

## The Nuclear Factor in the Politics of Apartheid and Liberation

by  
Femi Otubanjo

### INTRODUCTION

Among the highlights of the melodramatic 20th anniversary Summit of the Organization of African Unity was the Valedictory Report of the Secretary-General, Edem Kodjo.<sup>1</sup> Within the context of a *pro forma* account of his stewardship Edem Kodjo offered reformatory and policy prescriptions intended to improve the organization's structural and institutional ability to attain its multi-dimensional objectives. One important objective which Edem Kodjo addressed is the perennial concern of the OAU with the total liberation of the African continent from colonial and white minority rule.<sup>2</sup> The Secretary-General perceived this area of the organization's concerns as one in which the OAU can boast of the most achievement as well as one in which it is going to meet its stiffest test in the future.

The OAU's success in the area of decolonization derived from its persistent support for liberation movements and wars in Portuguese Africa and Zimbabwe which eventually paid off in the attainment of independence and black rule by these territories. Its future test, as seen by the Secretary-General, resides in the strength, resolve and stubbornness of the white minority population in South Africa and Namibia. The obvious determination of the South African government to give independence to Namibia on South African terms, rather than on terms acceptable to the United Nations and the OAU, has created an impasse which does not appear to be resolvable in the near future. Meanwhile, in South Africa itself no meaningful measure has yet been contemplated which would enable the black majority to participate on equal terms in the political and socio-economic life of the country. Indeed, rather than pursue meaningful reforms, the Afrikaner-dominated Nationalist Government seems intent on allowing only cosmetic changes which are unacceptable to African opinion, simultaneously building a formidable capacity to defend the *status quo* in Namibia and South Africa if the need arises.

South Africa's inclination toward maintaining the existing structure of racial relations and her resolve to defend it through the acquisition of a deterrent military capability — conventional and nuclear — constitute, for Edem Kodjo, the future challenge which the OAU must meet if it is to attain the important goal of eliminating colonial and white minority rule from the African continent. Edem Kodjo believes that the OAU has the capacity to attain this objective but that it needs to activate, sustain and enhance this capacity through total commitment and sacrifice, particularly in respect of military support for the liberation forces active in Namibia and South Africa. It is not that Edem Kodjo is a committed

skeptic who believes that negotiations are futile, rather he is a realist who while encouraging maximum effort in negotiations wants the OAU to match the build-up of military capacity and the increasing militarism in South Africa, if only for the purpose of attaining a balance of power in any negotiating encounter.

Thus in his valedictory report, Edem Kodjo advocates a "balance of terror" approach to the relations between the OAU and South Africa. The essence of this approach is that the OAU must encourage any African country which has the capacity to engage in a nuclear energy program to do so, as a matter of urgency and duty,<sup>3</sup> in order to develop a nuclear weapon capacity to counter-balance the nuclear capacity which South Africa is believed to have attained in recent years. For such an African country there will be no need to hide under the camouflage of a peaceful nuclear energy program; the development of an "African Liberation Bomb," akin to the "Islamic Bomb" so beloved of Pakistan, Iraq and Libya, would be a messianic duty which must be publicized to bolster the morale of the oppressed Africans and Liberation movements. Further, it would serve to remind the white minority of the inevitability of change and the futility of resistance.

This call to nuclear arms was the first time any Secretary-General had attempted to focus the attention of African leaders at any OAU summit on the desirability of a counter-balancing African nuclear power in relation to South Africa. Although South Africa's nuclear energy program had been the subject of attack by individual African leaders (particularly after the reported detonation of a nuclear device in September 1979<sup>4</sup>), the OAU had at no time in its deliberations, either at the Council of Ministers or at the Council of Heads of States and Governments, considered South Africa's nuclear energy program as an additional problem in the fight for decolonization and black majority rule. Rather, the OAU continued to adopt resolutions on South Africa in a way which did not acknowledge the possible use of nuclear weapons in the decolonization process. At the 20th Summit, for example, the OAU repeated its customary condemnation of the apartheid system in South Africa and South Africa's occupation of Namibia and called for greater support for and escalation of the armed struggle in Namibia and South Africa.<sup>5</sup> For the past twenty years the OAU has perceived the armed struggle for the liberation of white-ruled South Africa in terms of a massive and sustained non-conventional military (guerrilla) onslaught on South Africa.

Edem Kodjo may have had several reasons for his "balance of terror" statement. He may have been seeking to modify the standard African perception or he may simply have been attempting to rouse the OAU from its current lethargy by reminding it of the immensity of the threat to Africa. Alternatively, he may just have been out to give encouragement to, or seek corporate support for, the few countries which have mooted the idea of embarking on a nuclear energy research program.<sup>6</sup> It is, indeed, because of the existence of such nuclear aspirants within the OAU that the idea of "an African liberation bomb" is not just an ephemeral and terminal idea whose significances will attenuate with the receding influence of Edem Kodjo. Instead, it is a potential element

in the politics of the OAU and decolonization in Africa. Although South Africa is believed to have a nuclear capability, there is no indication as to how this capacity may be neutralized to attain a military solution to the problem of white intransigence in South Africa. The suggestion seems to be that the development of an African bomb and the capacity to deliver it will be enough to change radically the strategic balance in Africa *vis à vis* South Africa and compel South Africa to seek accommodation with Africa rather than risk nuclear annihilation.

