

Africa Through the Prism of the Sudan War: Reconfiguring Internal “Castles” Across the Region

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Abstract: The raging conflicts and coup d'état across the face of Africa is a testament of a region in turmoil. This article argues that despite the unique challenges engulfing the continent, Africans should stop pointing accusing fingers at foreign states by adopting inward strategies to reconfigure its internal “castles” to enhance the socio-economic and political developments of the region and its peoples. Although foreign and geo-political interests cannot be discounted from the prevailing coups, yet this article keenly contends that a courageous, visionary and decisive leadership is needed to steer the African Union in the direction of the European Union, and as exemplified in the Franco-German model. Furthermore, it argues that with an altruistic leadership, corruption can be minimized to provide adequate funding to create an independent regional medical research centers to develop medicines and health care strategies uniquely responsive to African needs. Finally, it is proposed that strategic initiatives such as the nascent African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), coupled with substantive regional military force should be established to intervene legally to curb wanton coup d'états, thereby providing stability to shore up critical developmental projects necessary for the growth and development of the region.

Key words: Sudan, conflicts, internal castles, free movement, regional solutions, good leadership

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1. Introduction

For Africa, the state of socio-economic distress, political coup d'états and cultural disintegration are gradually nudging the continent to the precipice of collapse. The tentacles of corruption and avarice among political leaderships are seeping into the lives of the people who struggle each day to sustain themselves and their dependents. Coupled with the brazen misgovernment are the wanton misuse of state institutions and agents who exert brute force to intimidate and deny the masses the space to exercise their inalienable human rights and dignity as enshrined in international law and domestic constitutions (Binghema, 2010). The failure to improve the peoples' wellbeing, human rights and dignity through effective governance create paralysis, manifesting in destabilizations of Sudan, and most currently the Sahel region of Africa. It is against this profoundly bleak backdrop of, paradoxically, an enhanced human vulnerability — that this paper is being organized. Thus, the questions being posed for this discussion are: what have been the fruits of Africa's independence of over six decades; and how does Africa develop itself into a substantive regional power capable of promoting its peoples' socio-economic

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wellbeing without reliance on western and foreign power? To answer the above questions, this paper, first, examines some of the underlying factors, especially the Sudan conflict and the related uprisings in the region; second, it explores the crises of exemplary leadership; third, it discusses Sudan as a prism of the African nemesis; fourth, the role of foreign powers' influence in the internal conflicts of Africa; and lastly, some strategic recommendations are proffered to help the region regain its rightful status as the second largest and resourced-endowed continent in the world.

2. Factors Responsible for Coup d' Etat Across the African region

The widespread coup d'état across the African continent, especially in Burkina-Faso, Chad, Mali, Sudan, Guinea and, most recently Niger, are due to a combination of personal greed and external influences (The Economist, 2023). Whereas the Sudan conflict serves as a prism through which the continent is examined, in this paper, the Sudanese people had suffered varied degrees of vulnerabilities occasioned by the dictatorial regime of Omar Al-Bashir, which has been re-enacted by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan (Buhan) of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and General Mohamed Hadam Dagalo (Dagalo) (United States Institute of Peace) (USIP, 2023). Without doubt, the pursuit of personal ambition for power and authority, which is shaping the Sudan conflict, also translates ugly into violation of human and brazen distortions of socio-economic structures and infrastructural development that render the people and society depraved (USIP, 2023). Characteristic of most conflicts in the African region, the Sudan conflict can be seen as a manipulation of junior military forces by the army-generals to achieve personal whims instead of protecting the wellbeing of the people; because both faction leaders use nationalistic sentiments and ideologies to persuade the people to support them or numb their thinking-capabilities to resent them (The Economist, 2023, p. 39). Furthermore, as a colonial legacy bequeathed to Africans: “A military uniform bestows an image of power, prestige and legitimacy. It can also be misused to cover up, or even justify unethical practices” (Ouédraogo, 2014, p. 3). Pervasively, in the continent of Africa, and especially Sudan, not only is the military complicit in craving for power, but also elected politicians collude with their elite public servants in a cabal-like fashion to exploit the peoples and nations' resources through corruptible means and dubious deals (Ofori, 2021). The consequence is the plethora of civil uprisings and military coups of which Sudan, and the Sahel region are testimonies.

