whose mandate includes the preservation of civil order in Africa. But that august body has produced more invective than action. "Where is the OAU?" asked Henry Assabill, a Somali refugee in Chicago. "Can't the OAU mobilize the military forces at its command to oust the warlords who are dividing Somalia?"[32]

In its entire history the OAU has not succeeded in mediating an end to a single conflict in Africa. The OAU has protested only when it has seen white faces in power in South Africa. That body, which claims that "one man, one vote" is necessary for South Africa, has not actively promoted the institution of that democratic principle in the rest of Africa. It has not even enforced its own Charter of Peoples and Human Rights--tenets that are all vital for participatory development.

And individual leaders of other African countries have offered little, if any, assistance. "Somalia is burning. People are dying in droves daily from bullets and starvation. Yet African leaders are doing nothing to stop the war," lamented Mahmoud Farra, a Somali refugee in Britain. "Why hasn't an African leader or senior official of the OAU ever visited Somalia to assess the situation and propose a solution as [was] done by President Mitterrand of France in Yugoslavia?" asked Rakiya Omaar, executive director of the London-based human rights group African Rights.[33]

Recently, however, there have been signs that the OAU has begun to shape up. A resolution was adopted in June 1993 to create a new "mechanism for conflict prevention, resolution and management." The objective of the resolution, declared Secretary-General Ahmed Salim, is to allow "Africa to be the center place for taking decisions relating to conflicts."

A vital feature in any humanitarian mission to Africa should be inclusion of the newly reformed OAU. The United Nations should work to transfer the peacekeeping mission in Somalia to the OAU instead of sidelining that organization with a multitude of excuses. The oft-voiced charge that the OAU is hopelessly inept and unreliable is a particularly crude irony in light of the United Nations' performance in Somalia. True, the OAU might fail in such a peacekeeping and nation-rebuilding mission, but it should still be given the responsibility and opportunity to try. In any case, it is difficult to imagine the OAU's doing worse than the UN- U.S. fiasco.

### Needed: An African Solution

The shameful ineffectiveness of the OAU and African governments in resolving crises in Africa has resulted in solutions imposed from outside. It was in that context that on November 23, 1992, President George Bush ordered a contingent of 30,000 U.S. troops to lead a UN relief effort into Somalia. The ostensible objective was humanitarian: to secure the ports and supply routes, to protect relief supplies from the thugs, and to deliver food to the starving.

On the surface, it is hard to question that mission without appearing cruel and callous. Something had to be done to end the staggering human misery. But serious reservations can be expressed about the "external solution," whether that course of action was an effective way of helping Somalia. First of all, not all Africans--not even all Somali--supported the military intervention. "Leave Africa alone!" fumed Femi Akomolafe, a Nigerian economist. "I am not excited by the pyrotechnics of Westerners giving charity. Africa truly doesn't need it." [34] Nuruddin Farah, a Somali novelist, wrote, "I confess that I find it extremely difficult to get myself psyched up to put my faith in the genuineness of a gesture of goodness originating in areas of the globe with a history of imperialist domination." [35]

The day the troops landed in Mogadishu in the full glare of TV camera lights will be etched in the memory of many Africans as the darkest day in modern African history. To them, the "humanitarian" mission carries repugnant undertones and ramifications that go far beyond the mere provision of food relief. For one thing, the mission assails the dignity and pride of Africa and its people. "Shame on you, Africa; shame on the Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity; shame on your heads of state. I speak as a pan-Africanist!" said Farah. [36]

The humanitarian mission reinforces existing myths by insidiously portraying Africans as savage morons who are incapable of solving their own problems and who must forever wait for a white knight in shining armor to come to their rescue. Even before the dispatch of the U.S. Marines, hundreds of pieces, interviews, and commentaries on the Somalian situation had appeared in the media. Barely a handful were written or given by Africans, leaving the offensive impression that Africans themselves are not knowledgeable or articulate about their own condition, let alone capable of crafting their own solutions.

