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## ***On Machiavelli and the Mercenaries***

by KENNETH W. GRUNDY\*

THE use of mercenaries in Africa has been almost universally condemned. Africans in particular loathe foreign mercenaries. Small wonder, with the memory and reality of the Congo experience still fresh. So pejorative has the label 'mercenary' become in Africa that at one point in August 1962, when United Nations troops had been occupying a none-too-quiescent Katanga, the Katangan Minister of the Interior passed a U.N. road-block manned by Indian troops and cursed them by shouting across the barrier, 'Mercenaries, mercenaries!'<sup>1</sup> And this came from a member of the very Government that had hired the first contingent of mercenaries in the independent Congo. Even Colonel Jean Schramme, leader of the band of 125 mercenaries encamped last year in Bukavu, hates the epithet 'mercenaries' and prefers to call himself and his men '*volontaires*'.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the former and the few remaining *colons* in the Congo (many of whom owe their lives to the presence of European soldiers) and the white settlers and their régimes in the southern quarter of Africa, few people today respect or even sympathise with the foreign mercenaries who made the Congo their battleground.

Despite this almost unanimous distaste for mercenaries, it is not entirely clear that Africa has learned from her unfortunate experiences. Rumours of recruiting teams in search of free-lance soldiers to fight in African states are still heard and there are still some politicians in Africa who, at the same time as they publicly denounce mercenaries and those who bring them to the continent, secretly consider their utility in their own political circumstances.

A classic argument on the matter of mercenaries and armed forces in general is provided in Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Unfortunately, at a time when foreign troops in one form or another as well as indige-

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<sup>1</sup> *Africa Diary* (New Delhi), 33, 11-17 August 1962, p. 697.

<sup>2</sup> John de St Jorre, 'Looking for Mercenaries (and Some Pen-Portraits of Those We Found)', in *Transition* (Kampala), xxxiii, October/November 1967, p. 24.

nous military forces have been exercising an inordinate influence on the affairs of this continent, Machiavelli has been neglected. Or, to put it more precisely, I have noted no open reference to Machiavelli's view on mercenaries, auxiliaries, or citizen armies by contemporary African leaders.

This strikes me as unfortunate, for Africa's experiences with foreign mercenaries in many respects support and vindicate some of the observations made about mercenaries by Machiavelli over 450 years ago. On the other hand, some of these observations have not been borne out by African events. In this article I intend to explore some of the problems of mercenaries and auxiliaries in Africa, bearing in mind Machiavelli's perceptive analysis, which was founded of course on his appraisal of Italian experience.

Before we proceed, a classification of terms is in order. 'Mercenaries', as used in this article, refers to individuals who are hired for money to fight for the government of a state or portion of a state of which they are not citizens. They may be employed as a group, since many mercenary leaders have already formed units ready for hire, or they may be employed as individuals, but the chief criterion is that they are professional free-lance soldiers who are not citizens of the political entity for which they are fighting.

Auxiliaries, on the other hand, are soldiers who are seconded or attached to the armed forces of another state by their own government. Of necessity, they are usually engaged as a group by arrangement between two governments. Although they fight on behalf of the host government, they are ultimately answerable to their own. Thus they enjoy far less manoeuvrability than do mercenaries, who move about from employer to employer depending on the pay and conditions of work.

#### I. MACHIAVELLI ON MERCENARIES AND AUXILIARIES

Machiavelli's discussion of military forces can be summarised in a few paragraphs. It arises in the context of how principalities can organise for attack or defence.<sup>1</sup> In his estimation, the main foundations of every state, new as well as old, are 'good laws' and 'good arms'. Making no effort to explain these normative phrases, he proceeds to state that good laws are not possible without good arms and that, where there are good

<sup>1</sup> See Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated with an introduction by George Bull (Harmondsworth, London, 1961), pp. 77-90. All quotations of Machiavelli in this article have been taken from this edition.

arms, good laws inevitably follow. The priority is clear-cut. Forces at the disposal of a prince can be of four sorts: his own, mercenaries, auxiliaries, or a combination. At this point, Machiavelli makes a definite condemnation: 'Mercenaries and auxiliaries are useless and dangerous.'

