Full Length Research

Kwame Nkrumah and the proposed African common government

Aremu Johnson Olaosebikan

Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ado- Ekiti, P. M. B. 5363, ado- Ekiti, Nigeria. Email: johnsonaremu2006@yahoo.com.Tel:+2348032477652.

Between 1957 and 1966, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana fought vigorously for the creation of a Union of African States with a Common African Government. His optimism for the unity and cohesion of Africa as a lever for continental development was unparalleled. However, his dream never became a reality due to stiff opposition from African leaders, most of whom feared the loss of their sovereignty, and the West, due to selfish interest. This notwithstanding, this paper posits that Nkrumah's mooted idea of unity government is still the best option if Africa will be able to overcome her precarious socio-economic and political tragedies of intermittent wars and conflicts, poverty and exploitation of her natural resources by the West; even in the face of daunting challenges. The paper concludes that only a union government could enable Africa to compete favourably with other political and economic blocs in this age of globalization and continental integration process going on in various other continents of the world.

Key words: Integration, cohesion, Pan-Africanism, unification, development

INTRODUCTION

A lasting positive legacy left by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana for African development is his vision for a Continental Union Government for Africa or a United States of Africa. Biney (2008: 131) rightly submits that Nkrumah passionately advocated Pan-Africanism as the solution to Africa's myriad economic, social and political problems and unequivocally reiterated his belief that no single African nation could progress without unifying politically and economically with other African countries in order to harness the economic potential and resources of the continent for the betterment of its people. Earlier, Mazrui (2004: 22) acknowledged that:

"Nkrumah's greatest bequest to Africa was the agenda of continental unification. No one else has made the case for continental integration more forcefully, or with greater sense of drama than Nkrumah. Although most African leaders regard the whole idea of a United States of Africa as wholly unattainable in the foreseeable future, Nkrumah even after death has kept the debate alive through his books and through the continuing influence of his ideas".

It need be recalled that attempts at African unity started with the Pan- African Congresses held between 1919 and 1945 (Aremu, 2007: 13). However, the expression "Pan-Africanism" did not come into use until the beginning of the 20th century when Henry Sylvester- Williams of Trinidad and William Edward Burghardt DuBois of the United States of America (U.S.A), used it at several Pan-African Congresses which were mainly attended by scholars of African descent of the New World. This was further reinforced by the popular "Back to Africa Movement" of Marcus Garvey (Nkrumah, 1963: 132).

The primary component of Pan-Africanism was a belief in the necessity for African unity either through political union or economic and technical cooperation, (Legum, 1987: 67). It need be observed however that the identification of Pan- Africanism with supra- state political unification has resulted largely from the activities of Kwame Nkrumah. This was perhaps why the AU in its July 2009 "Declaration on the Celebration of the 100th Birthday Anniversary of Kwame Nkrumah" described him as "an advocate of pan-Africanism who played a vital role in the establishment of our Continental Organization and the liberation of the Continent" (cited in Quist-Adade, 2010). Hence, any assessment of Pan -Africanism and

African unity movements must take account of Nkrumah's actions, arguments and postulations.

Kwame Nkrumah: A short profile

Kwame Francis Nwia Kofie Nkrumah was born on 21 September, 1909 at Nkroful, in south- western Ghana (Quist-Adade, 2010). He belonged to the Nzima ethnic group. Nkrumah was educated locally at Achimota College before proceeding to England and the United States of America (U.S.A) for higher education. He became one of the leading figures in the nationalist movement in the whole of Anglophone Africa and perhaps the leading figure in the Pan- African movement. He became the first president of Ghana upon independence on 6 July 1957. He was removed from office on 24 February, 1966 through a coup d'etat. (Nkrumah, 1968: 10; Wiseman, 1991: 164). Nkrumah worked ceaselessly and assiduously but ultimately unsuccessfully to bring about the political union of the newly emerging states of Africa between 1957 and 1963. The creation of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U) in 1963 at Addis Ababa which represented a bare minimum of real unity was indeed a great disappointment for Nkrumah (Wiseman 1991: 166).

Three major factors may be said to have motivated Nkrumah's call for African unity and a political union of African independent states. These were : the wealth and power of the United States of America (U.S.A) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R), now defunct); his association with George Padmore, a leading exponent of Pan- Africanism and; his personal belief in the efficacy of politics. A brief elaboration of these factors is very crucial at this juncture.

(a) The wealth and power of U.S.A and U.S.S.R: Nkrumah was impressed by the dynamism of the United States in fighting their bitter civil war to maintain the political union that was threatened by the reactionary forces and how the Soviet Union forged continental unity and retained national sovereignty by the federal states, which eventually lifted a most backward society into a most powerful unit within a remarkably short space of time. (Nkrumah, 1963: 132; Biney, 2008: 131).

(b) Nkrumah's association with George Padmore: This factor also promoted Nkrumah's commitment to political unification of Africa. It need be recalled that George Padmore, a journalist and trade unionist from Trinidad and Nkrumah met after the Second World War at the Pan- African Congress held in 1945 at Manchester (Welch, 1966: 18). Padmore was a leading expositor of African nationalism and pan-Africanism as a concept of political unification. He later came to Ghana at the invitation of Kwame Nkrumah in 1957 when the latter became the prime minister of Ghana. He became

Nkrumah's political adviser on Pan-African affairs through which he exerted great influence on Ghana's foreign policy until his death in 1959 (Webster and Boahen, 1980: 382; Welch, 1966: 19).

