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AFRICA AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Abstract

War is an exciting socio-political game. It can create and destroy nations and a people. From time immemorial, mankind has always engaged in warfares either as pastime or for clearly defined goals. These wars took many forms such as local wars, civil wars, intra-state wars or inter-state wars. In all these war scenarios, it was only in the 20th century that the world witnessed the phenomena of World Wars which occurred in all continents of the world. The First World War took place between 1914 and 1918 and the Second World War occurred between 1939 and 1945. To be sure, these two World Wars occurred as a result of stresses and strains in European diplomacy, but ultimately their reverberations were felt in almost all corners of the globe. Africa as a continent was caught in the web of European politics throughout the first half of the 20th century and on account of this state of affairs it became a direct participant in the two World Wars. As the world today marks one hundred years of the occurrence of the First World War and as statesmen and Veterans of wars all over the world celebrate the event, especially in Europe, there is need to appreciate the roles of Africa and Africans in that war. This article, therefore, examines the roles of Africa in the First World War. A major argument in the work is

that Africa was of strategic significance to the war efforts and Africans played key roles in the victory of the allied forces and the defeat of the axis forces.

Introduction

Though the First World War started in 1914, its origin can be traced to the events that occurred in Europe in 1870s. Of these events, the most important one that changed the political colouration and contour of Europe was the tilt in the balance of power. The balance of power is a situation in which a nation or coalition of nations is not allowed to become overwhelmingly and preponderantly powerful. In other words, it's appropriate usage should be in reference to a system in which power is distributed among nation - states in such a way that none of them is dominant. The term refers to some kind of equilibrium resulting from the distribution of power and it is a function of many factors.

Historians, statesmen and students of international relations often assert that the only way to keep peace is through a careful balance of power. According to Walter S. Jones, balance of power connotes not only military and deterrent capabilities, but the entire structure of power and influence that governs the relations of the states. Balance of power is concerned, therefore, not solely with the ability of states to threaten their neighbours or to dissuade others from planned policies; rather, it encompasses all of the political capabilities of states - coercive and pacific - by which the delicate balance of conflict without war is maintained.¹

In light of these observations, "balance of power" can be presented as an analytical concept for exploring the practical effects of equilibrium and disequilibrium in world politics, and for assessing the consequences of power shifts. It becomes an analytical device rather than a form of advocacy, prescribing no particular model(s) for world peace. Instead, it searches out the conditions of order and disorder in international relations, concentrating on the sources and consequences of balance and imbalance.²

The role that a state plays in a global or regional balance of power is determined by its capabilities and intentions. In its external relations, a government makes what are presumably rational and calculated determinations of the costs and benefits of specific policies as related to specific objectives. From these formulae, it sets the course of foreign policy, and by them it determines the state's role in the balance of power. Questions to guide statesmen and decision-makers are: "Will we attempt to enlarge our power, or are our present interests served in the international system by the power that we presently command?" "Do our relations with a neighbour require that we alter the existing balance?" or "Is our neighbour altering the balance to our detriment, and must we, therefore, increase our power potential?"³ In general, balance of power derives from: (a) the existence of a number of sovereign political actors with specific but unequal powers; (b) the existence of small, intermediate and great nation-states, without any of them having the authority and power to control others; and (c) persistence competition, periodic confrontations and possible conflict among them.⁴

In Europe, by 1870, the balance of power was disturbed to the extent that the equilibrium never existed again. This development occurred as a result of the unification of Germany in 1871. The exercise itself was as a result of the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. After that war, German unity was proclaimed and with that proclamation a great power was established in central Europe. This was Germany. The type of diplomacy that Germany adopted in order to permanently isolate France created some problems that resulted in complex alliance system, arms race, tension and the First World War. To comprehend this development in Europe and the aftermath of it, we have to analyze the situation in Germany after its unification, Bismarck's foreign policy (1871-1890) and William II's leadership of Germany (1890-1914).