This contention is based on two further propositions. Either mercenaries are successful militarily, in which case they hold their employer at ransom, or else they fail to win militarily and thus may abandon the employer to the mercy of his enemies. The latter circumstance is more likely, since mercenaries, to put it crudely, would rather 'switch than fight'. This leads Machiavelli to the conclusion that 'If a prince bases the defence of his state on mercenaries he will never achieve stability or security.'<sup>1</sup> He then proceeds to catalogue the weaknesses of mercenary forces:

mercenaries are disunited, thirsty for power, undisciplined, and disloyal; they are brave among their friends and cowards before the enemy; they have no fear of God, they do not keep faith with their fellow men; they avoid defeat just so long as they avoid battle; in peacetime you are despoiled by them, and in wartime by the enemy. The reason for all this is that there is no loyalty or inducement to keep them on the field apart from the little they are paid, and this is not enough to make them want to die for you. They are only too ready to serve in your army when you are not at war; but when war comes they either desert or disperse.<sup>2</sup>

Thus nothing but unhappiness attends the mercenaries. Machiavelli does imply that under certain conditions the use of mercenaries, though by no means ideal, need not be disastrous. This is when the prince or the republic is able to maintain command of the armed forces. Thus, if a state can avoid employing a mercenary band with its own commander, it might be able to utilise mercenary soldiers profitably. It is consequently the mercenary commanders who are to be avoided at all costs. If they are skilled military leaders, you cannot trust them because they seek always to maximise their personal power, either by coercing their employer or by coercing the enemy more than the employer government had intended. If the commander is a military bungler, as often as not he brings about the ruin of his employer.

The crucial factor is that the armed forces must be under the firm control of either the prince or the republic. A prince should assume personal field command of his troops. A republic must appoint only its own citizens to positions of command and see to it that it limits the commanders' authority by statute. In Machiavelli's view, historical

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 77-8.

evidence proves that 'only princes and armed republics achieve solid success, and that mercenaries bring nothing but loss'.<sup>1</sup>

Auxiliaries, as Machiavelli uses the term, are troops provided by one ('powerful') state at the request of another state. In themselves, auxiliaries may prove reliable and useful, but historically, 'for the one who calls them in, they are almost always a disaster'. They are disastrous, he would argue, largely because of the problem of control, essentially the same issue advanced with regard to mercenaries. If auxiliaries are defeated, the host government is left in the lurch and if they are victorious they hold the host in their power. Under no circumstances are they solidly under the command of the employing government.

Machiavelli argues that in the long run auxiliaries are even more dangerous than a mercenary army:

Auxiliaries are fatal; they constitute a united army, wholly obedient to the orders of someone else; whereas mercenaries need more time and opportunity to do you harm, in that they are not a compact force and you have raised and paid them yourself. Mercenaries, also, are led by someone you appoint, and he cannot immediately assume sufficient authority to be able to do you harm. To sum up, cowardice is the danger with mercenaries, and valour with auxiliaries.

The wise prince, therefore, would prefer to lose battles with his own obedient forces, than to win them with someone else's troops. In Machiavelli's words, 'no true victory is possible with alien arms'.<sup>2</sup>

The secret of military and presumably of political success, therefore, is to escape reliance on foreign forces. A citizen army, composed of subjects, citizens, or dependants, is the best solution to this problem. A republic with its own citizen army is less likely, he maintains, 'to be subjugated by one of its own citizens than a republic whose forces are not its own'. Invoking Tacitus' dictum that 'nothing is so weak or unstable as a reputation for power which is not based on one's own forces', Machiavelli concludes that 'unless it commands its own arms no principality is secure'.<sup>3</sup>

With this outline of the substance of Machiavelli's thought on armed forces, these ideas can now be discussed in the light of African experience. Our discussion can be organised around what appear to be the two issues at the heart of Machiavelli's thesis: (1) the problem of force in institutionally weak societies, and (2) the problem of control of various sources of armed force.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 83-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 79 and 86-7.

II. THE PROBLEM OF FORCE IN  
INSTITUTIONALLY WEAK SOCIETIES

Military strength is a relative commodity. It is not a question of how large or how powerful in absolute terms a particular armed force is, but how large or powerful it is in relation to another armed force or forces, or to a particular problem of foreign or domestic affairs that may necessitate its utilisation.

Black Africa's level of military preparedness is low, in absolute as well as in relative terms. The ratio of military to civilian population is about 1:1,131, compared to 15 per thousand for the United States, ten for the United Kingdom and the Middle East, and five for the Maghreb states.<sup>1</sup> The disparities would be magnified further if one were to deal with the ratio of soldiers to total area.