2.1 Mismanagement of States Resources

With mismanagement of state resources by both democratically elected politicians and military juntas in Africa, socio-economic fragility ensues, creating favorable conditions for coup d'états to be engineered and succeeded (Nantulya, 2016), as the following examples affirm. Paradoxically, Niger, a west African state, which spans over 490,000 square miles and the seventh producer of uranium in the world, and with considerable amount of gold and oil is suspiciously described as the second poorest state in the world (World Atlas, 2021). The word “suspiciously” is advisedly used in the sense that while the social, economic, political and cultural development of the Nigerien population befits the negative description tag, mismanagement of the State's financial resources earned from exporting its mineral resources coupled with diversion of those funds by current and successive leaders are partly attributable to the unfolding conflicts in the country. Furthermore, the chronic policy of entrusting the extraction and processing of minerals and natural resources in African states to foreign multinational corporations, backed by their governments, provide easy avenues for self-seeking leaders to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses (World Atlas, 2021). As an example, in the 1950s, Uranium was

discovered in Niger at specific places such as Azelik, Madaouela and Tassa; whilst Imouraren is the production hub and has produced over 1 trillion tons of Uranium under the management of a French company — French Atomic Energy Commission and Conema (Now Oramo) (World Atlas, 2021). Not only is it shocking to designate a country endowed with such mineral and natural resources as the poorest in the world, but it also reflects a misgovernance trait demonstrated by the Nigerien leadership, which has been replicated across the breadth width of the African continent. Similarly, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is another classical example of mismanagement of state resources, which attracted the coinage “resource curse”.¹ Davies (2021), a senior economist at Fathom Consulting, explained the underlying reasons for the DRC’s crisis, thus: “it is well endowed with natural resources such as Cobalt (commonly referred to as the blood diamond of batteries), Coltan (a key ingredient for the electronics industry and Copper (used for wiring in electrical equipment and motors), yet the country remains poor and divided”. The DRC’s conflict is triad in nature because instead of promoting the wellbeing of its people in the spheres of building good socio-economic infrastructures to enhance livelihoods, it has become the cause of intra-tribal conflict resulting in many civilian deaths, and thus providing opportunities for the government, its cronies and foreign corporations, to exploit the people as well as indiscriminately damage farmlands, biodiversity and local properties (Davies, 2021). The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2021) also observes that “Sudan has persistent large macroeconomic imbalances due to past mismanagement and lack of external investment and financing. The weak economic status of African states often created by mismanagement and greed among their elites are major contributing factors of the current crisis in the continent, instead of external western powers.

Undoubtedly, in situations of grave poverty where citizens struggle to attain access to basic resources for livelihood and sustenance, while the political class and their elite cronies live in an outward ostentation, the situation is more likely to tease the majority to foment uprisings as witnessed across the region of Africa. In the words of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2021, p. 2): “The Guinean Military’s overthrow of President Alpha Condé — an outcome of autocratic overreach, economic mismanagement, and eroding democratic norms — points to both internal leadership failures and weaknesses of the sub-regional organization coupled with international partners’ inertia to anticipate and respond to an evolving coup playbook.” Besides internal struggles for political power, the recent coup d’état in Niger has traits of poor economic mismanagement laced with excessive corruption among the governing political elites. Este (2023) contends that the rapid decline in state security and economic stagnation motivated the overthrow of President Bazoum of Niger. Although foreign powers’ geo-political and economic interests in Africa cannot be excused for the endemic coup d’états plaguing the region, however, the absence of altruism among African politicians to craft humane socio-economic vision and articulate same to inspire genuine hope among the peoples has ignited intense distrust among the ruled and the ruling, manifesting the incessant internal strife across the continent.