### Avoiding Recolonization

The mission resurrects old suspicions about colonialism, despite the active involvement of the United Nations. An editorial in West Africa, a magazine published by black Africans, expressed those qualms: "We would do well to recall that the concluding document of the iniquitous Berlin Conference of 1884-5, which paved the way for the great colonial carve-up known as 'the scramble for Africa,' was couched in very humanitarian language about abolishing slavery." [37] The cynicism of that humanitarian mission was expressed by Englishman Herbert Macaulay in 1905: "The dimensions of 'the true interests of the (African) natives at heart' are algebraically equal to the length, breadth and depth of the whiteman's pocket." [38] Said Jomo Kenyatta, the black nationalist who won independence for Kenya in 1963: "When the missionaries arrived, Africans had the land and missionaries had the Bible. They taught us to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible!" [39] More recently, Omaar and Alex de Waal, codirector of African Rights, have warned the West against engaging in "philanthropic imperialism" in Somalia and other sub-Saharan countries. [40]

Somalia is an African problem, requiring long-term African solutions. Back in 1985 short-term band-aid solutions

("Live Aid" and "USA for Africa") were applied to the Ethiopian famine crisis. Ethiopians are still trying to escape the vicious circle of poverty and famine.

Any long-term solution to the recurring famines must have an African input or be predicated on an African initiative. The fact that such an initiative is currently lacking does not mean it should not be encouraged or actively sought. Unfortunately, that has not been done. What Africans themselves were doing or should have been doing to tackle the Somali crisis was of little interest to the Western media. Omaar opposed U.S. military intervention in Somalia (her native country) for precisely this reason: it undermined local relief initiatives. She was promptly fired from her job with Africa Watch for expressing such a heretical view. Yet without an African input, the mission in Somalia is doomed to failure, no matter how magnanimous the objective or noble the motives.

The gung-ho attitude that the Marines can be sent into Somalia and quickly take care of the problem sends the wrong message to Africa's dictators, especially those in countries where a Somali-type situation is brewing--that they can continue to slaughter their people, deny them basic human rights, receive and squander U.S. aid, and, if things get worse, the United States will send in the Marines to solve the problem. The moral bankruptcy of such a message is clear. It gives African governments little incentive to shape up and do what they are supposed to do in the first place. Those governments, it should be noted, have in many cases received billions of dollars in U.S. military assistance in the past. Their inability to send a peacekeeping force into Somalia is a serious indictment of the effectiveness of U.S. military assistance programs.

### **Undermining Prospects for Recovery**

Compassion is a virtue and feeding the starving a noble ideal, but blind compassion is pointless. Rushing headlong into a foreign situation with little understanding of the complexities of local particularities is likely to create more problems than it solves.

Indeed, the outside forces in Somalia have already discovered the difficulties of trying to establish a functioning society in the midst of a civil war. It has become virtually impossible for competing Somali forces to view the United Nations as an impartial mediator. The fact that the United Nations soon made the capture of Aidid its highest priority eliminated any pretense that the international agency could impose a political settlement without taking sides. It came as no surprise that many Somali responded with hostility to the United Nations' involvement. That hostility manifested itself most violently on June 5, 1993, when angry Somali killed 24 UN troops in Mogadishu. Unfortunately, the United Nations has become ever more deeply involved in trying to resolve the country's internal disputes, and its response has been even more violent than the actions of the Somali. Incidents in which UN forces have clashed with Somali crowds have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Somali.

The United States has not been able to occupy Somalia without becoming entangled in its domestic conflicts. Indeed, Somali groups have expressed their hostility toward the U.S. presence on numerous occasions, culminating in the deaths of 18 U.S. soldiers on October 3-4, 1993. In the words of columnist George F. Will, the U.S. intervention in Somalia could be aptly termed "colonialism of compassion."<sup>[41]</sup> Obviously, a lasting solution to Somalia's problems cannot result from such questionable involvement; in the final analysis, policies must be judged by their consequences, not their intentions.

