

AN APPRAISAL OF OAU AS A TOOTHLESS BULLDOG AND ITS TRANSFORMATION TO AFRICAN UNION, 1963-2002

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Organization of African Unity (OAU) as a toothless bulldog. The genesis, charter, and achievements of the Organization also came to focus. It assesses the transformation of OAU to African Union in 2002. The data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Oral interview constituted the primary sources while books, newspapers, journals, theses, and desertion serves as secondary sources. It was found that OAU which was established in 1963, transformed into African Union in 2002. It was also found that the non-interference of OAU in the internal affairs of member states was a serious challenge. It was demonstrated that the OAU was clearly a toothless bulldog and a talking club of African leaders. In conclusion, it was noted that the transformation of OAU to AU was a step in the right direction because of the monumental failure of OAU to deliver on its mandate.

Keywords: OAU, AU, Transformation, Toothless bulldog, Peace.

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INTRODUCTION

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed on May 25, 1963. It is an association of independent African States established to promote unity and cooperation among African States and defend their sovereignty territorial integrity and independence. Specifically, the OAU aimed at promoting political unity, liberation of African territories, and economic development of African States (Adesola, 2004: 70). Article 52 of the United Nations' charter which supports the creation of regional organization gave legal impetus to the formation of OAU (Article 52 of the United Nation's Charter).

The OAU as its name connotes is founded first and foremost for the promotion of unity and economic progress among the various countries that makeup the continent of Africa (Abiola, 1979: 25). According to Abiola, the idea to form the organization emanated not from the continent but from outside it (Abiola, 1979:251-257). The move began in America where some American Negroes, consequent on their terribly intolerable social conditions formed what was then known as the Pan-Africanist movement (Ibid). The target of this movement was to fight for the rights and oneness of Black men all over the world. It also aimed at struggling for the elimination of foreign domination in Africa as well as to restore to the Africans their past glory and dignity.

Notable founders of Pan-African movement were Du Bois, William Blydun, Mackay, and Marcus Garvey. Soon after its establishment, people in Africa were attracted by its objectives. Such persons were Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya; Sekou Toure of Guinea, and Johnson of Sierra Leone. These fathers of African nationalism later joined the movement. According to Abiola, after Ghana's independent in 1957, the activities of the movement were carried into the continent (Ibid, 251-263).

Ghana's President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah acting in his capacity as the Organization's Secretary General convened its meeting in Ghana where he said in his address to the members present that:

Today, we are one. If in the past the Sahara Desert separated us, now it unites us and injury to one is an injury to all of us (Nkrumah Address to the First Pan-African movement in Ghana, 1957).

Later, when attempts were made when heads of the African States met at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia of abolishing the various existing blocs to pave way for the establishment of an all-embracing African organization became a difficult task. (An Interview with Dr. Influence Osagie, 16-6-2022).

These blocs included the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs. Kolawole noted that the founding fathers were divided on the form the organization or association should take (Kolawole, 2001: 86). The Pan-Africanist like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana wanted an association that would unify African States. However, the conservative and moderate group represented by the Head of State of Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Selassie, and the former Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa advocated for an association that only unite rather than unify African States. Before the formal establishment of the OAU, there has been the Congo crisis which had produced two major opposing political groups in the continent (Eluwa et al.; 2005: 198-292). The groups were the Casablanca groups made up of radical states such as Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco. The group supported a strong central government in the Congo under Patrice Lumumba, the other group called Monrovia group also known as Monrovia Brazzaville group consisted of Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Upper Volta, Senegal, Gabon, Chad, Nigeria, Liberia, Ethiopia, etc. They supported a loose federation of the provinces in the Congo (Ediagbonya et al., 2020).

At first, it was not an easy task to get members of these blocs disbanded to form one embracing union. Furthermore, the countries realize the need for such an unusual but necessary exercise. Fortunately, however, African leaders saw that their unity and collective action were necessary for Africa's survival and progress after a series of formal and informal contacts among themselves in which discussions were carried out in a spirit of gives and take (Eluwa et al., 2005, 198-295).

It was at that point that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia convened a conference of independent African States in Addis Ababa in May, 1963. Thirty-two Heads of State from 32 independent countries were in attendance where the historic charter of an organization to be known and called the OAU was signed (Ediagbonya et al., 2020: 41). It was to the credit of the African Leaders that they agreed for the formal

dissolution of the former blocs to pave way for the total unity of African States.

It is important to note that though the former blocs were officially dissolved these ideological differences among the leaders were a serious challenge toward the realization of objectives as stated in the charter. According to Kolawole this polarization of ideas on the form the organization should take has continued to retard the growth and utility of the organization for the realization of the continental purposes for which it was conceived.