Germany after the Unification, 1871-1895

The unification of Germany which was completed early in 1871 introduced a new dimension into European economic and social development. Because the country was integrated, new religious problems had to be solved and due to the vastness of the new territorial unit problems of communication and political unification had to be solved as well. Germany had a great advantage because of its economic potential.

At the helm of affairs was Otto Von Bismarck, the creator and unifier of the nation. Bismarck immediately set about solving the political issues of Germany. He recognised the hostility of the Catholic elements who now joined together with the conservative elements to form the opposition party. Bismarck began by allying himself with the liberal Radicals to fight the central party. Because the central party had considerable support in **Reichstag**, the lower legislative house, Bismarck attracted people to himself by distributing patronage and favours. Furthermore, Bismarck interfered with elections and made sure major government was not conducted in the **Reichstag** but in the **Bundesrat** which included representatives from the various states.⁵

Therefore, Bismarck more often sat in the **Bundesrat** than in the **Reichstag**. To a large extent Bismarck succeeded in destroying the influence of the central party and encouraging the success of liberal party. Allied to the problem of the central party were those who believed that the Pope was infallible. In a period when Bismarck needed universal allegiance he could not afford any competition. In a series of wars called the **Kulturkampf** Bismarck established state schools, state churches, state cultural centres. Thereafter, he expanded the country's industries and provided a good communication network in the country.⁶ Another major opposition in Germany were the socialists. In order to undermine their influence Bismarck introduced fundamental social reforms and made provisions for workers' insurance and welfare services. By 1878, Bismarck had effectively brought the central party and the socialists

under control. To further encourage German industries he needed to introduce protective tariffs. Now, the liberals who favoured free trade opposed him and, therefore, he allied himself with the central party to achieve his aims.

Bismarck believed, and perhaps rightly too, that the German nation was his handy work. William I also shared the view; after all Bismarck had been invited at a critical period of the monarchy and he had successfully transformed the Prussian monarchy into the German Empire. The king was very grateful to Bismarck and he allowed him to have his way and his say. Anytime the King stood on his way Bismarck threatened to resign and he was begged to stay by the aged Emperor. This changed in March 1888 when the Emperor died and was succeeded by Frederick.

Both Frederick and his wife hated Bismarck. For one, Frederick was a liberal and a radical who was strongly opposed to the conservative administration of Bismarck. For another, Frederick's wife did not believe that Bismarck will allow her husband independent action and judgment. A confrontation appeared inevitable. But this was postponed because of the short reign of Frederick. After only 90 days Frederick died in June 1888 and was succeeded by William II. William II was a young tempestuous and ambitious man. He was very resourceful and for him the presence of old Bismarck was both unsatisfactory and annoying. He privately resolved that he would only put up with the old man for a while and then sack him. William II believed that until he got rid of Bismarck he will never be Emperor in the real sense of the word.

To Bismarck, the coming of this young man meant new challenges and new problems, but he was always aware that he was in full control of affairs. This was because all Ministers were responsible to him and not to the Emperor. He therefore, thought the role of Emperor was a ceremonial one, but this was precisely what William II hated. A confrontation appeared inevitable. In 1890, Bismarck challenged one of the young Ministers for having direct dealings with the Emperor. The Emperor who learned about the matter expressed his dissatisfaction to Bismarck. Bismarck

threatened to resign hoping that the young king who needed his service and experience would not accept his resignation. However, William II hastily accepted it and immediately appointed a new Chancellor in March 1890. Bismarck and the whole world were astonished.⁷

Bismarck retired to his country home after 1890 and everyday hoped to be called "back as Chancellor". On one occasion they invited him to a dinner party to celebrate his 80th birthday. Bismarck believed that this was the time he would be invited back but the king did not say a word about the Chancellorship. Frustrated and disappointed, Bismarck returned to his country home where he began to attack William II, through his writings, as a misguided, childish, ambitious and vain man. He died in 1898 leaving behind his memories as pioneer statesman, nationalist, opportunist, ruthless individual with some measures of charismatic leadership.⁸ However, what interests us most in the events preceding the First World War, were the form and style of Bismarck's Foreign Policy and the character and style of leadership of William II after the exit of Chancellor Bismarck.