Even food aid can prove harmful because it often undermines the local market in produce, creating disincentives to grow crops in the future. For example, in Genale, Somalia, Faaduma Abdi Arush, a 52-year-old peasant farmer, not only survived the drought and Somalia's civil war but also managed to produce a bountiful harvest of corn months before the arrival of U.S. marines. But she could not sell her crop. "Nobody is interested. Everybody has his own relief supply," she lamented.<sup>[42]</sup>

"The quantities of relief food which have come flooding in here have devastated the market for local produce," said Willet Weeks, a staff member of the American branch of Save the Children. "Now relief agencies are also discussing the possibility of a price support program, in which they would buy the crops of farmers at prices that make farming profitable."<sup>[43]</sup>

### **Recommendations**

Since 1960 the West has provided more than \$300 billion in development assistance and various credits to Africa. Unfortunately, that aid has failed to arrest Africa's economic decline and, instead, has helped produce numerous economic and political disasters, such as the one in Somalia. More effective assistance programs can be devised by adhering to the following principles.[44]

### **Prevention Is Better Than Cure**

Conflicts and wars against repressive and unrepresentative states have exacerbated crises in Africa. Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Zaire, and other countries would probably not be facing such strife were they democratic. Furthermore, it is better to attack the root causes of a disease than to treat its symptoms. Humanitarian missions in Somalia, Sudan, and other African countries are typical cases of treating the symptoms.

The repressive state is the root cause of Africa's civil wars. Such conflicts are waged for two primary reasons. Various ethnic groups may fight a secessionist war to end political domination and economic exploitation by the extremely centralized state (e.g., the Biafran War, 1967-70; the Eritrean War, 1962-91; and the conflict in Cabinda, 1991). Other groups--mainly political--may fight a war to overthrow an oppressive state and seize political power. The absence of mechanisms for the peaceful transfer of political power and the peaceful resolution of conflicts means that seemingly innocuous political differences with an ethnic flavor can easily degenerate into protracted and intractable civil wars that rage for years (e.g., those in Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Zaire). Such mechanisms should be established in Africa as a matter of utmost urgency.

Political reforms in Africa are imperative. Although the West can facilitate those reforms--say, by eliminating aid programs that encourage corruption and politicize domestic economies--its role can at best be marginal. Africans must be responsible for initiating and sustaining the types of reforms that will create more stable and democratic political systems.

### **Institutions Last Longer Than Individuals**

Independent institutions are needed that will allow Africans to choose their leaders, express themselves freely, and go about their economic activities freely. Whether the West likes the leaders chosen by Africans is irrelevant. It is the institutions that are important. Essential institutions are free markets, democracy, an independent press, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, property rights, a neutral army, and a bill of rights.

There should be no Western aid to any African country that is ruled by a military dictatorship or a one-party state system that spends more than 10 percent of its budget on the military and security forces or whose government officials indemnify themselves against the misuse of funds. U.S. AID cannot preach "accountability" while it allows African governments to exempt themselves from accountability. Recent cases occurred in Benin and Ghana. When Ghana drafted its new constitution in March 1992, sections 33, 34, and 36 were clandestinely inserted without any debate to give the ruling military regime (the PNDC) blanket and perpetual immunity for "any official act or omission (committed) during the administration of the PNDC." That is, the PNDC cannot be called to account for the \$3 billion in various loans and credits it received over a 10-year period from U.S. AID, the World Bank, the IMF, and other Western government institutions.

The whole aid-allocation business is shrouded in too much secrecy. Africans who are being helped often have no idea of how much aid has been granted them and what it is being used for.

### **African People vs. African Governments**

The West should make a fundamental distinction between the African governments and the African people. The West still operates on the naive assumption that helping African governments necessarily helps the African people. Most of the governments in Africa are not only illegitimate but woefully out of touch with reality and their own people. The West should listen more to the African people than to their illegitimate governments.

### **Neutrality**



The West should deal with various political factions in Africa with scrupulous neutrality. It should not favor one political group over another--whether in South Africa or Angola. The Clinton administration erred in granting diplomatic recognition to the Marxist MPLA regime in Angola, where war is still raging and it is far from clear which faction is actually in control of the country. Washington simply cannot recognize one side in a conflict and remain neutral at the same time.

### **Consistency**

Standards adopted for Western policy initiatives in Africa should be applied with rigorous consistency to all African countries. Any form of apartheid in South Africa cannot be condemned while the equally heinous apartheid practiced by regimes in other African countries escapes denunciation. While Western aid to the repressive Tanzanian regime should certainly be eliminated, such a measure should be applied to other, equally repressive governments as well. In Africa foreign aid has far too often subsidized the cold-blooded policies of recipient states and has a dubious record of promoting democracy. Countries such as Kenya and Malawi that are taking steps toward establishing multiparty democracy are better off undertaking reforms without relying on official loans that in the past have served to expand their gigantic public sectors and politicize their economies.