This over-all low level of force is made even more significant when one considers the additional problems of logistics in under-developed countries, and the fact that the military may be called upon to maintain order in states where loyalty to the government or to the very idea of the nation-state may be constantly in question. A ratio of one military man for every 1,000 citizens may be adequate in states where there is a firm consensus on the basic ground rules of government and the economy, and where there is no question of the legitimacy of the government of the day, but few African states have displayed such characteristics in their short histories of independence.

African military forces consist almost entirely of infantry. Although many states have a skeletal air force, navy, and an élite paratroop force, their over-all fire-power and level of special skills are marginal. Where specialised forces do exist they are highly dependent on foreign military assistance and training if not on expatriate personnel.

But size and fire-power alone do not represent the prime ingredients of military effectiveness in situations of limited strength. Organisation, discipline, and loyalty appear to be at least as important factors in whether or not a particular military force is one to be reckoned with.

It appears that, given all these socio-political characteristics, African states truly need a different approach to maintaining internal order. It is for these very reasons—because of the relativity of power, because of the over-all low level (in absolute terms) of military power in Africa, and

<sup>1</sup> Calculations are my own, based on figures for January 1966 drawn from David Wood, 'The Armed Forces of African States', in *Adelphi Papers*, no. 27 (London), April 1966, p. 28. The comparative data for other regions are from I. William Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1966), p. 90.

because of the premium placed, not so much on size, but on organisation, discipline, and reliability—that some African heads of government are perversely attracted to the idea of part-time mercenary forces and, conversely, adventuresome free-lance fighters are drawn to Africa. Particularly in the Congo and Nigeria, where fundamentally disintegrative forces have broken the surface, the possibilities of a force recruited abroad seem to be at first blush seductive for both sides in the struggle. In this context, a mercenary band may look appealingly like a ‘quick fix’. Not always do the politicians realise in advance that the after-effects—the withdrawal symptoms—may outweigh the alleged short-term advantages.

To be sure, many African leaders have soberly concluded that there are dangers inherent in involvement with mercenaries. They may well see the need for keeping in check the potential threat of mercenaries, even those introduced into the continent by others. At least one group of African military planners has expressed its apprehension in practical terms. In November 1967 the 5th Battalion, the Paratroop Company, and the Reconnaissance Troop of the Kenya African Rifles conducted exercises in the form of a ‘battle against mercenaries’. Manœuvres centred around the contingency that a neighbouring country was having trouble with mercenaries and had appealed to the United Nations for military help. A battalion of the Kenya Army was sent, but the ‘mercenaries’ then crossed into Kenya and terrorised the people of Siaya District in south-west Kenya. Ultimately, all the ‘mercenaries’ were reported killed or captured.<sup>1</sup>

Despite such efforts at forethought and planning, it is even conceivable that a situation might arise in Africa where mercenaries for one side would be brought in to combat mercenaries hired by the other side. There was a time when it looked as if Moïse Tshombe, in exile, was recruiting a mercenary army of Europeans to invade the Congo, which, in turn, would be defended by a composite force made up of Congolese soldiers reinforced by mercenary officers and special units, in the employ of the central Government. It has even gone farther than that. In November 1967 it was reported that anti-Castro *émigrés* from Cuba piloted aeroplanes that bombed Bukavu while it was occupied by Colonel Schramme’s legion.<sup>2</sup>

An even more clear-cut example emerges from the present civil war in Nigeria. Both the Federal Government and the breakaway state of Biafra have attempted to build up mercenary units capable of tipping

<sup>1</sup> *East African Standard* (Nairobi), 13 November 1967.

<sup>2</sup> *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), 9 November 1967.

the balance in their direction. Both also have sought the services of Mike Hoare, known as the 'Mad Major' from his Congo days.<sup>1</sup> Others with Congo experience have signed on to help recruit mercenaries for the belligerents and to officer units in the field. In the face of decisions of the Organisation of African Unity permanently banning mercenaries from Africa, both sides in Nigeria seemed intent on fielding a mercenary force. It is this very practice, the use of mercenaries by both sides, that represents the *reductio ad absurdum* that Machiavelli condemned as 'the present ruin of Italy'. Although there had been times when mercenaries appeared to fight well against other mercenaries, when they were matched against foreign invaders or against citizen armies 'they showed themselves for what they were'.<sup>2</sup> So far, Africa has not reached this level of mercenary involvement.