(c) Belief in the supreme efficacy of politics: Nkrumah's slogan "seek ye first the political kingdom" inscribed boldly on the base of his statue outside Parliament House in Accra supports his strong belief in the supreme efficacy of politics and this partly explains his stress upon political unification (Biney, 2008: 131). To him, simple measures of co-operation in different fields of human endeavour among African States were inade-quate for the transformation of the African destiny. The only requirement to him was continental political integra-tion into one United States of Africa (Welch, 1966: 19). Such motivating factors as highlighted above propelled Nkrumah to make major moves between 1947 and 1960 for the unification of Africa. Some of these moves shall be examined briefly hereunder.

Nkrumah's attempt at promoting African Unity, 1947-1961

In 1947, drawing great inspiration from his deep involvement in the Pan- African movement between 1945 and 1947 as Organizing Secretary to the International Conference of the Pan-African Congress, Nkrumah published his most insightful book titled "Towards Political Freedom" (Agbi, 1986: 115). In the book, he canvassed for the coordination of African efforts in fighting racism, colonialism, minority governments and European exploitation in Africa. In order to achieve this goal, Nkrumah established a Pan-African Secretariat in Ghana which pursued the twin goals of total African indepen-dence and continental unity (Microsoft Encarta Library, 2004). Other giant steps taken by Nkrumah for the promotion of African unity between then and 1960 included the followings:

(i) Organization of the first conference of independent African States in April 1958: On 15 April 1958, all the eight independent states of Africa (Ghana, Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, Liberia, Morocco, Ethiopia and Egypt) met at Accra, Ghana. The aims of the Conference, which was convened by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, were: to exchange views on matters of common interest; to explore ways and means of consolidating and safeguarding the independence of African states; to strengthen the economic and cultural ties between African countries; to decide on workable arrangements for helping fellow Africans still subject to colonial rule and to examine the central world problems of security and peace (Nkrumah, 1963: 136; Hallet, 1974: 409). According to Nkrumah, the conference was a historic occasion as free Africans met together on the African soil

to examine and consider African affairs. The Accra Conference no doubt resulted in a great upsurge of interest in the cause of African freedom and unity.

(ii) All- African People's Conference in December, 1958: In December 1958, also at the instance of Nkrumah, about sixty-two African nationalist organizations were represented at the conference which discussed at length plans to harmonize and coordinate strategies for nationalist agitations in Africa with the aim of achieving political independence for African states within the shortest period.

(iii) Conference of All- African Trade Union Federation, November 1959: This meeting was held in November 1959 at Accra, Ghana. It was well attended by representatives of trade unions all over Africa. Matters relating to the welfare of workers across Africa were deliberated upon.

(iv) Conference on Positive Action and Security in Africa: This conference took place in April 1960 at Accra, Ghana. It was called by the government of Ghana in consultation with other independent African States to discuss issues relating to the total liberation of Africa with the basic goal of guarding against neo-colonialism and balkanization of Africa (Nkrumah, 1963: 137-38).

(v) Organization of the Second Conference of Independent African States at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1960. In mid- 1960, twelve African states met as indicated above. The meeting was a follow- up of an earlier conference held at Accra, Ghana in April 1958. Members reiterated their political will and commitment to the total eradiation of colonialism from Africa.

(iv) Conference of African Women, 18 July, 1960: This conference was held at Accra, Ghana on 18 July, 1960. For the first time, African women made up of wives of African political and nationalist leaders, women activists and professionals met to give a gender backing to the concept of African unity and independence. The major agenda of the conference centered on freedom, unity, social and economic progress and the welfare of women. It was indeed a major step at enhancing the status of women and prepare them ahead for the task of nation building (Nkrumah, 1963: 138). It needs to be observed that despite all the above mentioned conferences conveyed by Kwame Nkrumah, efforts at African unity were more of rhetoric's. Cogent actions at actualizing African unity started to emerge in November 1958 largely due to the influence and commitment of Kwame Nkrumah.

The first giant step taken by Kwame Nkrumah towards African political union took place on 23 November, 1958 when Ghana and Guinea agreed to form the Ghana-Guinea Union with a draft Charter of a "Union of African States". In May 1959 the two countries formally announced the Union of their countries and christened it the "Nucleus of the Union of Independent African States" (Uwechue, 1996: 14; Onwubiko, 1985: 397). The Union was later joined by Mali in December 1960 to form the Ghana – Guinea- Mali Union. Later in April 1961, the Union produced a draft Charter of the United States of Africa. The basic aims and objectives of the organization as proposed in Article three (3) of the draft charter are:

(i) To strengthen and develop ties of friendship and fraternal cooperation between the member states politically diplomatically, economically and culturally.
(ii) To pool their resources in order to consolidate their independence and safeguard their territorial integrity.
(iii) To work jointly to achieve the complete liquidation of imperialism, colonialism and neo- colonialism in Africa and the building up of African unity.
(iv) To harmonize the domestic and foreign policies of its members so that their activities may prove more effective and contribute more worthily to safeguarding the peace of the world (Nkrumah, 1963: 142). According to Mazrui (1967: 45-48) and Onwubiko (1985: 397), the Union acted to bridge the gap between Anglophone and Francophone countries and served to harmonize and co-ordinate policies of the three states in strategic spheres.

Meanwhile, earlier in July 1959, Ghana, Liberia and Guinea met at Sanniquellie to discuss the question of African freedom and unity. At the end of the meeting, a communiqué titled 'Declaration of Principles' was issued which proposed the establishment of a Community of Independent African States with membership open to all Independent African States and federations. Its proposed motto was Independence and Unity (Nkrumah, 1963: 141).

Having examined some of the initial efforts made by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana to achieve African unity, it is pertinent at this juncture to identify in clear terms the major components and objectives of his proposed African Common Government.