Bismarck's Foreign Policy 1871-1890

Bismarck realised in 1871 that his new country was going to face severe problems. He recognised the problem of France. France was a country, which had been humiliated and defeated in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. The country was, therefore, bitter and hostile. Bismarck knew that the aim of France would be to avenge the shattering defeat of 1870-71. On account of this, his primary pre-occupation in foreign affairs was to make sure that France did not have the sympathy or the help of other European powers. He also wanted to ensure that France was isolated from other European powers so that she could not win friends to attack Germany.

Another problem was created by the recognition of Germany's new strength and potential. A newly unified powerful country had emerged on to the European scene. Bismarck recognised the powers of Germany but was careful not to exploit them. According to him,

Germany was already satisfied and was only conscious of preserving status-quo.⁹ Bismarck realized that Germany needed time to consolidate and settle down and to do this, an aggressive policy was not desirable.

Another problem faced by Bismarck was the problem of Germany's immediate neighbour, Austria. This was a country that was vanquished in 1866, humiliated and virtually expelled from Germany in 1870 and 1871. Yet Bismarck recognised the importance of Austria's proximity to Germany. He therefore, carefully worked out a friendly relationship with Austria. Indeed, his first step in foreign affairs was directed towards Austria. In 1872 he established an alliance with that Empire. Bismarck recognised that Germany stood between France and Russia and that Germany could not afford to be caught on two fronts and therefore he began to forge friendship with the Austrian ruler. By 1876, he had established a three Emperors' league of Russia, Austria and Germany. Although a clever policy, this was an unrealistic alliance because Russia and Austria were at loggerheads in areas around Turkey. Bismarck then turned his attention to Italy which like Germany had just been newly unified.

He succeeded in establishing a triple alliance of Austria, Italy and Germany. Bismarck then felt satisfied that all the major powers had been neutralised in case there was any war against Germany. However, he was fully aware that England would always be interested in maintaining the balance of power in Europe. He, therefore, ensured that he was on friendly terms with England. Through this chain of alliances, Bismarck was able to ensure that Europe was not engulfed in any major war throughout the period of his chancellorship. In 1881, during the Bulgarian massacre and when war appeared inevitable between Austria and Russia, Bismarck was able to play one against the other, to threaten and blackmail and to ensure that the stability of Europe was preserved.¹⁰

Undoubtedly, Bismarck became the new Metternich of Europe and for twenty years he was the arbiter of Europe and like Metternich he did not interfere in the internal affairs of other

countries. Essentially, he was the real European statesman of the 19th century. With his coming on the European scene the capital of Europe was shifted from Versailles to Berlin, the capital of Germany. Therefore, when there was a threat of war over the scramble for, and partition of, Africa and over the solution of the Eastern Question, the European powers met in Berlin 1884-1885. Here, Bismarck played host to the European statesmen but it is important to note that Bismarck's primary pre-occupation in foreign policy was to maintain the status-quo and to ensure that nothing upset European diplomacy and policy.

Bismarck consistently had his eyes on France. But the word on every French patriot lips was 'revenge' and when Bismarck offered France freedom of movement in Africa in exchange for Alsace and Lorraine the French patriots replied that they would rather have their two children (i.e. Alsace and Lorraine than adult slaves). In 1875, Bismarck deliberately provoked a war-scare in which he gave the impression that France was preparing for a war of revenge against Germany. This action had the desired effect of the making the Germans aware of their political enemies. By 1890 the weaknesses of Bismarck's foreign policies were obvious.

