

# Africa's Geomosaic Under Stress

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In 35 years, the colonial map of Subsaharan Africa has been transformed into a patchwork of four dozen independent states, many subject to severe devolutionary stresses. Domino effects hastened the decolonization process; a short-lived but significant buffer zone slowed it in southern Africa. During the period of Africa's transition, polarization in South Africa (socially as well as spatially) intensified. Core-periphery contrasts in the republic deepened; whereas integration and modernization increasingly mark the South Africa's core areas, the prospect for the periphery is bleak and instability may develop. Insurgencies, refugee flows, and environmental stresses buffet a politico-geographical framework that may appear stable on maps, but which may collapse from within. **Key words:** domino theory, buffer zone, insurgent state, devolution, boundaries, core-periphery, centripetal-centrifugal forces, front line states.

In less than two generations, the political geography of Africa has been transformed. In the late 1940s, European powers, recovering from the effects of World War II, laid plans to reassert and consolidate their control over African colonial empires. In the early 1990s, Africa's last colony, South West Africa, became the independent state of Namibia, and South Africa faced the realities of the Africa of the future. Four decades of change saw what British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan called Africa's "Wind of Change" sweep southward from West Africa and the Sudan toward the Cape of Good Hope.

During the decade from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, developments in Africa rivaled cold-war competition for world attention. African leaders in the struggle for independence, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, and Jomo Kenyatta, rose to international prominence in a manner not unlike Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel today. President Kennedy appointed a secretary of state for African affairs, and his Peace Corps initiative, while a global venture, was directed principally toward Africa. Many academics were euphoric. I remember hearing a leading political scientist, addressing a convention of the APSA, describe political prospects for Ghana and Nigeria as "guaranteed" by the tested models on which their new constitutions were based. Ghana would become the embodiment of the Westminster model for Africa, and Nigeria would lead the continent with a federal system that was to be the vanguard for other states burdened with regional centrifugalism (Rothchild 1960). Shortly thereafter, I heard a future East African Union depicted as having "limitless opportunities for growth and development (once freed from the colonial yoke) ... on a par with Western Europe." African leaders visited the United States and lectured at universities; African students in unprecedented numbers enrolled in American colleges. African studies centers, programs, and institutes arose at dozens of U.S. institutions. Funding for field research in Africa expanded, and scholarly journals in their contents reflected the new era.

In Africa, elation at the demise of colonialism and optimism about the future, fueled in substantial part by the sometimes careless predictions of non-African scholars, led to a revolution of rising expectations. The arts, especially literature, blossomed as perhaps never before. An outpouring of prose, poetry, and plays by African authors writing in English and French conveyed African feelings to European and American audiences. Leopold Senghor, a respected poet and author, became the first president of newly independent Senegal. The knowledge, judgment, and wisdom contained in works from this period seemed to confirm the favorable prospects and bright potentials for Africa's future (Nyerere 1961, 1963; Nkrumah 1957, Houphouët-Boigny 1957, Rooney 1988).

But even as the tide of African nationalism and independence swept eastward and southward from its West African sources, the salient problems that were to dash the dream of a peaceful, stable, prosperous Africa became manifest. Ghana achieved sovereignty in 1957 with a strong agricultural and industrial base, good educational and medical facilities, an adequate transport system, the highest per capita income of any tropical African country, substantial foreign currency reserves derived mainly from cocoa exports, a comparatively efficient civil service, and a dynamic political leadership. President Nkrumah spoke and wrote of pan-African unity and cooperation based on common interests and aspirations (Nkrumah 1963). Less than a decade later, the Ghanaian army had staged a coup, President Nkrumah was exiled, graft and corruption were rife, foreign reserves were depleted, the infrastructure was deteriorating, and living standards were in decline. Only part of this was due to the drop in cocoa prices on world markets. Economic mismanagement, political misjudgments, grandiose engineering and building projects, internal corruption worsened by dealings with corrupt multinational corporations, and inexperience all contributed to the collapse of black Africa's first great hope (Hadjor 1988).

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the regional

cornerstone of West Africa, in 1960 became independent as a three-region federal state: North, West (really the southwest), and East (southeast). The federal parliament was regionally apportioned according to population, and the future depended on a delicate demographic balance (Azikiwe 1961). The first post-independence census, in 1962, showed the Northern Region to outnumber the other two regions combined, and a bitter controversy arose. As the 1965 elections approached, Nigeria plunged into anarchy that led to a military coup.

Following the military intervention, a wave of genocide occurred against Easterners living and working in the North. Eastern Nigeria responded by declaring itself independent as the state of Biafra. More than three years of devastating civil war ensued, setting Nigeria back severely despite the coincidental expansion of its oil industry. Thus, even before decolonization had reached southern Africa, disaster lay in its wake.