The charter of the OAU has the following objectives:

- To promote the unity and solidarity of the African States.
- To defend their sovereignty territorial integrity and independence.
- To promote and support peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration, unreservedly condemn the political assassination and subversive activities in all its forms by neighboring or any other states.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF OAU

In spite of the fact that the OAU has been described as a toothless bull that barks and cannot bite, it may be wrong to assert that the body did not achieve anything between 1963 and 2001; certainly, there were verifiable contributions to the organization.

First, it is not contested that the OAU to a reasonable extent promoted the unity of Africa. It was specifically stated in the charter that one of the objectives of OAU was to promote the Unity and Solidarity of African States. In this direction, OAU made a bold attempt. According to Abiola, the result today is that in the words of the late Pan-Africanist Dr. Nkrumah, every member State of the Organization regards the injury of another state as its own (Abiola, 1979: 250-251). This was clearly demonstrated during the Nigerian Civil War when the members of OAU gave strong support to the Gowon Led Government against the Biafrans. Despite the fact that four states of the OAU recognized the Republic of Biafra due to external influence. The four states were Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zambia and Tanzania.

Hence, the OAU supported the preservation of the Unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria despite the much pressure and insults from the imperialist (Ediagbonya et al., 2020: 40-41). It was also in the spirit of African unity that Nigeria gave a grant over N2 million to Dahomey (Republic of Benin) for the construction of Idi-Iroko-Cotonou road and as well as agreed to supply neighboring countries of the Camerouns and Niger with electricity (Abiola, 1979: 250-254).

Again, Africa can now speak with one voice in International Organization like UNO and the Commonwealth of Nations. The organization made substantial efforts to settle border dispute among the members. Such border disputes include Kenya-Somalia, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Guinea-Ivory Coast, etc. OAU succeeded in settling disputes between Zaire and People Republic of the Congo Brazzaville, Ethiopia and Somalia, Morocco, and Algeria. This is specifically designed to promote unity among the members and avoid crises.

To promote cordial relationships among the members, the OAU normalized relations between Guinea and Ghana and between Chad and Sudan in 1966 (Eluwa et al., 2005: 293-294). Again when Tanzania faced a mutiny of her soldiers, in 1964, the OAU provided the troops that replaced British troops in keeping the crisis under control (Ibid).

As part of its desire to promote unity, peace, and oneness among the members, the OAU promoted inter-cultural contacts, among African countries. Such cultural contacts or festivals included, All-African Cultural festival in Algeria, the festival of Black Arts in Dakar in 1966, the Second All-African Games in Lagos, in 1973, and the Second World Festival of African Art and Culture in 1977 in Lagos also (Ibid).

The above achievements are tangible no doubt about that. However, in spite of the above achievements, the OAU has been described as a toothless bulldog that barks but cannot bite. This is sequel to its monumental failure in many dimensions before its transformation to AU.

OAU AS A TOOTHLESS BULLDOG

The OAU has been described as a toothless bulldog by political historians, scholars, and commentators. Since foundation, the Organization has not really justified the confidence reposed on it due to challenges which had rendered the body incapacitated in the implementation of its objectives as stated in the charter.

First, the Angolan issue demonstrated the helpless nature of OAU in handling issues, the OAU performed very poorly as the members were divided into two camps on whether or not to recognize MPLA as the sole representative of the Angolans. Portugal, the former Colonial Master withdrew from Angola in November 1975 without an established central Government in Angola. (An Interview with Dr. Duyile Abiodun on 8-4-2022). Hence, arose competition between the three national groups of popular movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), all competing to capture political power (Akinyemi, 1979: 25).

The government of National Unity was proposed by the OAU Conciliation Commission on Angola. In the report of the Commission, it was suggested that "A government of national unity can be immediately formed by the Liberation movement for the purpose of leading Angola into independence (Aluko: 1977).

It is important to put on record that despite the fact that the OAU agreed on the government of National Unity by the three groups, some African countries were backing one group or the other for example: Zaire was backing UNITA, Senegal, and Zambia were backing FLNA, OAU could not stop them (Ibid, p.88). Considering the OAU as a toothless bulldog, General Ramat Muhammed, the Head of State between 1975, July 29 to February 13, 1976, did not wait for an OAU consensus to emerge before taking a decision. The way and manner the Angolan crisis was handled demonstrated that there was a change in both the style and context of Nigeria's Foreign Policy. The initial idea of the regime of General Ramat Muhammed was to work out ways the three national factions can come together and work as one united front towards the struggle for the independence of Angola. As a result of many vested interests, Apartheid South Africa supported FLNA, Britain, and USA supported UNITA and USSR and Cuba supported MPLA. The three groups did not co-operate and instead they "simply engaged in cut-throat competition for power.

Without waiting for OAU, Nigeria recognized the MPLA government of Agostinho Neto on November 25, 1975. General Ramat Muhammed condemned foreign involvement and advocated the withdrawal of all foreign troops fostering division of Angola (Eluwa et al, 2005:86-90).

