

## THE POLITICS OF ARAB AID TO AFRICA

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Policy Studies ¥ 13

August 1985



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### ABSTRACT

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The demonstration of political support by Africa for the Arab states in 1973 against Israel at a time when the quadrupling of oil prices led to the accummulation by Arab oil states of surplus billions of petrodollars created a favorable political atmosphere for the transfer of Arab financial assistance to Africa. The Arab states established a number of financial institutions meant to assist the troubled economies of the African states. However, since then, Arab aid has been a contentious issue in Afro-Arab relations. In spite of the rhetoric, the quantity and quality of aid have fallen far short of African expectations. Africa remained the least favored in the distribution of Arab assistance. Disbursements also seriously lag behind commitments. The whole issue of aid has become inextricably tied to the political and religious interests of the Arab donors. A country's degree of support for the Arab position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the religious character of particular African states, or regimes, have been more important than economic needs in the choice of aid recipients. For Saudi Arabia, the ideological orientation of particular regimes has remained an additional consideration in the choice of recipients as well as the amount of assistance. Consequently, the members of the Islamic Conference are the main recipients of Arab aid to Africa, and a substantial part of bilateral assistance has been directed toward the promotion of Islam rather than for economic development. Left wing or 'radical' states have also been discriminated against in the choice of African recipients of Arab aid. Because of the overriding political objectives of Arab aid, bilateralism rather than the multilateral approach favored by the Africans is a dominant feature of Arab aid to Africa.

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## Background

Although a few African states received some financial assistance from Arab states prior to 1973, there is a sense in which one can speak of 'Arab aid to Africa' as a post-1973 phenomenon. First, Arab states' aid resources were limited before 1973, and therefore Arab assistance was confined to a few states. And second, the close political relations between Africa and Israel acted as an impediment to the development of the political environment necessary for closer Afro-Arab relations.

However, the political support which the African states gave the Arab World by breaking diplomatic relations with Israel in the wake of the October 1973 War removed the main political obstacle to Afro-Arab cooperation. The coincidence of this dramatic political action with the accumulation of unprecedented financial surplus by the oil producing Arab states led to an expectation of, and African demand for, Arab aid. Africa's serious economic difficulties and problems were exacerbated by the Arab oil embargo, production cut-backs and the four-fold oil price increases, and made urgent the need for Arab aid. 1

## Objectives of Arab Aid to Africa

The term 'aid' evokes an image of a charitable, wellmeaning, generous donor helping a less fortunate, grateful recipient. However, Arab aid to Africa is not all it seems. Its motivations had been hardly philantropic.

Apart from the public protestations of 'brotherly solidarity' with African states, the objectives of Arab aid to Africa are rarely stated by the Arab donors. Nonetheless, beneath the ritual declarations of 'oneness' and 'solidarity' of the African and Arab countries and peoples, it is possible to discern political, economic, religious and sometimes humanitarian considerations in Arab assistance to African states.

Broadly, Arab assistance to Africa has been aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- the continued diplomatic isolation of Israel and winning support for Arab position on Palestine;
- ii) acquiescence by African countries in continuedoil price increases and support for OPEC;
- iii) ownership of profitable and significant African mineral resources;
- iv) enhancement of the political and economic power of the Islamic bloc of countries, individually and collectively;
- v) Islamic proselytization; and
- vi) ameloriation of the adverse social and economic impact of the rising cost of imported oil.

## The Birth of Institutionalized Aid

The Arab League responded to the African expectation of,

and demands for assistance from Arab sources by initiating a number of measures in 1973/1974. First they created an oil relief fund (SAAFA) meant to give soft loans to African states to offset the impact of the oil price increases. Second, they created a Technical Assistance Fund (FATA) designed as a substitute for the loss of Israeli technical assistance by African states. Third, they established an Arab Bank for African Development (Badea) with an initial assets of \$231million (raised to \$500 million in August 1975) to assist African economic and social projects. And finally, some of them created national funds to assist developing countries, including African states. Kuwait extended the operations of its national fund to include all developing countries.<sup>2</sup>