The proposed African common government: Components and rationale

There is no gainsaying the fact that Kwame Nkrumah was one of Africa's greatest sons of all times (Mazrui, 2002, cited in Mensah, 2007). This conforms to Lenrie Peters' assertion that Kwame Nkrumah was miles ahead of his time in his postulation of a Common Government for Africa. (Peters, 1999: 8) Upon his personal observation that Africa was a very vast continent, blessed with diverse human and material resources but poverty ridden, grossly under- developed and notoriously exploited by advanced nations of the world, Nkrumah submitted that the only way out of Africa's social, political and economic predicaments was unity. His unwavering

belief in the universal brotherhood of Africa and a glorious future for Africans largely informed his vision of a United States of Africa and establishment of a common government for Africa.

Components of the African common government

The major components of his proposed Union Government included:

(i) The immediate creation of a grandiose continental superstructure.
(ii) Total surrender of sovereignty of individual independent African state to a supranational body.
(iii) The establishment of the Federal Union Government of Africa.
(iv) Establishment of an African High Command as the defence unit of the continental government. According to Nkrumah, the organization of a system of joint defence will enable the union government to mobilize all the means of defence at the disposal of the states in favour of any state in the union which may become a victim of aggression (Quist-Adade, 2010).

In his view, local forces of individual independent states of Africa were ineffective in combating any major attack upon any one of them. He argued that no single state in Africa was capable of protecting its sovereignty against imperialist aggressions. Hence, he cautioned that if Africans do not unite and combine their military resources for their common defence, individual states, may out of fear of insecurity, be drawn into making defence pacts with foreign powers which may endanger the security of the African continent (Nkrumah, 1963: 220). Apart from this, Nkrumah also warned that the maintenance of large military forces imposes a heavy financial burden on the then young African states that were in great need of capital for internal development. It would therefore be suicidal economically for each state to separately assume such a heavy burden of self defence where the weight of the burden could be easily lightened by sharing it among them.

Objectives of African common government

According to Kwame Nkrumah, an African Common Government will promote the unity of Africa and help in achieving a number of social, economic and political objectives as enunciated below.

(a) Projection of the African personality: Kwame Nkrumah was perhaps the greatest exponent of the concept of African personality. In general terms, the concept has to do with Africa speaking with one voice within the international community in order to command

the respect of other nations. At the first conference of Independent African States held in Accra, Ghana in 1958, Nkrumah submitted that the time had come when Africa should speak through the voice of her sons and daughters. He reaffirmed the same desire of projecting the African personality under a Common Government when in 1961 he wrote that;

"A union of African States will project more effectively the African personality. It will command respect from a world that has regard only for size and influence. I believe strongly and sincerely that the African race, united under one federal government will emerge as a great power whose greatness is indestructible (Nkrumah, 1961)."

To actualize this lofty goal, Nkrumah propounded that Africa should have a unified foreign policy and diplomacy. This would not only give political direction to Africa's joint efforts at projecting her image but would also reduce the crushing burden of maintaining separate diplomatic representation within and outside Africa. (Nkrumah, 1963: 220).

(b) Overcoming the destructive forces of neo-colonialism: Nkrumah equally enunciated the need for a united government of Africa in order to overcome the destructive forces of neo-colonialism. Stressing the need to construct the African society according to African aspirations, unhampered by the crushing and humiliating new-colonialist controls and interference, Nkrumah advocated a sustained African effort and ordered rule as indispensable tools for maintaining African independence. He, therefore, pleaded for a united action by African States to overcome the destructive forces of neo-colonialism. According to him:

"No sporadic act or pious resolution can resolve our present problems (of under-development). Nothing will be of avail, except the united act of a united Africa. We have already reached the stage where we must unite or sink (Agbi, 1986: 115)."

The urgency of the need to secure a united Africa in order to overcome the destructive forces of neo-colonialism was re-emphasised by Kwame Nkrumah on 24 February, 1966 in his reaction to the coup d'etat that removed him from office on that fateful date. While still away in China on an official visit, Nkrumah submitted that:

"What had happened in Ghana was no more than a tactical set-back in the African Revolutionary struggle of a type which I had often predicted. At the very first Conference of the O.A.U. in Addis Ababa, I had warned that the overall strategy remained unchanged but what had happened in Ghana made it all the more necessary to press on by revolutionary means to secure a United

Africa (Nkrumah, 1968: 10)."

(c) Enhancing the security and cohesion of African states: Nkrumah was of the view that the security and cohesion of the newly independent states of Africa lie in their unity. He therefore advised leaders of Africa to embrace the spirit and vision of unity because "salvation for Africa lies in unity for in unity lies strength" (Obang, 1997: 2). He warned further that African states must unite or sell themselves out to imperialist and neocolonialist exploiters or disintegrate individually (Nkrumah, 1963: 145). Africa, must therefore not allow itself to be balkanized based on the languages of their former colonizers. Hence, Nkrumah submitted that Africans must see themselves as Africans and realize that their interests could best be served by unity within an African community. This was supported by Emperor Selassie of Ethiopia when he declared in 1960 that "a Union of African States is a necessity which should be pursued energetically in the interest of African solidarity and security" (Nkrumah, 1963)

(d) Transforming the political map of Africa: Nkrumah vehemently criticized the artificial divisions and territorial boundaries created by the colonial powers which he regarded as a deliberate attempt to obstruct the political unity of African peoples (Welch, 1966: 16). To Nkrumah, therefore, the concept of pan- Africanism meant nothing unless it transcends the artificial boundaries imposed by colonialism. Consequent upon this, he urged African States to take a bold step at unification by scraping the frontiers which were drawn to suit the convenience of colonial powers. He declared bluntly that "those who fear the fusion of divisions and the annihilation of separatism were allowing themselves to be used as tools by those who profit from the balkanization of Africa" (West Africa, 1961: 555). Africa must henceforth be administered as one large empire to redraw the map of the continent. In his words: "all over Africa, artificial boundaries dividing brother from brother have been erected by the colonizers. It is within the greater context of African union that these artificial boundaries imposed by colonization and imperialism will disappear (Nkrumah, quoted in Obeng, 1997: 3).

