

Assessing Kwame Nkrumah's Call for All-Africa Union Government in the 21st Century: A Re-Reading of *Africa Must Unite*

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the burning question of the place of Africa in the New World Order and poses the important issue of a real and efficient All-Africa political union government as a priority today. Furthermore, a look back at the early –independence-days clarion call of a visionary as Nkrumah is made necessary so as to come up with the conclusion that what the Father of the Ghanaian Independence has feared and fought for, more than half a century back in history, has walked its way to maturity and imposed upon its topicality. In these days of globalization where stronger and richer nations are still seeking to come together into all the more powerful entities, Africa should wake up from its sluggishness and come together as quickly as possible to avoid disappearing in the whirlpool of a too fast changing global world organization, engrossed in its merciless predation. The apparent and delayed rise of Africa from the cyclopean slumber should give way to a vivid awareness of the question and the scramble for a genuine union hastened away.

Keywords: new world order; all-Africa-political union government; visionary; awareness.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à examiner la question brûlante de la place de l'Afrique au sein du nouvel ordre mondial et pose le problème important de l'union politique réelle et efficace de ses états comme une priorité aujourd'hui. Qui plus est, un retour en arrière pour revisiter l'appel à l'union, des premières heures des indépendances des états Africains, initié par un visionnaire de la trempe de Nkrumah, est nécessaire afin d'en venir à la conclusion que ce que le père de l'Indépendance ghanéenne craignait, et ce pour lequel il s'est battu, depuis plus d'un demi-siècle en arrière, a fait son chemin jusqu'à maturité et s'est imposé dans son actualité. En ce temps de la mondialisation où les nations plus fortes et plus riches cherchent par-dessus tout à se mettre ensemble pour constituer une plus grande forteresse, l'Afrique se doit de se réveiller de sa léthargie et s'unir le plus tôt possible pour éviter de disparaître dans le gouffre amer d'un ordre mondial en pleine vitesse, et imbu de sa prédation sans merci. Le lent réveil apparent de l'Afrique de son sommeil de cyclope doit donner lieu à une prise de conscience profonde de la question, pour qu'une véritable hâte vers l'union puisse s'engager.

Mots- clés : nouvel ordre mondial ; gouvernement d'union politique de toute l'Afrique; visionnaire ; prise de conscience.

Introduction

One of the most burning issue in the African political arena today, as it has been five decades back in African political history, is the proposed political union of African independent states. This issue is urgent and Kwame Nkrumah eloquently puts it forth because of the pressing need for Africa to deal decisively with the brutal organizing problems of imperialist colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is a hot and burning issue so much so that over fifty years, Nkrumah wrote a book entitled *Africa Must Unite*. However, his dream never becomes a reality due to the stiff opposition from African leaders, most of whom feared the loss of their sovereignty, and also due to the

selfish interest of the west. *Africa Must Unite*, published in the same year (1963) as the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), advocates the total liberation and political unification of Africa. Therein, Nkrumah has made a comprehensive case for uniting the newly independent African states. He courageously puts it forth as it follows:

No single part of Africa can be safe, or free to
Develop fully and independently, while any part
Remains un-liberated, or while Africa's vast
Economic resources continue to be exploited by
Imperialist and neo-colonialist interests. Unless,
Africa is politically united under an All-Africa
Union Government, there can be no solution to
Our political and economic problems!(p.viii)

South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, Algeria's Today, those who may have considered decades back, when *Africa Must Unite* has been published, that Kwame Nkrumah has been pursuing a "policy of the impossible", can realize how topical and burning the issue still is today. Increasing turmoil through the succession of reactionary military coups and the outbreak of needless bloody civil wars, rampant social evils in Africa prove in a stark manner that only a solid united African political structure can ensure a durable stability and progress, in Africa and provide a realistic solution to the social, political and economic challenges facing the African states.

