

51st Anniversary: The African Union and the Illusive Promise of Unity

All across the continent and the Diaspora imperialism tightens its grip on the people

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May 25, 2014 marked the 51st anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union (AU), which was initiated through the Sirte Declaration of 1999 and formally established in 2002. Last year was the focus of the Jubilee Celebrations for the AU where there was much reflection on the historical developments on the continent since the 1960s.

A projection of 50-years forward was encompassed in the plan for 2063 through a document that was accepted by the 54-member organization which is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The initial focus of the OAU was to facilitate the independence struggle throughout Africa where in 1963 over 30 countries were already members of the United Nations.

Nonetheless, just in the last twelve months there have been enormous challenges and setbacks for the cause of African unity, sovereignty and economic self-reliance. Within the political context of worsening internal disunity and social turmoil, the actual role of the AU appears almost negligible within the broader international division of power and global decision-making.

At a recently-held Africa-European Union (EU) Summit in Brussels, Belgium, the political will of the AU was totally disregarded. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) established guidelines for participation in the gathering which were disrespected by the EU making a mockery of any semblance of authority and sovereignty for this continental organization.

What was revealing about the entire scenario was that despite the EU actions that sidestepped the PSC, some 36 African heads-of-state still participated in the summit. Although several leading African states declined to send their presidents and prime ministers, in addition to those that were not invited such as the Republic of Sudan and Eritrea, the event went on and issued a series of declarations including a plan to deploy EU troops to the former French colony of the Central African Republic (CAR).

What was reinforced in the whole situation was that the EU still supplies a considerable amount of aid and investment in Africa. Consequently, most of these governments, including the AU itself, could not afford to boycott a summons issued by Europe.

These events are a manifestation of the ongoing instability in several geo-political regions throughout the continent. The fact that the AU has not been able to effectively address these problems and crises is a key component of why Africa is not respected within the

world corridors of power that remain largely in the hands of the imperialist states in Western Europe and North America.

From Nigeria and Malawi to the CAR and South Sudan

The abduction of over 270 high school girls from the village in Chibok, Borno State is a manifestation of the five-year armed campaign by the Boko Haram sect against the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Many Nigerians have stated openly that the Boko Haram conflict stems from the regional divisions imposed on the country a century after its colonial creation in 1914.

At a national event held in Nigeria to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the British colonial project, French President Francois Hollande attended and pledged support to the oil-rich state, Africa's most populous, in dealing with its internal security crisis. Later in the year during May, Paris hosted an international conference on the ongoing failure of the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan to resolve the Boko Haram problem.

Meanwhile, civilians are dying in the hundreds every week in Nigeria. Boko Haram has bombed areas in the heart of the political capital of Abuja killing nearly one hundred people as well as attacking rural areas leading to the massacre of civilians, the destruction of property and the kidnapping of women and children. All of this was and is taking place at a time when western financial publications and institutions have anointed the West African state as having the largest economy on the continent, surpassing the Republic of South Africa.

It is interesting that at this stage in Nigerian and African development that the role of western imperialist military and intelligence penetration has reached unprecedented levels in the post-colonial history of the continent. Obviously there is a connection between saying that Africa is experiencing phenomenal growth during a period that its national and regional security apparatuses are ineffectual and therefore in need of the assistance of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), the EU military forces (EUFOR), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the State of Israel.

In the Southern African state of Malawi, where one of three women heads-of-state on the continent is in power, the country is facing a monumental political crisis stemming from what President Joyce Banda says was a flawed national electoral process. Banda, who was thrust into the position after the death of her predecessor Bingu wa Mutharika in 2012, has declared the elections null and void. She is ordering a revote within 90 days but says that she will not seek elective office.

The Malawian situation is still not settled. Whether the president will be able to maintain control of the country for another three months will remain to be seen.

However, she has faced problems similar to Mutharika, whose brother Peter is her main challenger in the presidential elections that appears to have gone wrong. The opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was leading in the vote count but numerous problems were in evidence including the lack of equipment, inadequate processing structures and in one case, violence at the polling places.

The regional partners within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which Malawi is currently serving as chair, are undoubtedly hoping that the crisis inside the

country can be resolved politically and without violence. The SADC has been successful over the last three decades in resolving internal issues through negotiations coordinated by both regional and continental structures.