#### Domino Theory

The spatial sequence of decolonization in Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that the notion of a domino effect has merit despite fulminations to the contrary (O'Sullivan 1986). Simply defined, the domino theory holds that destabilization, or other significant transferable change, in one country or territory can affect the stability or normalcy of an adjacent state, and that this process can, in turn, affect other contiguous entities. The domino effect was much debated during the Indochina War, and it would be difficult to sustain the position that the conflict in Vietnam did not contribute to the disruption of neighboring Laos or Cambodia or, to a lesser degree, Thailand. More recently, observers have commented on the apparent domino effect in the Eastern Europe of the

1980s; Poland is often identified as the first "domino," and Albania as the last.

In Africa, Ghana was first in the 1950s, followed by East Africa in the 1960s and southern Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. British progress in West Africa made the French position untenable, and De Gaulle seized the initiative and moved not only Algeria, but also French West and French Equatorial Africa quickly toward independence in a "community" association with France (Houphouet-Boigny 1957). So rapidly was this process set in motion that Francophone Africa became independent in the same year long-prepared Nigeria did. Only Sekou Touré's Guinea chose to go it alone, asserting

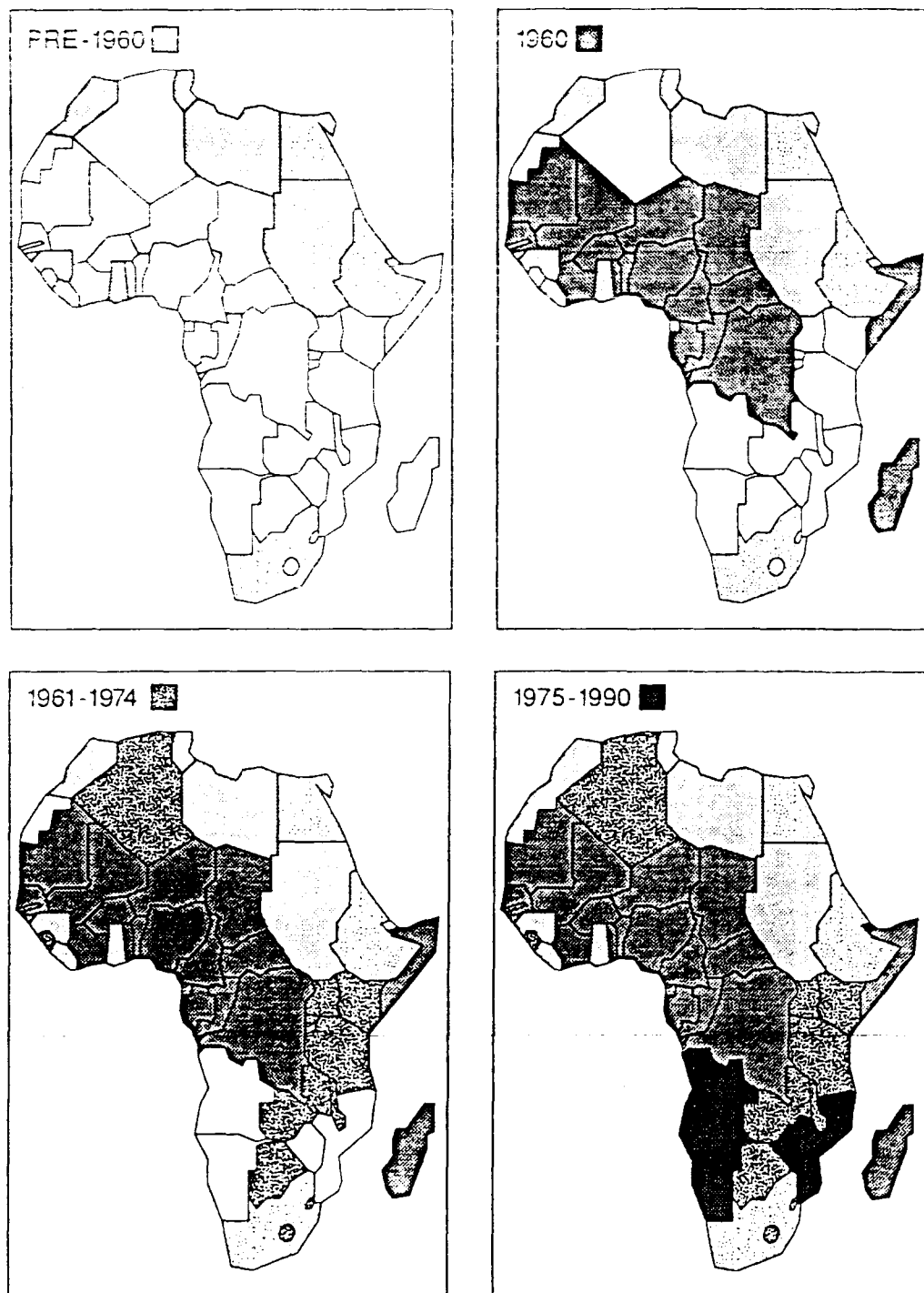


Figure 1. The progression of African independence in four stages. Before 1960, only Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa were independent states not subject to decolonization.