2.2 Corrupt Political Leaders as Source of Conflicts in Africa

No human society is free from the menace of corruption and its related counterpart, bribery. Yet, whereas western states and other developed countries are actively seeking strategies to stem the threat of corruption, African states willfully create opportunities for such vices to thrive (Ofori, 2021). Brazenly, the cancer of corruption is at the heart of major political struggles of which coup d’états are the leading cause of conflicts in

¹ The resource curse is also known as the paradox of plenty is the phenomenon whereby economies that are well endowed with natural resources experience less favorable development than their resource poor counterparts.

Africa (Baltai, 2022). Beyond the vestiges of colonial imperialism which are often disguised in macro-economic policies and handed to the region under bilateral and multilateral agreements (Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (TICPI, 2023), African political elites are imbued with greed and avarice which drive them to amass excessive wealth at the expense of their poor citizens. In the words of a commentator: “power-preserving political corruption, is when power-holders are using the proceeds and other funds, state or private, to maintain and/or strengthen their hold on power in illicit or immoral ways” (Amundsen, 2019, p. xi). The urge to entrench themselves in power through illicit means underscores the argument that western powers incite and foment internal conflicts through proxy wars in the region. This view, however, does affirm the fact that western states, especially France, is partly complicit in the conflicts across French-speaking African states. That notwithstanding, the prowess to divest state resources to pursue personal interests within and without one's state distorts the common regional and state developmental agenda, especially socio-economic institutions, which would have provided critical health, educational and technological resources, to create employment opportunities for the teeming youth populations of the region (Casey, 2017). Another strand of the argument is the rapid solicitations of bribes by public servants/agents who regard their positions as an avenue to enrich themselves. The practice of bribery stifles domestic initiatives such as building hospitals, roads and other facilities to enhance the wellbeing and developmental progress of states and by extension the region. A commentator opines that: “bribery is offered and paid by national and international companies to obtain rent-seeking opportunities, access to national resources, concessions, state contracts in civil engineering projects, construction works, defense supplies, and so on” (Amundsen, 2019, p. 11). The implication is that the impact of bribery induces aggressive militaristic tendencies among desperate citizens in yielding to external influences to support coup plots/adventures, thereby destabilizing the region or state. In that respect, this article proposes that Africa needs a leadership that can craft and articulate an inspiring vision and hope to win the good-will of its peoples towards a sustainable development.

2.3 Absence of Leadership to Galvanize the People and Region

For all the existing debates of leadership crisis in individual African states and at the continent level, the need for a courageous leadership embodying decisiveness, vision and altruistic qualities, is acutely urgent if Africa is to regain its rightful place in global affairs. Drawing on the exemplary leadership of the Franco-German partnership in the architecture of the EU and its functioning, a model exists for Africa, especially Nigeria and South Africa, to emulate in assuming an obligation to lead campaign to promote the welfare, growth and developmental aspirations of the continent (Koopman, 2018). For example, since the inception of the EU, the Franco-German leadership has been the cog in articulating and prioritizing the union's vision beyond the interests of individual states, thus enhancing the socio-political, economic and cultural wellbeing of the union's project (Koopman, 2018). During the tumultuous eras of the Covid-19 pandemic, banking crisis and Russia-Ukraine war, Angela Merkel/Olaf Scholz and Emmanuel Macron, adopted pragmatic strategies in procuring vaccines to immunize the European populations; re-capitalize the banks as well as offered substantial sanctuary and material provisions to support refugees entering the EU territories (Financial Times, 2016). Similarly, whilst a courageous and decisive leadership is offered by Abu Dhabi and Riyadh to strategies the rapid socio-economic and developmental agenda of the Gulf region, the converse is the norm in Africa because the entire continent could not organize or mobilize a regional vaccine manufacturing capacity to immunize against the virus (Hoffman, 2023). The absence of substantive leadership in the capacity of Franco-German style should engage the thinking and deliberations of the African Union instead of looking outwards for help in every crisis. In the absence of substantive leadership in the