Because of the relativity of power, it appears that a disciplined and well-trained band of two or three hundred fighters could well make the difference in a civil war, or in a potential war with another power. In societies where it increasingly appears that the institutional requisites for stability are not taking root as rapidly as originally expected, where political parties, governmental bureaucracies, and associational groupings are often 'paper organisations' with little real power or efficiency, military leaders and mercenary leaders assume inflated importance, especially in the short run.

One might argue that most of Africa's politicians don't have to be told to be Machiavellian, or, to put it more accurately, to be alert to the possibilities and needs for exerting power. The use of mercenaries is, superficially at least, Machiavellian (i.e. in keeping with the spirit of Machiavelli), since it appears to be based on the realisation that force is the crucial ingredient in political affairs. After all, it was Machiavelli who wrote that: 'A Prince . . . should have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organisation, and its discipline . . . The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war; the first way to win a state is to be skilled in the art of war.'<sup>3</sup> But serious

<sup>1</sup> See Colin Legum, 'Recruiting Row as Mercenaries Feud over Nigeria', in *The Observer* (London), 10 December 1967. Hoare's memoirs have recently been published under the unashamed title, *Congo Mercenary* (London, 1967). In an interview appearing in the *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), 17 December 1967, Dr Michael Okpara, former premier of the Eastern Region and now a spokesman for Biafra, categorically denied that Biafra was using or even attempting to recruit mercenaries.

<sup>2</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87. Although Africa's leaders would never regard themselves as being 'Machiavellian' because of its pejorative connotations, there is some reason to believe that, when others use mercenaries against them, they regard it as Machiavellian. For example, when it was reported that mercenary parachutists were dropping on Kisangani in 1967, Radio Kinshasa stated: 'The imperialists have put into effect their Machiavellian plans.' *Africa Diary*, vii, 32, 6-12 August 1967, p. 3510.



analysis demands a reconsideration, since the initial proposition neglects a second feature of Machiavelli's thought on armed forces.

### III. THE PROBLEM OF CONTROL

Much of the reasoning underlying Machiavelli's rejection of mercenaries and auxiliaries stems from the difficulties of controlling armed forces in societies without effective social counterweights to circumscribe military power. The prince or the republic must be absolute master of the forces. Machiavelli's explanation of the start of the downfall of the Roman empire was the hiring of the Goths as mercenaries. It is his view, and one that has been raised virtually to the level of a political maxim, that a republic which has its own citizen army is 'far less likely to be subjugated by one of its own citizens than a republic whose forces are not its own'.<sup>1</sup> But this view is based on the incomplete assumption that citizen armies are easier to control. It assumes that national patriotism and the desire for national unification, the preservation of the state, and the maintenance of the government in power are accepted attitudes of the members of the citizen army. Increasingly, however, the evidence available for Africa does not bear out that rather naïve assumption. From 1960 to the end of 1967 there were no less than 64 reported incidents of direct military involvement in the political affairs of Africa.<sup>2</sup> Hence, when one deals with the fundamental issue of control, there seems to be little choice between mercenaries and citizen armies.

To be sure, we should note the accuracies of Machiavelli's description of mercenary soldiers—disloyal, cowardly, thirsty for power (and money, I might add), and so forth. Mercenaries in the Congo bear out his observations with a vengeance. When they were victorious—and they never were really tested militarily by either the A.N.C. or the *simbas* (citizen armies?)—they coerced their employers and threatened to hold them at ransom. When the opportunity presented itself, they harassed, tortured, and murdered the enemy (and innocent Congolese peasants as well). Their behaviour toward the peasantry in the eastern Congo has certainly made the task of the central Congolese régime more difficult in winning over the citizens. Many were racists or anti-African to begin with. But then, were the units of the A.N.C. better disciplined or markedly more sympathetic to all segments of the citizenry?

<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 86 and 79.

<sup>2</sup> This tabulation includes successful military *coups*, military-led secessions, or military actions instrumental in bringing about governmental changes; and attempted military take-overs, secessions, and mutinies that failed to gain power but were ultimately disclosed for one reason or another. See appendix of my monograph, *Conflicting Images of the Military in Africa* (Nairobi, 1968).

