

## AFRICA AFTER 11 SEPTEMBER 2001

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AMONG THE GREAT OUTPOURING OF WORDS following the 11 September attack on New York and Washington, there is a high measure of agreement on at least two factors that are of relevance for Africa. First, that the consequences of the attack will have a rather negative impact for Africa. Second, that in any case the world will not look the same as it did before the attack.

At the time of writing, little was sure about either of these points. Historians-turned-journalists who try to determine the immediate signs of the times know that they are bound to get it wrong! However, the attempt is worth making. The editors of *African Affairs* will attempt to make some initial comments that they hope will be of interest to readers.

The immediate impact on Africa is likely to be marginal, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, because strategically the continent is now much less significant to the West and has only a small role to play in world politics, although the votes of fifty-plus nations in the United Nations cannot be discounted. The Islamist dimension of 11 September may result in further tension within African states that have a large Muslim population. In Egypt, political Islam has been harshly contained; the Algerian military regime has had a longer and more vicious battle to combat Islamist opposition. Sudan, and even Libya, have political and economic interests in better relations with the West. Somalia, however, weak, broken and divided as it is, could serve as a possible hiding-place for Islamist groups, perhaps even for bin Laden himself, and the United States may not wish to get involved in a repeat of the disastrous operations of 1993. Reports from Mali and northern Nigeria suggest that feelings of international solidarity with fellow-Muslims are running quite high in an area that has a long history of Islamic reform movements influenced by events in other parts of the Islamic world, close to those jagged Muslim-Christian fault lines. There was some talk of an upsurge of political Islam in the Sahel in the early 1980s, following the Islamic revolution in Iran, but some analysts of the region emphasize the continuing influence wielded by the leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods that tend to operate as an obstacle to more radical forms of political Islam.

The economic impact on Africa is likely to be much more significant. The view of the World Bank has been quite highly publicized, to the effect that the forecast for economic growth in developing countries, previously estimated at some 4.3 percent in 2002, is now being revised downwards by up to 0.75 percent. The Bank has little doubt that this will mean more poverty for Africa in the form of reduced trade and investment and less tourism. The Economic Commission for Africa, however, has cast doubt

on this, suggesting that Africa is so marginal to the world economy that the effect of reduced growth in North America may be only slight.

Less commented upon has been the likely effect on Africa as an exporter of oil to the industrialized world. Although most of the world's known oil reserves lie in the Middle East, major new fields are being discovered in African countries like Angola and Sudan. American strategists regard African oil as being much easier to manage politically than that from the Middle East, most particularly in places where oil is offshore and can be evacuated with a minimum of risk. Major African oil producers such as Nigeria and — especially — Angola are likely to become of greater importance, as the US in particular, pursuing its traditional low-cost energy policy, tries to decrease its dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Repairing relations with Libya, a major oil producer, may become more important to Washington as that country, along with Sudan, tries to regain an economic and 'respectable' place within the world community. Less significant to the Americans as an oil producer at the moment is Sudan where, interestingly enough, Osama bin Laden was resident in the first half of the 1990s. Khartoum was attacked militarily by the United States in August 1998, accused of being very closely connected to the international terrorist networks patronized by bin Laden, and yet now its government seems to be benefiting from closer ties to the US as it trades intelligence on him with Washington. Not only is Sudan eager to rid itself of that stigma which hurts economically, but also to disengage US official, financial or other support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army in the long-running war in the south.

On the second point — namely, the shape of future international relations — it is notable that the world is at present dominated by a system of liberal global governance that does not have one single centre and that is not run by any single institution, even if the US enjoys prime position. Global governance is a system of networking that includes states, leading businesses and news media, the international financial organizations, and other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations.<sup>1</sup>

It is now clear that this system lacks legitimacy, not only in the eyes of many people in the Middle East, but also of a substantial number in the industrialized world. Evidence of this is the major demonstrations against key international summits that culminated in the mayhem at the recent G-8 summit in Genoa. The attack on the US by persons of Middle Eastern and North African origin, apparently acting in pursuit of religious-political ideals, has revealed how urgently those who manage the system of global governance need to acquire a greater measure of legitimacy. The most

1. Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: the merging of development and security* (Zed Books, London and New York, 2001), which analyses some of the features described in the following paragraphs.

obvious way they can do this is to demonstrate that liberal global governance does not necessarily imply ignoring the interests of half the world's population and, perhaps even more importantly, does not necessarily entail contempt for their point of view.