sovereignty in 1958 (Toure 1959). Zaire became independent following a violent upheaval in 1960; adjacent, landlocked, Belgian-administered Rwanda and Burundi were decolonized in 1962. In East Africa, where the British had faced the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, it was Tanzania that led the way (1961), followed by Uganda (1962) and Kenya (1963). To the north, Somalia had become independent in 1960; to the south, Malawi and Zambia waited until 1964. Kenya's early independence, despite substantial opposition among its white minority, is especially relevant in the domino context. Nearly encircled by independent states and in control of Uganda's outlet to the sea, Kenya's sovereignty could not be deferred (Fig. 1).

The British awarded nominal independence to Botswana and Lesotho in 1966 and to Swaziland in 1968, but the key southern African territories—the Portuguese dependencies of Angola and Moçambique as well as still-British Southern Rhodesia—slowed the Wind of Change nearly to a halt. Indeed, change in Angola and Moçambique, in further affirmation of the domino effect, did not accelerate until insurgents could secure safe haven in adjacent Zaire and Tanzania, respectively. For several years, the Moçambique nationalist movement, FRELIMO, had headquarters in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest city. One of Angola's three insurgent movements, FNLA, received protection as well as fiscal support from Zaire across the border. The presence of insurgents in newly independent Zaire and Tanzania had severe impact on these countries and their economies. In the case of Zaire, the conflict in Angola disrupted the outflow of minerals from the reserves in the southeastern interior, which during colonial times had moved across the Portuguese territory to the port of Lobito. Tanzania suffered not only from the effects of war in Moçambique, but also from the disastrous events that occurred in its neighbor to the northwest, Uganda. Eventually Tanzanian armed forces entered Uganda in the aftermath of Amin's murderous regime, placing a heavy burden on an already impoverished economy.

Independence in Moçambique and Angola came in 1975, and again the domino effect came into play. Landlocked Rhodesia, where the white minority had declared unilateral independence (UDI), and which was under international economic sanctions, lost security along its eastern flank when the Portuguese withdrew from Moçambique. Immediately, its internal conflict widened into Moçambique, where insurgents now found safer haven and where Rhodesian forces engaged in hot pursuit. Britain's last domino fell in 1980; even South African support could not prolong UDI.

Angola's independence exposed Africa's last colonial domino, Namibia, to the full force of the Wind of Change. Despite continuing civil war in Angola, Namibia's rebel movement SWAPO (South West African People's Organization) used Angola's territory in its struggle against South Africa. Independence was achieved.

### Buffer Zones and Front Line States

The slowdown of Africa's drive for independence could be prophesied in the early 1960s, based on the dimensions and influence of white minorities in southern Africa and upon the

capacity of South Africa to affect regional power balances (De Blij 1962). From the beginning, it was clear that the ultimate objective of black Africans would be the termination of white minority rule in what was then still the Union of South Africa. In less than ten years following Ghana's independence, the Wind of Change had penetrated southern Africa. But Portugal did not match British or French flexibility; and Angola at the time of Zaire's independence had the second largest European minority in all of Sub-Saharan Africa. Moçambique, on the opposite coast, had a white minority more than three times as large as Kenya's. And landlocked Rhodesia, situated between Angola and Moçambique, was in position to slow the advance of African nationalism by thwarting British plans for decolonization. Together, these territories, astride the northern tier of southern Africa, created a buffer zone that for more than a decade separated South Africa from independent black Africa (De Blij 1973).

The southern African buffer zone had several consequences, some of which are outlasting its existence. First, by keeping the so-called Front Line States territorially removed from South Africa, the republic was able to implement its grand design of "Separate Development" with an impunity it would have been denied under other circumstances. Second, South Africa was given time to plan and organize support not only for the minority colonial regimes in the buffer zone, but also for movements that would later emerge as opponents of newly installed black African governments. Third, South Africa could prepare for the eventual breakdown of the buffer zone by exporting its Separate Development program to Namibia, by intimidating Botswana through cross-border raids (and by other means), and by strengthening its presence in the northern Transvaal. South Africa's geopolitical action(s) during this period leave no doubt that the republic was intent on substituting an internal buffer zone for the external one once the latter collapsed. Northern Namibia, Botswana, the northern Transvaal's Bantu Homelands, and the Kruger National Park all were part of this preparation for the time when the so-called Front Line States would abut South Africa itself rather than its neighbors to the north.