This is a point that Machiavelli inferentially made when he praised the superior loyalty of citizen armies. But, in many respects, soldiers of a citizen army from one section of an ethnically disparate country possess little sense of community with citizens from other regions of the same country. This fact has even determined decisions to deploy armed forces during internal unrest and recruitment policy for the military services. One might say, therefore, that in Africa some indigenous military men display a mercenary mentality. Many of Africa's soldiers have been, in fact, ex-mercenaries of a sort. Certainly those who served in the French Foreign Legion might have come to regard themselves as such.<sup>1</sup> Some unemployed former legionnaires who were mustered out of the French Army when their countries became independent had attempted to be assimilated into their countries' military forces. In Togo, President Sylvanus Olympio resisted their demands and so was assassinated.

The simple fact is that although mercenaries tend to exhibit most of the characteristics that Machiavelli attributed to them, based on his knowledge of Italian history, there is no guarantee that citizen armies in Africa, or anywhere else for that matter, will display more admirable qualities simply because they have been drawn from within the territorial confines of their countries. The chances are that African soldiers will be better behaved under the normal circumstances whereas one can expect foreign mercenaries to be difficult employees. But, under conditions of tension and stress, it is anyone's guess whether or not discipline will prevail.

When it comes to auxiliaries, that is another matter. Machiavelli's generalisations about auxiliaries are misleading in their application to Africa. Machiavelli regarded auxiliaries as even more dangerous than mercenaries because they were better organised and unified, and thus more likely to hold the host in their power.

On several occasions African governments have found it necessary to call outside powers to assist them by sending military units to maintain or re-establish order. The most celebrated cases so far were the three army mutinies in East Africa in January 1964. Prime Minister Obote of Uganda, President Kenyatta of Kenya, and President Nyerere of Tanzania, in that order, requested British military assistance to restore order among the mutinous soldiers. The British auxiliaries functioned effectively, and they departed when requested. The same can be said of the Nigerian contingent that later replaced the British in Tanzania. No

<sup>1</sup> For an unusual expression of this viewpoint with reference to Africans serving in British forces during World War II, see Waruhiu Itote (General China), *Mau Mau' General* (Nairobi, 1967), p. 10.

doubt the respective heads of government would have preferred to turn to their East African partners for this sort of assistance rather than to their former colonial rulers, but the timing of events made this impossible.<sup>1</sup>

The French military forces have been the most active in their 'auxiliary' role in Africa. A French Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, once boasted that, at the request of the legitimate African governments, French forces had intervened in their former African colonies at least a dozen times between 1960 and 1963.<sup>2</sup> The most convincing French intervention of all occurred in February 1964 when the Government of Leon M'Ba of Gabon had been overthrown in an apparently popular and bloodless *coup* carried out by elements of the army. Less than 24 hours later, French troops were airlifted in from neighbouring Chad and Congo (Brazzaville), and the M'Ba Government was back in power.

The French have even gone so far as to announce boldly the creation of a special *force d'intervention* of some 8,000 men for the purpose of responding rapidly to requests from African governments for support during crisis periods. Based in southern France and highly mobile in material as well as conception, the French believe that such a force reduces the need for large conventional troop concentrations throughout Africa.<sup>3</sup>

These various French interventions were carried out under the terms of a series of 1961 multilateral and bilateral defence agreements between France and most of her former colonies.<sup>4</sup> The terms of the agreements permit the French Government to make the final determination as to whether or not French troops will be committed to support the requesting African government. Likewise, *ad hoc* requests by former British colonies

<sup>1</sup> See the speech by Julius K. Nyerere, *East African Standard* (Nairobi), 27 January 1964, explaining his use of British troops. For a more analytical treatment of these events see Ali A. Mazrui and Donald Rothchild, 'The Soldier and State in East Africa: some theoretical conclusions of the army mutinies of 1964', in *Western Political Quarterly* (Salt Lake City), xx, 1, March 1967, pp. 82-96.

