

Africa in Review 2018: Electoral Politics, Social Stability and the Need for Genuine Economic Development

From the Democratic Republic of Congo to Sudan the need for continental solutions is apparent

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As 2018 concludes there is much to be learned from developments on the African continent where the nation-states and masses of people are continuing their quest for authentic national liberation and unity. This is a first in a series of articles which highlight aspects of events on the continent which point to the necessity of building an independent existence for working class, peasantry and youth that can guarantee a prosperous future free of the legacy of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Voting, Stabilization and the Economics of International Relations: The Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola

A much anticipated national presidential election in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was postponed for one week to December 30.

This mineral-rich state in the “heart of Africa” has been the focus of a concerted destabilization campaign by the imperialist nations since it gained independence in June 1960. First Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba was a Pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist fighter who sought to unite the former Belgian Congo internally for the benefit of the majority of its people.

Lumumba wanted to become a leading force in the struggle for African unity along with Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea-Conakry, Modibo Keita of Mali and other progressive elements leading the freedom movements of the 1950s and 1960s. After attaining power through electoral means, Lumumba was targeted for destabilization, a politico-military coup, house arrest and eventual assassination within the course of seven months.

Since Lumumba’s death in January 1961, there have been recurrent crises stemming from the legacy of colonialism. Over the last two decades the eastern region of the DRC has been a source for rebel activity much of which has been sponsored by Washington-allied regional governments as well as multi-national corporations involved in the exploitation of mineral resources.

President Joseph Kabila has been in power since 2001 when his father, Laurent Kabila, was assassinated. His organization, the People’s Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD), has its own candidate for the highest office, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary.

Opposition parties backed by the imperialists with economic interests in the extractive industry are creating an atmosphere where anything less than an outright victory for them will be denounced as fraud placing blame on the current administration.

In recent years there appears to have been a lessening of tensions between Kinshasha and the neighboring states of Uganda and Rwanda. This represents an apparent shift since the late 1990s when in the aftermath of assisting the elder Kabila to take power from longtime U.S.-backed dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997, Kigali and Kampala in 1998 invaded the DRC in a failed attempt to remove this same leader. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) deployed tens of thousands of troops to halt the putsch resulting in a withdrawal agreement for both sides and the stationing of 12,500 United Nations peacekeeping troops who are still inside the country.

The southwest Kasai region of DRC has been the scene since 2016 of clashes involving militias which support and oppose the Kabila administration. Hundreds of thousands of displaced persons have subsequently fled to neighboring Republic of Angola where many worked in the informal mining sector.

During October, the Angolan government ordered the deportation of up to 300,000 Congolese back across the border. This situation has created yet another series of problems of resettlement into areas where violence compelled their exodus.

Angola is undergoing a rectification process where the recently-elected President Joao Lourenco has sought to address the allegations of corruption from the previous administration of Jose Eduardo dos Santos. Lourenco is traveling to various states seeking partnerships and assistance in sustaining and rebuilding the national economy and infrastructure.

Both the DRC and Angola are rich in national wealth. It is undeniable that these central and southern African states have much more to gain through cooperation rather than divisions.

An Elusive Social Stability and Development: Burundi, Rwanda and the Republic of Sudan

President Pierre Nkurunziza has maintained his position as head-of-state over the last few years in a landlocked agricultural-based country which has a turbulent history of ethnic conflict and displacement. Opposition political parties argued three years ago that the president had no right to run for a third term of office under the 2005 peace agreement which ended more than a decade of civil war.

Mass demonstrations failed to dislodge the administration while fears of a wave of repression and possible renewed civil war, prompted hundreds of thousands of people to flee the country into the neighboring nations of Rwanda and Tanzania. The Burundi government led by the party of Nkurunziza, the National Council for Defense and Democracy (CNDD-FDD), has warned regional states about what they perceived as subversive activity on the part of exiles aimed at fomenting unrest inside the country.

Rwanda and Burundi share a similar history of colonization by Germany and Belgium. The ethnic makeup of the countries where the dominant groups of Tutsis and Hutus, with a small minority of Twa, was a mechanism utilized by imperialism to divide, conquer and control.



