

The United States of Africa:
The Solution for Political, Economic, and Social Stability in Africa

Andy R. Schmitz

23 July 2009

Madison Area Technical College

English II - Summer 2009

ABSTRACT

The African Union has been focusing on two main issues within Africa: correcting humanitarian issues, and continental integration. Their process for integration involves the creation of a pan-African, union government; commonly called the "United States of Africa". This paper analyzes the two forms that government could take (federal or confederate), and explains why a federal form would be a better solution. It also explains the benefits to African nations in terms of political, economic, and social gains and addresses some of the roadblocks the proposed government faces.

INDEX TERMS

Africa
African Union
Economic Development
Geopolitics
Nation Building
United States of Africa
Union Government

INTRODUCTION

The African continent has always been plagued with problems. Africa has a collection of failed states, rebel insurgencies, and genocidal dictators. Somalia, Nigeria, and the Congo are known for their pirates, scam-artists, and blood diamonds. The people of Africa deal with malaria, AIDS, and social unrest. By any standard, Africa is not a stable continent. For years, many foreign countries have given aid to various African countries and causes. Overall, the situation in Africa has shown little improvement. The constant flux of civil wars and coup d'etats have slowed. The African Union (AU), a diplomatic organization of African Nations, includes every African nation except Morocco [1]. African nations now view themselves as part of a greater African community, instead of as post-colonial possessions of Europe. Progress has been made, but much more must be done. Specifically, the African Union, and many African leaders, are discussing the possibility of creating a pan-African, union government, popularly known as the United States of Africa.

TYPES OF GOVERNMENT

This new government would stabilize the political situation in Africa, grow the economy, and cure the humanitarian issues that affect the entire continent. The exact structure of the government is unknown. But there are two main possibilities. A confederate form of government, like the European Union (EU), or a federal form of government, like the United States of America (USA). The differences between a federal form of government over a confederate one are significant. Many Americans know the terms in context of the American Civil War, but may not know the differences in definition. A federal form of government is what most nation-states use. The power of the government is vested in a single "national" government. Member states, whether states, provinces, or nations, give up some of their sovereignty to the national government. The national government then has jurisdiction over the smaller bodies and can dictate policy. A confederate form of government is what most organizations or groups of nation-states use. The power of the government is vested in the existing, local government. The smaller bodies maintain their sovereignty and jurisdiction over their own territory. The decisions of the national government can be enforced only with the

consent of the smaller body. A federal form of government begins as a collective of independent states but, in effect, results in the creation of a new, politically powerful nation. The federal structure is best suited for smaller, less powerful states because they are able to pool their resources for the common good. The states are typically more concerned about survival or economic well-being rather than the loss of sovereignty. In contrast, larger, more powerful states prefer a confederate form of government. Larger nations are already powerful and are therefore concerned with economic growth and political cooperation, but have no desire to give up any sovereignty. As a result, most nations have a federal form of government. It provides strength and unity for the nation as a whole, but regional independence may suffer. And most organizations of nations are confederate in nature, because the, already strong, national governments won't give up power to a higher authority.

The United States went through a federal-vs-confederate decision early in its history. The 13 original American colonies had a loose confederation throughout the Revolutionary War. General George Washington had problems securing money for the Continental Army because Congress could not enforce their acts upon the states. The Continental Congress could only issue recommendations to the various states. Even more, France, in recognizing the various state's independence from Britain, did not know where to send their diplomat. France considered sending 13 diplomats, one to each of the 13 separate colonies. Citizens did not call themselves "Americans", they called themselves "Virginians", "New Yorkers", or "Georgians". There was no "United" States of America. The first government of the USA, was based on the "Articles of Confederation". The confederate form of government would last for more than a decade [2] before the United States Constitution was written and adopted by the states. The Constitution established a federal form of government to address the political shortfalls and lack of power of the confederation. The preamble states the purpose as "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity" [3]. Every reason is entirely political or social in nature. The sacrifice of the states, so early on, ensured the centralized political power of the United States of America. In contrast, the European Union has very little political power; any power held is entirely economic in nature. The EU started, not as many weak, fragmented states like the USA, but as an economic agreement between the major powers of Europe [4]. Because the nations had existed, and been politically powerful, for centuries (except for the new nation of Germany), a political consolidation was unnecessary. The foundation of the EU, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), was therefore based entirely on economic agreement. The agreement created a free-trade zone between several nations, and created the economic foundation for the European Union [4].

