

## **Africa's vicious circle**

*The West says African aid can't flow until there's less chaos. The chaos won't stop until there's more aid, says DAVID MALONE*

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No one seems to be taking seriously the New Partnership for Africa's Development -- better known as NEPAD, the rescue plan for Africa. Certainly not Africans, as they witness murderous conflicts springing up across the continent, from Liberia to Uganda; from Congo to Zimbabwe. And certainly not the West, which cites this chaos and political repression as the reasons for not pushing reform packages with more vigour. The worse things get, the less energy the West is willing to put into reform -- so matters deteriorate further. It's a vicious circle.

How can it be broken? The visit to the continent next week by U.S. President George W. Bush helps. He'll be visiting Senegal, South Africa and Nigeria, three of Africa's four leading NEPAD proponents. (He'll also pay a call on Botswana and Uganda.) But the United States, has engaged with African security problems only gingerly since its debacle in Somalia a decade ago. Washington focuses mainly on Africa as a theatre for international terrorism. Its much-hyped AIDS initiative (still not fully funded by Congress) and its increased if comparatively niggardly economic aid program (ditto) leave the impression that it prefers to leave both leadership and risks in Africa to London and Paris.

Africans with painful colonial pasts, however, do not like or trust the military return of these former colonial powers who engage in military interventions that Africans view as self-serving and which do nothing to develop Africa's own peacekeeping capacities. Unfortunately, France and the United Kingdom do not participate meaningfully in UN peacekeeping efforts in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but instead, late in the game, launch well-publicized solo efforts to rescue failing UN peacekeeping operations.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the French lead a small but well-equipped "coalition of the willing" into Bunia, where the UN's under-powered peacekeeping operation, MONUC, had been overwhelmed by violence that broke out in the wake of Uganda's military withdrawal. This provoked much self-congratulation among participating countries.

But the civil war in Congo defies such short-term solutions. It has been a war in which many neighbouring states have participated, feasting off the resource-rich carcass of Africa's second largest country. Most of these parties to the war have been engaged in continuous mischief while paying lip service to South Africa's diplomatic efforts to end

the killing. If they remain more interested in plunder and personal vendettas than in the plight of African civilian populations, there's little the outside world can do to help.

But the West must also shoulder much blame. Why did industrialized countries fail to participate meaningfully in MONUC, which, since 1999, has been trying to implement programs of demobilization, disarmament and local reconstruction. That France and others should fly to its rescue under media spotlights only days before France hosted the latest G8 summit in Evian doesn't surprise Africans. Besides, they know that the coalition of the willing is scheduled to withdraw in early September -- and that killers have only to wait out this faint-hearted Western effort before the slaughter resumes.

Nor are Africans surprised that Western countries, whose struggle for influence in Africa divides along old francophone/anglophone colonial lines, have done little to inhibit frenzied trading in the ill-gotten gains of resource wars.

Canada did a creditable job of focusing international attention on Africa and NEPAD at the Kananaskis G8 Summit in 2002. But this focus dissipated at Evian, as the French stage-managed a circus-like encounter of many world leaders juggling many themes on a myriad of subjects.

Leading NEPAD countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria and Senegal have been trying to promote more effective African institutions and decisions, including on democracy and the rule of law. They have opposed the overthrow of governments, most recently in Mauritania. And 15 African countries have subscribed to a degree of peer review. Democratic changes of government are on the rise.

However, vicious conflicts continue to afflict the continent. Liberia's President, the indicted war criminal Charles Taylor, is just one reminder that West Africa, from the Ivory Coast to Guinea-Bissau, is now a theatre for continuous, interlocking fighting. France's military intervention in the Ivory Coast, belatedly backed by the UN Security Council, has helped freeze military skirmishing there, but has done little to resolve the tensions stoked by irresponsible and self-interested Ivorian politicians (often supported by economic and political allies in the West). In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe's fierce repression of the opposition -- unimpeded by neighbouring states -- shames all Africa. President Isaias Afwerki, Eritrea's prickly dictator, having waged a pointless war with neighbouring Ethiopia, continues to stoke national pride and resentments as best he can. His opposite number in Ethiopia has done little better.

The weakness of NEPAD and Western support for it lies in a failure to act on the program's interlocked conditions -- an exchange of increased Western assistance for improved governance in African countries. Progress on the latter, while clear, is slow and uneven. Western countries, meanwhile, tend to provide announcements of increased aid, rhetorical support and the occasional military band-aid while holding up more significant engagement until the Africans to do more to help themselves. This "après vous, Alphonse" dynamic now prevails, only thinly camouflaged by high-level encounters.

African leaders, particularly the core NEPAD proponents, must intensify their efforts to tackle African wars and challenges to the rule of law and they need to start showing results. As for the major Western capitals, they need to show that they can move beyond mediagenic, patchwork interventions and diplomatic gestures to support real resolutions to African conflicts. Their performance to date can only inspire deep skepticism among Africans.

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