

Why African Countries Implode (Part 1 of 2)  
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“He who does not understand the cause of the problem cannot solve it.”

An African Proverb

We have not done well tackling the fundamental or root causes of Africa's problems. We often apply band-aid solutions to their symptoms and then they flare up again. In 1991, Somalia imploded. Then Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Liberia and others followed. In 2011 – 20 years later – Libya imploded. Why?

To be sure, Western imperialism, colonialism, slave trade, etc. did great harm to Africa and left horrible scars and lingering legacies such as artificial borders. Whole ethnic groups were cut up and parceled off to different countries. The Somali, for example, found themselves in 5 countries: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. The Hausa fared the worst, finding themselves in 15 countries. Those factors, however, have little or nothing to do with why African countries have been imploding.

One word, “power,” offers a better explanation. In fact, the entire post colonial history of Africa can be written in terms of that one word. The centralization of power, the competition to capture it, its monopolization and use by one buffoon or group (tribal, racial, religious or professional) to advance their own interests by enriching themselves to the exclusion of all other groups (the politics of exclusion or political apartheid) have been the cause of conflicts in Africa and the bane of its development. The richest in Africa are heads of state and ministers and quite often the chief bandit is the head of state himself. It is no accident that the most powerful is often the richest. Power in Africa is used for only three things: To loot the treasury, perpetuate oneself in office and squash all dissent or opposition.

In the quest or struggle for power, over 50 wars have raged across Africa since independence in the 1960s. Year after year, one African country after another has imploded with deafening staccato, scattering refugees in all directions: Sudan (1972), Angola (1975), Mozambique (1975), Ethiopia (1985), Liberia (1992), Somalia (1993), Rwanda (1994), Zaire (1996), Sierra Leone (1997), Congo DRC (1998), Ethiopia/Eritrea (1998), Guinea (1999), Sudan (2003), Ivory Coast (2003), Kenya (2007), Zimbabwe (2008), Tunisia (2010), Egypt and Libya (2011), Mali (2012) with more countries on the brink. Some wars never end (Algeria, Burundi, Somalia, Sudan, Western Sahara) while others end and restart after brief lulls. At least 10 African nations are currently wracked by conflict and civil strife. Populations have been uprooted, decimated, infrastructure destroyed, and homes of people razed. The economic toll has been horrendous: devastated agriculture, deepening poverty, declining investment, increasing social misery, and a massive refugee population of mostly women and children.

The vast majority of Africa's conflicts have been intra-state in origin; only 3 were inter-state: Tanzania-Uganda in 1979, Libya-Chad in 1987 and Ethiopia-Eritrea in 1998. All the rest were civil wars started by politically marginalized, excluded or persecuted groups. Secessionist bids for independence have been few: Biafra, 1967-1970 (Nigeria), Cabinda, on-going (Angola), Casamance, on-going (Senegal), Eritrea in 1991 and South Sudan in 2010. The rest were not about driving away colonial infidels, or redrawing colonial boundaries. They are about political **POWER**, pure and simple. All rebel leaders seek to wrestle power out of the hands of a

despicable despot, so they head straight to the capital city because that's where **POWER** lies. The wars invariably pit an autocratic "government" on one side against a rebel group, representing a politically excluded group, on the other.

A bitter lesson in the postcolonial era is that no African government has successfully put down a rebel insurgency, which is different from a secessionist bid. The former seeks to overthrow or replace an existing government while the latter is an attempt to break up and set up a separate, independent state — for example, Biafra, Cabinda, etc. Generally, rebel insurgencies start from the countryside, where government troops are thinly spread and virtually non-existent. Fighting is often sporadic and can drag on for years or even decades, leaving much destruction and death in its wake. Demoralized government troops (loyalists in the case of the Ivory Coast), abandon posts or join the rebels (Ethiopia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Zaire). Unemployed and restless youth join the rebels, in hopes of gaining positions or improving the economic livelihood. They use their guns to pillage and plunder. Such has been the life of child soldiers.

A tyrannical regime may succeed temporarily in suppressing a rebel insurgency — as in the Cameroon in the 1960s and Zimbabwe in the 1980s — but it does not crush it, only to erupt again. In most cases, the rebels and government forces fight to a stalemate, with both sides committing horrendous atrocities. Appalled by the gratuitous mayhem, wanton destruction and senseless civil war, the conscience of the international community is stirred to act. Maximum pressure is applied to combatants to reach a cease-fire or peace accord. But they are band-aid solutions.