Each system of government has benefits, but the African nations are looking to replace the existing African Union with a stronger, federal form of government. They are creating an entirely new system of governance when the AU could, very easily, be modified to create a confederate, EU-like government. Africa is trying to avoid the political pitfalls of the European Union and the political weakness of a confederate government. The EU has been exceedingly successful for economic and social gains; but has almost no political power. On January 6th, 2009 the Russian government shut off the natural gas supply to Europe in a payment dispute with Ukraine. Eastern European nations were entirely dependent on Russian gas for energy, and many did not have emergency reserves. This event underscored a critical weakness in the security and well-being of Europe. A politically strong EU could have forced a quick resolution, but gas supplies did not return until January 21st [5]. The Russian gas company, Gazprom,

supplies 12% of Russia's entire GDP [6,7,8,9] and the European Union had a strong bargaining position. But because of the fragmentation of politics, and lack of political power, the European Union simply made themselves more dependent on the problem [10,11]. These events may seem disconnected from African politics, but are actually quite critical. The African continent, seeing the political vacancy of power and influence, have elected to avoid the confederate, decentralized power system of the European Union. They intend to create a new, federal government called, not coincidentally, the United States of Africa.

ARGUEMENTS FOR

There are many arguments for the creation of the United States of Africa. Those arguments are largely grouped into political, economic, and social gains. The political gains are more stable governments, increases in global power and prominence, and less foreign intervention. The economic gains are vast increases in trade, a regulated and centralized economy, and power in the political marketplace. The social gains are a greater sense of community and pride, reduced or eliminated ethnic conflicts, and stable governments who can provide services to citizens. The benefits to creating the United States of Africa are many.

As stated earlier, the African continent desires a strong political government to aid its stability. A federal form of government provides just that. By placing the national government above the state governments, it indicates the importance of the community over the individual. If an African nation has a coup d'etat, replacing the existing government, the national government would step in and send troops to reinstate the previous leader. The simple power of the national government would discourage the numerous coups and civil wars that have plagued Africa. Political opponents would be forced to "play by the rules" and achieve political change through democracy and reform. This would also create loyalty towards the national government because various leaders would know that they would be safe from potential coups, encouraging cooperation. Because of the politically stabilizing effect of a national government, smaller, less powerful nations would be encouraged to join. The larger, more powerful nations would be encouraged to join because of the global potential of a strong national government. Africa has historically been divided, conquered, and plundered by many stronger European nations. Creating a strong, national government would prevent that from ever occurring again, and would allow Africa to develop interests elsewhere. This concept can be summed up by the phrase "the best defense is a strong offense". Europe, while engaging in numerous wars, has generally acted through a "gentleman's agreement". Nations competed for colonies around the globe and generally avoided conflict with each other until existing, native-owned land had been exhausted. There are, however, many exceptions to that agreement. By projecting power to other locations around the globe, Africa moves conflict zones, and hot-button issues, off its own shores. The stability created would benefit larger nations as well as smaller ones. There are many political reasons for Africa to join together to form a strong federal government.

Political stability is not the only benefit brought about by a federal government. The economic benefits are often the most alluring. A massive increase in trade is the largest benefit for the African continent. This is of course the reason the European Coal and Steel Community, and later the European Union, was created. Although the political basis to the United States of Africa does not exist yet, the economic foundations have been in place for years. The first free-trade area in the world was the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) [12]. The various South African British protectorates created a tariff-free zone in order to increase trade between themselves. The agreement was entirely economic in nature because each protectorate was

