

Africa in Review 2015: Social Crises, “Peacekeeping” Operations and the Legacy of Imperialism

Part II

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From Burundi to Ghana and beyond the intervention of western states continues as an impediment to genuine development

One of the major issues gaining international attention during 2015 was the political crisis in the Central African state of Burundi stemming from a dispute over whether incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza could pursue a third term in office. Mass demonstrations took place in the capital demanding that the president reverse his decision to run for a third term.

Nkurunziza was appointed as the head-of-state over Burundi in the aftermath of a negotiated transition process aimed at ending a twelve year civil war during 1993-2005. The president said that the first term resulted from an appointment by the parliament and the second election was the first one where he had to stand before the electorate. A Burundi Constitutional Court decision on May 5 upheld the position of Nkurunziza in the disagreement.

The National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) ruling party won the elections held on July 21 guaranteeing Nkurunziza another five year term of office. Burundi is considered a lesser developed state with an economy based on agricultural production and exports.

Nonetheless, the unrest inside the country has continued. A disaffected military officer, Gen. Godefroid Niyombara, attempted to stage a coup on May 13 which did not succeed in part due to the condemnation of the effort by the African Union (AU) and East African Community (EAC) regional organizations. It has been estimated that 280,000 people have fled Burundi to neighboring states in response to the growing extra-judicial killings in the capital of Bujumbura and other areas.

In recent weeks there have also been clashes between rebels opposed to the Nkurunziza and Burundian security forces in the southwestern Rumonge district of the landlocked state. Similar attacks were launched near the capital of Bujumbura on Dec. 11.

According to UPI.com,

“Rebels in Burundi attacked military installations surrounding the capital of Bujumbura on Friday (Dec. 11), a sign from the opposition to the president that

the conflict is becoming a rebellion. The coordinated assaults at dawn by heavily armed insurgents on military sites, security encampments and a prison left 12 rebels dead and 20 under arrest, an army spokesman said."

Many Burundian refugees have re-located in neighboring Rwanda where claims indicate that armed opposition forces are being recruited. The government in Kigali has denied these suggestions and says that it is neutral in the conflict.

Rwanda and Burundi have a near-matching ethnic composition with Hutu majorities and Tutsi minority groups. However, in Burundi the head-of-state Nkurunziza, a former rebel leader during the 1993-2005 civil war, is from the Hutu majority whereas in Kigali, President Paul Kigame is Tutsi and the former leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), the guerilla army that took control of Rwanda amid the genocide of 1994 that killed an estimated 800,000 people.

Burundian Foreign Minister Alain Nyamitwe spoke during a press conference on December 19 in Bujumbura saying "There have been reports that some Burundian refugees have been recruited and went for military training to attack the country. We call on these illegal activities to stop. We needed the truth to be brought to the table as to whether the allegations are false or true." (The East African)

Refuting these assertions, Rwandan Minister for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs, Seraphine Mukantabana, stressed "These are the same baseless accusations that different people keep on trading. There is no proof to it, like the names, pictures or other details of refugees they allege were recruited so that we can go and check if they ever lived in the camp and left as a result of recruitments. I don't see anything factual except just hearsay, and idle word of mouth." (East African, Dec. 19)

Meanwhile, amid the failure of the Nkurunziza government and the opposition to reach a political agreement, the AU, which is seeking the support of the United Nations Security Council, has pledged to deploy 5,000 peacekeeping troops into Burundi. The Burundian leaders in Bujumbura are in complete opposition to this proposal.

Despite efforts by AU Commission Chair Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to reassure the Burundi government that it is only concerned with preventing the full eruption of a civil war and has no hidden agenda as it relates to regime-change, Nkurunziza refuses to entertain any foreign occupation of the country and is blaming the former colonial power of Belgium in conjunction with Rwanda for the rising instability. Dlamini-Zuma in a statement on the Burundi crisis "expressed the AU's readiness to rapidly initiate discussions with the government of Burundi to devise the best ways and means of facilitating the deployment of the mission, in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation".

