

## **REITH LECTURES 1979: The African Condition**

**Ali Mazrui**

### **Lecture 6: In Search of Pax Africana**

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In the early 1960s when I was a postgraduate student at Oxford, I was much preoccupied with Africa's capacity for self-pacification. The question which was often raised at that time in the wake of decolonisation was this: 'Now that the imperial order is coming to an end, who is to keep the peace in Africa?' I took the view that self-government implied, above all, self-policing. The logical conclusion of the whole process of decolonisation lay in Africa's ambition to be its own policeman. From this emerged the concept of Pax Africana.

In this lecture I want to carry my concept of Pax Africana a stage further. It is not enough that Africa should have a capacity to police itself. It is also vital that the continent should contribute effectively towards policing the rest of the world. It is not enough that Africa should find the will to be at peace with itself; it is also vital that the continent should play a part in pacifying the world. I am in no doubt at all that the world needs a policeman. There are four crises endangering the planet: depletion of resources; the population explosion; pollution and other dangers to the ecology; and large-scale violence among human beings. The first three dangers to our planet need institutions of global supervision and control. But the worst danger concerns large-scale human violence, including the danger of a nuclear war.

This is where Pax Africana looms into relevance. Is Africa affected by this nuclear cloud hanging over the world's political system? How does Africa suffer from it, and in what way can the continent contribute towards saving the world from a nuclear holocaust? At the heart of the matter is the paradox of Africa's location. It is the most centrally located of all continents, but politically it is perhaps the most marginal. This anomaly has implications for Pax Africana.

Africa's centrality has a number of dimensions. Among the oldest, once again, is the commercial factor, going right back to Vasco da Gama and the effort to find a sea-route to India. By the 1970s the Indian Ocean carried virtually a quarter of Britain's trade, and an even higher percentage of Japan's. The bulk of the exported oil also needed the two basic African routes—either through the Suez Canal or around the Cape of Good Hope. The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean also increased the significance of Africa. The Soviet Union is a hi-continental state, which needs the Indian Ocean partly to communicate with itself. The United States has had nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean covering Soviet cities. Britain's loss of such traditional military bases as Suez, Aden, Singapore and Gibraltar has also increased the functional alternative provided by a Western presence in the Indian Ocean. Once again, this has helped to consolidate Africa's strategic relevance. And yet, despite all this, Africa's influence is modest. Why is this? And what can be done about it? In my view, Africa's weakness is mainly due to three things: technological underdevelopment, organisational incompetence and military impotence.

As compared with many Asian countries, African countries manufacture very little themselves and are in command of only the most rudimentary technological capability. Transnational corporations have been among the major carriers of Western technology into Africa, but the level has still been rather modest as compared with the comparative technological sophistication in countries like Korea, Taiwan and Brazil. Then there is Africa's organisational incompetence, which is sometimes quite staggering. It is aggravated by political instability, social corruption and the whole crisis of moral ambivalence arising out of the bubbling of the cultural melting-pot. The third weakness is Africa's military marginality. In a way this was what imperialism was all about. Lenin argued that imperialism was the 'monopoly stage of capitalism'. It is at least as arguable that imperialism was the monopoly stage of warfare. Implicit in concepts like Pax Britannica was the assumption that Western powers have special privileges for being armed to the teeth, while at the same time proceeding to disarm the natives. It was readily assumed that Western powers were civilised enough to initiate world wars but Africans had to be stopped from waging tribal conflicts.

Of course, Pax Britannica pre-dates the nuclear era. The question now is whether the non-proliferation treaty, designed to minimise the number of countries that have a nuclear capacity and ultimately intended especially to discourage Third World countries from going nuclear, could conceivably be regarded as an extension of the old philosophy of 'imperialism as a monopoly stage of warfare'. Those who have already acquired the necessary capacity now assume the role of preachers, telling others not to acquire what they themselves wish to retain.