(e) Overcoming the problem of cultural divisions in Africa: Nkrumah's proposed African common government was meant to overcome the problem of cultural divisions in Africa. It was an attempt to strengthen the bond of unity among African peoples and forge unity out of diversity. In his words:

"Critics of African unity often refer to the wide differences in culture, language and ideas in various parts of Africa. This is true, but the essential fact remains that we have a common interest in the independence of Africa. The

difficulties presented by questions of language, culture and different political systems are not insuperable. The present leaders of Africa have realized they have much in common, in their past history, in their present problems and in their future hopes (Nkrumah, 1961)."

To Nkrumah, the need to establish a common political union in Africa was therefore of paramount and urgent importance to protect the African destiny.

(f) Putting an end to European exploitation of Africa: Kwame Nkrumah also promoted the idea of an African Common Government in order to put an end to European exploitation of Africa. He believed strongly that the political union of African States was the only antidote to European exploitation of Africa. This he unequivocally hammered when he stated that:

"Unless and until the independent States of Africa are united in a single nation, the exploitation of Africa by Europe will never end (Onwubiko, 1985: 367)".

In a similar vein, Nkrumah also impressed it upon African leaders in 1959 the danger inherent in a divided Africa. He suggested that unless African States work toward some form of constitutional union the African continent will remain a balkanized mass of small individual unit used as a political and economic pawn by those external forces which seek to keep Africans divided and backward (Webster and Boahen, 1980: 329). By implication, Nkrumah had envisaged a balkanized Africa becoming an easy prey to the exploitative tactics of European nations and hence, his desires for a united Africa under a Common Government to be able to stand firmly and solidly defend the African continent against exploitation.

(g) Effective exploitation and co- ordination of Africa's resources for sustainable development: Another major objective of union government as postulated by Nkrumah was to enhance the effective exploitation and co- ordination of Africa's resources for sustainable socio- economic development. Given Africa's numerous natural and agricultural resources, Nkrumah opined that African people have remained poor in the midst of plenty due to inability to evolve a strong political union that can effectively manage her God given resources for the betterment of lives of our peoples. Poverty in Africa, he submitted, amounted to nothing but a paradox. In what appeared to be a plea for a united African government as a way out of the economic predicament of Africa, Nkrumah observed that:

"Individually, the independent States of Africa can do little for their people. Together, by mutual help, they can achieve much. But the economic development of the continent must be planned and pursued as a whole. A loose confederation designed only for economic

cooperation would not provide the necessary unity of purpose. Only a strong political union can bring about full and effective development of our natural resources for the benefit of our people (Nkrumah, 1961)."

(h) Promoting world peace and security: This was another advantage derivable to African peoples from a common African government as submitted by Nkrumah. There is need to recall that Nkrumah made the proposal for an African Common Government at the height of the cold war which divided the world into two opposing blocs of States. To provide an alternative political system anchored on cooperation, unity and mutual co-existence, Nkrumah opined that Africa should provide the lead as an example to be emulated across other continents of the world. This was perhaps why he advocated a political union of African States. According to him the greatest contribution that Africa can make to the peace of the world is to avoid the dangers inherent in disunity, by creating a political union which will also by its success, stand as an example to a divided world.

Opposition to Union government by African leaders

It is instructive to note that despite the fact that other African Heads of State shared Nkrumah's analysis of the precarious situation in which African countries found themselves before and after independence and in 1963 during the inauguration of the Organisation of African Unity at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, they were not very much enthusiastic about, and were not prepared to entertain the idea of a Union Government. As a matter of fact, there was divergence of views on the best way to achieve the desired unity in Africa. While the more radical States such as Ethiopia, Guinea and Mali that belonged to the Casablanca group of States favoured Nkrumah's proposal of political union of African States, the more moderate or conservative States like Ivory Coast, Liberia, Togo, Benin, Sierra Leone and Nigeria which belonged to the Monrovia group supported economic cooperation as the surest way to Africa unity (Onwubiko, 1985: 384). Many African Statesmen were indeed skeptical about the wisdom of political union of States at the early stage of their independence as they were afraid that political union might impinge upon the sovereignty of their States. They were also suspicious of Ghana's hegemonic political ambition and Nkrumah's purported attempt to become the president of Africa. This was perhaps why many supported economic cooperation in lieu of a political union.

It should be observed that African leaders' reaction to Nkrumah's proposal was notably cautious. President Sourou-Migan Apithy of Benin Republic for instance asserted that:

"The concept of a continental government has a place within the revolutionary framework of Africa's historic

evolution. A Continental Executive will obviously be the logical outcome of the dialectic procedure of African Unity. My Government feels, however, that it would be wise to maintain for a certain time the liberal conception of flexibility or organization of our Conference. We should also abstain from giving a supranational character to the bodies it sets up. Caution demands that the O.A.U. be maintained for the present as a multinational organization (quoted in Nyerere, 1966: 302)."

