

Africa in Review 2020: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Imperatives of the 21st Century

Part II: Operationalization of a renewed call for cooperation and integration is needed in the current period

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Although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa does not in any way rival the existing public health situation in Western Europe and the United States, the presence of a new variant in South Africa and other regions of the continent emphasizes the necessity of independent efforts on the part of the African Union (AU) member-states to advance a policy of self-reliance.

To the extent that the newly formulated African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can move the 1.3 billion people towards a better standard of living along with greater control over the means of production within the society, it should be supported by progressive and peace-loving forces throughout the world.

The AfCFTA aspirations are by no means new to the post-colonial era. Leaders such as Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, founder of the Republic of Ghana, advocated the revolutionary unification of Africa under a scientific socialist system. In the interim during 1963 at the founding of the AU predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Nkrumah issued numerous appeals for unification including the book entitled “Africa Must Unite”, which was published to coincide with the maiden summit of the continental body.

Even after the May 25, 1963 first summit of the OAU in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Nkrumah and others continued to promote the notions of continental integration and unification. The 1964 summit in Cairo, Egypt took up the question of the national oppression of Africans in the United States with the intervention of Malcolm X. These developments in 1964, were utilized by the AU and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to raise once again in 2020 the institutional racism and brutality carried out by the state in the world’s leading capitalist country. The brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis further enraged the international community after reports of the brutal killings of Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia and Breonna Taylor in Louisville.

The enhancement of Africa’s status within the broader international community would inspire and encourage those within the Diaspora who are struggling for self-determination, national liberation, social justice and equality. As Nkrumah noted during the 1960s and early 1970s, the liberation of Africa would be a tremendous inspiration to all Black and oppressed peoples throughout the planet.

With specific reference to the potential role of AfCFTA, the [mission of the project says](#):

“The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a free trade area, outlined in the African Continental Free Trade Agreement among 54 of the 55 African Union nations. AfCFTA is the largest in the world in terms of participating countries since the formation of the World Trade Organization. The agreement was brokered by the African Union (AU) and was signed on by 44 of its 55 member states in Kigali, Rwanda on March 21, 2018. The agreement initially requires members to remove tariffs from 90% of goods, allowing free access to commodities, goods, and services across the continent. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) estimates that the agreement will boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022.”

Problems prevalent within the AU member-states in 2020 are by-product of the legacies of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and all aspects of imperialism. The decline in commodity prices within the agricultural and mining sectors has been a major impediment to the export-driven African economies for several years. These vulnerabilities on the continent have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact within the imperialist states.

Impediments to Implementations of the AfCFTA Project

In the leading economy of East Africa, the Republic of Kenya, there has been a recent diplomatic row which has erupted with neighboring Somalia. There is both a maritime and inland dispute over borders in the Indian Ocean offshore along with the areas of Jubaland in southern Somalia. Kenya has also aggravated tensions by hosting the leader of the breakaway northern region known as Somaliland. The area has not been recognized as independent by either the United Nations or the AU. (See [this](#))

Kenya has deployed its troops to Somalia as part of the U.S.-engineered efforts to control the political situation inside that country since the late 2000s. Aerial strikes have been carried out by the Pentagon now under the banner of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM). Kenyan soldiers have functioned within the United Nations-mandated African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) which is ostensibly designed to stabilize the government in Mogadishu and to defeat the al-Shabaab group that has waged war against the federal regime for a decade. These developments have surely complicated the potential for normalized relations necessary for the facilitation of trade and economic integration.

A [report published](#) on December 24 says of the situation that:

“There is growing concern the tensions between Kenya and Somalia may erupt into fighting, due to a military buildup along the two countries’ borders. The Somalia federal government has sent troops to the border town of Beled-Hawo, while forces from Somalia’s Jubaland region, which enjoys a good relationship with Kenya, are stationed in the nearby Kenyan town of Madera.... Hundreds of fighters allied to Jubaland Interior Minister Abdirashid Janan have been stationed in Madera for months. Last March, these forces launched a cross-border attack in Beled Hawo, killing dozens. On Tuesday (December 22), Madera residents took to the streets to demand the Jubaland forces to leave and stop endangering their lives. The protest took place after the Somali government sent hundreds of soldiers to secure the Beled-Hawo area.... Last week, Somalia cut diplomatic ties with Kenya. The federal government accuses Kenya of interfering with its internal affairs — an accusation that Kenyan officials deny. George Musamali is the head of the Center for Risk Management in Africa. He says any conflict between Kenya and Somalia would be felt

beyond the border area.”