Rwanda President Paul Kagame at AfCFTA Summit in Kigali, March 20-21, 2018

In recent months Kigali and Bujumbura have faced-off diplomatically in a manner which has drawn the attention of regional governments. Rwandan President Paul Kagame was highly critical of the decision by Nkurunziza to remain in power despite a Burundian Constitutional Court decision in favor of the CNDD-FDD. Kagame emphasized that events in Burundi risked the resumption of a major ethnically-laced civil war. While Rwanda itself has come under criticism for extending the tenure of Kagame for another possible decade or more, both leaders view each other as adversaries.

According to an article written by Selina Diaby and Patrick Hajayandi on the situation between Rwanda and Burundi:

“In recent decades the Great Lakes region has been marred by civil wars and suffered from consequences of sponsored violence and large-scale abuses of human rights that left millions of people dead and others displaced, raped, mutilated, traumatized and hopeless. It is therefore necessary for the EAC (East African Community) leadership, the African Union (AU) and possibly the United Nations to take seriously the conflict and escalating tensions between Burundi and Rwanda and the fact that they pose a threat to regional and continental stability.” (News24, Dec. 16)

Meanwhile the Republic of Sudan has experienced demonstrations centering on the economic crisis inside this oil producing state. The partitioning of what was once Africa’s largest geographic country after 2013 and the precipitous decline in oil prices on the international market triggered by the deliberate increase in domestic production by the U.S. under the previous administration of President Barack Obama, has plunged Khartoum into a desperate situation.

Over the last three years, the government has moved closer politically to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through their participation in the U.S.-engineered war against the people of Yemen. However, over twenty people have been killed in the month of December as the government attempts to suppress protests centered in the capital affirming in reality that partnerships with the junior partners of imperialism provide no way out of the perils of neo-colonialism in the 21st century.

Image on the right: Sudan President Omar Hassan al-Bashir visits Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad, Dec. 2018



Nonetheless, the government of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir appears to be dissatisfied with its attempts to “normalize” relations with Washington and its allies in the Gulf region. The president traveled to the Russian Federation earlier in the year where he expressed dismay at the current arrangements with the regime of Donald Trump. During December, the Sudanese leader made a surprise visit to Syria for discussions with President Bashar al-Assad.

The Arab League, in which Sudan is a member, had attempted to isolate Syria from the outset of the imperialist war aimed at overthrowing the government in Damascus. Now the governments of Bahrain and the UAE are reestablishing relations with Syria as all indications suggests the Washington-backed rebels have been defeated with the assistance of Moscow, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah of Lebanon.

These developments in Burundi, Rwanda and Sudan illustrate the precarious character of the post-colonial African states leading into the conclusion of the second decade of the 21st century. Alliances with imperialism provide no benefits beyond a possible short term false “rehabilitation” politically with the centers of the world capitalist system.

Conclusion: Economic Resources and the Quest for Sovereignty

Although all of the above-mentioned states have strategic significance as it relates to mineral wealth, geographical positioning and the imperatives of African unity, the historical process of neo-colonialism is designed to halt genuine development and the perpetuation of the dominance of the U.S., its European allies and client nations on the continent along with the so-called Middle East. Africa and its resources both material and human could if liberated place the region as a leading force in the world system.

Yet after a process of over six decades of national liberation movements and various Pan-African projects, there is the constant threat of recolonization. The declaration of an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in March of 2018 in Rwanda can be viewed as a positive manifestation. Nonetheless, until the class contradictions inherited by centuries of enslavement and colonization are overturned the character of growth and development cannot provide the total liberation of the majority of workers, farmers and youth on the continent.

Just a cursory view of several important African nations can provide a perspective on what needs to be done. Africa must become more conscious of itself as an important harbinger of international affairs in the mode of the outlook of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah from the 1950s to the early 1970s. When this level of self-realization and projection is achieved the prospects for transformation can become even more of a material and ideological force on a global scale.

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