African objections to these measures were immediate and two-fold. First, the Africans complained of the smallness of the financial resources involved. Many African countries derided the \$200 million SAAFA fund as paltry and as bearing no relationship to the huge burden imposed on African economies by the oil price increases and the enormous surplus funds accumulated by the Arab oil states. For example, despite a significant reduction in oil consumption, the aggregate cost of oil imports for 15 reporting countries rose by 220 percent or some \$560 million from 1973 to 1974. The additional expenditure on oil imports by thirty non-oil producing African states was estimated by various sources at between \$16 million and \$1.3 billion in 1974. The case of

Kenya is typical. Its oil import bills rose from \$46 million in 1973 to \$191 million in 1974, and \$215 million in 1975. But its allocation from SAAFA was only \$3.6 million.

Second, while the Africans wanted Arab financial assistance, they frowned at the Arab decision to create exclusive Arab financial institutions. They believe that the African Development Bank (ADB) which has nine OAU Arab states as members could adequately handle financial flows from the Arab World.

Their efforts to dissuade the Arab League from setting up the various Arab institutions failed. The Africans then insisted on joint participation in any development institutions meant to assist Africa. This, like other demands, including the sale of oil at concessionary prices, was rejected.<sup>5</sup>

These points of controversy dominated the discussions between the two groups until March 1977. In January 1977 a note prepared for the OAU Committee of Twelve (on Afro. Arab Cooperation) emphasized that despite BADEA the ADB was the "only one instrument for economic and financial integration" in Africa.<sup>6</sup>

This starkly demonstrates the misplaced optimism, even naivete of the Africans. The profusion of declarations of 'oneness' had led to the OAU's uncritical digestion of all the high sounding declarations of the Arab League and joint

Arab League-OAU meetings. The Africans seem to believe that the Arab states would behave differently from all other aid donors by divesting their national interests from their aid programmes. Or rather they seem to think that because they have given an unprecedented political support to Arab states against Israel, the Arabs would have common economic objectives with the Africans. Hence the talk of economic and financial integration. Despite the joint declarations to that effect, there is nothing to suggest that such a consideration figured in Arab policy considerations.

The contradictory conception of aid by both groups is illustrated by a 'Paper on the principles and framework of drawing a strategy for Arab-African dialogue' prepared for the League by its then Director of Technical Assistance Fund, Dr. Malik Ouda. Arab goals were defined as strictly political. On the criteria of selecting and determination of the projects in which Arab money should participate and their implementation, the paper stresses:

The continuation of the African political stand from the Arab point of view requires a political activity all the time, while injecting it with economic and cultural means and instruments as well as aids enough for the continuation of the required political stand toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.

This economic and cultural role as well as Arab technical assistance take place within a selective concept, i.e. to choose certain positions or certain coun-

tries or certain projects for this Arab role, so that it may give the required political result.

Implementation should take place first and best under the auspices of the Arab League...

## It further recommends:

Strong, effective and sensitive information organization to respond immediately to the initiative and through it, the Arab side controls first channels of contact with the OAU and Liberation Committee. Second, it prepares all the statements on the bilateral, collective and individual Arab activites and is responsible for their publication and inform all centres of information in the African countries all the time. The aim behind that is to control as much as possible the African information system.

In pursuance of this strategy, the Arabs refused African participation in any of the financial institutions they established. And when the \$200 million oil fund was conceived, it was not meant to be a new development fund but a means of disbursing a fixed sum rapidly to stem the tide of African criticism which had begun to mount. In March 1974, the capital of BADEA was increased to \$231 million and that of FATA to \$25 million to respond to African criticism of the meagerness of Arab assistance.

Again, the Arabs refused to channel the oil-funds

through the ADB as requested by the OAU. Rather, they asked the Africans to work out criteria for sharing it after which each state would have to collect its share at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo. This caused much resentment in Africa and considerable delay before the Africans started converging in Cairo to collect the first installment of their allocations. Even when the African states began to go to Cairo at the beginning of October 1974, in disarray, to collect their shares, the Arab League blocked the \$7.5 million allocated to Melawi on the basis of the latter's refusal to break relations with Israel.

