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The Geopolitics of Redress: Reconfiguring Africa's Diplomacy

by
Francis Kornegay*

Introduction

In the wake of the volatile World Conference on Racism (WCAR) in Durban, a critical mass of interplay between different state and non-state actors has emerged, ushering in the international politics of redress. Central to this new dynamic is the Organization of African Unity's transition to the African Union (AU) and its adoption of the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP) endorsed by the G-8, laying out a new African international relations terrain with global implications. Thus, President Mbeki's orchestration of MAP (a.k.a. the 'New African Initiative') has covered considerable ground in fleshing out his renaissance agenda. At the same time, that agenda may have to accommodate the pan-Africanist reparations tendency crystallized by WCAR that split the MAP coalition in Durban. This split surfaced in a realignment of Nigeria with the Congressional Black Caucus-led African diaspora contingents against the Pretoria orchestrated reparations compromise in Geneva, centred around MAP.

Prior to Durban, President Mbeki, together with his Nigerian and Algerian counterparts (joined by Senegal and Egypt) comprising the MAP task force B minus Egypt B were joined in Genoa by the Presidents of Mali, Bangladesh and El Salvador, in what amounted to a renewal of North-South negotiations that could ultimately restructure world politics. Indicative of this is the possibility, in the wake of continued antiglobalisation protests in Genoa, that the G8 may be facing extinction. Though little of substance emerged from Genoa, the G8 powers could give way to a G20 grouping including South Africa and the likes of Brazil, India and China. The Davos club and a so-called 'Shadow G8' of former officials like Henry Kissinger and Chester Crocker of the US are reportedly strongly backing such a move, indicating that western elites may be taking seriously the possibilities of a countervailing southern bloc and want to co-opt it. A southern G8 is one of the implications of President Mbeki's MAP-centred strategy as he attempts to orchestrate a broader renewal of the South. Thus, MAP partners Nigeria and Egypt have joined Pretoria over the past two years in a G5 grouping with India and Brazil with the potential for expansion into a 'G8 of the South' including China, among others.

The Changing Global Balance

Through South Africa's chairing of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Commonwealth as well as its lead role in MAP, Pretoria has thus far effectively orchestrated a new international politics of redress embracing three spheres of engagement: the African renewal agenda featuring inter-African partnerships as well as one with the G8; South-South cooperation; and North-South deliberations over the terms of globalisation. Here, the South's quest for equitable terms of globalisation dovetail with the international antiglobalisation movement and the demand for western reparations to the African world and to

indigenous aboriginal minorities associated with WCAR. All combined, they suggest a momentum toward

Institute for Global Dialogue
8th floor, Braamfontein Centre
23 Jorissen Street, Braamfontein
Johannesburg, South Africa

P O Box 32571, Braamfontein 2017

Tel +(11) 339-6585
Fax +(11) 339-6616
e-mail: info@igd.org.za
www.igd.org.za

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8Institute for Global Dialogue

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redressing the imbalance in power and resources between developed and developing countries and communities. Among other things, at the level of state actors, this agenda calls for effecting reforms in the international economic and trading system within the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Northern protectionism is a major obstacle to achieving MAP's objectives. The European Union alone, for example, spends US \$360 billion a year subsidising its farmers. It has been suggested that the potential benefits of a trade round on agriculture alone to developing countries would be three times what they receive each year in aid and possibly debt relief. This would unlock Africa's bread-basket potential and propel the continent's recovery. Amid western resistance to reparations for slavery and colonialism or to making meaningful economic concessions, combined WCAR/antiglobalisation pressures have virtually forced the G8 into a MAP partnership. Failure of the West to deliver on its side of this partnership within a wider North-South accommodation could, as Trade Minister Alec Erwin has warned, bring about the disintegration of the multilateral system.

To the extent that President Mbeki has succeeded in positioning Africa at the centre of the global politics of redress, Africa's marginalisation lessens. It also helps that Africa will continue occupying the helm of the United Nations (UN) with the continued tenure of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The challenge, however, is that this Afro-centric new world order, linked to redressing North-South imbalances, will stand or fall on its African foundations. That being the case, it becomes necessary to evaluate the inter-African and global balance of forces which President Mbeki has thus far successfully navigated in assessing the challenges that lie ahead. For the international politics of redress interacts with and are affected by an older set of dynamics that are yet to run their course.