This optimistic view of the nuclear bomb raises, for the African continent, what might be termed a "nuclear paradox," that is, the contraposition between the functions allocated to the nuclear bomb. The Africans perceive the South African bomb as negative input into the politics of apartheid, the impact of which will freeze the *status quo* in South Africa while attributing to the African bomb the role of a liberator. The nuclear bomb promises both to preserve an unwanted system and to create a new one. The paradox dissolves, however, once it is assumed that the South Africans will not use their nuclear capacity in their own defence, yet, because this is an assumption which cannot realistically enter into any calculation of the role of nuclear bombs in the politics of decolonization, the paradox persists.

Once the readiness of the South Africans to use their nuclear capability enters the power equation on the African continent, any African bomb which may be developed ceases to be an instrument of liberation. An African bomb in this context cannot be a rational instrument of policy considering that its purpose is to liberate and not to destroy; it will be an unusable military instrument. To restore any rationality to the bomb one would have to presume its diplomatic utility. This is to say that the development of an African bomb will redress the imbalance in military capabilities in relation to South Africa and increase the pressure on South Africa to embark on meaningful socio-political reforms aimed at extending the rights and privileges, now exclusively enjoyed by the white population, to the black majority. This pressure will derive from the South Africans perceptions of the dangers inherent in the possibility of African nuclear power. Such a power may not always behave rationally and may either offer the bomb to a liberation movement, such as the ANC, or use the bomb directly irrespective of the dangers of retaliation, or other consequences, toward the object of its liberation efforts. If the South Africans fail to perceive this danger or fail to possess the means of neutralizing the possibility of an irrational use of the bomb by an African nuclear power, then the diplomatic utility of the bomb would evaporate.

South Africa's current resistance to Namibia's independence and universal democracy in South Africa is based essentially on the perception of an ability to neutralize any military threat emanating from Africa. It is this confidence which the advocates of an African nuclear weapon seek to undermine in order to speed up the Namibian independence process and bring about acceptable socio-political reforms in South Africa.

## **THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF NUCLEAR CHOICE**

The prescription of a nuclear option for Africa must be understood against the background of the failure of diplomacy to bring about any desirable change in Namibia and South Africa.

In Namibia the hopes of independence, which reached an apex with the promise of UN supervised elections in 1978, have disappeared with South Africa's intransigence and prevarication. South Africa frustrated the Geneva Conference of January 1981, which had been summoned to discuss the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution No. 435, by refusing to sign the ceasefire document. Resolution 435 called for

a ceasefire, the restriction of South African and Namibian forces to a specified number of bases, the emplacement of a United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) to monitor the ceasefire, the repeal of all discriminatory laws and the release of all political prisoners precedent to the holding of free and fair elections for a Constituent Assembly, the entry into force of a new constitution drawn up by the assembly and the consequent achievement of independence of Namibia.<sup>7</sup>

South Africa's excuse for not acceding to the ceasefire proposals was its dissatisfaction with the UN's recognition of SWAPO as the sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people. The UN, in South Africa's view, was not an impartial agent and, given the dominance of radical and Third World countries hostile to South Africa in the UN, she could not trust UNTAG to act in an impartial way. The South Africans were also unhappy with the UN electoral proposals which upheld the democratic ideal of one man, one vote. Instead the Botha regime preferred a two-tier voting system under which each voter would cast two ballots: one on the basis of proportional representation for national candidates and the other a 'winner-take-all' for local candidates.

By June 1982, it appeared that the Western Contact Group had succeeded in restoring the momentum of negotiation. However, in spite of South Africa's public affirmation of sympathy for a new set of proposals worked out by the Contact Group and accepted by SWAPO and the Frontline States, South Africa failed to participate in the New York four-party talks which were intended to iron out differences on substantial issues. Worse still, South Africa escalated her aggression on SWAPO bases in Angola and called for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola before any serious negotiations on the future of Namibia could begin.

The introduction of a linkage between the presence of Cuban troops in Angola and the future of Angola seems to have wiped from the African mind any faith in South Africa's intentions for Namibia. As a result, there was reaffirmation of commitment to the liberation struggle by SWAPO and of support for this struggle by the Frontline States, Nigeria and the OAU immediately after the abortive Geneva Conference:

We are left with no alternative but to support the escalation and intensification of the armed struggle heroically

being waged by SWAPO. In this regard the OAU member states as a whole pledge their full backing. Africa pledges increased material and financial assistance to SWAPO until final victory and total liberation of Namibia.<sup>8</sup>

The deep frustration inherent in this fatalistic acceptance of violence as the only workable instrument of change in Namibia conforms to the enthusiastic solution of the former Secretary-General of the OAU, a nuclear option in the politics of decolonization. The logic of this solution is even more compelling if it is remembered that in South Africa itself the future for the black man, as conceived by the dominant power elites, is less promising than what awaits the Namibians.

The wind of change which Prime Minister Vorster promised in the aftermath of Angolan independence failed to materialize. In fact, as the limited reforms embarked upon by the Botha administration have since shown, the change was not intended to touch the African population. Botha's attempt to create an acceptable face for apartheid has been embodied in the constitutional reforms, the intent of which is to create a three-chamber parliament for three of the recognized races in South Africa — Whites, Coloureds and Indians. This reform was designed to give Coloureds and Indians greater decision-making powers in matters exclusive to their own communities. It envisages a Coloured Community Assembly of ninety-two members (eighty-two elected, six appointed on a proportional basis and four appointed directly) and an Asian Assembly of forty-six members (forty-one elected, three appointed on a proportional basis and two appointed directly).<sup>9</sup>

The more important aspect of the constitutional reform from the point of view of apartheid are the provisions for power sharing at the centre. At this level of government, the reform envisages "a Council of Ministers with a membership of six Ministers, three Coloured Ministers and two Asian Ministers in addition to the three Premiers who are members ex-officio. The State President will serve as the chairman of the Council of Cabinets."<sup>10</sup>