It stands to reason that, conditions and contexts have evolved, but current manifestations of the debate about continental unification show the topical relevance of Nkrumah's claims. In 2002, the re-launch of the African Union (AU), not only proved a clear institutional manifestation of Africa's quest for unity but also witnessed renewed debate on Pan-African unity. Libyan enlightened leader, late Muammar Gaddafi, a then stern opponent to western imperialism, challenged African leaders to unite across common purpose and try to master their destiny. Gaddafi encouraged for increased trade amongst African states, the creation of common continental institutions including a federal government and the free flow of persons across borders. In addition, a few African leaders: Bouteflika and Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade who initiated instead the new Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), were also felt to bring their contribution for the bold attempt to develop a policy framework towards a unified vision on Africa's development.

this study is meant to refresh our minds and bring back to the surface the burning issue of our true liberation through a united political framework. Nkrumah, the visionary has prematurely blown that whistle which has fallen into unwillingly ears to hear. But today, a close and careful look at the situation of black people calls to mind a few questions:

-Why are African States still under the yoke of international domineering and exploitative systems, and kept largely dependent on foreign powers to perform some key functions including diplomacy, defence, finance, and economic development after more than half a century of the so-called "Independences"?

-Africa is hailed as the richest continent on earth in terms of natural resources but why has our motherland paradoxically fallen prey to famine and poverty, malaria, AIDS, corruption, embezzlement, rebellion, military coups, terrorism, tribalism, genocide, civil wars, and the list will not stop?

Exploring the above questions may seem a waste of time, but however trying to avoid them will prevent from having a clear understanding of the challenges undermining the African unity, the contribution of Kwame Nkrumah to the Pan-African project, and the relevance of Nkrumah's vision of a united Africa. It would be, according to me, of a great academic interest to make a foray into

the questions with a view to awaken us up from our slumber and allow flashback to the past, to try to establish a relationship between Kwame Nkrumah's struggles for the United States of Africa and the current political and economic realities of Africa. As a consequence, the relevance and topicality of Nkrumah's early vision will glare in our failing minds of the twenty-first century observer.

This study will be carried according to historical method, to examine and analyze Nkrumah's ideas on continental unity nearly sixty years after his clarion call for it. I deem that methodological tool most appropriate to my study as it is meant, in Wikipedia, to "seek to understand a literary work by investigating the social, cultural, and intellectual context that produced it..."

This paper falls into two main sequences. The first is devoted to explaining how *Africa Must Unite* justifies Kwame Nkrumah's call for the political Unification of Africa; the second concerns itself with the relevance and topicality of Nkrumah's call today, referring to the current elements inviting to date to the political unification of the African continent.

1- A Few Elements Justifying Nkrumah's Call For The Political Unification

The precarious socio-economic and political situation facing Africa since independence in the absence of a union government may provide some justification for Nkrumah's proposed African Common Government. A few of these pervasive problems need to be highlighted in the frame of this study.

1-1. Persistent Poverty

The legacy of Western domination has left Africa devastated in the mess of crippling rates of poverty, hunger, and diseases. Recurrent strife and other political conflicts across the Continent have ruined its economic fortunes. Indeed, the devastating impact of wars and some other evils on the economy has considerably frayed the once giant Africa. The political stalemate and periodic eruptions of violence have resulted in significant cumulative declines in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This problem has been compounded by the frequent onslaught of drought in some sub-regions of Africa. Prospective investors in Africa have been turned away because of fear of instability, low profit and loss of investment due to looting and arson during wars.

Hence, the persistent failure to raise investment rates is translated into low GDP growth rates which ranged between 3 and 4 percent for several years as against the 7 percent annual growth required to reduce poverty and reach the Millennium Development Goals. This has bred poverty across the Continent. To date, an estimated 340 million Africans live below poverty line³. Paradoxically, Africa is not traditionally a poor continent. She is blessed with abundant natural resources such as gold, diamond and oil. These resources are however being exploited by the developed countries to their own benefit but to the detriment of African peoples. This social plague is fount of regular unrest due to rampant general disenchantment.

