

## United States of Africa: An African Elitist Revolution

I am an optimist about life. I refuse to go along with the opinion, fashionable in some corners, that the fortunes of Africa can't be turned around or that there are no solutions to Africa's problems. The impression that Africa is doomed forever is a shambolic dated thought I refuse to accept. If Africa garners the will and the necessary courage, the fortunes of the continent and its people can be turned around. I also profoundly believe that there is no more noble cause than dreaming up ideas, galvanizing support for those ideas and implementing them to help transform the lives of millions of people.

But, first and foremost, it must be realized candidly and very unblinkingly quite how stuck and paralyzed the African continent has become in these modern times. Economically, Politically and Socially. Let me put it another way, Africa is still dependent on foreign aid and impoverished as ever, with the vast majority of its youthful population unemployed or underemployed, and critical infrastructure left underdeveloped or underinvested in. Worse than that, the continent is plagued perpetually with conflicts and violence mostly instigated by political greed and has no real answers to mitigate the [burgeoning damages of climate change](#). All of these challenges will be coupled with much more difficult ones that will be faced in rebuilding the progress lost to the devastating effects of Covid-19. That is the reality of what's happened now.

Of much more significance is to understand that there is no single solution to the challenges faced by the continent. There's no single idea that can curtail the challenges the continent faces now and will face in the future. This is not to say that the continent is lost and hopeless forever, but that if there exists such a single idea, it is perhaps a set of the combination of ignorance and pontification. The myriad challenges faced has now got stuck. No single solution, no single idea, can relieve the continent of its tribulations. That is a fundamental truth people need to accept. Africa is at a point where the ebb and flow of prosperous life has been arrested and no singular idea will fix it. Therefore, I sometimes think it is important that the uniqueness of the trials faced by Africa and Africans are spelt out candidly and bluntly.

Yet, there are still groups and individuals who propose and support an idea of a single unified continental African government as the solution that could presumably administer African's resources more efficiently and equally. Yes, the grand [United States of Africa](#) idea. The great dream proposed and cherished from the earliest days of pan-Africanism. A dream that has been around for decades now. Pan-Africanist ideas first began to circulate in the [mid-19th century in the US but it began to take roots in African by the late 1940s](#) with Africans now taking the lead in propagating these ideas. Specifically, brilliant individuals such as [Kwame Nkrumah](#) as well as despots like [Muammar Gaddafi](#) and [Robert Mugabe](#) particularly cherished the grandiose idea of a single African government that will seemingly enable the continent to fulfill its potential to independently provide for its people. One would have thought that this idea could have died when these prominent advocates, important African historical figures, died. And that the United States of Africa movement receded.

In recent years, however, the idea of a United States of Africa continues to dominate the discussions of solutions for if Africa is to emerge prosperous from its current state. Groups and individuals, both young and old, politicians and academics alike continue to purvey the idea. Prominent amongst them being [Julius Malema](#) of South Africa and Professor [Arthur Mutambara](#) of Zimbabwe. For these folks, the failure of the post-colonial state is the root cause of the upsurge in the forces that have combined to plunge swathes of Africa into chaos and underdevelopment. More importantly for these modern pan-Africanists is that their push for a single state Africa hinges on two broad and very modern arguments.

First, embracing an ever closer union through the African Union (AU) has failed. Hence, Africa needs the United States of Africa, a country, and not a union of sovereign states. Put simply, abolish national sovereignty and embrace continental sovereignty. Now, it could be rightly said that the AU has failed to

advance adequate socio-political and economic development of Africa since its formation in 1963. It could be further argued that the AU has allowed African leaders enough room to pay lip service to continental economic integration and African Unity. Further, as it is sometimes argued in the pan-African circles, it could be said that the AU has been a very passive organization. Many Africans don't know what the organization does to mitigate conflicts and violence on the continent. Yes, these reasons might be true. And yes, these reasons could be valid.