The Afrikaner expects this limited recognition of the political rights of Coloureds and Indians to reverse the age-long alienation of these two racial groups from South African society and to increase their stake in, and support for, it without compromising the Afrikaner commitment to separate development. But although this concession may seem only cosmetic to those who wish to see universal suffrage in South Africa, in the opinion of a great many Afrikaners it is too revolutionary. Constitutional reform is considered to be the chief reason for the drop in support for the Nationalist Party and the strong showing of the ultra-right Reconstituted Nationalist Party (HNP) of Jaap Marais in the 1981 General Elections.<sup>11</sup>

A major manifestation of the restiveness in Afrikanerdom about this limited and obviously inadequate concession to racial equality is the recent rift within the Broederbond, an influential secret society. Dr. Carel Boshoff, who was chairman of the Broederbond, resigned in July

1983 following controversy over his support of a report by the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs attacking the new constitution as a force which would heighten rather than regulate conflict between races. Dr. Boshoff himself is said to have attacked the new constitution "for deviating from the doctrine of separate development by not making adequate provision for the 'self-determination' of South Africa's different races."<sup>12</sup> Dr. Boshoff's call for the withdrawal of the new constitution for redrafting is alleged to have the backing of at least 40% of the Broeders.<sup>13</sup> Although the new Chairman of the Bond, Professor Lange, is inclined towards the constitutional reforms, there are two factors which stay that inclination. First, the level of dissent concerning the reforms and, second, the not insignificant fact of Dr. Boshoff's immediate election to the executive of the powerful Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies,<sup>14</sup> with which hundreds of Afrikaner cultural societies are affiliated, suggesting a deep and widespread apprehension about the reforms and opposition to them.

Although the opposition lost out in the referendum it may still be able to undermine the intent if not the form of the constitutional reforms. Based on previous experience, it would be reasonable to presume that the Botha regime will attempt compromises which are more likely to satisfy Afrikaner parochialism than the demands for adaptation in a less hospitable and less understanding world. In that event, new structures may be created in race relations but they are unlikely to have any significant consequences for the patterns of those relations. The new constitution was not devised in order to create a racially integrated political system. However, the suggestion that it has the potential to do so is likely to stimulate counterbalancing measures to negate this potential. This can be expected if the National Party hopes to arrest the latent danger posed by conservatives and ultra-right elements to its dominance in the politics of White South Africa.

The Botha regime, however, appears committed to this new constitutional formula which promises to extend meaningful citizenship and power-sharing to 2.5 million Coloured and 800,000 Indians. And, although the Coloured and Indian population is generally skeptical about their potential political gains, this reform remains the most radical movement away from apartheid in South Africa's history and the one which has the most chance to bring about the political and racial integration much feared by right-wing Afrikaner opinion. Yet, even if this potential is realized, the new constitutional formula would not have begun to resolve the problem for which South Africa is almost universally condemned, for the critical problem needing resolution is not that of the status and privileges of the Coloured and Indian populations. Although the rights of Coloureds and Indians in a multi-racial society are a constituent and enduring element of the fight for justice and racial equality in South Africa, the focus of this fight has been and remains the status of the black majority in South Africa.

For the 21 million black Africans, the Afrikaner commitment to the philosophy of a separate development remains the determinant of their rights and privileges in South Africa. For this vast and long-suffering

majority the new constitutional proposals offer no hope of future accommodation in the South African policy. It is, instead, decidedly silent on the place of black Africans in the new "liberalized" order in South Africa. Indeed, the constitutional reforms, as promoted by the Botha regime, indicate a resolute commitment to apartheid and a total lack of desire to face the logic of the demographic situation in South Africa and the ethos of group relations in the twentieth century. It is a testimony to the depth of this commitment in the Afrikaner psyche that these inadequate proposals have been met with virulent opposition on the grounds that they promise to undermine the age-old favorable isolation of the white population.

This commitment is also evident in the resolute pursuit of the Bantustan policy for the 21 million Africans in spite of its overwhelming rejection by the affected Africans and the international community. This persistence is understandable, however, if the 'magic' of the Bantustan policy, at least from the point of view of the Afrikaner, is recognized. By creating independent ethnic homelands for the African population, the Afrikaner hopes to soothe world opinion as, in these homelands, Africans are seemingly granted the opportunity to exercise full citizenship rights which are denied them in South Africa. The inferior, disenfranchised African becomes a full-fledged citizen of a newly created sovereign state administered by fellow Africans. Since these new states are sovereign in principle, South Africa cannot be held responsible for the subsequent activities of their governments, particularly in respect to the rights of their citizens and their material well-being.

The Afrikaner elites are not, however, merely concerned with a method of absolving themselves from any responsibility for the welfare of an unwanted population. Rather the seemingly benevolent policy of enfranchising the African and enhancing his dignity by the awarding of citizenship has selfish intent. By creating the independent homelands, the Afrikaner seeks to impose a demographic solution on a problem which is fundamentally one of political and distributive justice. The allocation of new citizenships to the African population automatically deprives the Africans of South African citizenship while encouraging the evolution of a new South Africa in which white citizens will enjoy numerical superiority.

That the solution preferred by the Afrikaner for the multi-racial problem is inappropriate is illustrated by its rejection by the African population, all the significant groups and institutions with general and specific interests in South African affairs (the OAU, the Liberation Movements, the UNO) and by the overwhelming majority of world opinion. This rejection derives from the mutually exclusive perceptions of the key problem in South Africa — the problem of redefining the status of the black African majority in South Africa's socio-economic order. As far as most of the world is concerned the Bantustan policy aims at avoiding the problem rather than providing meaningful, long-lasting and universally acceptable solutions.