region, African leaders often regard their peoples as naïve or second-class citizens who require little accountable leadership, a situation that conveniently breeds coup d'états (Sandbu, 2023). Although Nigeria and South Africa have the potential to assume the reigns of leadership to chart the African vision for concrete developments, both states are often plagued with endemic corruption and abysmal economic down-turns. According to Vines (2023, p. 12), key African economies such as “South Africa and Nigeria were already stuck with low growth and many African governments have seen their debt burdens increase- such as Ethiopia and Ghana now have debt trading at distressed levels- and more countries will follow in 2023.” No state has abundant resources to solve its entire socio-economic and political challenges, yet the two biggest economies in Africa- Nigeria and South Africa- have persistently struggled to balance their books (International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2023). With cyclical debts and economic down-turns yearly, there is little prospect that Africa will have a strong leadership to galvanize the continent as a regional force in global affairs. This exposes its weak status as a pawn in the hands of foreign powers which manipulate it into expedient proxy wars.

2.4 The Influence of Foreign Powers in Coup d' etats in Africa

Stating that foreign powers sponsor policies which partly influence the perennial coup d' etats and civil strife in Africa is not only an established knowledge, but also a geopolitical strategy continuously being reframed to pursue an agenda of interest to them (World Nuclear Association (WNA) (2023). During the dictatorial reign of the deposed Al-Bshir of Sudan, the US-backed Chevron actively explored oil and related mineral resources, and contributed covertly to consolidating his reign, which emboldened him to suppress dissent opinions as well as abused opposition Sudanese (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Equally, Kepe et al. (2023, p. 4) state that: “Moreover, Africa is another region where Moscow seeks to undermine the Western international world and the influence of the United States and its Western allies while portraying itself as pragmatic, fair, and responsible strategic partner and power broker.” This statement affirms the established fact that foreign Powers, including Russia and China, have vested interests that transcend the exploration of mineral resources in Africa into securing geo-political advantages. Notwithstanding the geo-political advantages, there are several internal conflicts and coup d' etats raging across the continent of Africa, which have the trappings of western powers (Alamin & Squazzin, 2023). Notable among the hot spots in Africa are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan (Redealli, 2023). In all these conflict-prone states, a combination of foreign interference and mismanagement of states resources are a major factor pushing young Africans and disgruntled juntas into military expeditions. This distinguishes Sudan as a prism of the ensuing crisis in the region.

3. Sudan as a Prism of the African Crisis

Because of the authority and power which reside in people occupying leadership positions in Africa, politicians often regard themselves as demi-gods with absolute freedoms to use power and state resources to advance their greed, avarice and thievery without being held accountable (Murithi, 2023). Thus, political leaders in the region, especially Omar Al-Bashir and his cronies, exerted over-size power to intimidate and suppress opposing views to his mal-governance. For example, Dahir (2023), in his report of the Sudan conflict, stated that both General Burhan and General Hamdan, who are viciously engineering the current Sudan conflict were loyal servants under the deposed president, Al- Bashir. This represents a microcosm of the African crises in two respects. First, it demonstrates the perennial determination by politicians to employ deviant strategies to win elections and

entrench themselves in office. At the age of 79 years and before his deposition from office in 2019, Al- Bashir had been in power for three decades; however, the benefits gained by the Sudanese during his reign were a myriad of human rights abuses coupled with poverty (Dahir, 2023). Second, the desire to amass wealth to satisfy personal gratification pervaded the reign of Al-Bashir; and is amply, being re-enacted by the current army generals, who are bent on tearing the country asunder. Further, as a prism, it is observed that the overthrown of Al-Bashir mirrors the discontent among majority of Africans, who sought solace in fomenting internal conflicts to stymie the rot.