Over 40 such peace accords have been signed in post colonial Africa since the 1960s and their success record has been abysmal -- often shredded like confetti even before the ink on them was dry, amid mutual recriminations of cease-fire violations. In 2006, the UN juggled 9 separate peacekeeping operations across Africa: the Comoros, Congo DR, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Sudan (Darfur). The UN failed twice in Somalia and terribly in Rwanda. Its enduring success is Mozambique's 1991 peace accord, while shaky pacts held in Angola, Chad, Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone. The most spectacular failures were: Angola (1991 Bicesse Accord, 1994 Lusaka Accord), Burundi (1993 Arusha Accord), DR Congo (July 1999 Lusaka Accord), Rwanda (1993 Arusha Accord), Sierra Leone (1999 Lome Accord), Ivory Coast (2003 Accra Accord), Sudan (2005). Somalia, alone, has held more than 14 peace conferences to help restore peace and stability to country since it imploded in 1991.

Even when peace accords hold, the combatants – government and rebel/opposition forces – are urged to come together and form a “government of national unity” (GNU). Note that GNU is a temporary **POWER-SHARING** arrangement, which underscores the fact that the original cause of the conflict was monopolization of **POWER**. But the GNU concept itself is fatally flawed; it is another band-aid solution that does not address the root cause or the fundamental reason why power is monopolized in the first place. As a result, it has failed miserably in post colonial Africa.

First, the notion of former mortal enemies, who in the past plotted to kill each other, can bury their intense mutual hatred, sit down and work amicably together to govern a country is nutty; it defies logic. Look, not all rebel leaders are “Nelson Mandelas.” Second, a GNU is essentially a formula for joint state-sanctioned plunder of the country. It seeks to bring rebels or opposition leaders into government. Ministerial or government posts are expected to be “shared” equitably. At the 1999 Lome Peace Accord to end the civil war in Sierra Leone, for example, rebel leader Foday Sankoh got Minister of Lands and Mines. At the peace accord struck in January 2003 in Paris to resolve the crisis in Ivory Coast envisioned a power-sharing deal between the

government of President Laurent Gbagbo, which controlled the southern half of this country, and the rebel groups, who controlled the north and much of the west. But the formula seldom works.

Quite often, however, bitter squabbles erupt over the distribution of government posts as nobody is satisfied with the eventual distribution. A peace accord is an exercise in "give and take" but each side goes into negotiations believing it is "stronger" and should, therefore, be awarded more powerful ministerial positions. In the case of the Ivory Coast, a peace accord was signed in Ghana in March 2003 to establish a GNU that would include members of the ruling party of President Laurent Gbagbo, the main rebel group (the Côte d'Ivoire Patriotic Movement) and other political parties and rebel forces. But there were "disagreements over the distribution of cabinet posts and the January peace accord was greeted by a week of anti-French and anti-rebel demonstrations in parts of the country " (*Africa Recovery*, Vol. 17, No. 1, May 2003; p.3).

Supporters of Laurent Gbagbo bitterly opposed the allocation of two key ministerial positions (interior and defense) to the rebel groups. At the March 7, 2003 peace conference in Ghana, the rebel groups said they will drop their claims to the two pivotal cabinet positions in exchange for "other concessions from Mr. Gbagbo's government, including an assurance that it would guarantee the safety of their leaders and cede power to the man both sides have agreed would lead the unity government as prime minister, a veteran politician named Seydou Diarra" (*The New York Times*, March 8, 2003; p.A3). But Mr. Gbagbo was reluctant to spell out the powers he would hand over to Mr. Diarra until France exerted massive pressure. On Sept 23, 2003, the rebels, calling themselves the New Forces, pulled out of the "national reconciliation government" set up in March, claiming they had been denied real power. Indeed, out of the 42 ministries, only 11, all run by President Laurent Gbagbo, had budgets (*The Economist*, October 4, 2003; p.46). Fighting resumed on September 25 and re-ignited the civil war.

In most other cases, resentment inevitably builds over allocation of posts and the composition of the government of national unity or reconciliation. Squabbling over posts may lead to the resumption of hostilities and conflict again -- Angola in 1992, Congo in 1999, Sierra Leone in 2000, and Ivory Coast in 2004. As *The New York Times* (March 9, 2003) reported, "The ink had not yet dried on another promise for peace in Ivory Coast as fighting broke out in its unruly west overnight, with civilians fleeing their ransacked villages and men firing at French soldiers who were there to enforce a cease-fire" (p.A10). The French had to send in more troops to enforce the cease-fire.

Third, even if a final agreement is reached on the distribution of posts, African despots never honor power-sharing agreements to which they append their signatures. Their promises and signatures are just for show as they lack sincerity or commitment. They may agree to the creation of a post of prime minister but deprive it of power or a budget to enable him to function. Or they may try to kill the prime minister. Such was the case with Ivory Coast's Prime Minister Guillaume Soro. On June 30, 2007, three rockets hit his plane as it was landing at Bouake, killing four people. Mr. Soro escaped death but John Garang, the prime minister in Sudan's GNU, was not lucky.