The universal rejection of the Bantustan policy derives from the

nature of the Bantustans and its implications for the future of the black African. In the first place, the Bantustans are organized in a haphazard geographical manner without any consideration for contiguity. An even more serious element of their geography is that they are located in the most unproductive land areas of South Africa constituting roughly 17% of the total land area. The black African population which constitutes nearly 75% of the South African population is thus expected to live on and utilize only 17% of the land area leaving the greater proportion of the remaining 83% in the hands of the white population which constitutes only 20% of the total South African population.

Thus for the African, the Bantustans, with their poor, overcrowded and overgrazed land offer very little hope of escape from a life of squalor and permanent impoverishment. This prognosis of life in the Bantustans was not unknown to the Afrikaner political elites. The report of the Quail Commission (1978) into independence for Ciskei, for example, was very explicit in its observations and conclusions.<sup>15</sup> The Commission saw appalling living conditions, massive unemployment (39%), low agricultural productivity, chronic shortage of housing, overgrazed land, a total lack of industries, a predominantly female population and living standards which were the worst in South Africa.<sup>16</sup> Besides, the Quail Commission saw in the Ciskeians a total lack of enthusiasm for the idea of independence and, therefore, recommended that they would be better off with universal suffrage in a unitary state. But, despite the clear evidence of its unfeasibility, Ciskei was granted its independence in 1981 joining Transkei (1976), Bophuthasana (1977) and Venda (1979) in the Afrikaner march towards a total solution to the African problem.

The Bantustans have proved to be independent only in concept and not in reality. All of them rely heavily on the income from their migrant labor force and more significantly on South Africa's subsidy. In 1980 Transkei received nearly one hundred and thirteen million rands (R113) as a subsidy from South Africa, constituting more than 70% of its total revenue<sup>17</sup> while for Venda the South African subsidy represented 90% of its expected revenue for the same year. Attempts to moderate this dependence through structural adjustments in the economy have so far failed owing to the unwillingness of South African investors to take advantage of the favorable labor conditions and concessions to encourage industry to move into Bantustans or even in to the border areas. Thus, from all indications the Bantustans are destined, in the immediate future, to remain heavily dependent on South Africa for their economic survival and, therefore, remain essentially quasi-colonies of South Africa.

Given their current predicament and future prospects the Bantustans do not offer the Africans a realistic incentive for abandoning their South African citizenship for any other. Even more critical, from the point of view of acceptance, is the fact that the Bantustan policy does not represent the desires of a majority of Africans who are supposed to benefit from this benevolent allocation of new citizenships. From all indications the Africans prefer to remain South African citizens with full political, economic and social rights. This point has been repeatedly and forcefully articulated by all the significant associations and persons



representing African interests as well as by such concerned bodies as the OAU and UNO.

As long as the Afrikaners persist with their preferred solution they can expect it to be resisted in the most violent way possible. The Afrikaners are fully aware of this and the increased activities of the liberation movements in the region have served as a constant reminder of the unacceptability of the Bantustan solution. Notwithstanding the obvious signals, the Afrikaners have shown no intention of abandoning this solution and seem to be prepared to face any violent attempts to bring about a different kind of order from the one of their design. In this context, military weapons play a prominent part. Given the logic of military power and of South Africa's isolation from the rest of the world, it is not surprising that she should seek, and has consistently sought, for herself the most sophisticated and most destructive weapons in the world today, if only to deter her enemies. It is also not surprising that, faced with South Africa's intransigence, the Africans, apart from accepting the inevitability of a protracted war of liberation, have begun to think and talk of the need to acquire an African nuclear bomb which will not only neutralize South Africa's nuclear advantage but will undermine the military superiority upon which the stubbornness and equanimity of the Afrikaner political elites are founded.

### **THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOMB**

The nuclear weapons debate in the OAU and in a few African states such as Nigeria, is for the most part, inbred with the belief that South Africa has the capacity to develop an atomic bomb if it has not already done so. There is no serious disagreement in Africa, about South Africa's nuclear status; both the proponents and opponents of a nuclear option for black Africa are agreed that South Africa either already possesses some nuclear warheads or has the capacity and, more importantly, the will to develop and use nuclear weapons. The South Africans themselves have consistently denied the possession of nuclear warheads or of plans to develop them while not denying their ability to create them should the need arise.<sup>18</sup> The scenario of South Africa as a nuclear power began to acquire the seriousness that it now poses for the African with South Africa's discovery of a new uranium enrichment process<sup>19</sup> and, by implication, the acquisition of an enhanced capacity to develop nuclear weapons.

This discovery put within South Africa's grasp the potential to develop nuclear weapons. Given the absence of international supervision at the two major nuclear reactor sites at Pelindaba and Valindaba, and South Africa's commitment to military invincibility, it would not be unreasonable to be suspicious of South Africa's intentions in the area of nuclear policy. As far back as 1974, the Vice President of South Africa's Atomic Energy Board revealed the extent of South Africa's development in nuclear research when he suggested after the India atomic test of May 1974, that South Africa was capable of making a bomb and "was in fact technologically more advanced than India in the field."<sup>20</sup>

Confirmation of this capability appeared in the form of a proposed atomic test by South Africa in the Kalahari Desert in the summer of 1977. This test was, ostensibly, thwarted by the combined pressures of the Soviet Union, the United States of America and Western European powers. The South African Foreign Minister, at the time, Mr. Roelof Botha, denied the allegations that South Africa was planning to test a nuclear device although U.S. reconnaissance satellite photographs revealed construction in the Kalahari Desert which was identified to be typical of a test site.<sup>21</sup> The same response was given to the U.S. intelligence report of October 1979 "that a low-yield nuclear explosion had occurred in an area including South Africa."<sup>22</sup> Both the chairman of the South African Atomic Energy Board, Dr. Wynand de Villiers and the Foreign Minister, denied any knowledge of the explosion while one of South Africa's nuclear experts<sup>23</sup> suggested that a Soviet intercontinental missile, which failed to explode after landing twelve hundred miles south of the Cape in 1963, might have been responsible for the explosion.