Moreover, with the many conflicts and coups raging across the African continent, the struggle for political power, mismanagement of economies, abuse of human rights and rising insecurity continue to dominate as key reasons (Mishra & Topak, 2013). As stated above, the Niger coup, as at the time of writing this article, indicates that power struggles backed by external organizations, and coupled with a desire to control state resources translate into fierce conflicts across Africa (Mishra & Topak, 2022). Paradoxically, there is feeble proposition that these conflicts are unique to the French-speaking African states. While on its face value such an argument seems plausible, a critical examination of those regional conflicts portrays a contrary position. This is because the developments which led to the coups and conflicts in French-speaking African states are repeating themselves in most English-speaking African countries too, as the examples following hold. First, although the World Bank (WB) (2023) in its Regional Economic Outlook has stated that: “Growth in sub-Saharan Africa will decline to 3.6 percent this year due to global slow down”, however; significant variation exists as to the degree of discipline and prudence adopted by each individual state to manage the wellbeing of its people. By way of illustration, the profligacy by some statemen, in this case, President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, in hiring expensive and luxurious private jets for his foreign travels at the expense of state aircraft, cannot be attributed to global economic down-turn but irresponsible leadership, which incentivizes public anger and potential uprising (Asante, 2021). Second, despite the two term-limit established by the Ivorian Constitution, President Alassane Dramane Quattara (Quatarra), has manipulatively taken advantage of his party’s majority in Parliament as a strategy to change the law, so as, to run for a third term in the country’s presidential election (Snergia Foundation, 2019). Given the controversies surrounding his 2010 presidential election, which led to the trial and jailing of Laurent Gbagbo by the International Criminal Court (ICC), one would have expected Quatarra to respect the rule of law as stipulated in his country’s constitution. Third, Tinubu, the current President of Nigeria, is facing a legal challenge from the main opposition candidate, Peter Obi, in an election universally declared as an indelible stain on the image of the country’s electoral and democratic dispensation (Hoffmann, 2023). The preceding examples and many others which time and space would not allow in this article are peculiar to most English-Speaking African states. It is therefore imperative to learn that majority of the problems in Africa are domestically orchestrated and thus requires internal remedies without looking for external solutions. Thus, to regain its rightful position in world politics, it needs to build internal “castles” to protect the continent and its peoples from relying on external aids.

4. Building “Internal” Castles Across the Region

The extraordinary nature of the African crises requires solutions that are regionally conceived to build internal “castles” that will protect the interests and image of the continent against external threats and manipulations. Symbolically, castles represent fortifications against dangers or attacks for which they are constructed to defend. Thus, Africa needs to stop pointing fingers at foreign governments and other multinationals (MNCs) for their own underdevelopment by devising an inward state-regional strategic policies to shore up the

continent creatively as the following suggests.

First, Africa needs a strong, decisive and courageous leadership through the agency of the African Union (AU), to craft and communicate a vision that embodies the aspirations, hopes and ambitions of the peoples and continent. Substantively, this can be achieved in consonance with the tenets of the founding fathers of the AU, who promulgated a transcending government beyond personal interests and whims. This reinforces the point articulated earlier, that Nigeria and South Africa, should assume a leading role as in the Franco-German architecture of the EU, to initiate an agenda that enhances the economic growth of the continent, including a political power to implement substantive sanctions to curb civil conflicts/coups as well as hold deviant heads of states accountable for misgoverning their respective peoples/states. In this respect, South Africa has set a precedent by jailing its former President, Jacob Zuma, for engaging in corruption activities in 2021 (Cotterill, 2023). Although jailing of Zuma is a limited example on the continent, it teaches a significant lesson for all African states to emulate as a precedent in holding public official accountable.

Second, to wield the necessary influence and authority to promote peace and stability needed to drive the political, economic and social developments of the peoples, a substantive regional military force should be established to intervene legally to stem illegal and unprovoked coups. This is crucial because it will free the continent from over-reliance on foreign military expertise which often breached the territorial integrity of the individual states within the region. There cannot be a meaningful African development in freedom with constant foreign military presence in the region. While there are some fourteen US and other foreign military bases in Africa alone (Trico Continental, 2021); France has “hovered like a ghost. For more than 60 years, Paris has meddled in politics and business on the continent in a cozy system that came to be known as *Francafrique*”. (Pilling, 2023, p. 17). With a well-established and equipped continental military force to protect the region against internal and external threats and interferences, Africa will be better placed to manage its own affairs productively and to achieve the desired respect through sound developmental projects.

