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Terrorism, Democratisation, and American Foreign Policy towards Kenya: 1990 – Present.

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Chapter One
US FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS KENYA DURING THE COLD WAR

Introduction

The majority of African countries began to gain independence from their colonial masters after World War Two. As they gained their independence they were caught up in the politics between the United States (US) and the Soviet bloc. Unlike the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War was an ideological conflict between the Soviet block's communism and the US's democracy, a conflict that went on for over forty years.

The newly emerging independent African States soon became the scene of Cold War skirmishes. The Soviet Union and the US competed for their allegiances, mainly through economic and military aid. These newly independent States found themselves economically dependent on the industrialised and wealthier countries for development assistance. Their economic needs made these countries vulnerable to foreign influences and pressures. Thus, foreign aid was given with the intention of capturing the political support of these new States. According to Hans Morgenthau (1971:242-4) much of what goes by the name of foreign aid is in nature bribes, he argues that bribery appears in the guise of aid for economic development, military assistance and subsistence to influence the receiving party. This was the case as African governments sought loans and technical assistance from either or both world powers. The powers in turn did not pay much attention on how the aid was utilised as long as the current governments leaned towards their ideology.

Kenya was not to be excluded from these Cold War skirmishes. As Kenya gained independence in 1963 various factors like the British influence in the country and their interests were to play a key role on the side the country leaned towards. It is also during this period that Kenya became an undemocratic State with kleptocratic leaders who suppressed any opposing voice. This chapter sets out to provide a background of Kenya-US relations during the Cold War, giving an insight on how the relations developed. It will also look at the security concerns that guided US policy towards Kenya during this

period and how in turn Kenya responded to this policy. Finally the outcomes and impact of the Cold War relationship between these countries will be examined.

The Cold War Security Concerns in the Greater Horn of Africa

Kenya and Her Neighbours

In the Greater Horn of Africa, countries like Uganda, Somalia and Ethiopia shifted sides, playing both the Eastern and Western powers to suit themselves, depending on the government that was in power at the time. According to John Spainer and Steve Hook (1998:6) the behaviour of nation-states is profoundly shaped by the ever changing distribution of power. As the distribution shifts at both the regional and global level, it alters the strategic environment, defines the options available to States and informs their policy choices, this was the case in the Greater Horn of Africa.

In February 1967, Tanzania under the leadership of Julius Nyerere adopted the Arusha Declaration a policy that called for self-reliance known as *Ujamaa* hence the country pursued a definite socialist path. Uganda under the socialist leaning President Milton Obote adopted the People's Charter. In the Horn following a military coup in 1969, Somalia fell under the leadership of Siad Barre, during his twenty-one years rule he shifted from one ideology framework to another, changing alliances in line with the need of political survival. Whereas in 1971 Ethiopia fell under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who seized power after overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie, his Marxist-Leninist Worker's party instituted a regime of repression with the support of the Soviet Union. In the region Sudan was not to be left out, under Colonel Numeiri, the country received continuous support from the Soviet bloc during his seventeen years military dictatorship. Hence, Kenya was seen as the main pro-Western country in the region, and thus became a great ally and aid beneficiary of the US in the Greater Horn of Africa. (Africa Watch 1991: 362, Gordon 1994: 240)

The Colonial Legacy

In order to understand Kenya's pro-Western stance it is important to examine Kenya's relationship with her former colony Britain, as this had a major role to play in Kenya becoming of strategic interest to the US during the Cold War. Kenya remained under

British rule for over fifty years, and by the time the country gained its independence in 1963, strong intricate commercial ties had been woven with Britain hence Kenya became one of the largest recipients of British aid in Africa during the Cold War.(African Watch 1991:362) At independence Britain gave Kenya the resources it needed to help establish the Kenyan Armed Forces, and thus became Kenya's largest supplier of arms, it trained troops and gave them substantial assistance, therefore establishing strong military ties.[2] Kenya's strong relations with its former colony had a major role to play in Kenya remaining a pro-Western country.