### **Do Not Reward Corruption, Tyranny, or Abuse of Human Rights**

For far too long, African dictators and a cohort of elites have plundered their countries, committed atrocities against their people, and bolted to the West to enjoy their booty. The West should make it clear that no political asylum will be granted any African leader or diplomat who knowingly and willingly participates in the oppression and slaughter of his own people. Britain took the lead in May 1992 by deporting Abdulai Conteh, former vice-president of Sierra Leone. Other Western countries should follow suit by returning intellectual collaborators and scoundrels to their home countries.

The United States, France, and Belgium are considering setting up an international commission to seize the assets of President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. The West should also offer other African countries help in recovering the billions of dollars of loot stashed abroad by corrupt African leaders and ministers, while, of course, being mindful of due process considerations.

Regardless of what the West chooses to do in Africa, it must recognize that, ultimately, it is Africans who must solve Africa's problems. The West can help, but the initiative has to come from Africa itself. That means reform must be generated inside Africa, not dictated from the outside. Internally generated reform is far more sustainable. For the African people to be able to solve their own problems, they need freedom of expression to debate their own solutions. That freedom is guaranteed by article 19 of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights but is lacking in the majority of African countries. It is also guaranteed by article 9 of the Organization of African Unity's Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights.

Only since the 1980s have Western governments and donor agencies been promoting, at least in their rhetoric, human rights and economic reform; their promotion of political reform (democratic pluralism and government accountability) is even more recent. But the West has largely ignored intellectual reform (freedom of expression, thought, and the media)--the most critical piece of the whole reform process. African leaders say one thing while doing precisely the opposite, and nobody can publicly criticize the flip-flops. Not surprisingly, the "reforms" that have taken place in Africa can be characterized as a rousing performance of the "Babangida boogie": one step forward, two steps backward, and a flip to land on a fat Swiss bank account. If the African people themselves are to determine the type or types of political systems that are suitable for Africa, they need the freedom of expression to do so. Clearly, African tyrants are not serious about reform, especially when a "compassionate" West continues to make excuses for them.

Somalia's latest crisis has reminded the world that chronic violence, famine, and stagnation remain unfortunate features of much of black Africa. But Somalia's plight also holds lessons for the future of the region. Both African leaders and Western powers must avoid committing the same errors and abuses that helped create the region's ongoing problems. For civil society to once again thrive in Africa, there must be a return to responsive civilian forms of government. Freeing economies from state control would also empower African citizens with a greater degree of individual

sovereignty. Those changes, however, must be based on African initiative if they are to endure. Outside powers have too often provided "help" that has only aggravated or prolonged the continent's troubles, and the U.S.-UN intervention in Somalia is proving no exception. It is time that Africans work out their own destinies and put an end to the recurrence of Somali-type disasters.

## Notes

[1] IC Publications, *New African Yearbook 1991-92* (London: IC Publications, 1991), p. 303.

[2] Wolfgang Achtner, "The Italian Connection: How Rome Helped Ruin Somalia," *Washington Post*, January 24, 1993, p. C3. Emphasis in original.

[3] Quoted in *ibid.*

[4] The organization also noted that "entire regions have been devastated by a military engaged in combat against its own people, resembling a foreign occupation force that recognizes no constraints on its power to kill, rape or loot." *Africa Report*, March-April 1990, p. 10.

[5] Quoted in Reid G. Miller, "Aimless Shells Kill Women, Kids in Somalian Civil War," *Washington Times*, March 2, 1992, p. A9.

[6] World Bank and United Nations Development Program, *African Economic and Financial Data* (Washington: World Bank, 1989), p. 3.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[8] World Bank, *World Development Report 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 48.

[9] "Time to Devalue: Africa's French-franc Zone," *The Economist*, July 21, 1990, p. 82.

[10] They were Gen. Olusegun Abasanjo of Nigeria (after 1 year), El Hadj Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon (after 22 years), Abdul al Dahab of Sudan (after 1 year), Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (after 23 years), Leopold Senghor of Senegal (after 20 years), and Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone (after 14 years).