If, as seems certain, key players in the system of global governance seek to enhance their legitimacy both at home and abroad, it will reduce the influence of the isolationist Republicans who have been dominant in the US since the election of George Bush. It will focus attention on how the rich world can ensure a greater degree of social justice worldwide than has been apparent in recent years.

The general problem with doing this, beyond the usual political complexities of individual regions, is that many of the formal institutions of international governance (the UN system, international courts, the international financial institutions and various treaties) are finding it increasingly difficult to carry out their mandates. This system, largely designed at the end of the Second World War, can not be simply restored to full working order with an input of money even if it is accompanied by real political will. Above all, the base on which the institutions of international governance are built has eroded, for these institutions and agreements depend on the world's 189 sovereign states each functioning properly. In fact, many of these sovereign states have imploded over the last twenty years or so. It is not just Afghanistan. Many states in Africa too are unable to uphold even a minimum level of law and order or to fulfil their international obligations in their own territories. Russia and many parts of the former Soviet Union have failed to make a transition to regulated, market-based economies and they have now lost the chance to do so for the foreseeable future.

New attention to the institutions of global governance will be ineffective without remedial action for many states in the former Second and Third worlds. The older notion of development has been radically redefined already. The development of the poor world has for some years been seen as no longer a technical process of economic upliftment but as a security issue that affects the rich world too. Humanitarian aid workers and security or military specialists now regularly work together on conflict prevention in a way that was unthinkable even ten years ago. Economic development is subordinated to wars on drugs and against terrorism.

Moreover, the instruments of global economic policy are less effective than they once were, owing to the rise of informal economic activity on a scale that economists seem to have difficulty in comprehending. In many parts of the world the non-formal economy is much bigger than the formal economy, making nonsense of many official statistics and making policy outcomes less sure than they once were. These informal economies are profoundly illiberal in the sense of being controlled by social groups that are not open to competition and that reject formal regulation of their markets.

It is through informal economic activity, most obviously in the narcotics trade, that the poor world has actually become more closely integrated into globalization. The merging of development and security, together with the prevalence of informal economic activity, leads to the spectacle of wars closely connected to control of the drugs or diamond trades.

So, as well as paying serious attention to the inequity of the world and listening to the point of view of people outside the core constituencies of the rich world, attention also needs to be paid to regulating markets that are not formal and which, by definition, do not respect official rules. For the rich world still needs resources from the poor world, especially oil. The rich world also needs people, especially those with high-level professional skills. The US during the 1990s was receiving immigrants at a record level, the majority from Latin America and Asia. Europe also needs to acknowledge its need for immigrant labour, but is more reluctant to do so. Hence, international development co-operation will need to expand its scope to include the creation of an equitable system of migration to replace the outmoded controls put in place after the Second World War. How to receive migrants from the poor world without endangering national security will be a key element of the new international co-operation. All of this is a large task but it is not impossible, if we recognize that the new development is not a technical exercise but is a political matter *par excellence*.

Africa has had more than its share of atrocities in the last 20 years, and most of these have been largely ignored by the West — Rwanda, the repeated famines that have killed hundreds of thousands, continuous war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Angola, the Horn, and in and around Liberia — the list is long and invariably carries the same depressing note that the rich world stood idly by. The past record of the West as the ‘new order’ global policeman has been limited to those areas that pose a serious threat to Western interests — the Gulf with its oil, and Kosovo which is too near and too European to be ignored. Occasionally policing may have a moral imperative, as with British intervention to support the Sierra Leonean government. But the recent experience of Africa is one of neglect. It is difficult to see that that position will change substantially as a result of 11 September.