The appellation "Front Line States" originated in the southward march of African independence alluded to previously. While the external buffer zone remained intact, Tanzania and Zaire were Front Line States, both supporting insurgent movements in the Portuguese colonies; and Zambia was on the front line opposite white-minority-ruled Rhodesia. Malawi, although adjoining Moçambique and certainly affected by the strife in this Portuguese dependency, never played a comparable role ideologically, a posture dictated by its conservative ruler, Hastings Banda. But all of the Front Line States paid a price for their relative location. Revolutionaries, refugees, and retribution spilled across boundaries into these countries, themselves still searching for post-independence stability. A prominent Moçambique leader, Eduardo Mondlane, was killed in a bomb attack in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's capital. Zaire's Kasai province was seriously destabilized by cross-border warfare. The then-outlawed (South African) African National Congress set up headquarters in Zambia, where South African paramilitary forces repeatedly attacked it.

When Portugal yielded, and Angola and Moçambique became independent states (1975), these flanks of the buffer zone now became Front Line States themselves—confronting not only South Africa, but, in the case of Moçambique, revolution-ravaged Rhodesia as well. Immediately, both countries were drawn into regional as well as superpower conflicts. Even as three factions vied for control over Angola, the government in Luanda proclaimed the country a Marxist state; a similar position was taken by the new government in Maputo (the renamed capital of Moçambique). In Angola, the movement called UNITA, ostensibly an anticommunist, “democratic” organization, received support not only from South Africa and from the United States but also from China—because the Chinese wished to counter Moscow’s influence in the region. The Luanda government received proxy support from Cuba as tens of thousands of Cuban soldiers rallied to the Marxist side. By the mid-1980s, the UNITA movement had created an insurgent state in eastern and southern Angola (McCull 1969). In Moçambique, the RENAMO movement challenged the Maputo government, inflicting terror and dislocation on a rural population already ravaged by famine and disruption. RENAMO, supported by South Africa, never achieved the territorial success of UNITA; it controlled several sections of the country including parts of the hinterlands of both Maputo and Beira (Fig. 2). The conflict in Rhodesia also damaged Moçambique severely. The port of Beira, the landlocked neighbor’s nearest outlet, was in disrepair. The Beira corridor to the interior lay devastated: bridges, roads, dams, railroads, and power lines were destroyed. The cost of front-line location was incalculably high.

When the struggle in Rhodesia ended and the independent state of Zimbabwe appeared on Africa’s map (1980), the breakdown of the buffer zone was complete and South Africa confronted Front Line States across the entire length of its boundary except in the west, where Namibia still was under its

control. At that time, the republic still pursued its campaign in Angola (in support of UNITA and in opposition to the Namibian independence movement, SWAPO) with enthusiasm. However, the cost of the war, both militarily in the field and politically at home, contributed to a search for settlement of the Angolan as well as the Namibian issue. The independence of Namibia in March 1990 with SWAPO members in the majority in the elected government, made Namibia a Front Line State and ended colonialism—not counting the domestic form within South Africa—on the continent.

South Africa’s campaigns of support for UNITA and RENAMO in Angola and Moçambique, respectively, and of sabotage and disruption in Zimbabwe, were attempts to influence the geopolitical situation in the now-defunct buffer zone, intended to sustain conditions that had existed there previously. As long as the Front Line States were preoccupied with internal problems, they would be less able to cause or promote difficulties for South Africa. But in fact, the republic in the 1980s faced domestic challenges that could not have originated in the Front Line States. Urban insurrections, labor resistance, civil disobedience campaigns, and other forms of mass opposition to apartheid and Separate Development (and these systems’ legal foundations) led to concessions that, in time, will be seen as the beginning of South Africa’s political transformation.

### Core, Periphery, and Front Line

The geopolitical situation in southern Africa in 1990 thus limited the roles of the final Front Line States in contributing to change within South Africa. Moçambique’s primary objective was recovery. Zimbabwe, its economy the healthiest among regional states, was engaged in internal political reorganization. Botswana, many of its inhabitants dependent in one way or another on revenues earned in South Africa, was in no position to risk South African retribution. Namibia had become

independent early in the year, its ties with (and dependence upon) the republic virtually unchanged as yet.