Third, strategically building an economy which promotes intra-state trade among Africans will not only induce growth to impact the socio-economic fabrics of the peoples but will also increase the competitive edge of the region vis-à-vis Europe and other developed economies. Thus, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)² project is theoretically a good proposition. However, signing and ratifying the AfCFTA will not secure the peoples’ wellbeing unless legislations are passed to facilitate free movement of Africans across each other’s borders to engage in active trading, taking up job opportunities and using one common currency without undue restrictions. This must be backed by the removal of restrictive tariffs which hinder sound economic activities. As the second biggest and well-endowed continent in the world, African states must collaborate actively to unleash the economic prosperities of the region to avoid being characterized as a stagnant economic region (Vines, 2023). Furthermore, Africa needs to adopt value-creation strategies with a view to improving the quality of its bounteous raw materials prior to exporting them outside the region. This strategy will not only strengthen its negotiating capacity at international trading fora but also enables it to secure competitive prices for its natural resources and commodities.

Fourth, security is at the heart of every human existence and the same is the case for organizations and continents of which Africa is an integral part. Undoubtedly, a major crisis confronting Africa is insecurity, which

² The Agreement establishing the AfCFTA was adopted on March 21, 2018, with May 30, 2019, making its entry into force. As at May 2022, 54 African States had signed up to their Agreement out of which 43 has deposited their instruments of ratification.

has manifested in terrorism activities such as abduction of civilians especially women and children in many parts of Africa including the northern parts of Nigeria and Niger. As a strategy to promote the economic, social and political freedoms of the peoples, it needs to devise a robust security system with an intelligence gathering capability, headquartered in one African state. With such security facilities, information and intelligence can be collected and shared with individual states on potential threats so as to foil them. Also, security arrangements and protocols can be established with credible foreign/external agencies to engage in collaborative projects to defeat insurgents and terrorist organizations that impede good governance and development.

Fifth, education is a key strategic policy that can be developed to enhance the competitive edge of the continent. Critically, the African Union should initiate and sponsor creative educational policies, curriculum and syllabuses that are uniquely taught across all African schools and higher educational institutions, with a common goal to instill and spur creativity for the developmental needs of peoples and continent. Also, education should be strategized within the individual states to equip the people with critical knowledge in international negotiations, international law, business, science and vocational/technical/skills that are needed to build the infrastructural capacities of the region with little reliance on foreign sources. For over sixty years of independence, Africa has relied on foreign expertise for basic educational needs, that must stop.

Sixth, health is a critical social and developmental need. However, Africa with its rich resources -human and mineral resources-remains dependent on foreign donors for medical assistance. The outbreak of Covid-19 clearly demonstrated this point extensively. Whilst the governments of the US and UK were providing funding to support the research activities of Pfizer and AstraZeneca (UK, 2022) to develop vaccines to combat the virus, Africa had been pleading with external powers for donations of vaccines. To become substantively independent, Africa must develop its medical and health research capabilities by investing adequate resources to furnish the Africa Research Centre with requisite equipment, buildings, personnel and timely funding so that it can cater for its peoples' health needs wholistically. Also, invitations and opportunities should be extended to renowned African scientists around the world to share and exchange their expertise with African health practitioners at home so that the region can build a proficient continental capacity to address the peculiar health needs of the peoples without reliance on external donors. Furthermore, these can be achievable feats if African leaders would spend a fraction of their state budgets to sponsor such a scheme rather than dissipating them on personal and fleeting luxuries in foreign countries.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the unique challenges of the African continent through the prism of the Sudan conflict. The key argument/contribution of this article is that Africa must stop wagging a finger at foreign powers for its crises by developing sound internal “castles” to promote the social, economic, political and cultural wellbeing of the peoples and the region. Although this article raises some controversial issues with respect to challenging the status-quo in Africa, the practice of attributing every problem facing a state or the region to an external force is a defeatist approach which denies the people the capacity to fashion solutions unique to African problems. The persistent and ravaging conflicts in Sudan reflect similar tensions in many parts of region. Thus, without a good and visionary leadership to steer continent, corruption and the drive for political power to enrich and entrench oneself in power will culminate in civil strife and coups as witnessed across the region.

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