William II of Germany 1890-1914

William II inherited not only a solid and powerful Germany in 1890 but also the problems created by Bismarck. With the departure of Bismarck in March 1890, William was left to carry out the business of the state single handedly. Although there were five successive Chancellors, William II took considerable initiatives in foreign affairs as well as in domestic issues and seldom referred to these Chancellors. The first problem which William II inherited was in international affairs. Bismarck had carefully established a complex and difficult chain of alliances. So complicated was the system that only Bismarck himself could work it out. William II found the system not only confusing but too diverse. He had brought together Austria, Italy, Russia and Germany together, but it was obvious from the beginning that the interests of these three nations

were incompatible. Although William II had inherited the problems, he did not inherit the energy and the drive of Bismarck to cope with them. Unlike Bismarck who was a cool diplomat, William II was a theatrical, self-willed, ambitious Emperor who found it difficult to continue the system of alliances. One historian described William II as a man who was quick witted and who had a receptive mind. He was always willing to learn and he frequently analysed the problems facing Germany. He also had many interests extending from Naval warfare to Archaeology. Interestingly, William II also had a fine imagination and a very high sense of duty and an almost limitless capacity to work. However, as egoist, William II found it difficult to work with other politicians and statesmen. It is not surprising, therefore, that throughout this period, William II could not successfully continue the alliance system. He changed basic foreign policy. Whereas Bismarck had favoured the status-quo, William II believed that Germany must expand. He argued that Germany had the will and ability to expand and also had worldwide interests. According to him, Germany must be fully involved in world politics and world traffic to reflect this new expansionist policy and to demonstrate the increasing importance of Germany in foreign affairs. It is not surprising that William II encouraged full colonial enterprise. According to him, Germany's glory, economic interests and need for markets and raw materials for a growing economy demanded German expansion. Several cartoons pictured William II snatching the symbol of Bismarck's neutrality and status-quo and directing William II as Kaiser of Germany with a sign board looking east, west, north and south and announcing "Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles". In continuance of his new policy and to support his new empire, William II began to develop his Navy and he ensured that cruisers were built for the German Navy and he augmented the votes for the navy by one third.¹¹

Other nations that were watching these developments also began to develop their navies and armies. It has sometimes been argued that World War I came because of this arms race; for with the

increase in armaments there was always a possibility that there would be a trial of strength. There were also the rivalries overseas among these European countries. Unlike the period of Bismarck, Germany's new policies were now nationalist and expansionist. It seems that the most likely explanation for the outbreak of World War I could be found in the way William II handled foreign affairs between 1890 and 1914. He bungled the system carefully laid down by the calculating Bismarck. Because of his diplomatic inexperience he failed to realise the importance of Russia. Because he treated Russia as if it did not count much in European politics, Nicholas II, the new Czar of Russia, gradually drifted away from Germany into the warm embrace of France. In 1895, a treaty of alliance was signed between Russia and France and in 1896, the Czar and the Czarina (Nicholas II and his wife) paid an official visit to France.

This major development ended the isolation France and upset the objectives of Bismarck in isolating France. Gradually William II lost the friendship of England and witnessed the institution of the *Triple Entente* which sought to be a counter alliance to the *Triple Alliance*. In 1905, Emperor William paid a visit to Morocco and announced that the independence of Morocco was negotiable. After this Morocco drama of 1905-1906, France and England gradually came together and signed the treaty called the *Entente Cordial*. It has been argued that the smashing up of the chain of alliance established by Bismarck by the tactless, undiplomatic William II inevitably brought about the World War I.¹²

Triggers of First World War: The Action and Actors

From June 12th, 1913 it seemed that the whole of Europe was preparing for confrontation. On that date, the German government passed a new German Navy law. This made provision for an annual contribution which would provide for 6 submarines. Furthermore, the new law made provision for 810,000 regular soldiers. The law also made provision for additional battleships and two armoured cruisers. In July 1913, France and Russia also enacted new military

laws. In France the terms of military service was raised from 2 to 3 years and the French army stood at 650,000 regular soldiers. At the same date, the Russian army stood at 1,200,000 soldiers.

During this period as well, the French elections returned Poincare in January 1913 as President of the French Republic. Poincare represented French hostility and bitterness against the defeat and humiliation of 1870 and 1871. A contemporary described him as a symbol of the French hatred of Germany. According to him, "all his pronouncements breathed nationalism".¹³ Poincare, therefore, set about doing his best to woo other European nations and consolidate the position of France against German.