In assessing nuclear energy, we must distinguish between its impact on East- West relations, its effect on North-South relations, its implications for Black-White relations, and its repercussions for South- South relations. From the point of view of its impact on the relations between the Western alliance and the Soviet bloc, nuclear power has been liberating for the Third World watching from the sidelines. The major powers are now more afraid of war with one another than ever. This has helped to reduce gunboat diplomacy and territorial annexation. The old style of imperialism, in the sense of direct invasion by a great power to take over territory, seems to be receding into history. Meanwhile, the newly independent nations have opted for a policy of non-alignment in world politics. Non-alignment in those early days was still seduced by the ideals of disarmament. This was partly because of India's ambivalence on the precise relationship between non-violence and non-alignment.

These two doctrines were India's most important contributions to African political thought. Gandhi contributed passive resistance to one school of African thought; Nehru contributed non-alignment to almost all African countries. As Uganda's Milton Obote put it in his tribute to Nehru when the Indian leader died, 'Nehru will be remembered as the founder of non-alignment . . . The new nations of the world owe him a debt of gratitude in this respect.' And yet India's non-alignment was destined to go nuclear. India was indeed the first non-aligned country to explode a nuclear device, in 1974.

But is nuclear non-alignment a contradiction in itself? Should Africa and other Third World countries pursue their older traditions of distrust towards militarism? If one of the ambitions of non-alignment continues to be the effort to moderate tensions in the

world, then two Third World legacies have to go nuclear. One is the legacy of Nehru in India and the other is the legacy of the warrior tradition in Africa. The nuclearisation of non-alignment would mean not only using nuclear power for peaceful purposes, but using that power to reduce the danger of East- West convulsion. For the time being, India has assured the world that it will use its nuclear capacity for peaceful purposes. At the same time, though, India has warned that such a commitment would partly depend upon Pakistan's nuclear policy in the years ahead.

Which brings us to the impact of the atom on Third World politics. Nuclear power could constitute credentials for leadership within the Third World. The death of Nehru reduced India's stature as a Third World leader; but the explosion of a nuclear device ten years later helped to restore it. Another impact of nuclear power on South-South relations concerns the whole problem of sub-imperialism in the Third World. We are back to phenomena like Pax Tanzaniana and Pax Indiana. A nuclearised India is an India with additional credentials to help control the destiny of South Asia as a whole. That's why Pakistan has been so eager since 1974 to enter the nuclear age itself. And behind Pakistan is what Westerners fear most next only to communist rivalry — the spectre of nuclearised Islam, the jihad with an atomic face. Is Libya subsidising Pakistan's nuclear programme? Will Saudi Arabia finally intervene to help Pakistan become the first Muslim member of the Nuclear Club? Will this arouse the fears of regional neighbours? In Black Africa nuclear politics still seem remote. And yet the mushroom cloud may soon be on the African horizon as well. And when any African country goes nuclear, the temptation to exercise extra leverage on its neighbours could drastically increase. In Africa, as elsewhere in the Southern Hemisphere, nuclear power does carry the risk of sub-imperialism.

But if the nuclear deterrent in East-West relations has indirectly helped the liberation of the Third World, and if the atom has created new rivalries within the Third World, the role of nuclear energy in North- South relations has conversely provided another possible area of dependency. It is particularly relevant in Africa's relations with those Western countries without uranium reserves of their own. France has successfully deepened her exploitation of those of her former colonies with uranium reserves. Some of them, including the Central African Republic once ruled by Emperor Bokassa, have remained poor and subsidised by France in spite of the fact that their uranium reserves have been exploited by France.