As Kenya gained its independence there was a notion that it would be a socialist country. According to D. Barnett and K. Njama (1966) this was informed by a school of thought that interpreted the Mau Mau[3] as a socialist oriented peasant rebellion based on mass consciousness evincing concrete social formation and class consciousness. Shortly before and immediately after independence a strong impression that Kenya was bound to establish a socialist system after independence based upon the radical nature of the country's colonial experience under British rule, was dominant.[4] This though did not turn out to be the case. At independence Kenya adopted an extremely moderate and cautious stance in handling her external affairs, preferring to maintain a low profile in what John Okumu (1997:136) describes as 'quiet diplomacy'. He defines this as a diplomatic position which recognises that the uses and functions of foreign policy of a poor nation are to promote economic and social modernisation, this mainly meant that the country avoided radical aggressiveness that it could not defend nor protect itself from, thus opting to avoid burning issues in Africa and the rest of the world. The country adopted a stance of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. This non-alignment policy continues to be ascribed to.

[2] Ibid.,p.369
[3] The Mau Mau was an uprising that fought the British rule in Kenya, the uprising was defeated but ultimately it helped bring about Kenya's independence.
[4] See, Jack Woodis, Africa; The Roots of Revolt (London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1963) and John Okumu 'Kenya's Foreign Policy' in Olajide Luko (ed) The Foreign Policy of African States (London; Hodder &Stoughton, 1997) pp.136-137

Following ideological clashes with President Kenyatta, Oginga Odinga Kenya's first vice president, formed a new socialist opposition party, Kenya People's Union (KPU). This led to his detention along with a number of other members of the new party. No new opposition parties were formed there after, and Kenya African National Union (KANU) became the sole political party until the early 1980s when former Member of Parliament, George Anyona, attempted to register the Kenya African Socialist Alliance (KASA) along with Oginga Odinga. KASA advocated for a socialist stance, and the government took a stern action to ensure that such leaders did not influence the people[5] as they were arrested. Besides not tolerating socialist inclined politicians, intellectuals who seemed to lean towards socialism were also unacceptable by the government. Subversive literature possessing works of Mao Tse Tung and Karl Marx among others were confiscated and those found with it were imprisoned. Intellectuals like Dr. Alamin Mazrui, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo were either detained or forced to go into exile, as intellectual opposition increasingly became a punishable offence.[6] Although Kenya maintained some relations with Eastern Europe and China, John Okumu (1997:158) points out that the country was reluctant to receive substantial economic or technical assistance from these countries. He further states that Kenya continuously refused Soviet aid in its process of cleaning Kenya's political, academic and economic institutions of socialist influence. This aid was seen as a threat to the entrenched British economic activities in the country.

The British economic activities mainly in farming, commercial and manufacturing industries controlled the country's economy and development and the protection of these interests was an integral part of the 'golden handshake'[7] of independence. Therefore, from independence Kenya's patterns of trade, its foreign interests and aid were an

[5] President Kenyatta passed legislation permitting detention without trial in cases where security was deemed to be threatened after the arrest of Oginga Odinga. This law was later repelled in 1997. The attempted registration of KASA led to the change of Section 2 (a) of the constitution, making Kenya a *de jure* one party state. George Anyona along with Oginga Odinga were arrested and detained without trial.

[6] Ali Mazrui argues that intellectualism in Kenya died partly because of the governments strong opposition to socialism in the country during the Cold War. See, Ali A. Mazrui; 'Towards Re-Africanizing African Universities: Who Killed Intellectualism in the Post Colonial Era?' Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations, Vol.2, No.3&4, Fall/Winter 2003 http://www.alternativesjournal.net/volume2/number3and4/mazrui.pdf P.138-9 Accessed 16 Nov. 04

[7] Ibid., p.157 this 'golden handshake' constituted a set of agreements that sealed Kenya's close relations with Britain at independence.

indication of the existence of relatively strong economic, political and military ties with the West mainly influenced by its intricate relations with its former colony though it preferred to be viewed as non-aligned.