An analysis of Apithy's comment above reveals that he clamoured for more time for Africa to build the bridge of trust and confidence among African countries before setting up a supra-national institution as proposed by Nkrumah. He therefore, advocated a step-by-step approach to unity. The same view-point was expressed by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania when he opined that "to rule out a step-by-step progress in a march to unity is to rule out unity itself" (Nyerere, 1966: 302).

But, if other African leaders were cautious and mild in their reaction against Nkrumah's proposed African Common Government, the same cannot be said of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's Prime Minister. Balewa was not just radically critical of the wisdom behind Nkrumah's proposal; he was vehemently opposed to the idea and did not hesitate to confront Nkrumah on the idea. To Balewa, political union must be achieved through effective functional cooperation. Such a cooperation, in his wisdom, would be brought about by what Ogwurumba (1997: 58) referred to as "quiet diplomacy, peace and the policy of live and let live" premised on the respect for national boundaries, equality of all States, and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. By implication, Balewa wanted a functional and gradual approach to African Unity that would emphasize practical steps in economic, cultural, educational and scientific cooperation. This practical approach, he thought, would enable African States and peoples to understand themselves before undertaking the more complicated and more difficult arrangement of political union (Agbi, 1986: 117).

Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria who in 1963 assumed the role of the spokesman of the Monrovia group of States also rejected the idea of surrendering part or all of each State's sovereignty for the benefit of the Union of African States. Emphasizing Nigeria's official position on the idea, Balewa submitted that:

"Nigeria's stand is that if we want unity in Africa, we must first agree to certain essential things. The first is that African States must respect one another. There must be acceptance of equality by all the States. No matter whether they are big or small, they are all sovereign and their sovereignty is sovereignty (Agbi, 1986: 116)."

Balewa's reluctance to promote hasty amalgamation of African States into a political union, in which they would surrender their sovereignty, may be said to be realistic in

view of the fact that Nigeria was surrounded by weaker and smaller States, who were suspicious of Nigeria's size and economic strength. This had rather informed Balewa's insistence that a lasting union could not be built on suspicion. According to Balewa:

"If Nigeria appeared well-meaning to its neighbours, there was no need why they should not give to us our recognized position by virtue of our size and position; but it is not for us to go out to show the small nations that we are big in size and population and therefore, they have to come trailing behind us(quoted in Craig, 1965: 55)."

Between 1960 and 1965, Chazan et al. (1988: 313) report that Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria was totally committed to debunking the unity proposals of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah. Ojo (1983: 260) also reports that Balewa responded to Nkrumah's proposal by instituting an alternative arrangement for cooperation. The arrangement also featured a coalition network centred on Nigeria's immediate and other West African neighbours on regional associations such as the Monrovia Group. The coalition was largely directed towards a gradualist approach to African unity in opposition to Nkrumah's Union Government proposal. During the 1963 Addis Ababa meeting that led to the emergence of the Organisation of African Unity, differences between Nigerian and Ghanaian leaders on the issue of African Common Government became so heated that Balewa could no longer hide his hatred about Nkrumah's idea. In one of such heated arguments, Tafawa Balewa was reported to have arrogantly retorted Nkrumah's overtures that "Nigeria is big enough and does not need to join others" and added emphatically that "if others wish to join with Nigeria, their position would be made clear to them in such a union (Aluko, 1976: 111). Eventually, Nigeria, under Balewa, led a sporadic and vehement successful campaign against Nkrumah's efforts to mould a continental political structure of an African Common Government. This was because the O.A.U. that finally emerged came in form of an international organisation made up of independent African States without loss of sovereignty and with no common government. It indeed fell short of the kind of Union envisioned by Kwame Nkrumah.

Opposition by Western powers

As Nkrumah's vision was being confronted internally by some Africans, Western nations were not even pleased with it. Quist-Adade (2010) suggests that Nkrumah's tragedy was probably that he came to power at an inauspicious time, in the "heat" of the cold war, a period when the bi-polar East-West ideological confrontation made leaders like Nkrumah sacrificial lambs on the altar of superpower chauvinism. Indeed, Cold War politics broached no homegrown nationalists and patriots; it did

not forgive leaders who refused to worship the gods of Soviet communism or American capitalism. Apart from this, Western nations feeding on Africa's resources felt threatened by an African common government championed by Kwame Nkrumah as this would weaken their control on the African economy. Given the fact that the West has a strong economic interest in Africa, the Western powers have tried to utilize all the avenues possible to ensure that Africa remains politically disjointed and marginalized in the global economy.

African common government and the African union initiative

The creation of a Union Government was the principal topic for debate at the July 2007 AU summit held in Accra, Ghana, with the aim of moving towards a United States of Africa. Earlier in 2006, a study on the Union Government was adopted which proposed various options for "completing" the African Union project. There were deep divisions among African states on the proposals, with some (notably Libya) following a maximalist view leading to a common government with an AU army; and others (especially the southern African states) supporting rather a strengthening of the existing structures, with some reforms to deal with administrative and political challenges in making the AU Commission and other bodies truly effective (Biney, 2008: 149). Nkrumah's greatest bequest to Africa was the agenda of continental unification. No one else has made the case for continental integration more forcefully, or with greater sense of drama than Nkrumah. Although most African leaders regard the whole idea of a United States of Africa as wholly unattainable in the foreseeable future, Nkrumah even after death has kept the debate alive through his books and through the continuing influence of his ideas.

At the end of a heated debate in Accra, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government agreed in the form of a declaration to review the state of affairs of the AU with a view to determining its readiness towards a Union Government. Specifically, the Assembly agreed to:

(i) Accelerate the economic and political integration of the African continent, including the formation of a Union Government of Africa.
(ii) Conduct an audit of the institutions and organs of the AU; review the relationship between the AU and the Regional Economic Commissions; find ways to strengthen the AU and elaborate a timeframe to establish a Union Government of Africa.