If uranium in the South is one important aspect of North-South nuclear relations, technology in the North is another. The transfer of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes was until recently regarded as legitimate, provided there were safeguards against its use for military purposes. Some African statesmen were tempted by the potential and prestige of nuclear energy almost from the start. Nkrumah even argued that socialism in Africa could not flourish until it kept pace with the march of science. After all, socialism was both an ethic of distribution and an ideology of development. In the ceremony at which he laid the foundation-stone of Ghana's atomic reactor centre in Kwabinya, near Accra, Nkrumah said that neither Ghana nor Africa could afford to lag behind other nations in the nuclear age. Development was, in part, a utilisation of power. I quote him:

We have therefore been compelled to enter the field of atomic energy because this already promises to yield the greatest economic source of

power since the beginning of man . . . We must ourselves take part in the pursuit of scientific and technological research as a means of providing the basis for our socialist society. Socialism without science is void.

But given that much of modern technology is a child of capitalism, is not socialism with technology almost equally void? Is not technology from the West an additional form of penetration? Kwame Nkrumah left Ghana in greater debt to Western capitalism than he found it. He preached freedom—but fell victim to a deepening dependency.

The third area of nuclear relations between the North and the South is the expanded development of nuclear power in the North itself, as a potential substitute for oil. Ever since the rise of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, and its demonstrated capacity to hold petroleum prices high and to impose an oil embargo if need be, the West has been agonising over alternative sources of energy. Since OPEC is the most powerful economic organisation so far devised by the Third World, the issue of rival sources of energy will affect the balance of power between the North and the South in the rest of the 20th century. If nuclear energy is successfully developed to levels which reduce the Western world's dependence on oil from the Third World it would be the greatest single blow imaginable against prospects for a new international economic order. After all, the greatest reserves of uranium are in places like Australia. A decline in Western dependence on oil in favour of dependence on nuclear power would constitute a reconsolidation of the West's economic hegemony.

The fourth arena of nuclear politics concerns Black-White relations. Of special concern is the uranium in the Republic of South Africa and whether or not it can be used to consolidate apartheid. This has been made more ominous by the reported consultations in nuclear research between South Africa and Israel. South Africa has the uranium and part of the know-how. Israel has more or less the rest of the knowhow. Reports about nuclear collaboration between these two international pariahs have alarmed not only Africans, but many friends of Israel. Will Israel's technological expertise enter into an alliance with South Africa's financial power and uranium resources to create parallel nuclear capabilities in the two countries?

I myself am not quite as concerned about South Africa's nuclear capability as many fellow Africans may be. This is because I believe that nuclear power is less relevant for the survival of apartheid than it may be for the survival of the state of Israel.

Israel's most dangerous adversaries lie outside Israel—the radical Arab states and the determined Palestinians. But apartheid's most dangerous adversary is within the Republic of South Africa—in the form of potential black militancy and radicalism. Israel could conceivably use nuclear weapons against her external adversaries, but the architects of apartheid in South Africa could hardly threaten nuclear annihilation against the restless masses of Soweto. Even if they decided to use tactical nuclear weapons on pockets of insurgents in, say, Bantustan, such nearness of nuclear pollution would soon begin to send whites themselves tracking to distant lands for refuge. Nuclear power notwithstanding, this immensely rich and relatively developed economy is bound to pass into the hands of the majority of the people of that country before the end of the century. South Africa will then take its place among the

triumvirate of diplomatic leadership in Africa—alongside Zaire and Nigeria, the two other giants of black Africa, in terms of human and natural resources. After liberation and the introduction of genuine majority rule in South Africa, its nuclear status will be more clearly an asset unless the world has already de-nuclearised by then.

From this point of view, African countries should stop thinking in terms of making Africa a nuclear-free zone. This was a position which made sense at one time. President Kwame Nkrumah organised a ‘ban the bomb’ march against French nuclear tests in Algeria before independence. He also froze French assets in Ghana as part of the strategy against the nuclear desecration of African soil. Nigeria broke off diplomatic relations with France over the tests. All this made sense in the early 1960s. But for the 1980s and 1990s Nigeria should move towards making itself a nuclear power, unless the world as a whole calls a halt to nuclear weapons.