administered by the powerful British government; political strength was already present. Since then, many free-trade zones have been created, all across the globe. This has been an interest to almost every government, especially since the development of modern economic theory and the death of Mercantilism [13]. The prevalent belief about trade is that it is not a win-lose, zero-sum situation, but a partnership where both nations benefit. The second economic reason for integration is the establishment of common economic regulations. One of the reasons instability occurs so often in Africa is because the economic resources are often used by the opposition forces. Conflict diamonds are diamonds mined from regions in Africa facing internal turmoil. The diamond mines are major sources of income for the rebel forces. The insecurity of Africa's natural resources directly affects the stability of the political, economic, and social situation. By creating a strong federal government, the United States of Africa would be able to enforce better control over these resources. Not only would that improve the stability of Africa, but it would bring additional tax revenue for the various governments. The third economic reason Africa should unite is for the development of economic power. The economies of Africa are largely geared towards the production of raw materials instead of the production of goods and services, like most developed nations. The biggest economic gains of Africa will be felt through increases to industry. Historically, the economic theory of Mercantilism was based on the economic disparities between the home nation and its colonies. The colonies shipped raw goods to the home nation and the finished products were shipped back, at an inflated price. Tariffs, laws, and military pressure was exerted on colonies to limit their trade only with the home nation. This created a situation of dependence, where the colonies could not exist without support. The economic basis of Africa is still based on those lines. For example, 64% of Zambia's exports come from copper and cobalt mines [14]. The economy had been hit extremely hard when the commodity price of copper fell by more than half in Q3 and Q4 2008 [15]. Maintaining a balanced, product based economy is one of the ways industrialized nations have maintained stability. Low commodity prices are a boon to their own economies, and provide a natural economic boost during a recession. Another way that Africa would benefit from more economic power, is from decreases in competition. Africa, and specifically the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is a major source of coltan. Coltan is used in almost all major electronics. Coltan mines, like conflict diamonds, are a major source of funding for rebels inside of the DRC [16]. As discussed earlier, the Congolese government would benefit tremendously from control of those mines. Currently, the coltan is being sold on the black market to supply the rebels. But if the DRC and other African nations could control those mines, they could charge higher, premium prices for coltan ore. It is difficult to maintain a cartel with many independent members, but by creating a single, African economy, the national government could do just that. There are other sources of coltan, Africa is not the only continent with reserves, but any political organization would likely, put mines back into government hands, and push prices higher. A modern, product-based economy, paired with local coltan mines, would leapfrog Africa into economic prominence as demand for high-grade electronics will only increase. The world revolves around the almighty dollar, and the arguments for economic integration are immense. The European Union was, and still is, based upon the principles of free-trade; and Africa would be foolish not to follow in their footsteps.

As powerful as the political and economic reasons for a federal government are, the social benefits are also quite important. As important as humanitarian concerns are, they will likely be side-effects of the stronger political and economic integration of Africa. Organizations solely based on humanitarian concerns are charities, and must be externally supported. But by developing the political and economic power of Africa first, it puts more and more pressure on

the state governments to control and solve social problems. When the United States President, Barack Obama, spoke in Ghana, he said "the true sign of success is not whether [the USA is] a source of aid that helps people scrape by - it is whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change." [17] President Obama seems committed to permanent economic and political development in Africa, not just increasing aid dependence. This is the same self-reliant sentiment that pulls the various African nations together to create the United States of Africa. The primary motivational factor is pan-African pride. The idea of "Africa of Africans" has been around for a very long time. But it is only now that Africa has developed enough to reach that goal. The African Union currently has passports available that belong to the African Union, not to any one government [18]. This action allows people to become Citizens of the African Union, instead of citizens of a single nation. Free travel is a very symbolic gesture and is one of the pillars of both the European Union and the United States. Restrictive, undemocratic regimes from the Soviet Union, to North Korea, to Nazi Germany, have all restricted travel in some way. By opening international boundaries, a government creates a greater sense of pride and community. This will in turn encourage citizens to invest effort into the new federal government, to ensure their freedoms remain. The second social benefit that would come from a federal African government is the reduction, if not elimination, of genocide and other ethnic conflicts. Ethnic tensions will never completely disappear, but outright war can be stopped with the efforts of a strong government. Civil war is disastrous to a nation's economy, and it is always in a government's economic and political interest to keep genocide from happening. Unfortunately, it still does occur. The common theme throughout the history of genocide, is a history of unstable regions. Minorities are often demonized and blamed for a nation's misfortunes. This is usually done at the hands of a dictatorial government as a way to shift attention away from internal unrest. The best way of ensuring that ethnic tensions never occur, is to ensure that internal unrest never occurs. The eternal quest for money is alluring, and healthy economies tend to distract people from ethnic differences. By creating a healthy, powerful federal government, African citizens will put aside their ethnic differences. Another social benefit that a federal government would bring is lots of social services. Governments that are politically and economically stable can put their efforts into improving the lives of their citizens. Instead of pouring meager amounts of money into preventing war and unrest, governments can spend that money on investments for the future. While economic investments are important, social investments are far more subtle, and far-reaching. The education of a nation's youth has always been the best way for developed nations to stay on top. A developed economy draws educated immigrants and allows the most talented individuals to pool their resources into one nation. Unfortunately, this creates an educational void everywhere else. Africa needs to invest heavily in education, and needs to develop a strong economy to keep that talent within the continent. Once those talented individuals stay, their skills and training will encourage others to the best of their ability. The social benefits of a unified Africa cannot be achieved alone, but will come from progress in political and economic stability.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