First, there is the post World War II system entrenched in the Permanent Five of the UN Security Council alongside the unreconstructed Bretton Woods Institutions, namely, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. This power structure combines with the legacies of the former bipolar Cold War system which, to a major extent, conditioned the North-South divide. The legacies of both systems converge to reassert a more traditional balance of power politics between major states interacting with a newer dynamic operating between different regional and sub-regional economic blocs: the globalisation of balance of power geopolitics, with the African renaissance introducing yet another element into this fluid global environment via the 'international politics of redress'. This trend's potential is fuelled by the demographic momentum centred in Africa's population expansion in

the resource-rich central African conflict zone. Here, population is growing at a rate of 2.7 percent a year in such key states as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Thus Africa, the former underpopulated hominid cradleland, will emerge alongside China and India in the billion-plus population club in an increasingly deracializing Afro-Asian world, setting the stage for global socioracial multipolarity among state and non-state actors. This is what gives the politics of redress its potency as northern industrial economies demographically contract alongside influxes of developing country immigration. However, these mega-trends are not without their own set of contradictions. An important consideration here is the global South's own uneven development and geocultural diversity which resonates in inter-African geopolitics.

Remapping the Inter-African Terrain

The emerging AU combined with MAP signals a new balance of forces in Africa. If President Mbeki, Nigerian President Obasanjo and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika have their way, the integration of MAP's Heads-of-States Forum with the machinery the AU inherits, has the potential to impose much-needed discipline on Africa's 53 odd 'sovereignties'. However, bringing order to this neighborhood will not be easy given the new set of dynamics unleashed by these changes. What President Mbeki *et al.* have achieved in MAP is a realigning of the continent into two more or less distinct camps: a revisionist/reformation bloc including themselves and countries like Senegal, Egypt, Ghana, Mali, Benin, Botswana, Mozambique and Tanzania, and a largely Libyan-led and financed counter-revisionist bloc wedded to the authoritarian status quo. This loose alignment includes Liberia, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Swaziland and others where leaders are resisting substantive democratic change. This competition is all the more ironic inasmuch as Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's initiative in pushing the AU to the fore of the outgoing OAU's agenda was a major factor in generating momentum for the type of African renaissance envisioned by President Mbeki.

Gaddafi's leadership bid, powered by his petrodollar patronage across Africa's Saharan Muslim/non-Muslim divide is enhanced by the internal political and economic challenges confronting Presidents Obasanjo's Nigeria and Bouteflika's Algeria. Hence the fragility of the revisionist coalition and Pretoria's interest in bolstering it through binational commissions (BNC) and investment links. The Nigerian connection within this coalition is centrally strategic. The BNC relationship between Abuja and Pretoria is already generating what the London-based *Business Confidential* terms a "South African explosion" in Nigeria of trade, investment and commercial activity. This momentum is generated by the joint Nigeria-South

African Chamber of Commerce, which has helped lay the foundation for the flow of investable funds from South Africa to Nigeria while bringing a new breed of reputable Nigerian business men into the South African orbit. These developing economic relations are judged to be of such a magnitude as to have the potential to “fundamentally alter the course” of Nigeria’s development.

In terms of strategic cooperation in the rest of Africa, the South African-Nigerian axis is also coming into play in the evolving peacekeeping prospects for Burundi. In southern Africa itself, the revisionist coalition is gaining ascendancy with the following developments: the emergence of the South African-Botswana-Mozambican troika representing SADC on the MAP Heads-of-State Forum; Mozambican President Chissano’s ascending to the chair of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security with Tanzanian President Mkapa as his deputy, shuffling Zimbabwean President Mugabe into third place; and the establishment of a MAP troika-led task force on Zimbabwe, an unprecedented political intervention in SADC’s second major power, the outcome of which will determine the potential for MAP to exert politically corrective changes in Africa’s more powerful states. Meanwhile, the immediate challenges facing South Africa, Nigeria and the AU/MAP enterprise are the unresolved wars in Africa’s ‘big three’ conflict states: Angola, Congo and Sudan.

Together with South Africa, Nigeria, and similarly endowed countries, these three countries could potentially underwrite the AU and generate momentum for continental recovery. Angolan President Eduardo Dos Santos’ intentions of not standing for a re-election, the continuing momentum toward a political settlement in the DRC and Sudan’s recent overtures to Pretoria which could eventually lead to an end-game in its civil war, are reasons for cautious optimism. How President Mbeki navigates AU/MAP leverage in addressing such challenges will indicate the likelihood of the Renaissance bloc within the AU and SADC prevailing over counter-reformation forces. This in turn will determine the pace and potency of the international politics of redress globally.

Policy Options

The policy implications of these trends for South Africa underline the following illustrative options.