The declaration also emphasized the 'importance of involving the African peoples, including Africans in the Diaspora, in the processes leading to the formation of the Union Government.'

Following this decision, a panel of eminent persons was set up to conduct the 'audit review'. The review team

began its work on 1 September, 2007. The review was presented to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at the January 2008 summit in Addis Ababa. No final decision was taken on the recommendations, however, and a committee of ten heads of state was appointed to consider the review and report back to the July 2008 summit held in Egypt. Presently, no final decision has been taken on the matter.

JUSTIFICATION OF NKRUMAH'S VISION

The precarious socio-economic and political tragedy confronting Africa since independence in the absence of a union government may provide some justification for Nkrumah's proposed African Common Government. A highlight of three of these problems is considered essential at this juncture.

(a) Regularity of conflicts in Africa: Though it is true that Africa has no monopoly of conflict, it is equally, true, that the regularity of conflicts in Africa has become one of the distinct characteristics of the continent. Since the 1960's, series of civil wars had taken place in Africa. Examples include: Sudan (1995 to 1990), Chad (1965 to 85), Angola since 1974, Liberia (1980 to 2003), Nigeria (1967 to 1970), Somalia (1999 to 1993) and Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (1991 to 2001). But apart from civil wars, Africa has also witnessed a number of intermittent borders and inter- state conflicts notable among which are the following:

(i) Nigeria- Cameroon dispute over Bakassi peninsular since the 1970's.
(ii) Algeria- Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountains area in October 1963.
(iii) Eritrea- Ethiopian crisis between 1962 and 1979.
(iv) Somalia-Ethiopia` dispute of 1964 to 1978 over the Ugandan desert region.
(v) Chad- Libya crisis of 1980 to 1982.
(vi) Kenya- Somalia border war of 1963 to 1967 in which Somalia aimed at recovering its lost territories including the Northern frontier district of Kenya.
(vii) Tanzania- Uganda crisis in 1978-79 (Barkindo et al., 1994: 279-32l; Cook and Killingray, 1983: 183-84; Europa, 1987: 187).The fact that the history of Africa as a continent is replete with conflicts has prompted the insinuation that Africa is the home of wars and instability. (Alabi, 2006: 41).

It is imperative to note that of the numerous causes of conflicts in Africa cited by experts, the arbitrary borders created by the colonial powers and the heterogeneous ethnic composition of African states have been frequently mentioned (Alabi, 2006: 57; Cammack et al., 1988: 13; Carment,1994: 137; Dare, 2001). It is apt to observe that Kwame Nkrumah had foreseen the frequent occurrence of wars and conflicts across Africa in the absence of a union government. This was perhaps why at the Casablanca Conference on 7 January, 1961 he said, among other things, that

" what I fear worst of all is that if we (African leaders) do not formulate plans and take active steps to form a political union, we(African peoples) would soon be fighting and warring among ourselves (Obeng,1997:3). "

Given this present situation in Africa, Cerebra (2007) charged African leaders to embrace unity government as proposed by Nkrumah as a panacea to the incessant wars on the continent. In his view, "with greater integration, the scope of conflict will be limited although this does not eliminate conflict altogether". To Dare (2001), the key, however, "is action by Africans on their own behalf. Their options for ending the circle of violence are few but practicable. Africa needs a new generation of leaders to define and pursue a dynamic political and economic agenda in order to create an atmosphere conducive to implementing development programmes".

(b) Poverty: Incessant strife and political conflicts across Africa hurt the continent's economic fortunes. Indeed, the devastating impact of wars and crisis on the economy of Africa has been considerable. The political stalemate and periodic eruptions of violence have resulted in significant cumulative declines in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This problem has been compounded by the frequent recurrence of drought in some sub- regions of Africa. Prospective investors in Africa have been turned away because of fear of instability, low profit and loss of investment to looting and arson during wars. Hence, the persistent failure to raise investment rates have translated into low GDP growth rates which had ranged between 3 and 4 percent for several years as against the 7 percent annual growth required to reduce poverty and reach the Millennium Development Goals. This has bred poverty across Africa. As at date, an estimated 340 million Africans live below poverty line (Aremu, 2010: 556). Unfortunately, Africa is not a poor continent. She is blessed with abundant natural resources such as gold, diamond and oil. These resources have however been exploited by the developed countries to their own benefit but at the detriment of African peoples. This leads us to another major socio-economic challenge confronting Africa.

(c) Exploitation of Africa's resources by the West: As rightly observed by Weinstein (2008) for centuries, beginning with the slave trade, the West has ruthlessly exploited the African continent. The turning of Africa into a commercial warren for the hunting of black skins was one of the chief sources of "primitive accumulation" that signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. Pathetically, he noted that the abduction and enslavement of millions of Africans was only the start because in the late nineteenth century, in what became known as the "scramble for Africa," the continent was

arbitrarily carved up into colonies by the leading European powers, which violently subjected its people and plundered the continent of its rich natural resources. In the post-independence eras, African states became weak pawns in the world economy, their path to development largely blocked by their debilitating colonial past. More recently, the West has choked Africa with an onerous debt regime, forcing many nations to pay more in interest on debts to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) than on health care, education, infrastructure, and other vital services combined.

