

Entente Bestiale makes OAU its enforcer

by Frédérique Vereycken

The Organization for African Unity held its 32nd annual summit this year over July 5-10 in Yaounde, Cameroon. The conference took place in the context of what OAU Secretary General Selim Ahmed Salim called “the second-generation program” for this institution. Two principal undertakings are in process.

The first is the establishing of a “mechanism for prevention, management, and regulation of conflicts.” The idea for creating such a structure comes from the June 1993 OAU summit in Cairo. In the Cairo Declaration, it was expected that “the OAU might deploy civilian and military observer missions; should the conflicts degenerate, the assistance of the United Nations is requested.”

The major powers have gladly accepted this OAU decision; after the November 1994 Chartres summit, a Franco-British initiative was launched with the aim of supporting peacekeeping mechanisms in Africa by the OAU. In addition, whereas in 1993 the expectation was that this “mechanism” would be limited to observer operations, afterwards, the project for creating a true OAU intervention force, under the mandate of the UN, was filled out. A conference of the heads of state of OAU member nations took place with this in mind over June 3-6, 1996. Since their direct interventions in Rwanda and Somalia, the major powers undoubtedly came to look favorably on a military OAU acting in the service of the UN Security Council—as Henry Kissinger had demanded in the case of Somalia, for instance.

Will Burundi be the testing ground for setting up a new OAU as a secular arm of the UN? Already there is an OAU observer mission on the scene. Since June 1996, all Frenchmen have left that country, and military cooperation with the Burundi Army has been suspended. France has left the nation in the same situation as Rwanda, leaving the OAU mission to manage the crisis, and reserving its own direct interventions to its “preserve,” (e.g., the Central African Republic).

OAU Secretary General Salim is wasting no time. He has already declared that the Burundi coup is illegal, as the OAU will not tolerate coups in Africa. For some time, he has been working with Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and with former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, the godfathers of the Tutsi military machine in Rwanda and Burundi, for a “regional intervention force” for Burundi, composed of Ugandan, Tanzanian, and Ethiopian troops. Such direct intervention was only preempted by zealous Burundi military of-

ficers. Tanzanian and Ugandan troops, it should be noted, have already been part of the “peacekeeping forces” in Liberia.

Under the auspices of the OAU in part, regional leaders met in Arusha, Tanzania at the end of July, to map out their response to the Burundi crisis—stopping short of direct military intervention and instead opting for sanctions to be imposed on the country. Paul Kagame, the head of the Rwandan Patriotic Army, the Rwandan-Tutsi splitoff from the Ugandan Army, declared reluctantly in Washington on Aug. 9 that Rwanda would go along with the sanctions, rather than supporting the Burundi coup leaders directly, since Burundi had bucked “the regional framework.” That regional framework is not run by Salim, or his OAU, or by the warlords on the ground, but from Washington, London, and Paris.

The creation of this “mechanism for controlling conflicts,” takes place in a strictly UN context. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for example, is demanding the creation of a 50,000-troop force to intervene in Burundi—but not under UN auspices. If it comes down to an intervention force in Burundi or elsewhere, it would permit a country such as France or Great Britain to protect their geopolitical interests, without overtly appearing to be neo-colonialists, since African troops would be doing all the work.

Free-trade zones

The second undertaking for restructuring the OAU is also compatible with the UN order. Officially, this has to do with creating an African economic community to ameliorate the lack of intra-African trade and to enhance the integrated, self-sufficient development of the continent. In fact, the effort is being concentrated mostly on creating a profusion of administrative institutions to form a free-trade zone in goods and capital. This looks a lot more like the European Union’s Maastricht Treaty, than the postwar Coal and Steel Community, which boosted the industrial development of Europe.

Moreover, contrary to what was done in 1987, the OAU is no longer pushing for a global, equitable solution to the problem of the debt. In 1987, the debt made up 45% of the Gross Domestic Product of the continent; *today it makes up 72%*. Since then, the attitude of the OAU has become more “realistic”—that is, within a logic of non-confrontation with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; there are no discussions on development projects, such as infrastructure that would actually allow for the continent to become integrated. The approach is administrative, without breaking the rules of the game called “structural adjustment.”

The manner in which Selim Ahmed Salim characterized the OAU reveals quite well the attempt to put a good face on the IMF, the World Bank, the UN, and the “markets”: “Our institution today is viable. No one can any longer turn a deaf ear to the voice of Africa, which must not be confused with Rwanda and Somalia, just as we would not confuse Chechnya and Bosnia with Europe.”