Second, pan-Africanists tout the United States of Africa as a solution to globalization, the doomsday evil that is coming for all of us. For them, corporate-led globalization has intensified Africa countries' dependence on the western world for essential goods and services. This has made African countries susceptible to privatizing national assets to the benefit of western multinational corporations, which coupled with the western countries' protectionism and subsidies have resulted in the deterioration of Africa's terms of trade, especially [sub-Saharan Africa](#). The purveyors of these gloomy reasons often purport the United States of Africa as a solution to the adverseness of globalization. The rationale here is that a United States of Africa that has one currency and with one economy enabled by free movement of goods and services can provide the markets for African businesses to flourish and its people to thrive. Now, that makes sense until it is further argued that if that United States of Africa is to succeed, it will need one president, with one parliament and one judiciary. This position was made clear when [Julius Malema](#), after he was re-elected as leader by his party on 16 December 2019, disturbingly opined to his delegates: "*We need to lead Africa, we want a United States of Africa. With one currency, with one economy, with one parliament, with one president and with one judiciary*". His words should send chills down your spine when you take your time to properly analyze them.

But, let us hang on for a minute and think hard, think really hard about this grand United States of Africa idea that is continuing, louder than before, to take roots and gain traction in discussions on the continent. Where is the individual's - the average African who goes about his or her daily life without government interference - place in this grand idea of a United States of Africa? How does a one African parliament help mothers living off in remote villages who want very good schools for their children? How does a very bureaucratic one African parliament help a social enterprise that has got a great idea for tackling poverty? How does one Africa judiciary help a pensioner who doesn't want pity but wants dignity and security in old age? How does a one Africa president help the vast majority of people who are already ignored by the political systems in their respective countries: the people who work hard, the people who set businesses, the people who work in factories, the people who teach children, the people who keep our streets safe, etc?? These questions only brings us to a plausible and far more troubling conclusion. The conclusion that the idea of a United States of Africa is curiously an African elitist revolution and Africans need to truly understand what it is.

These African elites - made up of moneyed elites, politicians, academics, unaccountable individuals and organizations among others - are able to advance their vested interest because African's problems has made Africa vulnerable to influence. The absence of checks and balances in our systems, the ever centralization of power democratically or undemocratically in some cases, and the impoverishment that continues to threaten the survival of thousands of people have allowed these elites to operate almost like the old colonial masters: indoctrinating young Africans and much of it is invisible.

So when I see young Africans of this generation thunder and applaud the idea of a United States of Africa, I mope. Because what I see is an encroachment, by way of proxy and unacceptable influence, of the African elites who are operating almost like the old colonial masters and are doing so in entirely unaccountable ways - much of it is invisible - and almost all of it is entirely unknown to the African public. For instance, when [Julius Malema](#) declared "*We need to lead Africa, we want a United States of Africa*", who is the "*we*"

he is talking about? South Africans? He and his public office holding colleagues? Or Him and his rich (comparatively) donors who fund his political activities? A lot of answers are needed right there.

But don't get me wrong, these African elites may all individually be decent people, but they have acted knowingly or [otherwise](#) in an unusually coordinated fashion, to mobilize very significant amounts of support, derived from different sectors of Africa, in pursuit of one particular ideological objective, which is not only to create a one African State. But crucially, if you read the musings and outpouring of these individuals, they are all united if somewhat from different directions, by a hardline, socialistic and communistic, let's create more bureaucracy and give those bureaucracies more power to control the masses view of the world. That Africa needs to move to a United States of Africa, a one African state, to gain our economic virility. That Africa needs to pursue a communist-style state like China or Russia, or the union of states-style of the US to prosper is quite simply ludicrous.

My point is this, the whole impression that Africa needs a United States of Africa – such a grand solution - to solve Africa's many problems is dangerous. This reasoning is stuck in the past. It is not in keeping with the spirits of our age, the technology age. But more frustratingly dangerous is the idea of a United States of Africa itself. Look at it this way. What does [Ahmed Sékou Touré](#), [Muammar Gaddafi](#), [Julius Nyerere](#), Kwame Nkrumah, and [Robert Mugabe](#) – all African pan-Africanist political leaders who were at the forefront of calls for a United States of Africa- have in common? What is the common denominator for all these African political leaders? All these are leaders who were powerful men and wanted to stay in power for long extended periods. Some succeeded in doing precisely that, others didn't.

