

Africa in Review 2017: Reconstruction and the Impediments of Imperialism

Mass demonstrations, repositioning priorities and the escalating Pentagon presence

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Featured image: Pentagon drones striking areas around the world including Somalia

Coal mining had been a lucrative business in the northeastern Oriental region of Morocco for many decades where in the city of Jerada thousands of workers were employed in the extractive industry.

During the 1930s, the earliest trade unions in the North African state were organized there to represent miners who worked under extremely dangerous and exploitative conditions.

The Moroccan Workers Union (UMT) came into existence and was affiliated with the largest labor federation in France at the time, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT). Paris had Morocco under a protectorate which was tantamount to colonial status.

Nonetheless, by the end of the 1990s, the mines in Jerada were closed when it was decided that the operations were no longer profitable. Approximately 9,000 workers lost their jobs spawning the flight from the city leaving many unemployed and impoverished people behind.

Nonetheless, the closed mines of Jerada became a source of potential income within the informal economy. Independent scavenging of the abandoned facilities where coal and other minerals could be acquired to be sold on the underground market attracted many young people.

Two brothers, aged 23 and 30, became trapped while emergency services personnel proved unable to rescue them. News of their presumed and confirmed deaths prompted anger on a mass level sparking large-scale demonstrations which advanced economic demands.

An article published by The New Arab said of the situation that:

“The unrest began on Friday (Dec. 22), when relatives of the victims and local residents railed against perceived inadequacies in the local emergency services’ rescue efforts. According to Moroccan media outlets, the rescue operation took as long as 36 hours. Protests continued on Saturday and Sunday and came to a head at the funeral of the brothers on Monday (Dec. 25), which was attended by thousands. After a general strike, protesters headed down to the city’s center and demanded improvements to living conditions in Jerada.” (Dec. 26)

The slogans advanced in the Jerada protests were similar to those which emerged in the Rif region where mass unrest took place around Hoceima earlier in the year. These northern areas of Morocco were bearing the brunt of the decline in the mining industry and therefore creating serious political problems for the monarchy under King Mohammad VI.



Morocco demonstrations in Jerada during late December 2017

Meanwhile in Egypt, there are other challenges which are a direct by-product of the post-colonial African crises. Blue Nile basin states from throughout North Africa extending to the Horn of Africa and the eastern coast has accepted a redirection of the flow of water resources needed for the construction of the ambitious Great Renaissance Dam project in Ethiopia.

Successive administrations in Cairo have opposed the project. Former President Mohamed Morsi had threatened to go to war with Addis Ababa in 2013 if Egypt did not maintain its levels of usage of Nile waters. Ethiopia called its bluff saying it was not afraid of the Muslim Brotherhood leader who was soon overthrown by Field Marshal Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi.

As the Field Marshal took off his military uniform in exchange for civilian clothes to run successfully for president absent of by then the outlawed Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), a political arm of the Brotherhood, the same differences remain over the amount of Blue Nile water which will be available to Egypt.

The Republic of Sudan, which was party to the revised colonial-era British agreement, signed in 1959 between Cairo and Khartoum, left Ethiopia to fend for itself as it never formally recognized the arrangement. At present Sudan is siding with Ethiopia and the other Nile basin nations against Egypt.

By November 2017, talks had broken off between President el-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn. The Egyptian leader said that the question of the Blue Nile was a matter of life and death for Cairo.

According to the Financial Times:

“Work on the dam is already advanced — it is 62 per cent built, says Ethiopia.

The Ethiopians are due to start testing the first two turbines next year, with construction in theory set to be completed by the end of 2018. But the three riparians have yet to overcome their mistrust of each other and agree on mechanisms to contain the impact on downstream countries both during the filling period and once the dam comes into operation." (Dec. 26)

Consequently, the potential for further conflict remains. Ethiopia views the Renaissance Dam as essential in its strategic economic blueprint.



Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Project

Despite the unrest in Morocco and the disagreements over access to water levels from the Blue Nile, perhaps the most widely covered story within North Africa for the year was the report by the Cable News Network (CNN) documenting human trafficking in neo-colonial dominated Libya. This of course is the same CNN which served as a champion of the Pentagon and NATO-led war on Libya during 2011.

The imperialist destruction of Libya in 2011 along with the elimination of its leadership in the personage of Col. Muammar Gaddafi and the obliteration of state institutions of the Jamahiriya as well as the imposition of a series of regimes which have failed to maintain any real authority in the country, has created the conditions for the enslavement of Africans by serving as a base for the destabilization of both North and West Africa.

Human trafficking through Libya across the Mediterranean to southern Europe is a direct result of the imperialist militarism which bombed the country into its current state of underdevelopment and impoverishment. Prior to 2011, Libya was the most prosperous nation in Africa serving as a beacon of growth and a proponent of Pan-Africanism.