These denials may be genuine and may suggest that South Africa has not yet developed a nuclear warhead or, at least, not one that is testable, but they by no means invalidate the suggestion that South Africa could produce nuclear warheads if it chooses and was determined to do so. An alternate view is to see South Africa as using the nuclear threat — that is, the threat to go nuclear — to forge a favorable strategic relationship with the United States and NATO. The suggestion here is that the advertisement of her nuclear capacity is a more effective policy option than the actual production and use of nuclear weapons.<sup>24</sup> By publicizing its capacity to develop nuclear weapons which, in view of the uranium enrichment formula developed by South African scientists and the possession of a reprocessing plant capable of a separating plutonium from the reaction full waste, is highly credible. South Africa, it is argued, is seeking to scare the Western powers into a policy of accommodation or co-operation since it would be in their interest to be in a position to restrain a nuclear-armed South Africa. This is the explanation which has sometimes been given for the alleged test preparations in the Kalahari Desert in 1977. This view is unacceptable for a number of reasons.

In the first place, the scenario is based on the assumption that South Africa does not yet possess nuclear warheads. There is no evidence as to South Africa's nuclear weapons status. The fact that South Africa has not yet tested a nuclear device is not proof that it has not developed one.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, it is unlikely that the logic of South Africa's nuclear research will be deliberately short-circuited by faith in the beneficial consequences of the announcement effect of nuclear capability. While a nuclear-armed South Africa may attract greater military interaction with the Western powers,<sup>26</sup> this may not preclude the attempt by the Western powers, to abolish the apartheid system and to create of a just society in South Africa. In any case, the relentless pressures of liberation movements, the OAU and others is likely to ensure that the Western powers do not abandon this end.

A third and perhaps more compelling reason for believing that South Africa will not be content to limit her nuclear capability to

peaceful uses alone resides in the ideology and psychology of the Afrikaner power elites. As Professor Spence has warned, any assessment of nuclear possibilities in South Africa must take account of

the distorting influence of the Afrikaner's ideological perception, the growing sense of isolation on the part of its leadership, the deep-rooted fear of an aggressive, revolutionary Soviet Union and the absence of a sizeable professional elite skilled in the theory and practice of nuclear strategy and contributing to informed debate on these matters.<sup>27</sup>

The resolute transformation of South Africa into a garrison-state through external procurement and domestic development of military weapons and the persistent attachment to the philosophy of a separate development, as evidenced in the turmoil over the constitutional reforms and commitment to the Bantustan policy, are symptoms of the disturbing influences which compel a pessimistic assessment of South Africa's nuclear intentions.

There is nothing in current Afrikaner attitudes or recent South African politics which undermine South Africa's status as a 'Pariah State,' one which, in Richard Brett's taxonomy of potential nuclear powers, combines "the disadvantages of pygmies and paranoids along with more visceral and unremitting opposition by their regional enemies and growing isolation from most of the rest of the world."<sup>28</sup> It can, of course, be argued that South Africa's superiority in conventional weaponry and abilities is adequate for coping with the pressures on a pariah state. However, this conventional superiority can only discourage the acquisition of nuclear arms if the permanence of conventional superiority can be guaranteed. But as long as the opposition of the Africans and the commitment to change in South Africa retains its vitality, there can be no guarantee that the strategic balance will not be disturbed in a way which would compel South Africa to resort to the development of nuclear arms.

### **AFRICA'S NUCLEAR PREFERENCE**

African reaction to the prospects of a nuclear-armed South Africa has been generally limited to the rhetoric of condemnation and resolutions, at OAU meetings, to that effect. African concern about South Africa's nuclear program came to the fore with the announcement in 1976 of France's<sup>29</sup> agreement to sell twin 1000MW pressurized water reactors, together with supplies of low enrichment fuel, to the South African Electricity Supply Commission. At the 13th OAU Summit<sup>30</sup> the host Prime Minister, Sir Seewosague Ramgoolam, in his opening speech, initiated the evolution of an African opinion when he warned about the dangers inherent in the French reactor sales and the subsequent nuclearization of South Africa. The OAU shared Sir Seewosagur's fear and adopted a resolution condemning France's decision to sell nuclear reactors to South Africa. By the 14th OAU Summit<sup>31</sup> the list of South Africa's nuclear collaborators had grown significantly and the resolution on the matter condemned France, West Germany, Israel and the United

States for their co-operation with South Africa in the nuclear field.<sup>32</sup> Condemnation gave way to positive proposals at the 15th OAU Summit. The Council of Heads of States and Governments adopted Resolution 6 which called on "all concerned to end all forms of co-operation with the racist regime" and, on the UN Security Council, "to discuss issuing resolutions to ban all forms of nuclear co-operation with South Africa...".<sup>33</sup>