The Soviet Threat in the Horn

After the wave of African decolonisation, the US decided to place an American embassy in every independent African country; it established an embassy in Nairobi in 1964. Herman Cohen (2003) argues that this action accompanied by major aid programs was motivated largely by the fear of communism expansion on the continent. Both the US and the Soviet were interested in the Horn's strategic location, which is close to the Middle East. The region served as a critical vantage point to command or interdict oil shipments from the Middle East and elsewhere.[8] Thus, the expansion of Soviet influence and domination in the Horn was of great concern to the US, according to a report by Africa Watch (1991:372) their greatest worry being ensuring the security of the Suez Canal trade route and oil shipments.

In 1977, conflict broke out between Somalia and Ethiopia in the Ogaden region.[9] President Siad Barre of Somalia had the intentions of forcefully reuniting the people of Somali descent to form a greater Somalia. He acquired substantial military aid arsenals from the Soviet Union to enable him carry out his mission, and in turn the Soviets acquired access to a strategic port in the region. (Biwott 1992)[10] Apart from the Ogaden, Barre promoted insurgent movements in Kenya after its independence in his cause to unite the Somalis of North Eastern Province (NEP) in Kenya to the greater Somalia.[11] Having realised the expansionist initiative of the Barre regime, Kenya and Ethiopia joined forces in 1969 and signed a Defence Pact, its purpose was to enhance a joint military effort in the region in the event of their common enemy, Somalia, invading any

[8] Ermias Abebe, The Horn, The Cold War, and Documents From the Former East-Bloc: An Ethiopian View. http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/CWIHP/BULLETINS/b8-9a6.htm Accessed 19 Nov. 04

[9] It is a desert region in Southeast Ethiopia, between the Ethiopian Highlands and the border of Somalia and is inhabited mainly by Somali nomads. A claim to the area was made by Somalia in the 1960s.

[10] Major H.K.Biwott 'Post-Independence Low Intensity Conflict In Kenya' *Global Security* 1992 http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1992/BHK.htm

[11] The province wanted to annex itself and be a part of the greater Somalia. The population of Somalis in the province was estimated to be about 250,000 at independence; they had migrated into the region between 1894 and 1912.

of the two nations in its greater Somalia vision. This pact was renewed in 1980 and again in 1987 and is still in existence to date. This was not enough for Kenya which later sought the US for further protection.

Kenya-US Military Relations

Kenya continuously felt threatened by Somali's vision for a greater Somalia especially after the NEP insurgencies and the Ogaden conflict. The country thus began a military build up. In the hope of deterring Somali from attacking Kenya the government sought much closer ties with the US. The country requested a US military survey on Kenya's defence requirements according to Karl Prinslow (1997) this resulted in a blueprint of support, cooperation and a long term acquisition and modernisation plan that continues to date. This signified the birth of closer military relations between Kenya and the US.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 pushed the Horn into a supporting role in the Cold War. There were suspicions of the Soviets planning a military expansion beyond Afghanistan into Iran and Kuwait. As a result the US felt threatened and hence sought and obtained military base rights, facilities and transit authorisations from the Horn and East African countries close to the Persian Gulf. (Cohen 2003) Following the Iranian revolution the US laid down the so called Carter Doctrine that committed the US to use military means to defend American interest in the oil rich Persian Gulf, according to Michael Clough (1992:11) this in turn this greatly increased the strategic importance of the Horn. As a result of this and in keeping with Kenya's need to protect herself from her neighbours, the US signed the Facilities Access Agreement with Kenya in 1980. The agreement provided for over flights, landing rights at three airfields, and access to the Mombasa sea port and was accompanied with military assistance of twenty million dollars in 1980 and in a period of two years it had risen to thirty million. (Nelson 1984:227, Gordon 1994:248) This agreement established the US as the major supplier of arms and military support to Kenya, a position previously held by the former colonial power. Kenya came to be regarded as part of the Central Command (CENTCOM) under

the Kenya US Liaison Office (KULSO).[12] This office is still in existence to date and has gained prominence especially with the war on terrorism in the region.