This is not to say that pan-Africanism or Pan –Africanist ideas promote despotism. But perhaps, Malema and his comrades need to realize that there is a greater possibility of tyranny when a more powerful government exists. The tendencies of some of these pan-Africanist political leaders who all had control of powerful governments and sought to cling on to power for long serves as shreds of evidence to this fact. It could be advanced that some of these leaders and, dare I say it, all of these leaders abused power and contributed heavily to the problems facing Africa currently. One political leader in control of as huge an entity as the Government of the United States of Africa with enormous resources, judging by the political history of African leaders, is extremely dangerous and simply frightening.

Further, if pan-Africanists argue that the strategy to consolidate African states first and gradually integrate the continent through regional blocs like AU hasn't worked, how is jumping to quickly unify into a United States of Africa an answer? It should be argued then that Africa needs to cooperate more on economic integration to allow for much more freer trade of goods, capital and labour amongst countries on the continent to advance economic growth and realize the full benefits of free trade. This, I believe, is what the [Africa Continental Free Trade Area](#) (ACFTA) is here to achieve. And if Africa should learn anything from the failure of AU to integrate Africa politically, it is precisely that the ever centralization of power won't work because it is hard to achieve given the geopolitical and geo-socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, countries within Africa should work to decentralize political power instead. These countries need to allow for more democratic, autonomous and accountable local governance. It is clear that the solution is not to jump to a potentially forceful and coercive catastrophic political unification with a unitary government and one president.

Another thing to consider among other things is how to reconcile the heterogeneity of the African people under a United States of Africa. Just take a glance at the North ([Maghreb](#)) and the rest of the continent, you will see what I am talking about. Different Languages. Different ethnicities with around [3000 different tribes](#). Different values and economic principles. This is sure to be a problem, and thereby, the question of how exactly a one African parliament is able to comprehensively accommodate and represent these

heterogeneities. A more reason to believe that a United States of Africa is just another scheme to funnel more money into the vested interest of the political elites.

From the arguments laid out above, I believe profoundly that there is something very, very, very wrong when a continent like Africa, which has come a long way, flirts with and is seduced by such an ideology. An ideology which represents such a radical and abrupt, and in my view, self-harming and destructive departure from even pre-colonial times where people could break away from their original tribes to form new communities for self-determination and liberty. The thought that this way of life, the African spirit that longs for freedom always, can be changed by imposing a single identity under a United States of Africa, I believe with my head, heart and soul, is simply in the long run unsustainable. It is absurd and deeply *un-African*.

So the African youth must mobilize and make their voices heard. The youth must mobilize, make their voice heard and say that discussions surrounding establishing a United States of Africa will not happen in their name. The youth must mobilize, make their voice heard and say that discussions surrounding establishing a United States of Africa will not be fuelled on their watch. It is not going to be easy. The vast majority of people who support the idea of a United States of Africa have nowadays transformed themselves from vigorous idealistic individuals into a cabal that knee-caps any opposition to the idea, and delegitimizes and discredits them. Anyone who now speaks against the trajectory that they want is treated, in an organized fashion, to an industrial scale attack.

But that doesn't mean that the vitriol will forever carry on. Since for every action in life, there is always a reaction. And Africa has much to be proud of. What Africans must fear though more than anything else is passivity, cynicism, hopelessness and a sense of complete disempowerment. The destiny of Africa is in the hands of the African people, all the people regardless of class, gender, race, religious orientation etc and not in the hand of the elites alone. Africa is a special continent. The world knows it and Africans know it too in their innermost thoughts. Africa is the greatest continent on earth. As I told you in the beginning, I am an optimist about life!

**Writer:**

**Nana Kwaku Asamoah**

**nanaasamoah007@gmail.com**