<sup>2</sup> In the Cameroun (1960 and 1961) to help restore order; in Congo (Brazzaville) in 1960 to help the Government quell inter-tribal warfare, and again in September 1962 (and also in Gabon) when a disputed soccer game resulted in riots against resident nationalists from opposing sides; 'several interventions' in Chad between 1960 and 1963; in Niger, a French 'show of force' in December 1963 to discourage a military uprising against President Diouri; and twice in Mauritania (1961) to assist the Government in dealing with tribal agitation. Peyrefitte's statement is quoted in: 'Gabon: putsch or coup d'état?', in *Africa Report* (Washington), ix, 3, March 1964, pp. 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> See Rodney Angove, 'Intervention Force', in *Sunday Nation*, 12 November 1967. In no time this newly formed, special unit was called into action. According to *Le Monde* (Paris), 17 November 1967, a company of French paratroops was sent to Bangui, Central African Republic, shortly before 11 November. The company was drawn from the 11th Division, *La Force d'intervention*.

<sup>4</sup> See 'France's Military Role in Africa', in *Africa Report*, ix, 1, January 1964, p. 10.

would place the burden and advantage of final decision on the European power too, and to this extent auxiliaries are outside the control of the host government. But, once committed, there seems to be no doubt that they have carried out their responsibilities to the satisfaction of their African hosts. Although we have not been privy to the deliberations regarding their deployment and withdrawal, there seems to be no indication that they have not functioned according to the original agreements.

There has even been one isolated case where Cuban 'auxiliaries' in the employ of the Government of Congo (Brazzaville) have been used to rescue the Government from an attempted military take-over. In June 1966 insurgent army units had arrested the army's commander-in-chief along with the director and deputy director of the security police while the President was in Malagasy. The Government was forced to retreat to the sports stadium, and the Cuban soldiers, recruited originally for presidential guard duty, threw a protective cordon around the stadium and occupied Radio Brazzaville until the dissident soldiers could be dealt with.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, the only indication we have of a case where an auxiliary force, of a sort, left an African government in the lurch was when the United Nations, in sheer financial desperation, withdrew the U.N. forces from the Congo in 1964 with all the attending consequences. The troops were there officially at the request of the Head of State. They had left, not only without his request, but over his protests, thereby leaving the Congo vulnerable at a time of expanding civil war.

Auxiliaries are dangerous, however, in a sense not considered by Machiavelli. In an age where 'popular' government is regarded as imperative, it is a political liability to appear to be dependent on outside help, especially from the former metropole. It is even more disastrous to be *militarily* dependent on former colonial powers. Consequently, African leaders who have been forced, albeit reluctantly, to ask for 'auxiliaries' have taken great pains to explain their actions to their own citizens as well as to the outside world. President Nyerere, in particular, has been acutely sensitive to the political embarrassment of that week or two in January 1964. He struck out at his critics thus:

I am told that already there is foolish talk that the British have come back to rule Tanganyika again. This is rubbish. I asked the British Government to help in the same way as I would have asked our neighbours to help us if this had been possible. Any independent country is able to ask for the help of another independent country.

<sup>1</sup> *Africa Diary*, vi, 31, 25-31 July 1966, pp. 2963-4.

Asking for help in this way is not something to be proud of. I do not want any person to think that I was happy in making this request. This whole week has been a week of the most grievous shame for our nation.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear, however, that this was not simply an embarrassment involving the inability of a state to maintain internal order and the necessity to call on foreign troops. It was clearly the need for *British* troops that seemed so disastrous politically. Within a couple of months Nyerere's Foreign Minister, Oscar Kambona, went to Nigeria to find African replacements for the British troops. He stated that Tanzania was now 'in a hurry' to find *African* military assistance. The stigma had to be erased.

It is understandable that former colonial powers may be willing to co-operate with some of Africa's indigenous régimes. They may conceive that their interests coincide with the maintenance in power of particular governments and, when requests arrive from such governments, they happily honour them. But Machiavelli was still concerned with the issue of ultimate control. The issue consequently is not whether a European power is willing to do the bidding of an African government, but rather, to what extent that African government is a prisoner of its foreign auxiliaries. It could be phrased a bit differently: To what extent do the Africans perceive their dependence on foreign forces and therefore alter otherwise independently conceived policies? Perhaps the real answer may be less complicated than we may suggest. Perhaps Africa's leaders merely reason that it is better to be somewhat dependent upon outsiders and still in power, than to run the risk of losing power and perhaps the very existence of the state itself.