Algeria was the only Arab state that decided to deposit its own \$20 million contribution to SAAFA to the ADB. Even then, it converted it to an Algerian Trust Fund. Disbursement conformed largely to the criteria established by the OAU, but Algeria reserved the right to select recipients of these funds itself. States designated as recipients were those West African states and the newly independent radical governments of Angola and Mozambique that were important to Algeria's foreign policy interests.

In 1976, the capital of the Fund was increased to \$350 million. In December of the same year, due to the insistence by the OAU that African states would not travel to Cairo to collect further disbursements, the Fund's loans of \$221.74 million and its undisbursed capital were merged with BADEA. Allocations to the Ivory Coast and Togo were also withdrawn for unspecified reasons. It is, however,

probable that the refusal of the Ivory Coast to agree to the application of the Arab Boycott Policy and to endorse the "Zionism equals racism" November 1975 United Nations (UN) resolution as well as its determination to ensure that reference not be made to the resolution in the OAU, were responsible for the blacklisting of Ivory Coast.<sup>7</sup>

The reasons for the exclusion of the Africans from part ownership of BADEA and the Arab refusal to use the ADB as a channel of disbursement of aid were therefore political. If BADEA had been a joint Afro-Arab venture, it would have been more difficult to use it as an instrument of political pressure on the Africans.

The disatisfaction with Arab aid policy had become sufficiently profound in early 1975 that the Sudanese Chairman of the OAU Committee of Seven had to be replaced by the Tanzanian foreign minister. The unhappiness was not just due to the quality and quantity of Arab aid but the Africans were also hurt by not being treated by the Arabs as equal partners. Senegal's foreign minister Assane Seck bluntly stated that the "idea of being a beggar of the Arabs is not acceptable to Africans." In some African states there was even talk of resumption of ties with Israel.

While the Africans were emphasizing economic cooperation between the two groups, the Arab League seemed to make that cooperation dependent on institutional relations between the OAU and the Arab League. The aim was to tie Africa more closely to the political interests of the Arabs, particularly on the various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Both groups agreed that a summit conference of leaders of African and Arab states was needed to defuse the situation.

The summit conference which finally took place in March 1977 was itself threatened by disagreement over aid. However, in a dramtic move, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE pledged \$1.45 billion to African economic development over a 5-year period. Although the pledges saved the conference from collapse, the Africans were not altogether pleased as they received mere pledges and not immediate disbursement, which in any case fell far short of their demand. Besides, the Arab pledges to development banks favored the Arab-sponsored BADEA and not the ADB. The Saudi participation in BADEA was doubled to \$240 million, while their participation in the ADB was raised to only \$20 million. Besides, the pledges at Cairo merely strengthened Africa;s bilateral aid links with Arab oil states. effect, Arab strategy in Cairo did not change -- they continued minimal deployment of aid, always on their own terms, and just enough to maintain African support for Arab anti-Israeli policy.

Although agreement was reached on joint coordination and cooperation on economic, financial and political matters, no new financial institution emerged from the conference. Besides, the joint institutions which were set up to monitor implementation of the agreements reached in Cairo did not

function as envisaged. The four meetings of the Standing Commission, before further multi-lateral cooperation was stalled by Africa's refusal to punish Egypt for making peace with Israel as demanded by the Arab League, were spent over disagreement on Africa's insistence on some form of participation in the decision-making process of Arab funding of development projects in Africa. The Africans had interpreted both the spirit and letters of the Cairo accords to assume such joint participation. The Arabs came up with a plan that would have given them exclusive control over matters relating to the Cairo decisions. However, the Africans insisted on the participation of the ADB in at least receiving projects for Arab funding from African states and in carrying out feasibility studies on such projects. The compromise eventually reached still left the Arab states with the final decision as to which projects would be funded and under what terms by Arab institutions.9

To maximize their policy objectives, the Arab donors have given a disproportionate preference to Arab bilateral channels. The pledges made at Cairo underscore this point. 85 percent (\$1,231 million) of the pledged assistance was to be committed on a bilateral basis. A glossary comparison of the capital of Arab national financial institutions and Arab sponsored African aid agencies brings this into sharp focus. The Saudi Fund for Development had an initial capital of \$2.9 billion, and later increased it to \$8 billion The

national funds of Abu Dhabi, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have a combined capital of over \$16.589 billion while the capital of BADEA (plus SAAFA and FATA) remain only at a little over \$988 million. Over 80 percent of total Arab aid to Africa since 1973 has been through bilateral channels.