This legacy of Western domination has left Africa devastated with crippling rates of poverty, hunger, and disease. The continent today has a gross national per-capita yearly income of $829-below that of the 1950s and 1960s in most African countries-and an average life expectancy of only fifty years (World Bank, cited in Weinstein, 2008). Sixty-two percent of Africans have no access to standard sanitation facilities, and two-thirds of the total world population suffering from HIV/AIDS (25.8 million people) live in Africa. It remains a continent abundant in human and natural resources, but these manage to enrich only a handful of African rulers and foreign capitalists. Using the words of Amuwo (2008), one may rightly suggest that "there is too much of the West in Africa to allow Africa to design its future on its own terms". Hence as Weinstein (2008) has rightly suggested, this situation may only be reversed if African resources are jointly managed by Africans for the benefit of Africans. This is another justification of Nkrumah's proposed common government.

Challenges facing the African common government

The challenges facing the proposed African Common Government are numerous. One of such challenges is the restriction of movement of its people across the breadth and length of the continent through the enforcement of the visa requirement on immigrants. The enforcement of the visa requirement symbolized the border of the mind that African leaders still kept. This will no doubt slow down the progress toward "globalizing" the African continent. Abolishing the visa requirement will however quicken the rate of integration among African states.

Another major challenge facing the proposed African common government is the lack of political will. Most African states are afraid of relinquishing their sovereignty and this has been a major obstacle to the evolution of common government. Situation is yet to change since the days of Nkrumah .For instance, Sako (2007).the executive director African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) said although there was a growing recognition of the economic and political advantages of having a united Africa, there was great doubt whether African states would be willing to surrender their sovereignty to a supra-national institution serving as a union government. To compound this problem is what Adhanja (2007) referred to as a relationship of "dishonesty and mistrust" that exist between countries across Africa. This may definitely hamper the success of a Continental Union government.

The social, economic and political inequalities among African states are another major obstacle to the evolution of Common Government. This has led weaker states to nurse some fear that the benefits of integration will be dominated by the economically stronger nations. This has greatly hampered the move toward political integration.

Another obstacle to political union in Africa is its diverse ethnic composition and the divergent interests of her peoples. Pesently, Africa has fifty four independent countries with a population of more than 350 million people. African countries also differ greatly in historical background, political structure, language, size (territory and population) external alignment and ideological orientation. Murapa (2007) captured the picture adequately when he noted that "Africa is perhaps the world's most fragmented region both politically and economically. We have diverse backgrounds and so our understanding and opinions will be different, this is a weakness".

Equally daunting an obstacle to political union in Africa, as mentioned earlier, is the recurrence of inter and intra-state wars and conflicts. Since the 1960's, series of civil wars, intermittent border clashes and inter- state conflicts, too numerous to mention, have taken place in Africa. Most pathetic about these conflagrations is that they have defied any meaningful solution and their negative impacts have gone a long way to retard the process of integration and peaceful coexistence in Africa. This has weakened cohesion, unity and the emergence of a political union in Africa till date.

Another challenge to the success of African Union Government is the non-inclusive nature of African people in the Unity government debates and deliberations as this may undermine its acceptance by the citizens of Africa. This will possibly deter the long-term success of this proposal since one of the values of the United States of Africa is popular participation and transparency in governance. As rightly observed by Deve (2007), "without public consultation, the United States of Africa proposal will have as much chance of flying as an elephant. African governments and citizens must therefore explore the immediate implications and opportunities a Union Government creates for ordinary citizens".

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper observes that Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (1909 to 1966) worked tirelessly for the emergence of the United States of Africa. As Quasi-Adade (2010) even suggests "all of Nkrumah's adult life was devoted to one and one passion alone—the liberation and unity of the

African race. He lived, dreamed and died for this ideal." Nkrumah had argued vehemently that only a federal state of Africa based on a common market, a common currency, a unified army and a common foreign policy could provide the launching pad for a massive reconstruction and modernization of the continent, and also optimize Africa's efforts to find its rightful place in the international arena and to effectively checkmate internal conflicts, fend off superpower interference, predatory and imperialistic wars (Quasi- Adade, 2010). His proposal of a common government for Africa however brought about great divisions among African leaders and prompted his enemies to brand him "dreamer, a megalomaniac, an African Don Quixote" (Quasi- Adade, 2010). But judging from the parlous state of the continent's desperate, dispirited, non-viable 54 countries today, Nkrumah's call for the formation of a United States of Africa government was a wise one, if brazen at the time.

As the debate on the relevance or otherwise of such a union government is still as fresh today as in the Nkrumah days, it is apt to state that though a continental union government as advocated by Nkrumah may not have been a panacea for all of the continent's seemingly intractable problems, one can say without fear of contradiction that the situation in the continent would have been much better than it is today if a union government had been instituted. Such a continental government would have allowed for greater coordination and mobilization of Africa's rich resources, which is fundamental for growth and development. Furthermore, a continental government will also enable Africa to compete favourably with other political unions and economic blocs in this globalized world. Advantages of economies of scale, the avoidance of duplicity, presenting a united voice in world affairs, and a collective bargain in international trade are, but a few of the fruits to be reaped in a continental union government (Traore, 2007).

The successes recorded by the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement in which both have united countries of disparate cultures, languages, and political and even ideological orientations, coupled with the surging globalization of the world economy point to the breadth of Nkrumah's vision.

Lastly, the efficacy of peace, democracy and good governance for sustainable development cannot also be overemphasized. As Peters (1999: 16) has strongly advised,

"…we as Africans must mould our future. First peace, then economic advancement. Sooner, Africa and Africans would be respected in the international community and the dignity of Blackman would be restored."