Given the relatively low level of armed power in Africa and the inherent dangers of relying on auxiliaries or mercenaries, what are the alternatives for African governments? The most serious proposal so far has been to create an all-African emergency force designed along the lines of France's *force d'intervention*. However, the conceptual and actual hurdles of such a force render its establishment unlikely. First of all are a battery of financial problems which impede its creation. All armed forces are costly to establish and maintain. A highly mobile and well-equipped one compounds the difficulties. A force that must be airborne is a serious technical and financial challenge that, in their present stage of development, few African states are able to sustain or even contribute to. Most of the major airlift operations so far on the continent have been handled by expatriate specialists—either mercenaries or auxiliaries.

<sup>1</sup> *East African Standard*, 27 January 1964. See also the explanations of Prime Minister Obote, *ibid.* 25 January 1964, and President Kenyatta, *ibid.* 8 February 1964.

seconded to African governments or in other cases remaining under the command of expatriate military advisers or officers.

Second are a set of political hurdles, perhaps even more complicated than the financial and technical ones. It is unrealistic to suppose that, whatever its composition, such a force would be acceptable automatically everywhere in the continent. This leads to another question, Where would such a force be based? And, even more perplexing, Who decides when the emergency force is to be employed? After all, such decisions are critical political ones, for they imply support or opposition for the threatened African governments. Many of the *coups*, attempted *coups*, and mutinies so far have been sudden operations. It is unlikely that in most instances a force from elsewhere in the continent, even given prompt deployment, could have saved the fallen régimes. In fact, their intervention might have added to the bloodshed. Since the purpose of any contingency force of this sort is not to save governments under fire, but to preclude the necessity of intervention by deterring proposed take-overs, a measure of credibility and reliability is imperative. So far, this is lacking.

It is for these reasons, among others, that Africa's leaders reluctantly turn to mercenaries and auxiliaries. In the choice between the two alternatives of outside assistance, Professor Ali Mazrui maintains that, from one point of view, the employment of mercenaries can be more consistent with a country's sovereignty than a request for auxiliaries, or even United Nations-organised contingents. 'By *buying* foreign soldiers for his own use, Tshombe showed, in one sense, greater independence than Lumumba had done when he invited the United Nations to help him out', writes Mazrui.<sup>1</sup> However, his argument is based on two assumptions: that basically African states are militarily weak (which is correct), and that hired soldiers are more likely to be disciplined and obedient to the wishes of their African employers than foreign auxiliaries (which is debatable).

The difficulty lies in Mazrui's contention that mercenaries are 'presumably answerable' to their employers. Technically he is correct. Mercenaries are individuals hired to fight for or on behalf of a foreign power. Auxiliaries, however, are committed as units and are, technically, still in the employ of their own governments, and thus outside the ultimate direction of the host governments. But, in practice, auxiliaries have proven to be far more amenable to the wishes of their hosts than have mercenaries. The backing and reputation of the lending power is at stake. Moreover, the principles of military discipline are more deeply

<sup>1</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, *Towards a Pax Africana* (London, 1967), p. 205.

ingrained in long-established military units. Mercenaries have more to lose than simply their reputations, which are dubious. As a whole, mercenaries have not displayed a willingness to die for money. This is precisely their great handicap. They are for the most part free-lancers, soldiers of fortune who tend to shift with the winds. Auxiliaries are more solidly rooted than that.

In this discussion, however, it should be made clear that the issue is not simply one of weighing the pros and cons of various sorts of fighting units and then employing the one regarded as the best alternative. The matter of choice and the range of alternatives open deserves some discussion. First, there are certain limitations of choice facing the African leaders. Modern warfare demands specialists, and few specialists can be found in Africa's armies. Thus, if a leader finds himself in a war and he wishes to employ air transport or commence bombing operations he is faced with a limited range of alternatives. Should he bring in auxiliaries or individual mercenaries? and, if so, where shall they come from? His area of choice may be even further narrowed if outside powers are reluctant to make specialist auxiliaries available to him. Still, the nature of modern warfare forces him to undertake tortuous decisions that, in less dangerous circumstances, he would regard as repugnant.

In Machiavelli's time the fighting man had to be trained, but in general it took little specialised skill or scientific knowledge to be a good soldier. The skills needed could be picked up in a few months' intensive training. Thus, the Prince truly did have a fairly free choice to make between various sorts of fighting units. Not so with modern warfare. Some African states simply do not have a supply of qualified men at the stage where they are ready to be trained to become military specialists, pilots, signallers, engineers, logistics experts, quartermasters, and so forth. An African leader thus intent on defending his state or maintaining its unity may thereby find the actual alternatives open to him constraining rather than broadening.