The preference of bilateral channels is due to the fact that such channels afford donors to better maximize their political and administrative control over the allocation of their financial assistance. They also allow maximum exposure and public relations impact of aid when desired, and yet provide complete discretion if preferred. Assistance can easily be made to respond quickly to changes in bilateral political relations as was the case when Idi Amin was overthrown in Uganda or when Zaire and Liberia reestablished relations with Israel.

The Arabs have often emphasized, with considerable publicity impact, that Africa was the only geographic developing region singled out for special attention in the form of the multilateral aid institutions established. (SAAFA, FATA, and SAAFA). Yet the reality of Arab aid flows show that Africa has received the least aid from the Arabs. During the period 1973-79, Africa received only 5.8 percent of total Arab aid -- 4.1 percent of total bilateral aid and 8.9 percent of multilateral assistance. The bulk of Arab aid went to non-oil producing Arab states -- accounting for 69 percent of total Arab aid (or \$34 billion), and

between 75-80 percent of this was in the form of support  $\operatorname{grant.}^{10}$ 

In the most critical 1973-75 period, the African members of the Arab League received 89.6 percent of all OPEC aid going to African countries. The \$118 million disbursed in 1975 as SAAFA funds at a nominal interest rate of 1percent stands a poor contrast to the OAPEC Special Account of \$80 million offered as interest-free loans for 20 years to the 5 least developed Arab States -- Sudan (48 percent), North Yemen (18 percent) South Yemen (14 percent), Somalia (11 percent) and Mauretania (9 percent). Moreover these states were able to withdraw four times their national subscription from the \$875 million Arab Monetary Fund to handle balance of payments, currency flows, and international trade accounts. Compare BADEA's record in Africa with that of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD). While total BADEA disbursement at the end of December 1983 was only \$274.65 million, 11 the AFESD between 1974 and 1982 provided \$234 million to Egypt, \$176 million to Morocco, \$133 million to Sudan, \$155 million to Tunisia, \$108 million to Algeria, \$95 million to Somalia, \$84 million to Mauretania and \$13 million to Dibouti. 12

Asia received over 10.5 percent of total Arab aid during the period. It is instructive to note that Saudi Arabia made a loan of \$1.7\$ billion to Pakistan alone in 1976 to buy arms from the  $US^{13}$  at a time when all the Arab aid donors

were unwilling to commit more than \$1.4 billion in economic assistance to all African states. By the end of the 1970s, Asia had received commitments totalling nearly \$5 billion Commitments to Asia during the period were about 43 percent more than those to African countries. Throughout the 1970s Pakistan alone received more Saudi aid than the whole of black Africa. Because of the dominant role Islam and anticommunism play in Saudi foreign policy, Pakistan, the Arab states in the Horn of Africa and Mauretania took precedence over black Africa. Zaire, which was seen threatened by "communists" from neighboring Angola, also received some attention.

A Saudi government official summarized the Kingdom's Africa's policy in 1979:

"...(we) will increase financial aid to those countries --(we) perceive as part of a secondary defence line against Soviet subversion...Somalia, and the Eritrean rebels, both fighting Marxist (and, unstated Christian) Ethiopia -- the Sudan, Zaire, and Morocco, which are viewed as stabilizing influences." 14

Although black Africa contains ten times as many countries and is ten times more populous than Djibouti, Mauretania, Somalia and Sudan, the latter four states received two-thirds (\$3.636 billion) of the \$5.526 billion of bilateral aid committed to these four countries and 40 black African states in the period to 1980. The proportion is even more graphic if comparison is made on a per capital

basis: the four Arab League OAU States received commitments of \$234 per head while Africa received only \$7. What is more, about 46 percent of the bilateral aid received by these 4 states were in the form of programme assistance while only 29 percent of assistance to black Africa was given as programme aid. In addition five Gulf oil states also agreed to establish a fund to benefit the five least developed Arab states over a ten-year period. To be capitalized at \$5 billion, this fund was meant to provide soft, thirty year loans for economic and social development projects.