Should further change in South Africa take a revolutionary course, however, the relative location of the Front Line States would be likely to revive the role implied by their collective name. Cosmetic as well as consequential changes in the apartheid system have mainly affected the social geography of South Africa’s heartland, its major cities, and their hinterlands. This has intensified core-periphery contrasts in a country where such regional disparities already are very strong (Fig. 3). The periphery was the scene of the estab-

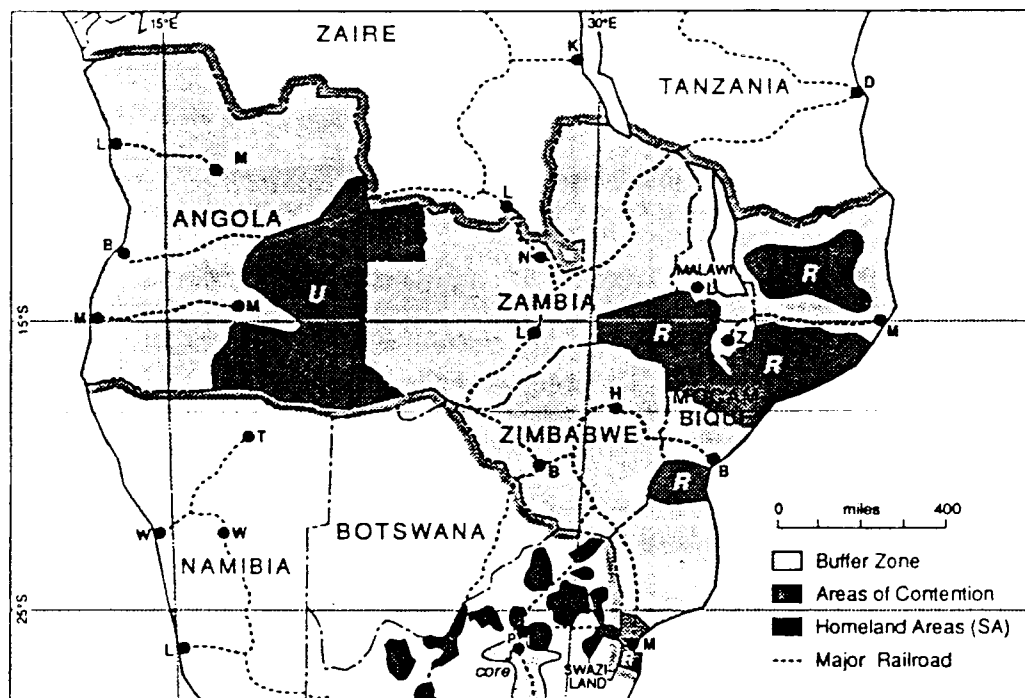


Figure 2. The buffer zone in its earliest stage. The stage of contention is indicated by the lettered areas: “U” for the UNITA movement in Angola, “R” for the RENAMO movement in Moçambique.

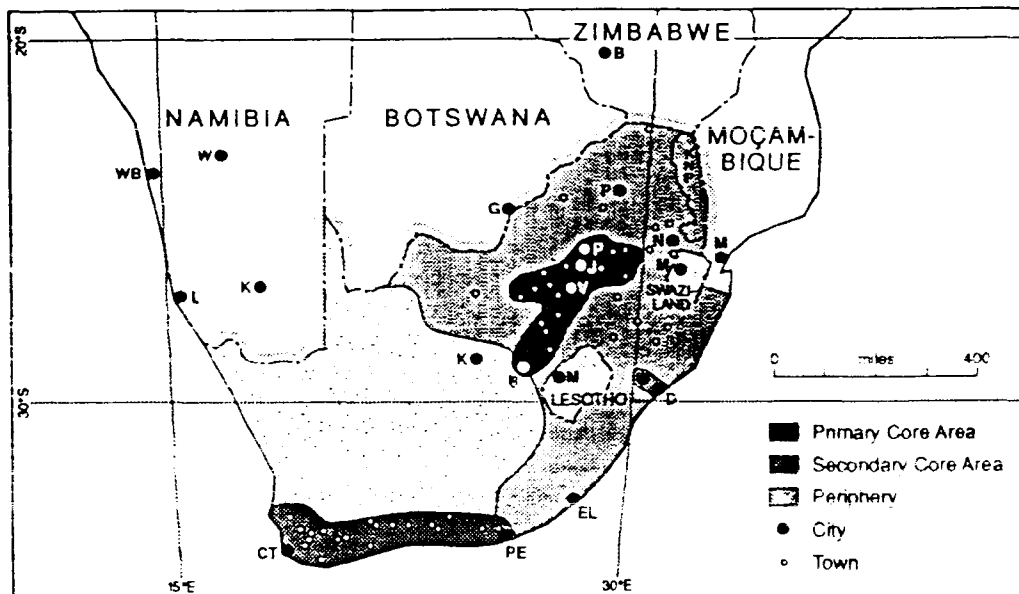


Figure 3. Core and periphery in South Africa. The lightly stippled area in the west is South Africa's emptiest quarter. Approximately 90 percent of the African population is located in the horseshoe-shaped zone enclosing the core area, and in the core area itself.

lishment of the black homelands in the Separate Development scheme, and the horseshoe-shaped zone of ethnic "states" that partially envelops the republic's core area spatially defines much of the periphery. In much of this zone, South Africa resembles the poorer rural parts of the continent rather than the comparatively rich country that average-reporting statistics suggest it to be.

