

Africa in Review 2017: Reinforced Neo-colonialism and the Imperative of Continental Unity

From Togo and Cameroon to the DRC and South Sudan, the African masses need concerted action to halt underdevelopment and dependency

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Featured image: Democratic Republic of Congo President Joseph Kabila

A monumental democratic movement demanding inclusion in the future of the West African state of Togo thrust the former German and French colony into the forefront news coverage this past year related to events on the continent.

President Faure Gnassingbe has been in office for over a dozen years after inheriting the throne from his deceased father Eyadema. All together the Gnassingbe family has ruled this largely agricultural producing state for more than a half century.

For months an alliance of 14 different political parties and coalitions has staged mass demonstrations and general strikes. The government has responded utilizing repressive crowd control tactics by the security forces as well as arresting leaders of the opposition.

Two formations have been prominent in the recent resistance these being the National Alliance for Change (ANC) led by Jean-Pierre Fabre and the Pan-African National Party (PNP) headed by Tikpi Atchadam. Altogether there have been 16 reported deaths related to the unrest.

One major impediment to the process of dialogue is the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which is chaired by Lome. Although ECOWAS had made statements urging national reconciliation, there have not been any fundamental reforms enacted by the regime.

Reports indicate that there are mediation efforts taking place with Ghana playing a leading role since it has a direct interest in preventing a deeper crisis which could prompt even more people to cross the border into the former British colony. The demonstrations have had an impact on the economic situation inside the country. During the festive season sales were down for small businesses despite the fact that people still gathered at the beaches to celebrate the holidays.

Close by in Cameroon, there has been a series of general strikes largely surrounding the inherited divisions of a state which has undergone German, French and British colonialism during the 19th and 20th centuries. People in the northwest and southwest regions of the country where English is the predominant language has protested against the apparent discriminatory practices within the educational and legal systems.

Compounding these sectional divisions of a post-colonial society, the inability of the state bureaucracy to pay teachers their salaries has led to demonstrations and work stoppages within the French speaking regions of Cameroon as well. Some educators say they have never received a paycheck since they graduated from college and joined the civil service, although the production and export of oil accounts for 40 percent of the gross domestic product. Whether this is the direct result of inefficiencies or outright corruption and embezzlement by higher level governmental officials taking resources which are allocated to pay workers, is immaterial since under either situation the educators are the victims along with their students and society as a whole.

Cameroon is theoretically not a francophone nation. However, those in the English speaking regions, constituting approximately 17 percent of the population, say that in essence it is administered as such.

As a neighboring state with the Federal Republic of Nigeria, there is the problem of Boko Haram which has spread its tentacles to Cameroon. The government is involved in a regional military alliance with Niger, Chad and Abuja to battle against the terrorist group which has staged its most deadly attacks in northeast Nigeria, where the Islamist group's attacks began in 2009 in the aftermath of the assassination of its leader and other members.

Both Togo and Cameroon are indicative of the crises of governance which emerged after the defeat of colonialism in West Africa. These issues can only be resolved through the emergence of a new breed of national leadership which places the well-being of the people above the narrow class interests of various ruling and sectional groups.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi and South Sudan: Central Africa and the Quest for Stability

Pressure is still being applied to President Joseph Kabila of the DRC to hold multi-party elections in one of Africa's largest geographic nation-states. This is a familiar narrative pronounced by most international media organizations.

At the same time the DRC remains a mineral-rich state which is characterized by political and social instability. Fighting in the central region of Kasai between supporters and opponents of the present government has created a refugee problem within the neighboring Republic of Angola.

During December the neighboring Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) entered DRC territory once again in operations against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamic-dominated guerilla organization which has waged a war against the Kampala for at least two decades. Nevertheless, this time the DRC government said it endorsed the UPDF operation aimed at crippling the ADF.

ADF rebels have been blamed for the early December ambush of 15 Tanzanian peacekeeping troops in the DRC operating under the rubric of the United Nations. UPDF spokesman Brig. Richard Karepire said of the military attacks inside the DRC that:

"Recently, the DRC authorities proposed that the two countries plan and conduct limited joint operations against this growing terrorist menace in our neighborhood. These terrorists should know that they may only buy time, but

will be targeted wherever they are. In a preemptive move, this afternoon UPDF (Uganda People's Defense Forces) conducted attacks on their camps in eastern DRC. ADF terrorists may only buy time but will be targeted wherever they are hiding! Our troops didn't enter DRC. We employed the Air forces and long range artillery to carry out the attacks." (Xinhua, Dec. 23)

The question remains as to whether the security situation in the DRC is conducive for the holding of national elections? Moreover, even if there was a new government put in place would it be in any better or worse position to address the decades-long divisions which have been a hallmark of the former Belgian colony since the imperialist overthrow and assassination of the first Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1960-61.