The AU Commission Chair encouraged the Burundi government to participate fully in peace talks that were scheduled to take place on December 28 in Uganda. However, the political character of the proposed intervention by the AU in Burundi remains to be determined.

Such an intervention would undoubtedly be reliant upon assistance from western imperialist states based in Washington, London, Paris and Brussels. With this type of deployment the potential for a conflict framed within the context of national sovereignty and the role of western states could prove problematic and protracted.

West Africa 50 Years After the Coup Against Nkrumah: Economic Dependency and the Ebola Crisis

Nearly five decades ago on February 24, 1966, a right-wing police and military coup guided and coordinated by the United States Central Intelligence Agency and State Department was staged against the Convention People's Party (CPP) of the First Republic of Ghana. Nkrumah had studied for a decade in the U.S. and two years in England where he attended Lincoln University, the University of Pennsylvania and the London School of Economics.

During his tenure overseas in the years of 1935-1947, Nkrumah was associated with the Marxist left and African nationalist movements in the U.S. and Britain. He was an organizer among African students, reading and learning from the work and personal association with luminaries such as W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James along with being a reputed member of the Garveyite Universal Negro Improvement Association, African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) while he lived in Pennsylvania.

After completing his studies in the U.S. during 1945, he traveled to Britain where he participated in the organization of the Fifth Pan-African Congress held that October, working with Du Bois, veteran communist and Pan-Africanist George Padmore, among others. By the end of 1947, Nkrumah had returned to the Gold Coast (colonial name for Ghana) becoming an organizing secretary for the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), a moderate organization which hired Nkrumah to develop a mass base for the group.

By mid-1949, Nkrumah had broken with the UGCC taking its Committee on Youth Organization (CYO) which he founded and the Accra Evening News publication conceived by him as well. The CPP was initiated on June 12, 1949 at a rally attended by tens of thousands of Ghanaians.

The Positive Action campaign of January 1950 landed him in prison for a year when he was released after the CPP won governmental elections established by the British colonialists to reform the system of imperialism. After his release from prison, Nkrumah was named Leader of Government Business by the British Governor General Sir Arden-Clark.

During the years of 1951-1957, Nkrumah described this period as moving from Positive Action to Tactical Action. The independence years of 1957-1966, witnessed tremendous strides in the areas of national development, support for other independence struggles through the CPP press and the foreign ministry and efforts designed to bring about the realization of a United States of Africa.

Socialism under an All-African union government was the strategic objective of the CPP. Nkrumah argued that in a 20th century international context of large-scale economic production within both the socialist world and the decaying imperialist system, Africa, in order to develop rapidly, required the consolidation of its nation-states, integrating small-scale neo-colonial dominated micro-national structures into a large continental political construct that could engage in centralized planning and development.

The Congo crisis of 1960, resulting in the imperialist-backed coup against national liberation leader and first Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, leading to him being kidnapped and assassinated in January 1961, illustrated even more starkly to Nkrumah and other anti-imperialist governments in Africa, that an independent military force was needed to

safeguard the sovereignty of the post-colonial states. These progressive governments led by revolutionary parties and organizations such as in Guinea, Algeria, Mali, Egypt along with Ghana, took a different line than the majority of the moderate and conservative post-colonial states which were divided into two blocs known as the Monrovia and Brazzaville groups.

Of course in Ghana, it was the military and the police that were utilized against the socialist-oriented state led by the CPP. Nonetheless, it was the economic dependency of the state in relationship to neo-colonialism, which Nkrumah described in his seminal 1965 book, as being "The Last Stage of Imperialism" that provided the ideological underpinning of the regime-change tactics utilized by Washington under the administration of the-then President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

The citadel of neo-colonialism is the U.S. and its multi-national corporations and banks. Nkrumah writes in the introduction of "Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism", that "Foremost among the neo-colonialists is the United States, which has long exercised its power in Latin America. Fumblingly at first she turned towards Europe, and then with more certainty after world war two when most countries of that continent were indebted to her. Since then, with methodical thoroughness and touching attention to detail, the Pentagon set about consolidating its ascendancy, evidence of which can be seen all around the world."