In Zimbabwe, the geographic situation was somewhat similar; there were no Bantustans in the South African sense, but core-periphery definitions and contrasts were sharp. It was in the periphery where the insurgencies of the 1970s arose and could not be suppressed. In South Africa, the periphery also will be vulnerable to insurgency—and the periphery marks the zone of contact between the republic and its front-line neighbors. Briefly during the 1980s, the vulnerability of this border area was underscored when land mines, planted by insurgents allegedly based in (or operating from) Zimbabwe, caused a number of casualties on Limpopo Valley farms. The South African government responded by compelling farmers to occupy their holdings for a substantial part of the year rather than leasing them to tenants. An increased military presence plus pressure on Zimbabwe suppressed the threat, but the potential for more serious problems along the republic's margins had been revealed.

The present Front Line States are strongly affected by their powerful neighbor—economically as well as politically. Their location relative to the geopolitical structure of South Africa will enmesh them in any revolutionary change the republic may undergo.

### The Realm's Boundary Framework

Black Africa became independent partitioned by a boundary framework that was defined and delimited by colonial powers. Whatever the merits and demerits of this framework, it was decided by the member states of the Organization of

African Unity that boundaries inherited at independence should be respected, and changed only by bilateral or multilateral consent (Brownlie 1979). Today, nearly four decades after the dawn of independence, the framework of African boundaries is substantially intact. Prescott (1987) attributes this to two causes: the colonial boundaries were defined with greater care and foresight than has generally been suggested, and African states have handled boundary conflicts with restraint.

In the early 1990s, the most serious boundary and territorial conflicts continue to afflict the Horn of Africa.

The Ogaden question remains unresolved, and the Eritrean war appears on the verge of resurrecting the relic boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Should the Eritreans' war for independence succeed, Ethiopia would become a landlocked country. This is undoubtedly the most consequential issue in black Africa's northeast today.

As a comparison between the maps of 1957 and 1990 shows, few boundary changes have been made during the period of decolonization. The boundary between former British and Italian Somaliland has been eliminated, and the Nigeria-Cameroon border was repositioned following a plebiscite in the borderland. Zanzibar was united with Tanganyika, eliminating a maritime boundary and resulting in the name Tanzania. In mid-1990, the issue of the South African exclave at Walvis Bay, on the coast of newly independent Namibia, remained unresolved. A United Nations resolution urged South Africa to yield the port and its immediate hinterland to Namibia, and there are indications that Pretoria will agree to a transfer. In that case, the exclave boundary will become a relic.

Given the intense fragmentation of Subsaharan Africa, the number of boundary disputes in the realm is small. Armed hostilities have occurred along the boundary between Mali and Burkina Faso, where a zone about ten miles wide and 100 miles long is contested. Nigeria and Chad have been in conflict over their boundary in Lake Chad, but this dispute has been overtaken by Chad's civil war involving Libya. In 1990, a boundary dispute erupted along the border between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau following the publication of reports that the area may contain fossil fuel reserves. And there is a disagreement between Zaire and Zambia over their joint boundary where it reaches Lake Tanganyika. Finally, the position of the border between Malawi and Tanzania at the northern end of Lake Nyasa has given rise to intermittent negotiations.

Considering the origin of Africa's boundaries, the purposes they initially served, and the number of landlocked states they created, this is a low incidence of border conflict indeed. A larger number of functional disputes have arisen, such as that between Kenya and Tanzania, which closed this East African boundary for more than six crucial years (1977 to 1983); but none of these has led to positional conflict. These functional problems, moreover, have generally been of short duration.

There are, however, signs that Africa's boundary framework may yet change significantly—not by boundary repositioning, but as a result of devolutionary stresses within African states. The Ethiopian-Eritrean case is only one of a substantial number of internal problems of this kind. The possibility of a north-south fragmentation in the Sudan grows as Khartoum's capacity to control secessionism in the south diminishes. The war in Chad has underscored the fundamental contrasts between north and south in this landlocked state as well. Strong and intensifying centrifugal forces are affecting Nigeria, where Muslim fundamentalism is fueling Islamic-Christian discord. In 1987, the worst religious riots in memory ravaged the northern regions (Brooke 1987). Devolutionary forces also are strong, as noted earlier, in Angola and in Mozambique. And the possibility of Natal's secession from South Africa, now mentioned by Zulu conservatives, is nothing new: it was proposed as an option in the early 1950s, when the Nationalist government's apartheid policies were first imposed on that multiracial, mainly non-Afrikaner province.