Likewise, depending upon his own ideological orientation, he may feel reluctant to turn to certain European powers for military assistance or to mercenaries from certain countries. If their own racial and doctrinal prejudices are repugnant to him, then he has a further reason for rejecting their services. So again the possibilities are narrowed. Conversely, some countries may not offer their assistance and some mercenaries may refuse to enlist in his service. The result may well be that he really has little choice to make at all.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Africans would do well to heed Machiavelli's message on mercenaries if not his caveat about auxiliaries. But borrowing in no way precludes originality, especially in the application of ideas to political problems.<sup>1</sup>

When Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* he was addressing himself to one of the most serious causes of lawlessness in Renaissance Italy: the bands of hired ruffians who would fight wherever the most money was offered, who were faithful to no one, and who were often more dangerous to their employer than to his enemies. Citizen soldiers of the free cities of northern Italy had been replaced by such professional soldiers. Even so, they had proved to Machiavelli that they were incompetent in the face of better-organised and more reliable troops from France. He knew from observation and study that mercenaries and foreign auxiliaries were disastrous to the ruler who depended on them. They failed the ruler when he needed them most (in wartime), and they exhausted his treasury. But, in a modern age of military assistance, auxiliary troops come cheaply, financially speaking, although their price in prestige and political popularity might be prohibitively high.

Clearly, Machiavelli was deeply concerned about many of the same problems that bedevil Africa's leaders today. The issues of nation building, unity and integration, stability and the fear of internal disorder, and then fear of outside intervention and manipulation are the common denominators. Machiavelli hoped that somewhere among the tyrants of the Italian peninsula there might arise a prince with a vision broad enough to see a united Italy and with the skills and courage bold enough to turn that vision into reality.<sup>2</sup>

Since Machiavelli's basic concern was about the role of force in socio-political relations, he attempted to set forth some guide-lines for the potential prince so that he might avoid the pitfalls facing him. For some reason, politicians all over the world tend to learn best by trial and error. Some of Africa's leaders, equally concerned about the use of force, have sought to integrate their states by the employment of mercenaries. Others, intent on asserting their independence of central governments,

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that a Swahili edition of *The Prince* will be published by the East African Publishing House, Nairobi, sometime in 1968, with an introduction by Professor Mazrui.

<sup>2</sup> Much of the discussion in this essay concerning the problem of mercenaries and auxiliaries is framed in essentially negative terms; i.e. what is to be avoided. For Machiavelli's advice on the more positive requirements for creating a good state and his views on the relationship between the state and the citizenry, a thorough examination of *The Discourses* would be imperative. A convenient edition is *The Prince and the Discourses* with an introduction by Max Lerner (New York, 1940).



likewise turn to mercenaries. Despite the widespread criticism of mercenaries and despite the periodic dicta handed down from O.A.U. meetings and summit conferences, there seems little chance that Africa will be entirely free of outside forces, either mercenaries or auxiliaries, in the foreseeable future.

Since political experience is a combination of rational planning and fortuitous circumstance, it appears that mercenaries, despite what Machiavelli says, may yet serve as unwitting collaborators in the unification of individual African countries and perhaps of the larger units of the continent, too. This could well be brought about in a way that the mercenaries and their employers never intended. What I mean is that the mercenary presence, if pervasive enough, may help to unify politicians and the populace against them, and behind their own governments. Negative stimulus is still an effective motivator.

In *Towards a Pax Africana* Ali Mazrui writes that future peace (and, I might add, unity) in Africa depends in some measure on minimising the chances of continuing feuds. Although, in the short run, white mercenaries ravaged the Congo and divided her people and provinces against one another, in the long run it was better that atrocities were committed by outsiders against whom some future politicians could rally the people, than by other Congolese.<sup>1</sup> The effects of inter-group revenge within the same country tend to perpetuate civil war. Revenge against outside scapegoats as well as genuine or potential enemies helps to cement disparate peoples together. Thus, it could be one of the ironies of history that a band of hated but relatively effective fighters, initially employed to aid in a secession movement, later retained by the central government to prevent secession, and still later acting on their own to throw the same country and the continent into confusion and division, might one day be the unwitting tools in the future unity of that state, and perhaps of the continent.

<sup>1</sup> Mazrui, *Pax Africana*, p. 206.