1-2. Regularity of Conflicts throughout Africa

Though it is true that Africa has no monopoly of conflict, it is equally true that, the regularity of conflicts in Africa has become one of the distinctive characteristics of the continent. Since the 1960's, series of civil wars have taken place in Africa. Examples include: Sudan (1990 to date), Chad (1965 to 1985), Angola since 1974, Liberia (1980 to 2003, Nigeria (1967 to 1970), Somalia (1993 to 1999) and Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (1991 to 2001). (Alabi, 2006: 41). But apart from civil wars, Africa has also witnessed a number of intermittent borders and inter-state conflicts, notable among which, are the followings: Nigeria-Cameroon dispute over Bakassi peninsular since the 1970's; Algeria-Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountains area in October 1963; Eritrea-Ethiopian crisis between 1962 and 1979; Somalia-Ethiopia dispute of 1964 to 1978 over the Ugandan desert region; Chad-Libya crisis of 1980 to 1982; Kenya-Somalia border war of 1963 to 1967 in which Somalia aimed at recovering its lost territories including the Northern frontier district of Kenya; Tanzania-Uganda crisis in 1978-1979, to mention but a few. (Alabi, 2006: 41). It is imperative to note that, of the numerous causes of conflicts in Africa cited by experts, the arbitrary and extremely porous borders created by the colonial powers and the heterogeneous ethnic

composition of African states are frequently mentioned. The balkanization of the continent resulted in the oppression of the African people and the setting of new boundaries regardless of their interests.

For Nkrumah, the arbitrary division of our motherland is an offence to fight against, since not only it mainly explains the division of African families and cultures, but also is the cause of different conflicts among African countries; therefore, impeding the African unity and the continent's development. It is apt to observe that Kwame Nkrumah had foreseen the frequent occurrence of wars and conflicts across Africa in the absence of a union government. This was perhaps why at the Casablanca Conference on January 7, 1961 he said, among other things, this:

What I fear worst of all is that if we (African
leaders) do not formulate plans and take active
steps to form a political union, we (African
peoples) would soon be fighting and warring
among ourselves (Obeng, S, 1997)

The outbreak of recent cases of conflicts and insecurity in African countries such as Mali, Nigeria, Central Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Ivory Coast, Libya, Tunisia, Cameroon, to mention but a few, explain the continuing relevance of Nkrumah's earlier call for the political unification of the continent. Given this present situation in Africa, Cerebra rightly invited African leaders to embrace unity government as proposed by Nkrumah as a panacea to the ceaseless wars on the continent. In his view, with greater integration, the scope of conflict will be limited although this does not eliminate conflict altogether (Cerebra, J, 2007). For Dare, the key, however, is action by Africans on their own behalf. Africa needs a new generation of leaders to define and pursue a dynamic political and economic agenda in order to create an atmosphere conducive to implementing development programs (Dare, S, 2001). For the giant of Pan-Africanism (Nkrumah):

The forward solution is for the African states to
Stand together politically, to have a unified
Foreign policy, a common defence plan, and a
Fully integrated economic program for the
Development of the whole continent. Only then
Can the dangers of neocolonialism and its
handmaiden balkanization be overcome (Nkrumah, Kwame. 1963)

It is then quite clear that from the above different views, the miracle solution lies in a continental Union that could probably settle the cynical division of the African continent and prevent among other issues, civil wars throughout Africa.