Meanwhile in the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) region a military coup in Mali on August 20 posed a major challenge to this body which represents 15 member-states. ECOWAS immediately deployed a delegation to Mali headed by former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to demand in no uncertain terms that the mutinous soldiers relinquish control to the previously elected administration. The leaders of the coup were trained by the Pentagon at military colleges in the U.S. This same phenomenon was true in regard to the putsch of 2012 where the lower-ranking officers involved in overthrowing an elected government were products of the pro-imperialist education given to soldiers by the Pentagon.

After much discussion, it was decided that an interim administration would be established which included both opposition political forces and the coup makers. ECOWAS threatened the suspension of Mali from the organization prohibiting trade and normal diplomatic relations with the landlocked country if the mutinous troops did not return to the barracks. Since August, problems are continuing with the military further threatening the stability of the country.

Mali has been inflicted for decades by an internal dispute inherited from French colonialism with the Tuareg population in the north. After the escalation in fighting in 2012-2013, France intervened militarily with the assistance of AFRICOM already operating in the country. Nonetheless, the northern insurgency has been heavily infiltrated by jihadist groups whose origins and backing tend to coincide with the aims of imperialism in Africa and West Asia.

ECOWAS during 2019 introduced a single monetary unit in the effort to promote cross border trade and travel. By the latter months of 2020, this launch of the “Eco” regional currency was suspended under the guise that the initiative was premature. Even with these apparent good intentions, the existence of armed opposition groups in several other states notwithstanding Mali, including Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Cameroon, only serves to provide a rationale for the continued presence of AFRICOM as well as the French-led Operation Barkhane, which inevitably prevents the realization of Pan-African unity.

These conflicts internally and over colonial-drawn territorial boundaries are not conducive to the implementation of the AfCFTA program of unity and cooperation. There is the necessity of resolving these issues as an imperative towards genuine independence and sovereignty for Africa and its people.

Political Stability as a Prerequisite for Pan-Africanism

An equitable distribution of resources in AU member-states could create the atmosphere for peace and security. Even short of civil war and border conflicts, there is unrest periodically over the legitimacy of governments and the character of governance. For example, in Ivory Coast and Guinea-Conakry, widespread outbreaks of violence were the direct result of dissent over whether the administrations in these states had the right to continue their tenure in office.



Nigeria #EndSARS protest movement

In Nigeria, the most populous state within the AU which is said to have the largest economy on the continent, was the scene of a national youth-led rebellion in October prompted by police misconduct carried out by the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Dozens of people were killed in further repression against the #EndSARS Campaign demonstrations at the hands of the police and military. In response there were violent retaliations targeting the Supreme Court, a prison, a leading television station and the home of the Lagos state governor, among other symbols of the state and national economy.

Within the context of the AU there is the Peace and Security Council (PSC) whose charge is to ameliorate conflict throughout the continent. [According to its mission statement:](#)

“The African Union leads policy making and implementation of decisions aimed at ensuring that Africa achieves Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 which aspires for ‘A peaceful and secure Africa’ through the use of mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centered approach to conflict prevention and resolution of conflicts and establishing of a culture of peace and tolerance nurtured in Africa’s children and youth through peace education. The Agenda 2063 flagship initiative of Silencing the Guns by 2020 is at the core of activities being put in place to ensure Africa is a more peaceful and stable continent.

The key AU Organ for promoting peace and security on the continent is the Peace & Security Council (PSC) which is the standing decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It is a collective security and early warning arrangement intended to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crisis situations in Africa. It is also the key pillar of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which is the framework for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa.”

In order for this division of the AU to function effectively there must be the resolution of the class, national and micro-nationality conflicts which are stifling qualitative development. The settling of these disputes is necessary for the AfCFTA project to reach its minimal goals

leading to the decisive years ahead.

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