In the selection of aid recipients in Africa, Muslim or states with predominantly Muslim population or with Muslim heads of state have been favored. A substantial part of the bilateral assistance has been directed towards the promotion of Islam rather than for economic development. The bulk of the \$4.5 million assistance expended under the Technical Assistance Fund before it ceased operations in 1978 also went to Islam. In its first year of operation, it sent ten Arabic teachers, an Arabic printing unit and an educational expert to the Comoros and twelve teachers to Burundi. programmes were continued in 1978. With FATA assistance about thirty-five teachers went to Burundi and Senegal. seventy "experts" were also provided for Uganda, Mali, Niger, Guinea, Zambia, Kenya and Mauritius. Dr. Lansine Kaba of Guinea as early as 1976 expressed African concern:

Muslims wish that Arabs were involved in African projects for development rather than merely in the construction of mosques and Islamic centres."  $^{15}$ 

As a group, the African members of the Islamic Conference have received 57 percent of all bilateral Arab assistance since 1973. A substantial part of the commitments (32 percent) of the Islamic Solidarity Fund were committed to Africa. However, almost half of this was contributed to Eritrea, 16 Guinea, Meli, Niger, Senegal and Uganda (plus Zaire and Kenya) have been the largest recipients of Arab aid in Africa.

Over 70 percent of Saudi aid has gone to members of the Islamic Conference -- and mainly concentrated on certain moderate Islamic states such as Cameroon, Mali and Senegal. Senegal, for instance, has followed a policy parallel to Riyadh, backing Morocco on Western Sahara, opposing the MPLA government in Angola, supporting Mobutu during the Shaba crises. Though a Christian, former President Senghor staunchly backed the Arab position on Palestine. Mali too has been a pivotal state in the political maneuvring over the Western Saharan issue and in Saudi efforts to counter the spread of Libyan influence in the Sahara. So clearly is aid tied to Saudi policy objectives that countries such as Uganda and Mauretania experienced a sharp decline in the level of assistance once their governments' policies ran counter to Saudi interests.

The level of Arab aid declined generally from the late

1920s, and since 1977 no new increments were made in the subscriber capital of Arab sponsored African financial institutions. This is probably closely linked to the OAU's refusal to tow the Arab League line on Egypt. The general reduction in Arab surplus petrodollars as a result of the weakening oil market and the increased absorptive capacity of the oil states themselves also contributed to the general low trend in Arab aid. For example Arab oil revenues slumped from a height of \$274 billion in 1980 to an estimated \$154 billion in 1983. The indefinite postponement of multilateral cooperation between Africa and the Arab World since 1978 also removed an important source of pressure on Arab donors to do more for Africa.

Besides, the cooling of political relations had coincided with the hardening of the terms of Arab aid to Africa. Arab aid donors became less willing to give program assistance, whereas in the period before 1975, Arab aid was mainly project assistance. Another important change is the Arab willingness to cofinance projects with non-Arab aid and investment agencies. This served a number of political purposes. First it enables, Arab funds to be spread over more projects in more African states -- with all the resultant publicity impact. And second, since for African governments must agree to the application of the Arab boycott policy in projects in which Arab finance is involved, it is believed that African Governments will be discouraged

from discontinuing the political boycott of Israel and that Israel's economic involvement in Africa will thus be reduced.

However, the gradual rapproachement between Africa and Israel seems to have generated a renewed spate of aid commitments to Africa, particularly after Zaire reestablished diplomatic relations with Israel in May 1982. Arab aid activities have been concentrated since then on those states which were believed capable of following in Mobutu's footsteps -- Kenya, Gabon, CAR Guinea, Sierra Leone, Togo and Zambia.