1-3. Over exploitation of African Resources by the West

Not only were our natural resources extracted but the benefits of their exploitation came, not to us but to the metropolitan country (N.K., 1963) For centuries, beginning with the slave trade, the West has ruthlessly exploited the African continent. During the period known as one of the "scramble for Africa," the continent was arbitrarily carved up into colonies, which violently subjected its people and plundered the continent of its rich natural resources. Such organized and deftly orchestrated

destruction could not escape the scrutiny of a visionary of the salt of Nkrumah. He was right when observing that: even though independent in name, these countries continue the classical relationship of a colonial economy to its metropolitan patron, i.e. providers of primary products and the exclusive markets for the latter's goods (N.K., 1963)

Therefore, he never spared any opportunity to vividly criticize neo-colonialism and the exploitation of man by his fellow in the African continent so that, in *Africa Must Unite*, he wrote: we must firmly stand together against the imperialist forces which are engineering our division and seeking to make Africa a war-ground of contending interests (N.K., 1963)

For Nkrumah,

The true explanation for the slowness of industrial development in Africa lies in the policies of the colonial period. Practically all our natural resources, not mention trade, shipping, banking, building, and so on, fell into, and have remained in, the hands of foreigners seeking to enrich alien investors, and to hold back the local economic initiative (Nkrumah, Ibid. p. 24)

In the same vein, Weinstein (2008) has rightly foreshadowed a reversed situation if African resources were jointly managed by Africans for the benefit of Africans. This is another justification of Nkrumah's proposed common government.

1-4. The Inability of the Independent African States to Stand by themselves

The inability of the newly independent African States to stand by themselves can better be explored and explained through the following factors:

- The Economic Weakness of Independent African States

At Independence, the leaders of the newly independent African States, when taking over the continent's affairs, inherited a weak and poor economy from their former masters. The latter had never planned an economic development ensuring self-sufficiency within their colonies. By so doing, they kept the colonies in a state of dependency which consequently led to the economic exploitation of these former colonies. Depicting this fact, Nkrumah explains as follows:

In her African colonies, Britain controlled the Export of raw materials by preventing their shipment to foreign markets. After satisfying the demands of her home industries, she sold the surplus to other nations and netted the profits herself. The colonial farmer and worker had no share in those profits. Nor was any part of them in Providing public works and social services in the colonies (Nkrumah. Ibid. p. 24)

In addition to these, the African continent possesses some of the world's greatest well It is crystal clear that before their independence, the economy of the African countries had served as a means for the development of Western industries. No attempt was made to promote Africa's industrialization, and the economy of the former colonies was kept confined to a trading economy vis-à-vis the Western colonial masters. As such, the African continent stood out to be a mere provider of cheap raw materials in exchange for expensive imported manufactured goods from the West. The economic weaknesses of the African States following their independence have plunged and kept the African continent into a disastrous plight. Taken alone, no African country can stand

by itself because there was no economic base on which it could rest. Hence, the new leaders were not able to sustain, out of their own countries, the resources necessary for the machinery of an independent State. In an attempt of remediation, Nkrumah proposed that African leaders and experts, throughout the continent, must try to come up with appropriate solutions and set up a plan for over all African development that will take into account points of development vital to the corporate progress of the continent (N.K., Ibid. p. 155)

- **The low Exploitation of African Mineral Resources**

Africa is hailed as the richest continent on earth in terms of natural resources which could be used to enrich the continent if they were well exploited for the welfare of African people. Our motherland provided, according to the United Nations Organization's (U.N.O) findings for 1956, the following proportions of the world's output:

“96% of gem diamonds, 69% of cobalt, 63% of gold, 48% of antimony, 37% of manganese, 34% of chromite, 32% of phosphate rock, 24% of copper, 19% of asbestos, 15% of tin, 4% of iron ore, 4% of bauxite(op cit., p. 151)known reserves of mineral resources which, according to Nkrumah, “may make possible the relatively early introduction of nuclear-electrical plants.”¹⁵ All these resources are quite important and stand out as indispensable for the industrialization of Africa. But the colonial power, decided otherwise and:

Much of Africa's mineral wealth was shipped
Away to develop the metropolitan industries,
Instead of being kept in Africa to promote its
industrialization. Africa has everything that can
enable its industrialization and contribute to the
taking off of its industrialization; yet it remains
poor (*Africa Must Unite*, p. 152)