Given Africa's strongly fragmented cultural mosaic, its ideological divisions, and the growing awareness of ethnic and historic identity among peoples ranging from the Zulu nation in Natal to the Muslim Hausa of northern Nigeria, the potential for the balkanization of postcolonial Africa exists—and not only in the larger, more populous countries. Rwanda and Brundi, the small but populous countries wedged between Tanzania and Zaire, have been the scene of such deathly tribal conflict between Tutsi and Hutu that the compartmentalization of these territories has been seriously advanced as a means to reduce the carnage. The African reaction to ethnic complexity of national populations has been the imposition of the one-party state; in early 1990, there were 18 one-party governments (and 17 military regimes). But the centrifugal forces inherent in Africa's anthropogeography will not be permanently accommodated by such centralization of authority. Many leaders in postcolonial Africa were much impressed by Soviet-style political control and economic policies (Ghana's Nkrumah was among the first), and the Soviet model is much in evidence in the African one-party state. The Soviet struggle to adjust to the realities of devolution will be equally relevant to African states trying to cope with similar stresses.

While boundary changes have been few, population shifts, mainly in the form of refugee movements, have been numerous and devastating. Both in terms of absolute numbers as well as per capita, Africa has the world's largest body of dislocated people. A gain the northeast has been most severely afflicted. Ethiopia's long-term conflict with its ethnic Somali peoples has driven nearly a million Somali across the border into Somalia, where they live in squalid, inadequate camps.

Another million Eritreans and Ethiopians, victims of the war for Eritrean independence, live, and starve, in the Sudan. The turmoil in Uganda produced 200,000 refugees, most of whom fled to the Sudan; many have returned to their home areas as Uganda stabilizes. Nearly a half million refugees are encamped in Zaire, where they seek safety from strife in Rwanda, Burundi, and Angola. By 1988, nearly a million inhabitants of Mozambique had fled into neighboring countries ill-equipped to accommodate them. Africa's refugee camps are places of misery, disease, malnutrition, and starvation. Because their occupants, in some areas, are perceived to support a political cause, governments have attacked and destroyed relief operations, condemning hundreds of thousands to death. Not even the most ruthless colonial rule (Portugal's in Mozambique probably was the most atrocious) caused such horrors.

And the numbers above do not begin to reflect the dimensions of dislocation in Africa. In Mozambique, for example, an estimated 1.2 million people have left their rural homes to seek protection from the civil war in towns and cities. Liberia, Chad, Uganda, Angola, and other strife-torn countries have seen their villages and towns swell from a rural exodus. The combination of deserted farmlands and overgrown urban centers spells economic disaster and political trouble. Thus, governments are impelled to take draconian action to protect the interests of their citizens. In 1983, the Nigerian government summarily expelled 2 million Ghanaian workers who had come to Nigeria from their dictatorial homeland and its collapsing economy, to find jobs. The hardship faced by Africa's dislocated people mocks the stability of the realm's international boundary framework. Whatever the OAU decided, changes are bound to come.

#### Geography, Demography, and Environment

The transformation of Africa's political geography has taken place against a background of population explosion and environmental deterioration. In 1957, the year Ghana became independent, Subsaharan Africa's population totaled just 200 million. In 1990, the realm counted 500 million inhabitants; the projected figure for 2000 is just under 700 million. No other world geographic realm even approached such a growth rate; Kenya during the 1970s and 1980s became the world's fastest-growing country at about four percent annually, a doubling time of approximately 17 years. The TFR (total fertility rate) in the early 1980s was an estimated eight children per woman in Kenya. In Kenya as in other African countries, hopes for economic progress and improvement were dashed by growing costs and burdens of larger numbers.

And yet, viewing the numbers in global perspective, Africa is not, in general, densely populated. India alone has a much larger population than Africa's nearly four dozen countries combined; India's area is one-seventh that of Subsaharan Africa. According to FAO statistics, Indians and Africans, in the early 1960s, consumed, on average, about the same number of calories (slightly over 2000) daily. By the late 1980s, the average intake in India had risen to 2150; in Africa it had declined to 1870. Dietary balances had improved in India, but deteriorated in Africa. The population explosion, plus the social dislocation discussed earlier, contributed to

this. But more important was the failure to transfer the Indian "green revolution" to Africa. Western agricultural advisers' obsession with high yields and cash crops led to the introduction of farming systems that worked in India's fertile Punjab, but not in most of Africa's low-yield countryside. Irrigation schemes and fertilizer-dependent crop varieties could not be afforded—either by governments or by subsistence farmers. African farmers need more roads and market systems to move farm produce from the remote, sparsely settled, land-abundant areas to the food deficient population clusters. Without an improving infrastructure to help traditional farmers, no massive dam-and canal schemes could solve Africa's food problems. So the African farmer lost ground in every direction: the newly independent governments mostly had their eyes on other, more prestigious sectors of the economy, and Western-devised green-revolution techniques, often involving irrigation projects and labor-intensive cultivation systems, were inappropriate for the realm's needs. In the meantime, millions of Africans remain utterly dependent upon overseas food supplies.