Whether in Morocco, the Nile Basin or Libya, the underlining failure to achieve stability, national and regional unity along with economic development makes a compelling case for unity and political integration. How these goals are to be achieved is the mandate of those who clamor for leadership positions. Ultimately it is the people of these geo-political regions which will be tasked with finding a solution to the perpetual crises of decentralized and competitive existence which hampers the realization of genuine democracy and independence.

Rectification and Industrialization in the Sub-Continent: Zimbabwe, South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)

After the resignation of Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe on November 21 amid a factional struggle for control over the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriot Front party (ZANU-PF) and the state, former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa took over as leader. Mugabe had led both ZANU-PF since the mid-1970s and later an independent Zimbabwe beginning in April 1980.

There have been several major contributions of the Zimbabwe liberation process to the overall African revolutionary struggle. Most notable the capacity to wage a protracted armed struggle against the dreaded settler-colonial regime of Ian Smith and some two decades after achieving state power initiating a sweeping land redistribution program that created hundreds of thousands of independent African farmers.

At a December Extraordinary Congress of ZANU-PF the party sought to outline its new course in the post-Mugabe era. Economic development seems to be the major concern of the proceedings.

The Mnangagwa cabinet has been trimmed down from the size of Mugabe's and it was repeatedly stated during the inauguration of the current president that Zimbabwe was now open for business. Yet the sanctions which have served to severely undermine the economy since 2000 have not been lifted by the United States and Britain.

Many are keeping an eye on whether there will be significant changes made in the land reform policy. Despite the propagandistic attacks on the character of Zimbabwe agricultural production since 2000, scientific studies conducted by Professor Ian Scoones of the Institute for Development Studies in Britain indicates that: "Since 2000, land reform has resulted in the transfer of around 8 million hectares of land across 4,500 farms to over 160,000 households, representing 20 per cent of Zimbabwe's total land area, according to official figures. If the 'informal' settlements, outside the official 'fast-track' program are added, the totals are even larger."

(<http://www.ids.ac.uk/news/zimbabwe-s-land-reform-ten-years-on-new-study-dispels-the-myths>)

Scoones' work challenges several myths which are enunciated by those who have an ideological aversion to radical economic policy as well as other Afro-pessimists. These areas of distortion include:

"Land reform has been a total failure; the beneficiaries have been largely political 'cronies'; there is no investment in the new resettlements; agriculture is in complete ruins creating chronic food insecurity; and the rural economy has collapsed."

The notion that Zimbabwe was once the "breadbasket of the region" fails to say when this was the case. Was it during the period of white settler-colonial rule? Unfortunately, the western-oriented corporate and state-controlled media never asks or answers this question. Such proclamations which are devoid of substance and specificity contain undercurrents which suggest that Africans were better off under European rule.

Tobacco has long been a major export from Zimbabwe. A recent article published by the state-run Herald newspaper discusses previous problems with transport and marketing. (Dec. 28)

However, this same article goes on to say:

“Recent statistics from the Tobacco Industry Marketing Board (TIMB) indicate that 100,000 tobacco growers have registered so far, showing intent towards the crop. The upward shift from the 73,658 who had registered last year at the same time, gives rest to speculation by critics who predicted a possible plunge in figures. These are signs that farmers are still willing to play their part in generating foreign currency for the country, despite the inconveniences they have been meeting. Tobacco buyers and the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Rural Resettlement should repay the resilience shown by these growers by improving the conditions they encounter when they come to sell their crop.”

Other changes are taking place in neighboring Republic of South Africa where just days after the ZANU-PF Extraordinary Congress, the African National Congress (ANC) held its National Elective Conference at the University of Johannesburg. Some 4,700 delegates attended the event which consisted of three long days of reports, deliberations and voting for a new leadership of the ruling party which took state power after democratic elections were held in April 1994.



African National Congress National Elective Conference delegates from Dec. 2017

The current Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was elected as the ANC leader. Ramaphosa comes out of the trade union movement as a co-founder and former Secretary General of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). He was the chief negotiator during the process of writing a new transitional constitution during the early 1990s.

Ramaphosa later left politics to enter the business world. It is said that he commands vast resources attained through the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program of the ANC government.

Nonetheless, like Zimbabwe, South Africa has undergone challenges to its national economy in recent years. There has been massive disinvestment by the mining and banking sectors

which are largely still controlled by foreign capital. Revelations of an interest-rate fixing scheme by the banks prompted the government to launch an investigation.

The rand has taken severe blows over the last three years amid a broader global crisis deriving from the precipitous decline in commodity prices which has negatively impacted emerging economies throughout Africa and the world. These factors are compounded by an unprecedented drought directly stemming from climate change.

Zimbabwe and South Africa are two of the most important economic states within the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC). At present President Jacob Zuma of South Africa is the chair of SADC. This regional body played an instrumental role in facilitating the transition of power within ZANU-PF during late November. Therefore it is essential that South Africa and Zimbabwe maintain its close relationship aimed at the much needed strategic industrialization plans for SADC.