Nkrumah ascribed such a fact to the very low exploitation of African natural resources, a fact which itself has its root in the colonial policy. To promote industrialization throughout the continent, Nkrumah suggested the exploitation of the African natural resources for the well-being and benefit of African people. To reach such a goal, a collective and joint action by all the African countries is of a great necessity. In that wake Nkrumah attests:“What economic possibilities will be opened up as our whole continent is surveyed and its economic exploitation tackled on a total basis, there is no tellings.”¹⁷

- **The Poor Development of Transport**

Generally speaking, Transport is an aid to trade; it is the movement of goods and passengers from one geographical area to another. Large scale transportation in Africa implies the connection of so many different countries together. This movement can be made by land (roads and railways), by water (rivers and seas) or by air. As such, Transport stands as a very important means for the economic development of a country.

Goingback to the colonial period, transport system in Africa was not somuch developed and did not meet the needs of the population. The only means of communication were the ones constructed by the colonial powers for the sake of their selfish interests. So, they built the then available to convey raw materials from their African colonies to their European destinations. Throughout the African continent, harbors, roads, railways and airports became inadequate to meet the increasing demands of the expanding traffic transport means in order after independence. Therefore, in such a situation, many African farmers met great difficulties to get their products to markets and sell them.

Furthermore, theyare not enough roads connecting countries, and most of the existing roads run from North to South. Nkrumah rightly points out that: “many large international airlines operate services in Africa, but most of them have planned their routes to serve the needs of passengers travelling to and from countries outside Africa.”¹⁸ As a matter of fact, the newly independent

African States had to strive so as to maintain and preserve the existing means of transport and build other to meet the requirements of the time. They are therefore compelled to build national roads, enlarge existing harbors or even build new ones. For the author of *Africa Must Unite*:

The development of transport on continental basis is vital to African intercourse and economic advancement. What Africa really requires is a fully integrated transport system for the continent; properly planned by a central organization, which will examine the relative potentials and economic of road, rail, river, air and sea system in correlation with an overall plan for inter-African trade and progressive economic and social development(Ibid. p. 130)

All those the above mentioned elements show in a clear way that Nkrumah's idea of All-Africa Union Government remains more than a necessity today in the 21st Century.

2- **Relevance and Topicality of Nkrumah's Call Today**

Nkrumah's Pan-African vision has survived into the 21st century and shaped the thinking of a generation home-born Africans. As Mazrui, one of Nkrumah's eager admirer lays it across:

Nkrumah's greatest bequest to Africa was the agenda of Continental unification. No one else has made the case for Continental integration more forcefully, or with greater sense of drama than Nkrumah. Although most African leaders regard the whole idea of a United States Africa as wholly unattainable in the foreseeable future, Nkrumah even after death kept the debate alive through his books and through the continuing influence of his ideas(Mazrui, Ali.2004)

Two years after Nkrumah's death, Tanzania hosted the Sixth Pan-African Congress, in June 1974 in Dar-es-Salaam. At this gigantic meeting of Africans from Africa and the Diasporic, policies and interests on the African continent, as well as ideas and concept of continental unity continue to motivate Africans of all descent. For Julius Nyerere, Pan-Africanism should not separate itself from the rest of the Third World and should seek solidarity with other oppressed groups and peoples of the world. Similarly, Nkrumah had envisioned an " Organization of Solidarity with the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAL)" in his writings of 1968, as well as creating links with all workers' movements in the capitalist imperialist states(Nkrumah, Kwame. 1968) Despite the ideological diversity of views represented at the Sixth PAC, Nyerere's address reflected the survival of Nkrumah's ideas. Twenty years later, the Seventh Pan-African Congress took place in April 1994 in Kampala, Uganda. Not only did that important coming together witness a larger representation of political groups than at the Sixth PAC, but also proffer ground for a wide range of ideological viewpoints expression. The participants unanimously agreed among other, to fight against the re-colonization of Africa by global capitalism. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were targeted to that effect for the drastic cure that Structural Adjustment was at the time to many African countries from the 1980s to the 1990s. Many post-colonial states were fraught with debt, civil wars, appalling brain-drain and subsequent huddle of African refugees. In this context the neo-

liberal agenda of the Bretton Woods institutions were disparaged. The tone, themes and condemnation of re-colonization of Africa, reminded the thinking, positions and ideal expressed by Nkrumah in his famous and outstanding book, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.