Nkrumah goes on to ask "Who really rules in such places as Great Britain, West Germany, Japan, Spain, Portugal or Italy? If General de Gaulle is 'defecting' from U.S. monopoly control, what interpretation can be placed on his 'experiments' in the Sahara desert, his paratroopers in Gabon, or his trips to Cambodia and Latin America? Lurking behind such questions are the extended tentacles of the Wall Street octopus. And its suction cups and muscular strength are provided by a phenomenon dubbed 'The Invisible Government', arising from Wall Street's connection with the Pentagon and various intelligence services."

Ghana's first attempt at securing a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was during the last several months of the Nkrumah administration in 1965. The Ghana government was severely impacted by the decline in cocoa prices on the global market. In addition, petty-bourgeois class interests within Ghana, allied with neo-colonialism and imperialism, worked incessantly to undermine Socialism and Pan-Africanism.

After the coup and the installation of a puppet regime composed of a group of lower-level military officers and police, the IMF granted a series of loans to Ghana under terms that proved quite disadvantageous to the interests of the workers, farmers and youth of the country. Consequently, Ghana has never regained its political and social status attained during the Nkrumah government of the 1950s and 1960s.

Today under the leadership of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) ruling party headed by President John Dramani Mahama, Ghana faces the continuation of the post-colonial crisis. The IMF is preparing to extend further credit to the government despite the hardships the people have suffered since 1966.

The economic dependency and military subordination of Africa could not be more clearly revealed than when the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic erupted during 2014-2015. These developments represented the largest outbreak of this virulent form of a Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (VHF) on the continent of Africa in 40 years, when it was first identified in the former Zaire, now-known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia were the most severely impacted by the EVD outbreak. It has been reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) that over 11,000 people died, most of which were in the above-mentioned states. Small incidences were reported in other states including Nigeria, Senegal and Mali but were rapidly contained and eradicated.

All three of these states, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia maintain close economic, political and military links with imperialism. The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) engages in military operations alongside these West African governments whose people are among the poorest on the continent and the world.

Absent of a firm Pan-African system of healthcare, economic production and communication, the devastation of this EVD outbreak could not be properly tackled. Even if Pentagon-based bioweapons research centers were the cause of this pandemic, the failure of Africa to squelch the spread in its infancy is a reflection of the current status of neo-colonialism well into the second decade of the 21st century.

Then it was the military apparatuses of Washington, London and Paris which were given permission by the neo-colonial dominated regimes to intervene. Cuba also deployed but solely with medical personnel and played a significant role in stemming the spread of EVD, even prompting recognition by imperialism through its corporate and state-controlled media.

Revolutionary Cuba has been subjected to biological warfare by the CIA and the Pentagon for decades. Nonetheless, the socialist state has been able to overcome these assaults and emerge even stronger as an anti-imperialist country.

The only medium and long-term solution to the healthcare crisis in Africa lies within a Pan-African planning framework. There must be an integration of the medical and scientific infrastructure to facilitate the sharing of investigative and research methodologies.

The need for an All-African military high command is as necessary in 2015 as it was during the early and mid-1960s during the times of Nkrumah, Ahmed Sekou Toure (Guinea), Modibo Keita (Mali), Ben Bella (Algeria), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania) and the other anti-imperialist leaders of the period. Nonetheless, this continental command must be independent of imperialism, distinguishing it from the current collaborative efforts led by AFRICOM and NATO which characterize the operations now in effect in Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, the Gulf of Guinea, the Gulf of Aden and other geo-political regions on the continent.

Neo-Colonialism: 1965-2015

Over the period of fifty years, Africa has experienced numerous crises involving food deficits, unsustainable national debt, periodic and consistent proliferations of infectious disease epidemics, ongoing series of military interventions both domestic and western in orientation as well as political efforts aimed at exerting continental influence upon the UN Security Council and other multi-lateral structures controlled by the imperialist industrialized states. In 2015 yet another African debt crisis is developing due to the precipitous decline in commodity prices including oil and strategic minerals.