Pentagon Escalates Interventions in Africa: AFRICOM and the Role of Somalia and Djibouti

Since taking office in January 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump has heightened the Pentagon war in Somalia. Over the last decade Washington through three successive administrations has sought to remake the Horn of Africa within its own image.

Trump in one of his infamous executive orders lifted the so-called “restrictions” put in place by the previous regime of President Barack Obama in regard to military operations in Somalia. In effect there have really been no restrictions on Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) activity in Somalia over the last decade.

Thousands of people have been killed in a genocidal war aimed at eliminating resistance to U.S. domination in Somalia. In 2007, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) was deployed with U.S., European Union and United Nations funds utilizing troops from Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Sierra Leone, among others countries.

This involvement by AMISOM did not limit the ability of both the Pentagon and the Royal Air Force (RAF) from engaging in surveillance and bombing operations initially against the Union of Islamic Court which was eventually integrated into the imperialist-backed federal government in Mogadishu, and during the recent years targeting Al-Shabaab. U.S. troops, intelligence officers and advisors have been killed in the line of duty in Somalia.

In an article published by the Associated Press on December 28 it notes the enhanced aggressive policy of the Trump administration reporting:

“The U.S. military says a new airstrike in Somalia has killed four members of the al-Shabaab extremist group and destroyed a vehicle carrying explosives near the capital. The statement from the U.S. Africa Command says the airstrike Wednesday evening (Dec. 27) about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Mogadishu prevented the bomb from being used against residents of the capital. Al-Shabab was blamed for the massive truck bombing in Mogadishu in October that killed 512 people.”

This same dispatch goes on to emphasize:

“The U.S. has carried out 35 drone strikes in Somalia this year against al-

Shabab and a small but growing presence of Islamic State group-linked fighters. The Trump administration early this year approved expanded military operations in the Horn of Africa nation. The new U.S. statement says they assess that no civilians were killed in the strike.”

It is interesting to observe that Al-Shabaab which has been said to have links with al-Qaeda is now ostensibly in alliance with the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In making such statements, the Pentagon war machine seeks to garner support from the U.S. and world opinion.

The often regurgitated falsehood that “no civilians were killed” is a frequent mantra that has been reiterated from the days of the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s right through the occupations of Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti and the Pentagon operations in Libya, Syria and Yemen in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Anticipations are that these airstrikes will be increased due to the apparent “battle fatigue” of the African governments which are supplying troops to AMISOM. As funds dwindle and casualties mount, the almost futility of the Somalia project becomes even more apparent. Already some 1,000 AMISOM troops have been withdrawn with more slated for 2018. The purported plan is to turn over these operations to the Somali National Army which itself has not been able to wage an effective military campaign against Al-Shabaab. The army is haunted by divisions and other administrative problems even though enormous resources have been allocated for training and equipment.

A UN news report published on December 27 sums up the view of the “international community” as it relates to Somalia. This article reads in part:

“In a year which saw millions of Somali civilians displaced by armed conflict and thousands more killed and wounded in violence, the United Nations envoy to the country has called for sustained cooperation to tackle a number of pressing challenges. ‘No one should underestimate the many challenges ahead, and the serious issues that continue to retard and even threaten further progress,’ said Michael Keating, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia. ‘These include pervasive corruption, most obviously in politics, and powerbrokers’ willingness to use violence, or the threat of violence, against opponents,’ he added. Noting that the militants have retained the capacity to mount such devastating attacks, Mr. Keating also emphasized that the terrorist group thrives, among other things, on the absence of functional local government and on the many conflicts around the country.”

The humanitarian crisis in Somalia continues as well with millions suffering from food deficits, lack of potable water and medical support. These are the real issues that should be addressed rather than placing emphasis on the supposed roles of ISIS, which is a residual effect of imperialist politico-military strategy emanating from the failed wars in Iraq, Syria and Libya.

Another Horn of Africa state, Djibouti, serves as a base of operations for AFRICOM on the continent. Thousands of Pentagon troops remain at Camp Lemonnier as a strike force for potential problems in the rest of the region and extending as far as the Arabian Peninsula where Washington is waging a proxy war against the Islamic Republic of Iran in Yemen.

Over ten years of military intervention in the Horn of Africa has also been an abysmal failure for imperialism. Not until African states establish their own independent military force which

has the capacity to tackle internal and external threats, the imperialist capitals of Washington, London, Brussels and their allies will continue to dominate the air, land and waterways of the continent.

Reconstruction Must Be Self-Determined

From the North African states of Morocco, Egypt and Libya extending through the Horn of Africa to the sub-continent, the AU member-states are facing similar crises. These problems will not be resolved with the maintenance of the status-quo and its reinforcement.

If the situation is to be reversed beginning in 2018, the African continent and its people must break the dependency of the 19th and 20th century configurations of economic power and the international division of labor and political relationships. AFRICOM has not brought greater stability to Africa. In actuality the just the opposite has been the reality.

A look inward with the prospects of curbing and arresting external imperialist influence is the only practical solution to the problems of sustainable development. These are the tasks of both the popular classes and the state in the coming period.

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