The US saw Kenya as a potential staging point for US forces in the Indian Ocean, partially because it was viewed by the US as its main stronghold in the region leading to a drastic increase in economic aid to the country between 1974 and 1985 (Africa Watch 1991:372) as the US safeguarded Kenya's position. Congress justified the aid increase by arguing in 1984 that:

> 'Kenya occupies an important position on the Indian Ocean in proximity to world energy resources. Our national security objective is to ensure out continued access to the region in times of crisis. To do this we must continue to contribute to Kenya's economic development, stability and military preparedness'[13]

Accordingly, Kenya was of importance for its strategic position, US foreign policy towards Kenya was mainly for the safeguarding of US economic and strategic interests, and not necessarily for Kenya's own sake.

Outcomes of the Cold War Relationship

The establishment of US bases in Kenya's coast further enhanced the US presence in Kenya. According to Gordon (1994: 240) the country had established a strategic partnership with the US thus bringing large volumes of military and economic assistance, and a degree of interdependence between the two countries. He states that in as much as the US was useful to Kenya because of military protection and aid, Kenya was useful to the US for access to the Indian Ocean due to its port and facilities at Mombassa along with other military bases, and also its access to the Horn of Africa. He goes on to add that this interdependence was quite essential with providing Kenya with 'substantial leverage' in relations with the US and other Western donor nations and the international agencies

[12] KULSO has the responsibility to support all US military activities and interests in Kenya. The senior officer offers input, counsel and advice to the Ambassador and embassy country team regarding the military perspective or viewpoint of US government policy vis-à-vis the host nation and region. KULSO is still in existence to date. See, Karl E. Prinslow op. cit.

[13] Congress in 1984 as quoted in Wanjiru Kihoro, Kenya: The US Connection and Its Implication for Development. (Thesis submitted Leeds University October 1987) p. 27

like the World Bank and the IMF. The problem though was that not much attention was paid on how the Kenyan government chose to use this aid.

Corruption, the abuse of human rights and manipulation of the constitution was on the increase during this period as President Moi became more authoritarian. In 1982, the ruling regime amended the constitution making Kenya a *de jure* single party State. This move by the government was not condemned by the West that advocated democracy. In the mid-1980s the Kenyan government was engaged in a major crackdown on alleged opposition voices especially in the academic institutions. Students and lecturers were arrested and detained due to their alleged membership to *Mwakenya*.[14] As stated in the report by Africa Watch (1991) during this same period the US Administration spoke in glowing terms of US-Kenya relations and the continuation of US economic and military support as the government engaged in a crackdown on opposition voices. However, the US did not always turn a blind eye to the human rights abuses in Kenya. As further stated in the report from time to time, though rare, the State Department protested allegations of torture of political prisoner's and the detention of lawyers who tried to represent the prisoners. Nonetheless, not much attention was given to these allegations and the government continued in its despotic practices. No criticism or questions were raised by the US when the Moi government continued to abuse its power particularly when the constitution was changed to increase the president's powers or when independent media outlets were banned.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide a background to Kenya-US relations during the Cold War. It looked at the security concerns that arose during this period and US foreign policy towards Kenya driven by these concerns. Immediately after independence Kenya adopted a non-alignment policy as analysed by John Okumu (1997). Due to its economic ties with its former colony the country leaned towards the West as opposed to the East. Largely owing to the ideology stance Kenya favoured and its strategic position in the Greater Horn of Africa it became a strong ally and major aid beneficiary of the US.

[14] Mwakenya is Swahili for Union of Nationalistic to Liberate Kenya.

During this period both President Kenyatta and Moi suppressed all forms of democratic debate in the country, any one who stood in opposition to the government was either intimidated, detained without a trial, or forced into exile. Kenya remained a *de facto* one party State until the constitution was changed in 1982 making it a *de jure* one party State.

Throughout the Cold War period the US was more concerned with fighting Soviet influence in the region rather than promoting democracy. The end of the ideological war brought about a change in the international political scene. Cold War policies were abandoned and the US begun to call on undemocratic states to democratise. Kenya's strategic position as pointed out in this chapter was no longer of great importance instead the US pushed for reforms in the country.

President Moi was under pressure from the US to change the constitution in order to ensure the country held multiparty elections. The following chapter will look at the new policies of the post-Cold War era and how they in turn affected domestic politics in Kenya along with Kenya-US relations.