## Conclusion

Arab political and religious considerations and interests have been foremost in the determination of the amount, type and direction of Arab aid to Africa. The degree of African states' support for the Arab position on Palestine has been and continues to be the single most significant determinant. The Arab donors determination to maintain maximum political and administrative control over their aid resulted in their firm stand against any form of participation by Africa in the decision-making process. The volume of Arab assistance to Africa often seems grossly overestimated. For example, official Arab estimates of total loans committed to Africa between 1975 and September 1983 amount to \$7.6 billion. However, the OEU's calculation of disbursed bilateral and multilateral assistance during the

same period was only \$1.2 billion. Perhaps the case of Zaire is typical. The loan BADEA approved for Zaire in June 1978 had not been disbursed by the time it was cancelled in May 1982 when the latter reestablished diplomatic relations with Israel. 19

The principal beneficiaries of Arab aid have been Uganda (under Idi Amin), Guinea, Zaire, Mali and Senegal -- states which (except for Zaire) are largely Muslim and which were early and relatively effective supporters of the Arab position on Palestine. With the exception of Zaire, the greatest concentration of Arab aid has been in countries where Arab political interests and Islamic affinity coin-Jcide. The Arabs have also avoided assisting nations whose policies are deemed by them to be opposed to their interests, including those which have close diplomatic and/or non-diplomatic relations with Israel, such as the Ivory Coast and Malawi, or states which are considered aligned with one or more of their inter-Arab rivals. The conservative donors have also shunned assistance to radical or Marxist states, including Angola, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome e Principe.

The continued deterioration of the economies of African states will most probably ensure continued African dependence on Arab aid sources despite the meagerness and the non-fulfilment of many of the commitments of Arab aid donors.

## Notes

- Oil prices were largely responsible for converting an overall near trade surplus balance for Africa in 1973 into a deficit of about \$2.7 billion by 1975. For details, see Olusola Ojo, <u>Afro-Arab Relations</u> (London: Rex Collings) forthcoming.
- 2. For details on the nature and operations of these institutions, see Victor T. Le Vine and Timothy W. Luke, The Arab-African Connection: Political and Economic Realities (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1981), Anthony Sylvester, Arabs and Africans; Cooperation for Development (London: Bodley Head, 1981) and Robert Anton Mertz and Pamela MacDonald Mertz, Arab Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa (Munchen: Kaiser, 1983).
- 3. Mertz, Arab Aid, p. 33.
- 4. African Business, October 1983, p. 29.
- 5. For details, see Ojo, <u>Afro-Arab Relations</u>. See also Philip Frankel, "The Arabs in Africa: Islamic Philanthropy or Petro-Colonialism" <u>African Bulletin</u>, Vol. 3, No. 3, December 1979, pp. 30-34.
- 6. OAU: January 1977 Lusaka Committee of Twelve, Report of Secretary General, Annex 4.
- 7. In April 1976, the Ivory Coast also vigorously objected to any reference to a Zionism-racism equation in the joint Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the

- first joint ministerial council of The Arab League and the OAU in Dakar, Senegal.
- 8. Cited in Le Vine and Luke, The Arab-African Connection, p. 65.
- For details, see Olusola Ojo, "Afro-Arab Financial Cooperation" <u>Afrika Spectrum</u> 82/3, pp. 328-331.
- 10. Mertz, Arab Aid, p. 27. See also Dunstan M. Wai, "Africa-Arab Relations: From Salvery to Petro-Jihad"

  <u>Issue</u> Vol. XII, 1984, pp. 9-13.
- 11 . BADEA, Annual Report 1983, p. 28.
- 12. African Business, October 1983, p. 28.
- 13. Le Vine and Luke, The Arab-African Connection, p. 67.
- 14. Cited in Mertz, Arab Aid, p. 107.
- 15. Lansine Kaba, "Islam's Advance in Tropical Africa" Africa Ca Report, XXI, 2, March-April 1976, p. 41.
- 16. Mertz, Arab Aid, p. 60.
- 17. African Business, October 1983, p. 28.
- 18. BADEA, Annual Report, 1983, p. 18.
- 19. See <u>ibid</u>, p. 72.

# המכון ליחסים בינלאומיים ע״ש לאונרד דייוויס מחקרי מדיניות

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