This crisis comes in the almost immediate aftermath of AU member-states being hailed for their phenomenal economic growth. Events in Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, the Republics of

Sudan and South Sudan and other countries illustrates how precarious these assessments of the financial status of neo-colonial dominated states are in actuality.

These challenges on the economic front are not limited to Africa. Many of the so-called “emerging countries” are facing the same problems such as Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Russia and China. Beijing with its social constructs utilizing the commanding role of the Communist Party and its planned economy under socialism with Chinese characteristics has proven to be in a better position to address the current crisis.

Xi Jinping’s recent state visits to the Republic of Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa, along with the second full summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), noted that the desire for closer ties between Beijing and AU member-states was cognizant of the new situation within the global economy still dominated by imperialism. Africa needs infrastructural development in order to secure genuine growth and development in the short, medium and long-term political and economic trajectories.

The fact that prices for oil have ranged from \$34-38 per barrel in December 2015, down by over two-thirds in the last year-and-a-half, provides a glimpse into the current situation involving the international division of labor and economic power. The U.S. under the administration of President Barack Obama has strongly emphasized domestic oil production and along with ally Saudi Arabia, has over-produced petroleum resulting in a glut in the market and a rapidly declining economic situation in the other producer-states including Russia.

Other prices for commodities have also gone down significantly. For example platinum, in which the Southern African states of South Africa and Zimbabwe constitute approximately 75 percent of the world’s production, has also declined in price impacting foreign exchange earnings and the labor market.

Bloomberg in an article published on September 29, stated that “Platinum extended its slump to the lowest in more than six years amid concerns demand from automakers will slow as investigations into the Volkswagen AG scandal deepen. Volkswagen cars with diesel engines rigged to cheat on emissions tests are being pulled from markets in Spain, Switzerland, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, while prosecutors in Sweden consider opening an investigation on potential corruption. About 42 percent of platinum demand comes from its use in pollution-control devices in diesel engines, according to Morgan Stanley.”

This same article continues saying “Platinum futures for January delivery fell 0.5 percent to settle at \$918.10 an ounce at 1:23 p.m. (Sept. 29) on the New York Mercantile Exchange, after touching \$899.60, the lowest for a most-active contract since December 2008. Palladium advanced. Gold futures for December delivery slipped 0.4 percent to \$1,126.80 an ounce on the Comex in New York. Prices are set for a fifth straight quarterly loss, the longest losing streak since 1997. Silver gained. Platinum is trading at a discount of about \$210.50 to gold, the biggest since August 2012. Some investors who had been betting on platinum outperforming gold are now exiting that trade, David Govett, head of precious metals at broker Marex Spectron Group in London, said by telephone.”

As Nkrumah pointed out in his book “Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism,” some five decades ago, “On the economic front, a strong factor favoring Western monopolies and acting against the developing world is international capital’s control of the world market, as

well as of the prices of commodities bought and sold there. From 1951 to 1961, without taking oil into consideration, the general level of prices for primary products fell by 33.1 per cent, while prices of manufactured goods rose 3.5 per cent (within which, machinery and equipment prices rose 31.3 per cent). In that same decade this caused a loss to the Asian, African and Latin American countries, using 1951 prices as a basis, of some \$41,400 million. In the same period, while the volume of exports from these countries rose, their earnings in foreign exchange from such exports decreased."

Consequently, the cycle of dependency in Africa upon the imperialist states must be overturned in order for real growth and development to occur and maintain its sustainability over a period of decades. This cannot be realized under the current system of global capitalism, also referred to as international finance capital and imperialism.

The realization of the aims and objectives of the African Revolution requires socialist construction. Until the character of development is viewed and analyzed within an anti-capitalist framework, the actual solutions to these crises will remain elusive.

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