The OAU could not speak with one golden voice because most of the members were pro-west in political orientation, ideology, and philosophy. Again, the OAU demonstrated a high level of incapability in settling disputed among the member states. The efforts made by OAU in this direction was quite laughable and shameful. The OAU could not secure a simple cease fire during the Algerian-Moroccan border shootout in October 1963. In the same vein, the OAU could not forestall the bloodshed between Rwanda and Burundi in November 1963 (Brown, 2002:123-140). During this bloodshed, about 3,000 armed men believed to be Tusti refugees invaded Rwanda from Burundi. The Brigade was routed and about 400 men lost their lives (Ibid). In addition to this, thousands of Hutus and Tutses massacred in both countries as reprisals.

According to Okafor in January and February 1964, Somalia and Ethiopia clashed several times at their borders (Ibid). Somalia laid claim to two areas of Ethiopia and Somalia also clashed almost in the

same period with Kenya on the North Frontier district of Kenya. It was quite unfortunate the OAU stood, watched, and did nothing.

In 1972, Uganda and Tanzania were involved in a crisis when Obote's supporters launched an attack from Tanzania against Idi Amin Government. The OAU could not stop the shoot-out and could not blame anyone for the incident. Again OAU could not stop Idi-Amin from making a bid to annex the Kagera and when Tanzania embarked on a political overthrow of Idi-Amin, the OAU could not stop Tanzania (Okafor, 1982: 86-90).

The OAU was not able to effect a permanent settlement in a surprised shoot-out handed down on Nigeria by Cameroon soldiers May 1981 which led to the death of five Nigerian soldiers. The most disturbing OAU's intervention was the Nigerian Civil War which took place between 1967 and 1970. The Organization was not able to speak with one voice due to the subversive activities of Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast, and Zambia. One of the objectives of the OAU as contained in their charter is that "to unreservedly condemn political assassination and subversive activities in all its forms, by neighboring or any other states (OAU Charter, 1963).

In spite of this, the above countries recognized the Republic of Biafra which was not the stand of OAU in the Nigerian crisis. President Charles De Gaulle of France encouraged Portugal, South Africa, and Rhodesia to support Biafra against the Federal Government. OAU could not do anything. It was said that leaders of the Ivory Coast and Gabon recognized Biafra through De Gaulle's subtle push (Tamuno and Ukpabi, 1989: 15). Again, the OAU was not forthcoming in given material support to the Federal Government. One of the major reasons why the USSR defeated Germany in the Second World War was the assistance received from the USA and Britain (Ediagbonya et al., 2020: 47). As the war was on, Britain started providing Joseph Stalin with intelligence information. Britain intensified the bombing of Berlin and other major German Cities to force Hitler to recall some of the forces back to Germany to counter the British offensive. Again, Britain and the USA gave military supplies including a large number of Air Craft and tanks as well as food and medical supplies (Ibid). This was not the case from OAU members. What the OAU succeeded in doing was providing accommodation and other facilities during the series of conferences they hosted for the purpose of bringing the war to an end. From all intents and purposes, that was not enough. It may be a major reason why the OAU has been seen as a "toothless bulldog"

Again, the OAU was helpless in taking serious actions against the member states who failed deliberately in their financial contributions to the body. This becomes a serious challenge against the background that the OAU needed adequate finance to execute its programs and policies. Part of the reason for their failure for the yearly due was their economic dependency on foreign countries (Abiola, 1979: 252). A serious organization should be concerned about its financial viability and takes appropriate actions against the members frustrating the body. The OAU could not take drastic action against defaulters due to its toothless nature.

Another glaring example was in 1965 when all OAU members agreed to cutoff diplomatic and other relations with Britain over Rhodesia (Okafor: 1982). Only a few states actually carried out this threat, others disobeyed due to their pro-west nature.

It must be stressed that the OAU inability to intervene in the affairs of member-states could be attributed to the non-interference provision as contained in the charter establishing the organization in 1963. (An Interview with Dr. Ukhurebor Roland on 7-3-2023). However, this obstacle is now seriously addressed in the new union which OAU transformed into called the African Union. The Constitutive Act of the African Union allows for interference in the internal affairs of member states.

The OAU pursued the goal of Africa liberation no doubt, however, it failed to confront the post-colonial problems of poverty, war, genocides, human rights, and environmental disasters.

It is quite unfortunate that the OAU was like a talking club of African Leaders with no power to execute its resolutions. It is equally laughable that under ruthless dictatorship of Emperor Bokassa I (1921-1996) of Central Africa Republic, Idi Amin (1924-2003) of Uganda, Mobutusese Seko (1930-1997) of Zaire and Sani Abacha (1943-1998) of Nigeria, the OAU was helpless only barks without concrete actions.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF OAU TO AFRICAN UNION

The idea of creating the AU was discussed in the Mid 1990's under the leadership of Libyan Head of State, Mammour al-Gaddafi. The Heads of State and Government of the OAU issued the Sirte Declaration on September 1999, called for the establishment of an African Union (Sirte Declaration, 9 September, 1999).