For these reasons, a GNU seldom lasts. Angola's GNU did not last for more than six months in 1992. In South Africa, former president de Klerk pulled out of the GNU after barely one year when apartheid was dismantled in 1994. Congo's GNU in 2003 created 4 vice-presidents but did not bring peace to eastern Congo, especially the Bunia region. Burundi's civil war flared up in August 2003 again, despite the establishment of a GNU, brokered by former president Nelson Mandela and Ivory Coast's GNU established in January 2003 collapsed in less than a year.

Sudan's GNU, brokered in Kenya in 2005 barely lasted a year. After battling the tyrannical regime of President Omar el Beshir of Sudan, the late Dr. John Garang of the Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA), decided to join a GNU. The agreement was supposed to foster peace by melding SPLM with the ruling party, the National Congress Party, in a national unity government that would rule Sudan until multiparty elections in 2009. But within nine months, he had perished in a mysterious helicopter crash. Though the mystery was never solved, his widow blamed the Beshir regime. Six months later, the rebel movement – now called Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) abruptly pulled out of the national unity government on Oct 12, 2007. The former rebels said "the move was intended to press Sudan's ruling party to live up to the multifaceted agreement, which has been hobbled by disputes over borders, troop movements and sharing Sudan's oil profits" (*The New York Times*, Oct 12, 2007; p.A8). In 2010, South Sudan broke away completely to become an independent nation.

Following Kenya's violent Dec 2007 elections in which 1,200 people perished, a peace deal was reached and GNU created in Feb 2008. But that deal has been floundering. Ominously, Prime Minister Raila Odinga has been complaining bitterly that he has been sidelined and excluded from major decision-making. He said President Kibaki has the habit of "embarrassing" him publicly by failing to consult him on important decisions. They made an effort to reconcile in Kiliguni in April, 2009 but the fence mending never got off the ground because the parties couldn't even agree on an agenda. The bloated government of 44 ministries and 53 assistant ministers achieved little. On April 6, 2009, Justice Minister, Martha Karua, one of Kibaki's staunchest supporters, resigned, claiming that she could not institute reforms.

Ditto for Zimbabwe's GNU, signed in 2008. It has been ditched; in fact, it really never had a chance. For one thing, Mugabe's ZANU-PF showed no interest in living to the letter of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) reached on Sept 15, 2008. For another, there was squabbling over the distribution of government positions. Article 20 of the GPA stipulated 31 ministers and 15 deputy ministers, with 15 coming from ZANU-PF, 13 MDC-T and 3 MDC-M for a total of 46. The most asinine GPA proposition was the joint control of the Home Affairs ministry by ZANU-PF and MDC-T.

However, Mugabe's ZANU-PF set out to grab all the key and important ministries. It was originally allocated 15 but seized 22 anyway. A furor erupted and 15 additional ministries were created, bringing the total to 61. Still, Mugabe was still not satisfied and transferred major portfolio powers from Communications Minister Nelson Chamisa of MDC-T to Transport Minister Nicholas Goche of Mugabe's own ZANU-PF party. A Joint Monitoring Implementation Committee or JOMIC was set up with the mandate to monitor the implementation of the Global Political Agreement and ensure that that Agreement was implemented to the fullest extent possible in letter and spirit. But JOMIC started off without any resources nor funding from the state. It did not even have an office or secretarial staff. Even then, JOMIC had no power of enforcement; only an authority of persuasion.

In short, GNU is a lazy band-aid solution that does not address the root causes of a problem. As long as **POWER** is centralized and monopolized by one buffoon, who adamantly refuses to relinquish or share it and uses it to enrich himself, his cronies and tribesmen to the exclusion of all others, there will be uprisings, rebellions, rebel insurgencies and more state collapse in Africa. The following African countries are heading nowhere but to an implosion: Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda,

Tanzania, Togo and Zimbabwe.

There are three reasons for the impending implosion, all related to **POWER**:

1. Monopolization of power by one person in power for more than 10 years; Angola, Cameroon, CAR, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe;
2. Military intervention and seizure of power: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Sudan;
3. Reluctance of the political elite to reform: Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo. In the case of Nigeria, the political elites are not serious about reform. They set up committees upon committees to window-dress or pretend they are solving problems.

The cause of conflict and state collapse in post colonial Africa has always been the monopolization of power, its use to advance personal or sectarian interests and the refusal to relinquish or share it. Politically excluded or persecuted groups will always rise up and rebel or secede. Those who do not learn from this history are bound to repeat.

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