Between 1978 and 1983 the issue of South Africa's nuclear program had only a residual interest for the OAU attracting no significant discussion until the outgoing Secretary-General, Edem Kodjo, raised the matter in his Valedictory speech to the 20th Summit in Addis Ababa. But even at the 20th Summit the discussion of nuclear matters was perfunctory and was not featured in the resolutions adopted at the summit. This apparent lapse of interest may be explained by the preoccupation of the OAU, in those years, with the more attainable goals of Rhodesian and Namibian independence as well as other problems requiring and capable of urgent and more realistic solution. Still, the lack of enthusiasm for Edem Kodjo's nuclear prescription derives in part from the loss of credibility by the author of the proposal<sup>34</sup> and from an acute awareness of Africa's limitations in such an area of high technology and massive financial requirements.<sup>35</sup>

Individual African states have consistently expressed concern at the dangers inherent in the nuclearization of South Africa. This was evident in African reaction to the reported explosion of a low-yield nuclear device in the South Atlantic in September 1979. African spokesmen uniformly expressed skepticism regarding South Africa's denials and saw the explosion as part of South Africa's efforts to build nuclear weapons with which she intends to dominate the South African quadrant, blackmail other African nations and maintain the apartheid system indefinitely. There seems, however, to be a general acceptance of the view that nuclear weapons do not constitute an attainable or desirable option in resolving Africa's colonial problems.<sup>36</sup> Thus, there is a noticeable lack of investment in nuclear research or nuclear energy programs in nearly all member states of the OAU. Only three of the states — Egypt, Libya and Nigeria — have a nuclear energy program and, significantly, the nuclear energy programs in Egypt and Libya have no prospects of being used to create, and put at the disposal of the OAU, a nuclear strike force directed against South Africa. If Egypt and Libya were to develop nuclear weapons, such weapons would, in all probability, be placed in the service of pan-Arabism rather than of pan-Africanism. Consequently, only the nuclear energy program in Nigeria offers a very remote potential for the creation of an African liberation bomb.

### **NIGERIA'S NUCLEAR ENERGY PROGRAM**

Nigeria's rudimentary nuclear program was initiated by the military regime of Lt-General Obasanjo in 1976. This was a period of demonstrable change in Nigeria's domestic and foreign policy. The military government led by Murtala Muhammed adopted a messianic posture both in domestic and foreign affairs as a corrective to the

increasing inept, corrupt and lethargic nature of the Gowon regime which it had replaced in a military coup on July 29, 1975. This posture was manifested, in domestic affairs, in a comprehensive purge of the public services. The purpose of the purge was to create a new ethics of public service, and in foreign affairs to achieve a clear articulation of Nigeria's interest and foreign policy goals. This change in Nigeria's foreign policy posture was dramatized fully in Nigeria's stubborn support for the MPLA in the Angolan Civil War and the open conflict with the Ford Administration over policy options with respect to Angola's independence. One major catalyst for Nigeria's policy choice regarding Angola was South Africa's intervention in the Angolan civil war, on the side of FNLA/UNITA alliance. For General Muhammed, South Africa's intervention represented an intolerable attempt to install a client state in Angola which could be manipulated to thwart the nationalistic aspirations of the people of Namibia and Zimbabwe.<sup>37</sup>

The vindication of General Muhammed's policy option relative to Angola, by the victory of the Cuban-backed forces of the MPLA, helped to sustain the new radicalism in Nigeria's foreign policy behavior even after General Muhammed was assassinated in the abortive coup of February 1976. Nigeria became increasingly committed to the cause of decolonization to the extent that she soon came to be recognized and treated as the sixth frontline state in spite of her geographical distance from the South African sub-region. It was the logic of this commitment which propelled Nigeria to respond in 1976 to the news of France's intention to sell nuclear reactors to South Africa. Nigeria responded by adopting a policy of nuclear energy development which goal is that of creating an African nuclear counterweight to South Africa. Nigerian spokesmen<sup>38</sup> did not hide the fact that this was the ultimate goal of Nigeria's nuclear energy research.

In pursuance of its nuclear ambition, Nigeria established a Nuclear Energy Commission in October 1976 to co-ordinate Nigeria's nuclear energy research and development efforts while two universities — Ife and Ahmadu Bello (Zaria) — were designated special centres<sup>39</sup> for promoting the teaching, research and development of nuclear sciences. Earlier on (in the summer of the same year), a high-powered government delegation led by Major-General Yar'Adua had visited West Germany and Canada to solicit assistance for Nigeria's desire to purchase nuclear reactors. In addition, serious consideration was given to the exploitation of Nigeria's uranium resources leading to the establishment of a Nigerian Uranium Mining Company which, with technical assistance from Minatome A/S of France, gained monopolistic control of uranium deposits in Nigeria. To augment domestic uranium stock, Nigeria has substantial interests and investment in uranium mines in the Republic of Niger and the People's Revolutionary Republic of Guinea.

However, despite the enthusiasm of the military government and the efforts to establish a nuclear energy program, very little has been achieved in the way of development of the infrastructure of a nuclear industry. Nigeria's nuclear program remains within the walls of the two centres at Ife and Zaria which have continued to train and retrain the manpower in

various aspects of nuclear technology, without any serious probability of the skills so taught being put to use.

The slow pace of the implementation of Nigeria's nuclear aspirations derives from domestic and international constraints. At the domestic level, the priorities of the Obasanjo regime shifted very rapidly between 1976 and 1979. The initial zeal for foreign policy posturing was dissipated by the efforts needed to create the infrastructures of a new democratic state and the energies required to manage a tottering economy. The task of preparing the way for civilian administration and dealing with economic difficulties precipitated by the erratic prices and the sale of oil altered the perception of Nigeria's capability and the instruments required for attaining policy objectives. Thus, the nuclear program receded into the background, joining the mass of programs in the low-priority category.