It might seem odd to be recommending that Nigeria should go nuclear, when oil is its major mineral resource. But the development of a nuclear capacity by Africa’s largest country is probably a necessary first step towards ending Africa’s peripheral status in international diplomacy. Nigeria should follow the example of its fellow giants—Brazil in Latin America and China and India in Asia—and pursue the goal of a modest nuclear capability.

My reasons for advocating this course have nothing to do with making Nigeria militarily safer. Only when the West and the Soviet bloc discover that they cannot make the rest of the world refrain from the nuclear dream unless they themselves give up the weapons will the world at last address itself to the fundamentals of human survival. Our third member of the triumvirate, Zaire, may be farther away from the organisational and technological capacity for nuclear status than either South Africa or Nigeria. But even Zaire could not be ruled out of the game of nuclear power for very long. It was among the very first African countries to discover uranium, though its future nuclear programme may well involve importing uranium from other African countries.

To summarise the argument so far, Africa should give up the idea of promoting itself as a nuclear-free zone except in terms of keeping outside powers and external bases at bay. Those African countries which signed the non-proliferation treaty should review their positions, and consider setting up a continental nuclear consortium allied to a strategy of developing a small military nuclear capability, first in Nigeria and later on in Zaire and black-ruled South Africa. For these three countries, going nuclear would be a new initiation, an important rite of passage, a recovery of adulthood. No longer will the Great Powers be permitted to say that such and such a weapon is ‘not for Africans and children under 16’.

As for the military gap between the big powers and the smaller countries, this will ultimately have to be narrowed, first by making the militarily weak more powerful, and then by persuading the powerful to weaken themselves by giving up their arsenals. The road to military equality is first through nuclear proliferation in Third World countries, and later through global de-nuclearisation for everybody. African countries will not rise militarily fast enough to catch up with even the middle-range northern countries; but they could rise sufficiently fast to create conditions for substantial disarmament in the world as a whole. Africa is still on the periphery of the

game of proliferation. To move from the periphery to the mainstream of action in the nuclear field, Africa will have to get out of its technological shyness and nuclear inhibitions.

When little white children misbehave in some Western societies the mother may sometimes say, 'Behave yourself—or a big black man will come and take you away.' Today we are dealing not with little white children, but with white grown-ups in northern chanceries who need to be threatened with the danger of big black men wielding nuclear devices. I realise this will sound outrageous to many people. Imagine Emperor Bokassa playing Napoleon with a nuclear bomb—or Idi Amin doing a war-dance with an atomic device! How can I even contemplate putting nuclear weapons into the hands of such tin pot dictators?

My answer is in several parts. First, such so-called 'tinpot dictators' will go nuclear before long, in any case, unless we declare these weapons illegitimate for *everybody*. Secondly, mad rulers are not limited to the Third World. The Northern Hemisphere has produced both Hitler and Stalin in our own lifetime. And remember, Nixon ordered a worldwide nuclear alert in 1973—partly in order to recover some dignity in the midst of the Watergate scandal. A ruler like him—under domestic fire—could all too easily take a potentially catastrophic international gamble.

My third argument concerns comparative damage. A tinpot Third World dictator with a nuclear device could indeed kill a lot of people, but is unlikely to have the capacity to destroy the world. However, a new Stalin, Hitler, or even Nixon in the Northern Hemisphere has the stockpiles to obliterate the human race.

My final argument to those who are scared of Idi Amin in nuclear armour is that I am banking precisely on that consternation of theirs. If the threat of a 'black man' can make a little white girl behave herself, perhaps a similar threat in a nuclear guise would scare northern war-mongers into sanity at last. Such an eventuality will be important in two ways. For Africa the gap between physical centrality and political and military marginality will be narrowed. Africa under its triumvirate of diplomatic leaders, partly endowed with nuclear credentials, will have begun to enter the mainstream of global affairs. And the world as a whole, once it discovers the lunacy of its ways, will have learned an old lesson in a new context—the lesson that wild mushrooms are dangerous.