In the summer of 1914, the Kiel canal was widened and expanded by a German government to take in the newly built dreadnoughts. About this time too there were developments which eventually influenced the cause of history in Europe. On June 28, 1914, Archduke Ferdinand who was the nephew of the Emperor and the heir apparent to the throne of Austria-Hungary was shot with his wife at Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia. As soon as this news reached Vienna, Austria concluded that the killing of the Archduke was a direct result of Serbian propaganda against Austria which intended to separate the Slavs from Austria-Hungary. Therefore, Austria concluded that the murder should not be treated in isolation.

The Austrians decided to tackle the problems of Austrian propaganda at its root. The German government studied this situation very carefully and gave the Austrians every support. With this background support, Austria delivered a very stiff note to Serbia on July 23, 1914. In this note, Austria made the following requests:¹⁴

1. All anti-Austrian propaganda must be suppressed in Serbia;
2. All unfriendly publications and societies must be destroyed;
3. The Austrian authorities were to be allowed to investigate together with the Serbian Authorities the circumstances which led to the death of Ferdinand;
4. All teachers and those connected with anti-Austrian propaganda in Serbia were to be dismissed summarily; and

5. Austrian authorities must be allowed to assist in quelling this anti-Austria agitation

On July 25, 1914, Serbia replied to this note and accepted most of the demands but rejected those which tended to undermine her autonomy and sovereignty. On July 20, 1914, the Austrian-Hungary army mobilized. In the meantime, other European powers carefully watched these developments. Austria-Hungary formerly declared war on Serbia on July 28. Other European countries reacted. This was because the position of the Balkans interested them. Earlier on, on July 27, 1914 Russia had dispatched a telegram in which she stated that "in no circumstance will Russian remain indifferent to Serbia's fate".¹⁵

Kaiser (or Emperor) William dispatched series of telegrams to the Czar of Russia on July 28, 29 and 30 urging the Czar not to precipitate a European war by his actions. Austria began bombardment of Belgrade on July 29 and as a result of this, Russia mobilized her forces. On July 31, Germany dispatched an ultimatum to Russia requesting her to demobilize within 12 hours but there was no reply from Russia. On August 1, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. France immediately began to think of her military duties and obligations to Russia.

Germany dispatched an ultimatum to France to make up her mind within 24 hours and on August 3, Germany declared war on France. Italy was still hesitating and wanted to declare neutrality. Similarly, Great Britain was not sure whether to honour the terms of the *Entente Cordial* which some people described as a mere piece of paper.¹⁶ But on August 4, Great Britain declared war on Germany. Asquith, the Prime Minister, who announced this to the House of Commons on August 6 declared:

If I am asked what we are fighting for, I can reply in two sentences. In the First place, we are fighting to fulfil a solemn international obligation. Secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle that small nations are not to be crushed in defiance of

*international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and over mastering power.*¹⁷

The Chancellor of Germany Bethman Hollweg explained the reasons why German was at war at the Reichstag on August 4, 1914. He declared: "Gentlemen, I repeat the Kaizer's word, Germany enters upon the war with a pure conscience. We are fighting for the fruit of our peaceful labour, for the inheritance bequeathed to us by a great past, and for our future. The great hour of trial of our nation has now struck. Our army is in the field, our fleet is ready for action and behind them, the entire great German nation".¹⁸

The war raged with ferocity for four years. In this war, six soldiers died for every civilian killed; totalling 8.4 million soldiers and 1.4 million civilians. These were beside the scale of destruction of towns, cities and communities and their infrastructure.

Africa and the War

Once the First World War started, Africa played significant roles in that war. Through their efforts both the allied and axis powers acknowledged their fundamental contributions which helped in no small measures in making the former power to become victories and the latter to be defeated. In discussing the roles of Africa and Africans in the war, we shall limit ourselves to the following critical areas: The strategic significance of Africa in the war, the degree of African participation in the war and the impact of the war on Africa.