At the international level, there were no enthusiastic sellers of nuclear reactors to Nigeria. The increased vigilance of the United States over the sale of reactors to non-nuclear states, particularly after the alarm over India's nuclear success, and American readiness to invoke sanctions on violators of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), would have complicated any purchase agreement and circumscribed the transfer of nuclear technology and assistance to Nigeria. Even if Nigeria had secured a promise of sale it was increasingly clear that, with the problems in her economy and the introduction of austerity measures, the military government could not, nor was it willing to, justify the investment of the huge sums required for the acquisition of nuclear reactors, especially since a case for their benefits would have been difficult to make.

The civil administration which took over power from General Obasanjo's regime brought the nuclear debate to the fore partly to improve its grand image of the direction of Nigeria's growth and partly to show that the government had a conception of the solution to Nigeria's reliable power supply problem. Unlike the predecessor regime, the Shagari government emphasized the use of nuclear power to ameliorate Nigeria's energy requirements

The experts point to all the trends leading towards an acute shortage of energy around the year 2000 (or possibly earlier) ... every effort should be made to meet demand with supply through consistent planning and rapid execution of energy projects. This anticipated demand can best be obtained from renewable and nuclear energy sources.<sup>40</sup>

Though Nigeria recognized the efficiency of nuclear energy and its desirability in the country's economic development, the investment in the nuclear energy program fell infinitely short of that required to begin any such program. The Shagari administration has continued to fund the research centres at Ife and Zaria but at a grossly inadequate level. In the 1982-83 fiscal year the Centre at Ife received a grant of 3.3 million naira<sup>41</sup> when it required 4 million naira to purchase a one megawatt research reactor, entirely apart from necessary funding for services and personnel

emoluments. This situation of underfunding is unlikely to change for a long time, given the economic problems in the country and the emergence of a policy of reallocating priorities and changing the pattern of government spending. With a nearly 40% drop in her oil revenue and an overstretched development program, Nigeria is unlikely to be able to finance a full-scale nuclear energy program anytime within the next five years or even later. The will to invest 400 million dollars on an experimental research reactor or one billion dollars on a full-scale reactor is likely to remain lacking in an atmosphere of limited foreign exchange earnings and increasing indebtedness. Hence the prospects of a nuclear-armed Nigeria is an extremely distant one and the vision of an African counterweight to a nuclear-armed South Africa remains very dim.

### **THE RATIONALITY AND IRRATIONALITY OF THE NUCLEAR OPTION**

The redeeming feature of the nuclear option resides in its economic advantages. In the first place, it is not generally accepted that nuclear reactors will replace oil and other fossil fuels in the not-too-distant future as the main source of energy. It is, therefore, not unwise to invest in nuclear energy programs. In the case of South Africa, investment in such programs is further justified by that country's isolation from the international community and her precarious oil supply resulting from the embargo on that product. Nuclear reactors thus offer a great relief from the burden of limited and unpredictable oil supplies both in the immediate and distant future. Further, not only does the South African economy have the capacity to bear the heavy investments required by a nuclear program, but such a program promises to be a major source of trade and revenue<sup>42</sup> because of South Africa's advancement in the production of enriched uranium. The same cannot be said for Nigeria.

The rationality of the nuclear option in Nigeria resides only in terms of scientific growth and in the inclination to keep abreast of scientific and technological advancements. Nigeria, like other nations, sees a future of scarce energy resources which can be forestalled or dealt with through a policy of investment in nuclear energy sources. However, the future is not as near nor the energy problem as urgent as to demand the suicidal investment of scarce Nigerian wealth on an energy source which is not immediately required. At the present rate of exploitation Nigeria's oil reserves will last another fifty years, even if new reserves are not discovered. Her gas and coal reserves are virtually unexploited and therefore offer a big cushion against the energy problem which supporters of the nuclear energy program frequently conjure. The investment in nuclear power will be uneconomic in a context of cheap oil and an abundant supply of gas and coal. In any case, Nigeria cannot afford, in the near future, the investment required to make nuclear power a viable source of alternate energy.

In talking about the rationality of the nuclear option attention has only been centered on nuclear energy and not on nuclear weapons. When nuclear weapons are considered, the rationality of the nuclear option becomes considerably more difficult if not impossible to discern. There is

neither a clear diplomatic nor a military advantage in acquiring nuclear weapons by any of the protagonists in the politics of apartheid and liberation.

As far as South Africa is concerned, it has been suggested that the acquisition of nuclear weapons will enhance its diplomatic status and strengthen its bargaining position in relation to the Western powers. As Spence points out,<sup>43</sup> the dependence of South Africa on capital and technology from the West, particularly in respect of her domestic production of military hardware and related technology, means she will need to continue bargaining with the West and that nuclear weapons may be useful in this process. He also argues, however, that it is unlikely that the Western powers will shift their positions and attitudes merely in deference to South Africa's nuclear status. Neither is it likely, if present attitudes remain a valid test, that African states will be persuaded by South African nuclear weapons to abandon their commitment to the eradication of apartheid or to accept negotiation for anything less than this declared objective.

In the case of an African nuclear power, the nuclear weapon may improve status but, paradoxically, it will not improve the diplomatic chances of attaining policy objectives in a South Africa which also has the leverage of nuclear weapons. In such a context, the threat to use nuclear weapons would not be credible, for no African state would risk nuclear retaliation and devastation in pursuit of a secondary interest nor would it use nuclear weapons against South Africa knowing that would destroy the object of liberation. It is for the same reason that the nuclear weapon is not a rational military instrument in the nationalistic conflict in South Africa.