Three years after the 7th PAC, In 1997 a historical speech was delivered by President Nyerere in Accra to mark the 40th anniversary of Ghana's independence. He was saying what follows:

Kwame Nkrumah was a state crusader for African Unity. He wanted the Accra Summit of 1965 to establish a Union Government for the whole of independent Africa. But we failed. The one minor reason that Nkrumah, like all great believers, underestimated the degree of suspicion and animosity, which his crusading passion had created among a substantial number of his fellows Heads of State. The major reason was linked to the first: already too many of us had a vested interest in keeping Africa divided (*Africa at 40*, Vol. 1.No.3, April 1997, p.4.)

From the above passage, Nyerere was quite clear that in 1965 the idea of coming up with a Union Government for Africa was an unrealistic objective for a single summit. The summit failed as there was no opportunity to discuss a mechanism for pursuing the objective of a politically united Africa. Moreover, after the plotted departure of Nkrumah from the political arena, nobody really took up the bold challenge of a Continental Union Government. In a forthright admission, the Tanzanian leader concluded: We of the first generation leaders of independent Africa have not pursued the objective of African Unity with vigor, commitment and sincerity that it deserves. Yet that does not mean that unity is now irrelevant (Ibid. p. 4.)

Two years after Nyerere's speech at the OAU summit in Algeria, in July 1999, Nkrumah's dream of Continental Union Government for Africa became more relevant to a number of African leaders who sought to turn the OAU into AU (African Union). Late Libyan President Gaddafi tried to emulate his fellow heads of states into resurrecting the ideals and vision of Nkrumah in his historical call for a "United States of Africa" at Sirte. He expressed the regret that Africans could have avoided the bloody conflicts here and there on the continent if Nkrumah's predictions were heeded. He furthermore emphasized the dreadful price paid for the lack of interest in the predictions of the father of Pan-Africanism in remarking that Nkrumah's words were brushed aside and Africa paid the price. The average African has paid the price in the form of subjugation to disease, exploitation, backwardness and blackmail (*New African*, August/ September 2005, p. 32). Gaddafi criticized those who considered the idea of a "United States of Africa" as too premature and reminded them: we have been moving gradually for 100 years(...). Had we heeded Nkrumah's advice at that time, Africa would now be like the United States of America or at least close to it. But we do not heed his advice, and even worse we ridiculed those predictions (Ibid. p. 33) Can any other event express in clearer ways the necessity today for African countries to come together as one and marshal their efforts to roll out poverty, insecurity, division and the grab of their resources? Nkrumah's vision of yesterday seems more real today than ever.

Conclusion

The long and painstaking walk from the OAU to the AU, appears to be a proof of the fact that African countries, after more than half a century of equivocation, are really feeling the need for

a strong institution that can better respond to their pressing quest for survival and influence in the global economic and political order fraught with merciless predations. The AU is a vivid example of the re-ignition of Nkrumah's vision of framing up a channel of a confederated supranational unit, capable of repositioning itself within a fast evolving world context. No need harking back to the fact that Nkrumah passionately, dauntlessly and unflinchingly devoted his life to making of the Pan-African ideal a tangible one to the newly independent African countries. His drive is clearly expressed through his rich and outstanding bibliography and mainly in his clarion call in *Africa Must Unite*. In spite of all the time wasted before realizing the importance of coming together within a strong framework today, only one important element needs to be celebrated: the topicality of Nkrumah's oeuvre. The union is a sine qua non condition today if we don't want to be swallowed in the jungle of the new global organization.

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