Right next door in Burundi the small former German and later Belgian colony has stood up to attempts by outside interests to bring down the administration of President Pierre Nkurunziza, who is serving his third term in office. The president in late October withdrew from the dreaded International Criminal Court (ICC) stemming from its preoccupation with the affairs of African Union member-states.

Even though Bujumbura has withdrawn from the Rome Statute that provides the ostensible legal framework for the ICC, the Netherlands-based institution says it will continue to pursue Burundian leaders over alleged human rights violations. The purported human rights groups and the European Union (EU) are continuing to reaffirm the necessity of the ICC to take action against African governments and rebel organizations while the war crimes of genocidal proportions inflicted upon the peoples of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America by the western imperialist states, with a leading role played by the U.S., are routinely ignored by the ICC, EU and largely by the investigators of London's Amnesty International and the New York City Human Rights Watch.

The Republic of South Sudan has been proven to be a nonviable state created at the aegis of Washington after a protracted civil war with the northern Republic of Sudan for two decades, with a transition process from 2003-2011, when Juba was recognized as an independent nation by the UN and the AU. Yet by the December 2013, the newest nation in the world was being ripped apart due to the conflict between President Salva Kiir and former Vice-President Reik Machar.

Today the situation in South Sudan has become a major humanitarian disaster along with being a threat to regional security throughout central and eastern Africa. Numerous attempts by regional organizations to gain a ceasefire between the two warring factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the SPLM in Opposition (SPLM-IO) have remained elusive.

Madagascar, Mozambique and Zambia: Pandemics, Economic Challenges and the Question of Solidarity with Oppressed Peoples

The African nation of Madagascar off the coast of the sub-continent has been hit by an outbreak of Pneumonic and Bubonic plague. This is the worst occurrence of these deadly diseases in recent times.

It was the Bubonic plague which struck 14th century Europe and within five years had killed an estimated 25 million people. Its rapid spread from Italy to the north of England spawned tremendous changes in the historical trajectory of Europe in successive centuries.

With specific reference to Madagascar, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported on November 27 emphasizing:

“From the 1 August through 22 November 2017, a total of 2348 confirmed, probable and suspected cases of plague, including 202 deaths (case fatality rate 8.6 %), were reported by the Ministry of Health of Madagascar to WHO. There were 1791 cases of pneumonic plague, of which 22% were confirmed, 34% were probable, and 44% were suspected. In addition to pneumonic cases, there were reports of 341 cases of bubonic plague, one case of septicaemic plague and 215 cases with type unspecified. In total, 81 healthcare workers have had illness compatible with plague, none of whom have died. Since the beginning of the outbreak, cases of pneumonic and bubonic plague have been detected in 55 out of 114 districts (48%), including non-endemic areas and major cities. Analamanga Region has been the most affected, with 68% of the cumulative reported cases.”

(<http://www.who.int/csr/don/27-november-2017-plague-madagascar/en/>)

Nonetheless, with the work of healthcare professionals, no new cases of the diseases have been reported since mid-November. There is speculation that another outbreak could take place during 2018.

Such epidemics are a direct result of the underdevelopment of healthcare infrastructure in Madagascar. The same problems are faced in AU member states across the continent. The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic from late 2013 until the early months of 2015 in several West African states, with the most severely affected being Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, was arrested with the assistance of the international community including the Republic of Cuba which sent hundreds of healthcare workers who played a critical role in the crisis.

Further west along the coast of the Indian Ocean is the former Portuguese colony of Mozambique. The country was born in the 1975 as a result of a protracted revolutionary war led by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) which went on to co-found the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), the forerunner to the contemporary Southern African Development Community (SADC), founded in 1992 in Windhoek, Republic of Namibia. SADC now has 16 member-states with the Union of Comoros, also in the Indian Ocean, being its most recent affiliate.

As a result of the legacy of Portuguese slavery and colonialism, Mozambique faced enormous socio-economic challenges at its independence. Further complications arose when the Portuguese intelligence trained Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) was taken over by the settler-colonial regime of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). After the liberation of Zimbabwe in April 1980, the racist apartheid regime then ruling the Republic of South Africa utilized RENAMO in an effort to destroy Mozambique as an independent nation-state.