South Africa's perception of the threat to its existence is essentially landward. The anticipated threat is from guerrilla forces operating from bases in African countries on South Africa's borders as well as from externally sponsored and sustained domestic insurrection within the black African majority. The South African military is, from all indications, capable of countering these threats with its program of counter-insurgency training and comprehensive weapons adaptation. In the realm of unconventional warfare, nuclear weapons can have no uses; they will not deter guerrilla incursions nor can they be used to destroy guerrilla bases without serious repercussions in both the African states and South Africa. However, it is also possible to view South Africa's nuclear weapons in relation to anticipated threats of Soviet invasion from the sea; here tactical nuclear weapons may have a major utility. But can the South Africans seriously expect a direct Soviet invasion? Though there is an apparent dearth of sophisticated professional strategic analysts, there must be a certain awareness of the linkages which exist in relationships with the super-powers. Will the Soviet Union risk nuclear confrontation with the United States in an area which is not central (though of great promise) to her interests, yet which is of interest to the United States and other Western powers? The acquisition of nuclear weapons cannot be seriously justified by reference to Soviet threats. It



would seem that the structure of linkages, which dictates that America "barks" in Poland or Afghanistan without "biting" while the Soviet Union does the same in Central America, is capable of ensuring that Soviet intervention in South Africa will likely remain covert.

As for an African nuclear power, the constraints outlined above in the context of guerrilla warfare will also apply and render the nuclear weapon unusable. Beyond this, South Africa is unlikely to allow a nuclear power to emerge in Africa. South Africa has already shown its preference for Israeli-type preemptive and deterrent strikes into neighboring African states. There is no reason to believe that South Africa will not further attempt to follow the example of Israel's raid on Iraqi nuclear reactors to discourage the emergence of a nuclear power and permanent threat to South African security on the African continent.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing it should be obvious that nuclear weapons are an irrelevant and wasteful factor in the politics of apartheid and liberation, particularly from the point of view of African states. Rather than simplify and hasten the process of liberation, they will inevitably complicate and freeze the process of negotiation and, with that, further entrench the *status quo* within South Africa.

Footnotes

1. Held in Addis Ababa, June 8-12, 1983.
2. As enshrined in the Charter of the OAU.
3. "It is the duty of those who are able to embark resolutely on the nuclear path."
4. *African Research Bulletin*, October 1979, p. 5456A.
5. Held in Addis Ababa, June 1983.
6. For example, Libya and Nigeria.
7. *African Communist*, vol. 85 (2nd Quarter, 1981), p. 13.
8. *African Communist*, vol. 85 (2nd Quarter, 1981), p. 14.
9. D. Worrall, "The South African Government's 1977 Constitutional Proposals," p. 128.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 128-9.
11. The National Party lost 3 seats and 11% of its support (in 1979) with the HNP gaining most of this support though it did not win a seat in Parliament.
12. *The Guardian* (London), July 6, 1983, p. 8.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *The Guardian*, July 18, 1983, p. 7.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *African Communist*, vol. 88 (1982), p. 14-19.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
19. *African Research Bulletin*, 1976, p. 4028B.
20. Prime Minister Vorster announced this discovery by the South African Atomic Energy Board in July 1970.
21. R. Varynen, "South Africa: A Coming Nuclear Power," *Instant Research on Peace & Violence*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1977), p. 47.
22. *African Research Bulletin*, August 1-31, 1977, p. 4546A.
23. *African Research Bulletin*, October 1-31, 1979, p. 5456A.
24. Prof. Ivan Smit, a chemistry professor and member of a panel which investigated the impact of the Soviet missile in the South Atlantic.
25. See J.E. Spence, "South Africa: The Nuclear Option," *African Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 321 (October 1981).
26. R. Varynen, "Transnational Corporations in the Military Sector in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 2 (April 1980), p. 243.
27. J.E. Spence, p. 451.
28. R.K. Betts, "Paranoids, Pygmies, Pariahs & Non-Proliferation," *Foreign Policy*, no. 26 (Spring 1977), p. 166.
29. *African Research Bulletin*, August 1-31, 1977, p. 4546B.
30. Held in Port Louis, Mauritius, July 2-6, 1976.
31. Libreville, July 2-5, 1977.
32. See *African Research Bulletin*, July 1-31, 1977, p. 4488A.
33. *African Research Bulletin*, July 1-31, 1978, p. 4914B.
34. Resulting from his role in the SADR issue which nearly led to the collapse of the OAU.
35. Paradoxically the politicians' reticence is not shared by a number of nuclear scientists who are normally more sanguine in such matters. For example, nuclear physicists in Nigeria often express an enthusiasm for a nuclear program, while in near-bankrupt Ghana the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission is known to have called for a Third World nuclear bloc to resist the nuclear powers (See *Africa Diary*, April 8-14, 1980, p. 9963).

*Fall 1984*

36. The *Daily Observer* articulates this view very strongly in its editorial entitled *Kodjo's Farewell Folly* republished in the *National Concord* (Nigeria), July 29, 1983, p. 12.
37. See General Muhammed's speech to the Extra-ordinary Meeting of OAU's Heads of States and Governments, Addis Ababa, January 1976.
38. Including the number two man in Obasanjo's Government — Major-General Shehu Yar'Adua.
39. Known as the Centre for Energy Research and Development.
40. From the speech of Mr. A Thomas, Minister of Science & Technology, to the International Energy Conference at Ife, July 1983.
41. See *The Guardian* (Lagos), July 26, 1983, back page.
42. See *Financial Times*, August 24, 1977.
43. J.E. Spence, p. 451.