The Strategic Significance of Africa in the War

Africa did not participate in the diplomatic initiatives that led to the First World War in the first place. Already, by the time that the war was fought Africa was still under colonial rule. But when the war started and raged on, Africa found itself engulfed in it. Outside being involved in the war, Africa was of strategic significance to the belligerents and because of this participated in the war from the very beginning till the end.

Basically, Africa found itself in the war because it appeared to

be essential for the economic survival of the European nations at this time. Before actual colonization of the continent, the Europeans had benefited immensely from Africa. From the continent they had raw materials for their industrial economy and even before the advent industrial revolution in Europe, slaves were taken away from the continent of Africa to work in the plantations in the Americas for the European nations.¹⁹ By the time of colonialism, Africa became a strategic market for the industrial goods produced in Europe.

In other words, from the very beginning Africa has always of strategic value to Europe, but during the First World War, Europe's reliance on Africa was strengthened when the war started. Africa and Africans could not stand aloof because they had lost their sovereignty and were dragged along. At least by now, the myth of the invincibility of the white man was still there.²⁰

Apart from Europe itself, Africa was the only other continent where the Europeans shared common boundaries. As a result of the scramble for, and partition of Africa in the 19th century, major European nations had colonies in Africa. Britain, for instance, had Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa and Uganda in East Africa and Germany had Togo in West Africa, Cameroun in Central Africa and Namibia in Southern Africa.²¹ For France, there was no sub-region in Africa that she did not possess a colony. In north Africa, she had Algeria and Morocco and in West Africa, upper Volta (Burkina Faso). She had Mauritania as well. Even less known and less powerful European states like Belgium had colonies; Portugal had Angola and Mozambique while Italy possessed Libya.²²

It can now be seen that when the war started, these European countries shared the same boundaries in Africa. Already, one of the causes of the war was the competition for colonial possessions in Africa. Therefore during the war, it actually mattered which country would have the support of Africa and as it is documented elsewhere in the article, Africa had to contribute both men and materials towards the war efforts. Indeed, the strategy of winning the war was designed to include Africa. All the waterways in Africa became very important

and critical to the navies of the allies. The strategic significance of Africa can be gleaned from the following excerpts.²³

Britain and France emphasised that it was strategic necessity rather than territorial covetousness that dictated the seizure of the Cameroons and all German oversee possessions. But it will become clear that strategy alone as a determining factor of British naval or military moves is not convincing. .. The British decided that the capture of Duala was a particularly valuable military objective. Its value lay in the fact it could afford a harbour of refuge to German warships, commerce raiders and destroyers, and from Duala it was believed vital British trade routes could be threatened. Its importance was further increased by the fact that there was a wireless and telegraph station there which maintained communication with Europe via Fernando Po and Kamina in Togoland. Information thus transmitted could then be disseminated to German ships and men of war.

All in all, most African territories, especially those located on the coast were strategically needed to prosecute the war.

The Degree of African Participation in the War

Africa and Africans participated significantly in the First World War. The first and foremost contribution of Africa came in form of men and material. Many Africans were recruited as soldiers to fight on the allies side.²⁴ They were used in various campaigns and they fought both within and outside Africa. In most colonial territories in Africa, the mode of recruitment took the form of conscription.

Besides, during this time many standing armies were either established in the colonial territories or refurbished there for the war. Take the case of Nigeria, the biggest of the British dependencies in West Africa and the most populous of all her tropical possessions except India. By the end of 1913, the armed forces of both Southern and Northern Nigeria were merged into one single brigade of five battalions known as the Nigeria Regiment.²⁵ Three of these battalions (including the only mounted infantry battalion) were stationed in the north and the remaining two in the south. The Nigeria Regiment consisted of two batteries of artillery each armed with 2.95 - inch mountain guns, a mounted infantry battalion of three companies with a total strength of about 380 men, and four infantry battalions each with an establishment of about 1,200 men; each infantry battalion had eight machine guns. In all, the total number of combatant was about 5000 and 320 reservists, and there were about 400 gun carriers.²⁶ The entire force was under the command of 172 British commissioned and non-commissioned officers.