The decline of apartheid compelled RENAMO to sign a ceasefire agreement with the FRELIMO government in 1992. Since this time period with RENAMO becoming an opposition party, periodic flare-ups of violence by the organization have occurred.

Although Mozambique has been cited for its economic growth over the last decade, recent problems involving the decline in commodity prices and difficulties within the financial sector has hampered the capacity of the country to develop. An article published by World Finance notes:

“Higher-than-expected government borrowing has shaken confidence in Mozambique’s economic prospects, with foreign direct investment falling 20 percent in the past year. There are, however, signs of improvement. The discovery of 20 billion barrels of natural gas in 2011 promises to transform the economy, but there are still many challenges that must be overcome if the country’s economy is to continue to develop.” (Dec. 22)

These discoveries of natural gas and oil resources in Mozambique as well as along the Indian Ocean East African states of Tanzania, Kenya and Somalia, illustrates the prospects for vast economic development. However, with the control of energy prices still remaining within the purview of the imperialist countries, the existence of these resources does not necessarily translate into greater independence and sovereignty.

Over the last four years, the consequences of the flooding of the oil and natural gas world markets with U.S. produced energy resources has had a profoundly negative impact on countries within Africa such as Nigeria and Angola. Consequently, the need to create alternative markets and sources of finance separate from the western-based banking institutions in all likelihood is a prerequisite of genuine growth and development on the continent.

This lack of real independence is reflective of the position of the Southern African state of the Republic of Zambia which announced in December that it would play host to the convening of an Israel-Africa Summit. Zambia maintains an embassy staff in Israel which includes a military attache.

A December 21 vote by the UN General Assembly against the declaration of U.S. President Donald Trump mandating the transferal of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recorded Zambia as being absent during the process. This order by Trump sparked anti-American and anti-Zionist demonstrations throughout Palestine and around the world.

Togo was reported as voting against the resolution opposing the U.S. As mentioned above, Lome has undergone mass opposition protests demanding democratization of the country which has lived under a neo-colonial dominated regime for some 50 years. Togo had initially agreed to have the Israel-Africa Summit on its soil. Nonetheless, the unrest related to its own domestic crisis forced the event to be cancelled prompting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s visit to the Republic of Kenya during the inauguration ceremonies for the second term of President Uhuru Kenyatta in order to seek assistance from other AU member-states.



Togo opposition on the march for removal of neo-colonial regime in Lome

Zambian President Edgar Lungu was photographed shaking hands with Netanyahu in Kenya on the sidelines of the inauguration. Such expressed intent to host this summit was revealed in an article published by the Lusaka Times in early December.

These revelations from Lusaka illustrate the weaknesses of African states in regard to maintaining their long-held solidarity with the Palestinian people and all other oppressed nations globally. Such a realization of this purported intent will serve as a colossal setback in the role of Africa within world affairs.

The Imperatives of Pan-Africanism and Socialist Transformation

Of course as long as the continent remains divided under capitalist and imperialist dominance these challenges will continue. Africa is rich in mineral, energy, hydro-electric and agricultural potential which can only be beneficial to the workers, farmers and youth when genuine national independence and sovereignty is attained.

Although there has been spurts of economic growth on the continent over the last decade, the reversal of this process within a period of four years proves that the reliance on foreign direct investment absent of a plan for strategic planning which will benefit the majority of people residing within the AU member-states, can only result in periodic cycles of debt crises, stagnation and economic downturn. This has been the situation in the leading African states of Nigeria, South Africa, Angola and Egypt.

Reports during 2017 stated that both South Africa and Nigeria were emerging from recession with minimal amounts of growth over a period of two quarters. However, this limited upturn is contingent upon the slight increase in commodity prices and the extension of credit from western-based financial institutions.



Kwame Nkrumah leaving prison, Feb. 1951

An integration of the AU member-states geographically, economically and politically is the only real solution for sustainable growth and development. This must be accompanied by the withdrawal of Pentagon forces through the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) from the continent and its replacement with an All-African High Command as envisioned in the 1960s by former First Republic of Ghana President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

The lessons of the 20th and 21st centuries also reveal that under socialism the fastest and most efficient societal development can take place. The examples of the former Soviet Union, along with the existing socialist states of the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Cuba illustrate how formerly colonized, semi-colonized and underdeveloped countries can achieve rapid expansion and the improvement of the living standards among the working people.

Therefore Africa should recapture the vision of the early revolutionary independence leaders who sought to build the continent as a major force within world affairs. This can be done under the direction of a new generation of leaders committed to liberating the continent and its people from the centuries-long legacy of enslavement, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

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