The declaration was followed by Summits in Togo in 2000 when the Constitutive Act of the African Union was adopted (Constitutive Act of African Union, 2000). In Lusaka in 2001, the plan for the implementation of the African Union was adopted. The African Union was launched in Durban on July 9, 2002, by its Chairperson, South African President. 'Thabo Mbeki' at the first session of the Assembly of the African Union (Official launching of African Union on 9 July, 2002, Address by the Chairperson of the AU, President Thabo Mbeki" Abba Stadium Durban, South African).

The objectives of the African Union as contained in the Constitutive Act are to:

- a. Achieve greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples of Africa
- b. Defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of its member states.
- c. Accelerate the political and socioeconomic integration of the continent.
- d. Promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples.
- e. Encourage international cooperation taking due account of the charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- f. Promote peace, security, and stability in the continent
- g. Promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, and good governance
- h. Promote and protect human peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and other relevant human rights instruments.
- i. Promote sustainable development at the economic, social, and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies
- j. Promote cooperation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African People (Constitutive of Act of African Union, 2002).

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

The African Union has started on a good note unlike the OAU Charter the Constitutive Act of the A.U allows for interference in the internal affairs of member states in cases of unconstitutional change of government, genocide, and conflicts that threaten regional stability (Dokubo, 2005 p: 138-155).

This is a welcome development viewed against the backdrop of the clause of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states entrenched into the OAU charter which prevented the OAU from taking any concrete action in resolving conflicts in Africa.

Again, the launch of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU on May 25, 2001, is a right step in the right direction in attempt to ensure peace and stability in Africa. The PSC has since met regularly in numerous sessions at various levels to discuss conflict situations on the continent peace processes, A.U peacekeeping initiative, and efforts to maintain an integrated and holistic approach to the continent's peace and security agenda (Akinbi and Olupayemo, 2009).

Furthermore, the African “Stand by Force” which the A.U established should be well organized and equipped to live up to the challenge posed by conflict situations. It is necessary to commend the African Union’s engagement in countering Al-Shabaab’s insurgency in Somalia through the establishment of the African Mission in Somalia (Johnson and James, 2017: 112-128).

Another area of interest is the activity of African Union in NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development). During the 14th African Union Summit in February 2010, NEPAD decided to transform its Secretariat into the New Partnership for Africa’s Development Planning and Coordinating Agency, integrating it into the structures and processes of the African Union with legal autonomy (Brown, 2002 p: 123-140).

As a result, NEPAD’s Programs and Projects now adhere to the rules and procedures of African Union Organs. Interestingly, a coordinating unit has been established to enhance synergy between departments of the African Union Commission and the NEPAD Agency. The African Union Agenda 2063 sounds bogus and ambitious considering its aims and objectives. The agenda is a strategic framework for Africa’s long-term development and transformation. It was adopted in 2015 and its outlines the continent’s aspirations and priorities for the next 50 years (African Union Agenda 2063, adopted in 2015). Another challenge before the AU is rapid military coups spreading in the continent. The year 2023 has witnessed two military coups in Niger Republic and Burkinafaso. This is a sad political experience because military coup is a catalyst to political instability in a country.

The above programs or policy is an eloquent testimony of an organization seriously prepared to deliver on its mandate. The only challenge is the problem of implementation of its decision and programs. The African Union should learn from the pitfalls of OAU to avoid been described as Toothless Bull Dog.

CONCLUSION

The OAU established in 1963 is an association of independent African States whose main purpose was to promote unity and cooperation among the States and defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.

In spite of the initial challenges posed by the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs, African Leaders later saw that their unity and collective action were necessary for Africa’s survival and progress. It was at that point that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia convened a Conference of Independent African States in Addis Ababa in May 1963, in which 32 Heads of State, were in attendance, where the historic charter of an organization to be known and called the OAU was signed.

In spite of the achievement of OAU, it has been described as a toothless bulldog that barks but cannot bite because of obvious monumental failure and disappointment. OAU later transformed into African Union in 2002. The AU was launched in Durban on July 9, 2002 by its Chairperson, South African President, “Thabo Mbeki.

There are obvious reasons to suggest that there could be a radical departure from OAU considering its activities so far. Worthy of note is the Constitutive Act of AU which allows for interference in the internal affairs of member states in the cases of unconstitutional change of government, genocide, and conflicts that threaten regional stability. It should be noted that the African Union should learn from the challenges of OAU to avoid the callous mistakes of the past. The AU should be very proactive in addressing the menace of military coups presently spreading in the continent. This becomes very imperative because military coup promotes political instability.

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