Internationally:

1. **Consolidating a ‘G8 of the South’:** Given the realities of power as the determining factor in international relations, global strategy should prioritise a consolidation of South-South economic and political relations. This should happen irrespective of the G8 phasing out into an expanded and more inclusive grouping. Only an organised South will ensure the restructuring of the international order along lines compatible with the interests of

developing countries within the UN and Bretton Woods systems. *Accelerating South-South trade and cooperation, linking the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean communities and grounded in a SADC-ECOWAS trading axis, would be integral to such a strategy.*

2. **Forging a partnership between Africa and the G8 for MAP implementation:** This in fact is on the cards. By the time of the next summit in Canada, a joint plan between the G8 and Africa on implementing MAP is to have been drawn up. The politics of reparations for slavery and colonialism at WCAR combined with the antiglobalisation momentum has generated pressure for delivery from such a partnership. *The logical next step would be an African campaign making MAP and the G8/African partnership on MAP the cornerstone of US and EU policies toward Africa.*

3. **From antiglobalisation to antinorthern protectionism:** Here South Africa and other African countries could work collectively toward transforming anti-globalisation constituencies into Africa lobbies dedicated to breaking down the tariff and non-tariff barriers within the G8. This is a vital corollary to ensure that a partnership on MAP actually delivers. The EU’s Common Agricultural Policy and the US anti-dumping onslaught in such sectors as steel are indicative of issues on which antiglobalisation support should be enlisted, thereby interacting with the next priority of forging a ‘Global African’ coalition with the diaspora.

4. **Global African Dialogue:** The force with which the demand for reparations surfaced at WCAR indicates that an African diaspora dimension to South African foreign policy should be seriously considered. *This should be aimed at opening a dialogue to build common ground between MAP and reparations.*

Africa:

5. **AU/MAP Integration:** Operationalising the AU and MAP in a manner that ensures credible delivery requires strategic planning aimed at integrating the conflict prevention, management and resolution machinery of the outgoing OAU (including the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation for Africa) with MAP’s Heads of State Forum. *This should become the top agenda item of Pretoria and its allies on the continent.*

6. **Ending the Civil War in the Sudan:** The outcome of a settlement here could potentially stabilise northeast Africa where Pretoria has a growing interest in consolidating economic and infrastructural links between eastern and southern Africa. This means reconciling southern Sudanese self-determination with Egypt’s security interest in the Nile. Resolving the Egypto-Sudanese civil war conundrum is indicative of the type of

challenge MAP is intended to tackle by packaging peace and security, regional cooperation and infrastructure development into recovery momentum attracting external trade, investment and targeted aid. *Washington's influence with Egypt, Cairo's MAP role and Khartoum's overtures to Pretoria could provide the needed critical mass for generating settlement momentum.*

Southern Africa:

7. ***SADC Organ on Politics, Defence & Security (OPDS):*** *In tandem with a strategic process for integrating into the AU those mechanisms inherited from the OAU, the newly revamped SADC/OPDS could serve as the sub-regional point-of-departure for a similar integrating of AU and MAP structures in southern Africa.* In fact, this integration is already implicit in the role of Mozambique as chair of the OPDS as well as a member, along with South Africa and Botswana of the MAP Heads-of-State Forum representing the subregion. Operationally, OPDS/MAP integration is evident in the SADC task force on Zimbabwe led by this trinity and this task force's political intervention in Zimbabwe.

8. ***National reconciliation in Zimbabwe:*** *Within the context of an evidently OPDS-linked SADC task force strategy coordinated with the Commonwealth, policy on defusing Zimbabwe's political crisis should aim to establish an open-ended national dialogue in Zimbabwe while encouraging efforts to establish a government of national unity before (preferably) or after next year's elections.* Such a dialogue has in fact emerged out of the recent task force visit to Zimbabwe though, perhaps, for diplomatic reasons, it's focus is on the 'land issue'. However, the establishment of the task force as an oversight monitoring committee suggests a broader agenda beyond land. The brokering of a 'national peace accord' has also been suggested and should be followed up as a possible additional stabilising option.

9. ***Angola and the DRC:*** *The OPDS intervention in Zimbabwe, through the establishment of the SADC task force on that country is a possible model to be explored for advancing political settlements in Angola and the DRC.* At this stage, the DRC peace process has gained momentum with the forthcoming convening of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD). The ICD process could be strengthened by an OPDS task force comprising the troika at the head and with the inclusion of South Africa, Angola and Namibia. A similar task force, under OPDS auspices, could explore the prospects of re-starting a political settlement process in Angola. In both cases, the DRC and Angola, such task force strategies would benefit from terms-of-reference of the task force on Zimbabwe allowing interaction with civil society as well as with governments and political opposition parties. The one caution here, however, is the dominance of pro-government NGOs among the Zimbabwean civil society actors engaged by the task force. In the case of Angola, such a task force could ensure that

renewed peace-talks include Angolan civil society actors as equal parties to such talks to de-polarise the MPLA-UNITA stalemate.

Suggested Reading:

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4. Rok Ajulu, *Zimbabwe at the Cross Roads B What Next?* *Global Insight*, No. 12, October 2001.

***Francis Kornegay is programme coordinator in the International Relations Department at the University of the Witwatersrand.**