In addition to this military force, there was also in Nigeria a police force of 33 British officers and 2,100 Africans, excluding the Native Administration police. The Nigeria police had a semi-military training and were armed with carbines. There was also a marine department with about 90 British officers and 1000 Nigerian ratings.²⁷ The marine department had over 60 steamers, launchers or pinnaces for work in the inland and coastal waterways; many of these steamers could be fitted with light, quick-firing machine-guns.

Furthermore, outside the provisions of troops for the Europeans, the Africans also participated in the war by providing materials for the troops. They were expected to bring goods and foodstuff for the soldiers. To this extent, they were encouraged to engage in agriculture in order to provide for the troops. Besides, Africans were forced to pay war bonds in order to support the war effort. For example, the Gold Coast contributed £500,000 as its own war effort.²⁸ The money that could be used for development was used in war. Africa bore the brunt of all these materials.

Additionally, African territories became a theatre of war. In areas like Togo, Cameroun and Tankanyika, the war was fought as fiercely as it was fought in Germany. These countries were German territories. Again, Africans contributed to the war in their loss of market. It is worthy of note that Germany was the greatest trading partner of the West African states and when the war broke out, this relationship was disrupted. For instance, the bulk of trade in palm kernel in Africa went to Germany and with the war the allied forces stopped German trade with Africa and for three years most Africans found no alternatives. This was economic loss which in any case contributed to the war effort. Because the Germans were pushed out of West African commerce, the bulk of the trading goods that were left were shipped to Britain at very low prices. Of course, Africans had no choice.

Fundamentally, Africans participated in the war greatly and their collective efforts made the allied forces to win the war. Indeed, the role of the African fighting man deserve some comment because of the uniqueness of the situation in which he found himself; fighting well-trained African like himself as well as Europeans all armed with the best that modern weaponry could provide. The Germans, for instance, maintained that they were defeated in the Cameroon because of the shortage of ammunition and the complete lack of artillery. This seems almost self-evident and beyond dispute. Secondly, the Germans claimed that honest fighting was rendered practically impossible because of the system of widespread espionage which the English carried on. She also blamed her defeat on the Dualas aided by British funds. Some Germans blamed unfairly their African troops, who could not stand the enemy's artillery, and in the face of shelling of their positions, they were said to have got out of hand and "the wild bush negro in them broke out"²⁹

But with the victorious Allies, the African soldiers were showered with praise. The French, who had always considered their subjects more of military asset than anything else, were extravagant in praises. The success of the campaign was attributed to the African

soldiers, particularly troops of the Nigeria Regiment.³⁰

Whose gallantry and wiling endurance of real hardships have been remarkable, who were plunged suddenly into a form of fighting of which they could not possibly have had any conception, but who responded magnificently to all the calls made upon them and to whom must for ever be credited a large portion of the success achieved.

Another officer writing about African soldiers in the field commented.³¹

... They are good fellows and work splendidly; of course they stand things not white man ever could... They are good fighters, too, and, considering they have never been up against rifle fire before, they are marvellous, as the black man generally has an unholy fear of a gun. It's an extraordinary experience for them, unlike anything that has ever happened to them before, and when they return to Nigeria again they will be full of swank as to what they have done and seen.

Brigadier-General Cunliffe in his appreciation of the efforts of each component part of the force also remembered the "transport carriers who have toiled incessantly under heavy loads and at times also under heavy fire to keep the troops in the field supplied with good and ammunition".³²

General Dobell on his own commented thus:³³

The troops of the W.A.F.F have realised my fullest expectations, to them no day appears to be too long, no task too difficult, with a natural aptitude for soldering they are endowed with a constitution which inures

them to hardship.

The Impact of World War I on Africa

The First World War was fought for four years and even though the cause of the war did not concern Africa, the war had a profound impact on Africa. In fact, at the end of the war, the political, social and even economic climate in the continent changed drastically.

Having participated in the war in men and materials, peace was made in 1919 and all German territories were given to the victors as mandated territories.³⁴ This was the only way that Africa came into the peace process. Consequently, German colonies were transferred from Germany to France and Britain and following from this, the inhabitants began to learn new languages.