Even as the political transformation proceeded and the population explosion gained momentum, Africa's regional environments also changed dramatically. There can be no doubt that human intervention (through the opening of marginal land and the herding of livestock into fragile ecosystems) played a significant role in this. But nature also dealt Africa a series of blows during the second half of the century. The Sahara's southward expansion created the Sahel crisis of the 1970s and its enormous cost in human and animal lives, but it was not all people's doing. The desert also spread northward, even where no human activity contributed to its advance. The evidence suggests that the Sahara during this period was embarked on one of its natural expansion phases. The Inter-Tropical Convergence (ITC), a bellwether for West African moisture conditions, made its northward move later and started its coastward retreat earlier, facilitating the Saharan advance in the interior and reducing the wet season in the coastal countries. The human (and livestock) presence exacerbated the environmental situation in the Sahel, but it was not the disaster's sole cause.

While attention was focused on the Sahel crisis, other areas of Africa also experienced droughts, including East and South Africa. Regional droughts in Africa have several consequences that last long after the dry spell has ended: people and livestock are induced to destroy a widening area of natural vegetation, and the loss of this vegetation appears to hinder the return of normal, average conditions. We have studied maps of climatic regions, rainfall distributions, and vegetative associations, perhaps taking insufficient account of the degree to which the mapped phenomena are interrelated. The evidence from the Amazon Basin suggests that, in areas where the forest has been cut down, the exposed surface reflects more sunlight back into space, creating layers of dry air close to the ground. Since as much as half of all rainfall comes from moisture evaporated from the land and plant surfaces, such a dry layer would absorb evaporated moisture without yielding beneficial "return" rains. This, in turn, inhibits the revival of vegetation. Break the ecological balance, the evidence suggests, and the

maps may have to be redrawn. In Africa, the destruction of natural vegetation may worsen permanently an already severe water shortage. Rainforest and savanna destruction are widespread. The Sahel problem (which extends all the way across the north from Senegal to Ethiopia) is only part of a larger environmental threat.

Environmental problems can have politico-geographical consequences. While the Sahel drought affected primarily the states and peoples of the Sahara margin, coastal West African countries were involved as well. Bassett (1988) describes the impact of a group of Fulani herders who drove their cattle from the desiccating Sahel zone into greener Ivory Coast. The government of Ivory Coast welcomed these pastoralists, who would make beef supplies more dependable and cheaper than they had been previously. But the local farmers saw it rather differently: the Fulani's cattle trampled their crops of cotton, corn, rice, millet, and yams. They resented the inadequate protection from the capital, and a violent conflict erupted. When finally the government decided to allocate parcels of pastureland to the Fulani, these were inadequate and the Fulani left the country. In the meantime, much of northern Ivory Coast was in disarray, a victim of the Sahel crisis hundreds of miles away.

Directly and indirectly, environmental change has had political repercussions in other areas: northern Nigeria, northeastern Kenya, and highland Lesotho are examples. The long-term impact of environmental change on the African political framework has just begun to be felt.

### Conclusion

The final chapter in the transformation of Africa's political geography is now being written. South Africans could see the dominoes fall and the buffer zone collapse, but until the mid-1980s the minority government pursued a course that was destined to make future accommodations more difficult. That future is now here, and the question is whether Africa will witness still another violent struggle for power (and not necessarily an exclusively black-white conflict) or if a negotiated transition can be achieved. Then, perhaps, South Africa could become the regional force it should be, the provider of products and technologies, the example of a successful, multiracial African economy, the leader in finance and investment. Preoccupation with the South African situation has done much to screen the problems of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa from world view and world opinion. Africa, the cradle of humankind, is now its sickbed, literally and figuratively. No geographic realm is so severely afflicted by disease (the total AIDS cases may number 3 million; some demographers are predicting an actual population decline in some areas as a result). No geographic realm has witnessed comparable economic and political failure; none is as hurt by falling commodity prices on world markets as is Africa.

The Wind of Change carried from Senegal to South Africa. Let us hope that a counterforce will soon emanate from the south, radiating the potential of a renewed republic, a prosperous Zimbabwe, and a stabilized Angola northward, eastward, and westward to redirect the destinies of a troubled realm.