There is a lot of support for the creation of the United States of Africa. But sadly, there is also a lot of resistance. Most of the resistance to the idea is given by the powerful nations in Africa, who prefer a confederate form of government. The powerful nations are powerful because they have a stable government, a healthy economy, and a positive social situation. Therefore many of the benefits of a federal government are diminished or eliminated. Powerful nations, such as South Africa, have already proven the effectiveness of their government and economic ideals. The idea of voluntarily giving up control and sovereignty over their own matters is deeply

disturbing; not only as a matter of national pride, but as a logical one. While a "failed state" [19] like Somalia, can basically guarantee that a national government would prove to be more stable and economically friendly, South Africa cannot. If the national government proves to be incompetent and incapable of managing resources, Somalia gains or loses nothing, but South Africa loses quite a bit. This dilemma is the primary roadblock to creating the federal form of the United States of Africa. The success of the national government depends on the support and governmental skill of the successful nations; but successful nations are understandably wary of the whole idea. The success of the idea is dependent on those who have the least to gain, and the most to lose. This is a serious issue that Africa needs to fix.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are many benefits for Africa to come together and create a strong federal form of government. A central political power will create stability in the individual nations, allow African power to project elsewhere around the globe, and keep foreign meddling to a minimum. A stable economy would increase trade and the benefits of that trade, centralize resources to be more efficient, and would allow Africa to control production, instead of being controlled by it. A stable social situation is dependent on a strong government, but would support that government through pan-African pride, an elimination of ethnic warfare, and strong social programs like education. Africa is attempting to unify the continent at breakneck speeds to catch up to the other industrialized nations. The quickest way to do this is to create a strong, federal government capable of protecting the political, economic, and social interests of its citizens.

REFERENCES

- [1] African Union. "Member States." African Union. http://www.africa-union.org/Member_states/member_states_a.htm.
- [2] Library of Congress. "United States Constitution." *Primary Documents in American History*. United States Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Constitution.html>.
- [3] Library of Congress. "Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789." *American Memory*. United States Library of Congress. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(bdsdccc0801\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/bdsdcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(bdsdccc0801))).
- [4] European Union. "A peaceful Europe - the beginnings of cooperation." *The History of the European Union*. European Union. http://europa.eu/abc/history/1945-1959/index_en.htm.
- [5] Mosolova, T., and Polityuk, P. 2009. "Russian gas reaches Europe again." *Reuters UK*. Thomson Reuters, Jan. 21. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKTRE5091KI20090121?sp=true>.
- [6] Miller, A. B., and Vasilieva, E. A. 2008. "IFRS Consolidated Financial Statements, 2008." Gazprom. Moscow, Russian Federation, Dec. 31. <http://www.gazprom.com/f/posts/71/879403/2ifrs.pdf>.
- [7] Wolfram|Alpha. "Russian GDP." Wolfram Research. <http://www67.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=russian+gdp>, (accessed 16:13 July 22, 2009).
- [8] Google. <http://www.google.com/#hl=en&q=4.696+trillion+RUB+to+USD>, (accessed 16:34 July 22, 2009).
- [9] Google. <http://www.google.com/#hl=en&q=150.6242+billion+USD+%2F+1.29+trillion+USD>.
- [10] Tavernise, S., and Arsu, S. 2009. "Gas Pipeline in Turkey Gains European Backing." *The New York Times*, New York, NY, July 13. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/world/europe/14nabucco.html>.
- [11] World Press. "Turkey - Energy - Oil - Gas - Pipelines." <http://www.worldpress.org/specials/pp/turkey.htm>.
- [12] Trade Policy Review Body. 2003. "Southern African Customs Union." *Trade Policy Review*. World Trade Organization, Lanham, MD, Bernan Press, April 25. http://www.wto.org/English/tratop_e/tpr_e/tp213_e.htm.
- [13] Wikipedia. "Mercantilism." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercantilism>, (accessed July 20, 2009).
- [14] Central Intelligence Agency. 2009. "Zambia." *The World Factbook 2009*. Washington, DC, Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/za.html>, (accessed July 21, 2009).
- [15] Wolfram|Alpha. "Copper Futures." Wolfram Research. <http://www65.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=LME%3ACU>, (accessed 20:50, July 20, 2009).
- [16] Ware, N. D. 2001. "Congo War and the Role of Coltan." *ICE Case Studies*. American University, Washington D.C., December. <http://www.american.edu/ted/ice/congo-coltan.htm>.
- [17] El-Shahat, S. 2009. "Why Africa depends on handouts." Al Jazeera English. Doha, Qatar, July 19. <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/2009/07/200971681917239803.html>.
- [18] Hakima. 2007. "African Citizenship for All." *AU Monitor*. Fahamu, July 8. <http://www.pambazuka.org/aumonitor/comments/279/>.
- [19] Foreign Policy. 2009. "The 2009 Failed State Index." *Foreign Policy*. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/the_2009_failed_states_index.