The war had impact on other areas as well. For one, it afforded the Europeans the last chance to consolidate their rule in Africa. Before the war, there were pockets of resistance in Africa and after the war, African resistance was destroyed. In West Africa, the British West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was used to suppress the revolt. The pacification of Africa ended with the war.

In the economic sector, the African economy was dislocated. A number of foodstuff which used to come to Africa was stopped because of problems of shipment. Gambia, for instance, was starved of rice. Again, it was not easy for farmers to perform their functions properly because of fear of bullets. This brought Africa a step further to becoming a dependent economy.

On the positive side, the myth of white superiority was destroyed. Having fought side by side with the Europeans, Africans found out that the Europeans too were human beings capable of being wounded in the war. In the war, some African troops were even stronger and more daring than the whites.

A second factor was that after the war, the European concept of colonialism began to change. In 1896, Chamberlain who was a Colonial Secretary wanted colonies to be developed for the benefit of

Britain but the World War I shattered this understanding. After the German territories were given to the victors as trust territories, the mandated territories generated a lot of controversies. People began to question whether African territories should be ruled as areas of exploitation and why all the territories were not ruled as trusts territories.

It was this time that Lord Lugard published his book entitled *The Dual Mandate on Tropical Africa*. It was exactly the climax of the debate of the era. He was of the opinion that colonies should be twofold for the benefits of European and Africans. This brought about the idea of development of Africa. Consequently, a series of African development programmes started from 1920s. There was increased development of roads, railway, health institutions and for the first time the educated Africans became important. Colonial rule was now to become a dual mandate. Until this time, colonies were seen as exploitative estates.

Furthermore, the war brought about enlightenment to the Africans themselves. With the return of soldiers after the war, there was a change of attitude of Africans. They increasingly began to demand participation in the governance of their countries. With this new orientation, there emerged proto-nationalist movements in Africa. All over Africa, there was the rise of nationalist movements. In Tunisia, for instance, there was the rise of the Detour Party; in Sudan, the White Flag League and in Kenya, the Kikuyu Central Association fought for the rights of Kenyans to the extent that it forced the British to send delegates in 1920 to determine the rights of Africans. In West Africa, there emerged the West African Nationalist Party.

What particularly helped the nationalists was the Marxist attack from the Soviet Union. The Communist state had taken upon itself to ask the capitalist states of Europe to stop the exploitation of Africa and to grant independence to the Africans. Across the Atlantic, many prominent Pan-Africanists like Marcus Garvey and WEB Du Bois were calling on Britain, France and other imperial powers to reform the colonial system and thereafter hand over power to

Africans who were now ready to rule themselves. It, however, took another war, the Second World War to drive home these points to the imperial powers.³⁵

Conclusion

The First World War which broke out in 1914 affected Africa tremendously even though the continent never participated in the events that culminated into the war. As a result of its strategic significance, Africa participated fully in the war in various ways. For one, because by this time most territories in the continent were under colonial rule and the colonising states were the very belligerents in the war, Africa contributed in raw materials towards the war efforts. These supplies helped the troops in no small measures.

Besides, Africans also participated as troops in the war. Many accounts of the war point to the fact that African troops were very efficient in the battlefields. They fought gallantly and fiercely. Just as they contributed money, food and blood for a free world, they expected rewards in form of freedom; that is, political independence. But after the war, this was not to be. Following from this, the veterans joined the nationalists to demand for self-government in the colonial territories. Most of them were even members of the nationalist movements.

The activities of the nationalists contributed directly to adjustments in colonial administration and such adjustments constituted the very process that led to independence in African states.

Fundamentally, the First World War had both destructive and constructive manifestations in Africa. It opened Africa rapidly to the outside world and facilitated communications as well. Politically, there is a direct correlation between the First World War and the rise of nationalist movements in Africa. All in all, our thesis is that Africa did not only participate in the war as a result of its location and history, but also contributed significantly in instituting peace in the world.

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