REFERENCES

Adhanja G (2007). AU Monitor, Peoples' Voices in the Grand Debate. Xinhua People's Daily Online --- http://english.people.com.cn/

Agbi SO (1986). The O.A.U. and African Diplomacy, 1963-1970. Ibadan: Impact Publishers.

Alabi DT (2006). "Emerging Trends and Dimensions of the Rwandan Crisis". Afr. J. Int. Affairs Dev., 11(1): 24-39

Aluko O (1976). Ghana and Nigeria; 1957-70: A Study in Inter-African Discord. New York: Barnes and Noble. p. 187

Amuwo K (2008). "Globalisation, NEPAD, and the Governance Question in Africa." African Studies Quarterly 6, no. 3: [online] URL: http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v6/v6i3a4.htm

Aremu JO (2007). The African Union: in Search of Continental Peace and Development. Ilorin, Majab Publishers. P. 148

Aremu JO (2010). "Conflicts in Africa: Meaning, Causes, Impact and Solution". Afr. Res. Rev., 4(4): 549-560. October.

Barkindo B, Omolewa M, Babalola G (1994). Africa and the Wider World (Book3). Agbor/Akure/Ibadan/Ilorin, Longman Nig. Plc. P. 174

Biney A (2008). "The Legacy of Kwame Nkrumah in Retrospect". J. Pan. Afr. Stud., 2(3): 129-159.

Cammack P, Pool D, Tordoff W (1988). Third World Politics: A Comparative Introduction. London, Macmillan Education Ltd P. 318

Carment D (1994). "The International Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict: Concepts, Indicators and Theory" J. Peace Res., 30(2): 299-316..

Cerebra J (2007). African Focus: Union Government for Africa Comes Under Spotlight in Zimbabwe. Xinhua People's Daily Online --- http://english.people.com.cn/

Chazan NR, Mortimer R, RavenHill J, Rothschild D (1988). Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa. London: Macmillan, 1988. P. 415

Cook C, Killingray D (1983). African Political Facts since 1945. London/Basingstoke, The Macmillan Press Ltd. P. 231

Craig DM (1965). Foreign Policy Process in the Emerging African Nation- Nigeria. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press. P. 139

Dare S (2001). "A Continent in Crisis: Africa and Globalization". Dollars and Sense magazine, July/August, Third World Traveler. www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Africa/Continent_Crisis.html

Deve T (2007). AU Monitor, Public Debates Launched Africa-Wide on Africa Day. Xinhua People's Daily Online --- http://english.people.com.cn/

Europa Publications Ltd. (1987). The Europa Year Book 1987: A world Survey. London.

Hallet R (1974). Africa since 1875: A Modern History. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1974. p. 219

Legum C (1987). "The Organization of African Unity as an Instrument of Africa's Foreign Policy". In Wright S, Brownfoot JN (eds). Africa in World Politics: Changing Perspective. London, Macmillan Press Ltd.

Mazrui A (1967). Towards Pax Africana. London: Weidenfeld and Nicoloson.

Mazrui A (2004). Nkrumah's Legacy and Africa's Triple Heritage between Globalization and Counter Terrorism. Accra: University Press. p. 62

Mensah K (2007). "Kwame Nkrumah and Political Marketing: Locating Campaign Strategy in Modern Political Campaigning". J. Pan-Afr. Stud., 1(8): 114-126.

Microsoft Encarta Library (CD) (2004)..

Murapa R (2007). AU Monitor, African Focus: Union Government for Africa Comes Under Spotlight in Zimbabwe. Xinhua People's Daily Online --- http://english.people.com.cn/

Nkrumah K (1961). I speak of Freedom: A statement of African Ideology. London: William Heinemann Ltd. p. 152

Nkrumah K (1963). Africa Must Unite. London: Longman, 1963. p. 229

Nkrumah K (1968). Dark Days in Ghana. London: Panaf Books. p. 223

Nyerere J (1966). Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1952-1965. Dar-es-Salam: O.U.P. 1966.

Obeng S (1997). Selected Speeches of Kwame Nkrumah. Accra, African Publication Ltd. p. 121

Ogwurumba A T (1997). "A Critical Analysis of Nigeria's West Africa Policy under the Babangida Regime". M.Sc. Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Ojo OJB (1983) "Nigeria: Foreign Policy and National Development and Integration", in

Onwubiko KBC (1985). History of West Africa, 1800 – Present Day (Book Two). Enugu,/Onitsha: Africana-Fep Publishers. p. 218

Peters L (1999)"… And Miles to go before I sleep" Fourth Annual Endowment Fund Lecture, West African Examinations Council.

Banjul . March 25.

Quist-Adade C (2010)." Welcome Address at Opening Ceremony of Kwame Nkrumah International (KNIC) Conference" held at Richmond, British Columbia, Canada, on 19 August, the Patriotic Vanguard, 24 August.

Sako S (2007). AU Monitor, African Focus: Union Government for Africa Comes Under Spotlight in Zimbabwe. Xinhua People's Daily Online --- http://english.people.com.cn/

Traore V (2007). AU Monitor, African Focus: Union Government for Africa Comes Under Spotlight in Zimbabwe. Xinhua People's Daily Online --- http://english.people.com.cn/

Uwechue R (1996). Africa Today. Lagos: Africa Books Ltd.

Webster JBA, Boahen AA (1980). The Revolutionary Years: West Africa Since 1800, London: Longman Group Limited. p. 302

Weinstein L (2008). "The New Scramble for Africa". International Socialist Review, July-August, Third World Traveler.

Welch CE (1966). Dream of Unity. New York: Cornell University Press. p. 396

West Africa (London) (1961). May 20.

Wiseman JA (1991). Political Leaders in Black Africa. Vermont, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.