However, events over the last several months in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Republic of South Sudan have starkly illustrated the need for the strengthening of the AU. With the CAR, a former French colony, the persecution and forced removal of the Islamic community is taking place right in the midst of the occupation of the country by troops from Paris, the EU and a host of African states.

The appointment of interim President Catherine Samba-Panza in the CAR earlier in 2014 has not resolved the problems of instability. The CAR is also well-endowed with mineral resources including gold, diamonds and uranium which are exploited by western imperialist states. When former President Francois Bozize sought to partner with the People's Republic of China, his government was soon removed opening the way for the Muslim-dominated Seleka Coalition that took charge in March 2013 under the leadership of Michel Djotodia.

When the atrocities committed by the Seleka armed forces in the capital of Bangui and other regions of the country became unbearable, the pressure from below and moreover from the Hollande government in Paris, Djotodia was removed at the aegis of Paris and forced into exile in Benin, another former French colony. What is clear at the present conjuncture is that the increasing presence of France and the EU, backed up by AFRICOM, is set to continue.

Africa's and the world's latest recognized state, the Republic of South Sudan, has reached a breaking point since the armed clashes between the two main political factions within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army began on Dec. 15 of last year. Tens of thousands have been displaced and thousands have been killed in the fighting between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and ousted Vice-President Riek Machar.

Despite the signing of a secession of hostilities accord in Ethiopia in mid-May both sides have accused the other of violating the letter and spirit of the agreement. The U.S., which was the major proponent of the partition of the country, formerly Africa's largest geographic nation-state, is responsible for this ongoing crisis.

Ugandan troops are present in large numbers in South Sudan to prop-up the increasingly fragile regime of President Salva Kiir. Uganda has served as a military conduit for Washington's foreign policy imperatives in Africa. There are Ugandan troops in Somalia, where a 22,000-member purported AU Mission is trained, bankrolled and coordinated by Washington and Brussels.

Whither the AU and the Need for Genuine Unity and Development

These unresolved internal and regional security issues are providing the imperialist states with a rationale for their escalating military and political intervention in Africa. What is even worse is the silence of the AU and the PSC in this entire process of fortifying neo-colonialism.

However, these western industrial states themselves are suffering from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Mass unemployment and increasing poverty within the imperialist states are prompting bank-imposed austerity programs that further disempower the working class and nationally oppressed within these countries.

In Western Europe right-wing parties are gaining currency within the electoral arena and governance structures. Hostility towards African migrants in Europe has reached unprecedented levels.

In the State of Israel, tens of thousands of economic refugees from Central and East Africa are treated as criminals and labeled “infiltrators.” These migrants are subjected to racist mob violence and the construction of a special prison to remove them from the occupied Palestinian lands.

The U.S., although headed by a self-identified African American president, Barack Obama, is making a major push toward the total domination of the continent militarily. Obama is a militarist and has engaged in massive Pentagon and CIA interference in Africa.

If Afghanistan is any indication, the president announced on May 27 that the 13-year U.S.-engineered war of occupation is coming to an “end”, yet some 10,000 Pentagon troops will remain in the country until at least 2016. While at the same time, the White House threatens war with Russia by overthrowing the government in Ukraine and placing a fascist regime in power on the doorsteps of Moscow.

The Obama administration has endorsed the economic strangulation and illegally-forced bankruptcy of the largest African American populated municipality in the country, the City of Detroit. It is no surprise that this same administration is working feverishly to cripple Africa by sewing divisions and sending in Special Forces, intelligence operatives and conducting massive bombing operations utilizing drones and fighter jets.

The real solution to Africa’s current plight is a total break with the world imperialist system. The capitalists of the West have nothing to offer Africa except more economic exploitation, oppression and militarism.

This holds true as well for the African American population within the U.S. The benign neglect of the Obama administration is obvious to all who seek to look and listen.

African Americans are even more unemployed, impoverished and politically marginalized after five years of the Obama White House. The only solution offered by this administration is to half-heartedly encourage African American men to engage in self-help efforts while their communities are being destroyed by bank foreclosures, low-wage employment, escalating law-enforcement repression and social containment through the prison-industrial complex.

A political alternative based upon Revolutionary Pan-Africanism, anti-imperialism and socialism provides the only hope for African redemption. The consolidation of Africa under genuine independence, unity and sovereignty will make a tremendous contribution to the abolition of all forms of injustice and inequality throughout the world.

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