[11] David Lamb, *The Africans* (New York: Vintage, 1984), p. 54.

[12] Kwame Nkrumah, *Handbook of Revolutionary Warfare* (London: Panaf, 1980), p. 8.

[13] According to Babangida, one party was a little to the left and the other a little to the right. But Nigerians promptly dismissed this "Babangida boogie" as "a little to the north and a little to the south." The two parties were dubbed the Northern Republican Convention and the Southern Democratic Party.

[14] "Illegal Gold Diggers Will Be Shot," *West Africa*, March 1, 1982, p. 618.

[15] Lyse Doucet, "Don't Shoot the Traders," *West Africa*, January 26, 1987, p. 154. The Sahel is the semiarid region bordering the southern terminus of the Sahara Desert. The Club du Sahel is a Paris-directed governmental organization that seeks to promote agricultural development and food self-sufficiency in the Sahelian countries: Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad.

[16] James Brooke, "Guineau Booms as Markets Replace Marx ism," *New York Times*, December 28, 1987, p. 28.

[17] J. S. A. Funna, "Prospects for Sierra Leone," Text of speech, *West Africa*, February 15, 1982, p. 446.

[18] "The Gravy Train," *West Africa*, May 1-7, 1989, p. 677.

[19] Jennifer Whitaker, *How Can Africa Survive?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 61.

- [20] "N30 bn Fake Debt," *West Africa*, September 25-October 1, 1989, p. 1614.
- [21] Quoted in Jonathan C. Randal, "French-Speaking Africa Hit by Popular Discontent," *Washington Post*, March 26, 1990, p. A17.
- [22] Jean Paul Cotier, "Benign Growth," *American Spectator*, May 1990, p. 31.
- [23] Gerald Bourke, "Houphouet's Heavy Hand," *Africa Report*, May-June, 1990, p. 14.
- [24] Paul Webster, "France's Black Burden," *Guardian Weekly*, June 17, 1990, p. 9. For more examples of gross corruption, see George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), pp. 233-64.
- [25] Claude Ake, "As Africa Democratizes," *Africa Forum* 1, no. 2 (1991): 13-18.
- [26] Quoted in D. R. Fraser Taylor and Fiona Mackenzie, *Development from Within: Survival in Rural Africa* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 217.
- [27] "Elements of the New Africa," *Index on Censorship*, April 1992, p. 9.
- [28] Ben Kwame Fred-Mensah, "The Dilemma of Much-Needed Institutional Change in Africa," *Social Change and Development News* 4, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1992): 7.
- [29] For an extensive discussion of precolonial Africa, see George B. N. Ayittey, *Indigenous African Institutions* (Ardsley-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Transnational, 1991).
- [30] Ruth Massey, "Making a Better Living," *West Africa*, April 3-9, 1989, p. 514.
- [31] Neil Henry, "Arid Botswana Keeps Democracy Afloat," *Washington Post*, March 21, 1991, p. A3.
- [32] *New African*, January 1993, p. 24.
- [33] Both Farra and Omaar are quoted in *African Letter*, August 16-30, 1992, p. 9.
- [34] Femi Akomolafe, "Leave Africa Alone," *New African*, January 1993, p. 14.
- [35] Nuruddin Farah, "Praise the Marines? I Suppose So," *New York Times*, December 28, 1992, p. A15.
- [36] *Ibid.*
- [37] "Misgivings over Mogadishu," *Editorial*, *West Africa*, December 14-20, 1992, p. 2135.
- [38] Quoted in A. A. Boahen and J. B. Webster, *History of West Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 225.
- [39] Quoted in Lamb, p. 17.
- [40] Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, "Doing Harm by Doing Good? The International Relief Effort in Somalia," *Current History* 92, no. 574 (May 1993): 202.
- [41] George F. Will, ". . . When to Fold," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1993, p. A27.
- [42] Quoted in Alison Mitchell, "A New Question in Somalia: When Does Free Food Hurt?" *New York Times*, January 13, 1993, p. A1.
- [43] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. A8.
- [44] These recommendations were also made by the author at the House Foreign Relations Committee hearings on

February 23, 1993.