

Imperialism and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan and Libya

After 60 years, the African Union, the successor to the Organization of African Unity, faces monumental challenges in the contemporary period

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May 25 represents the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) created by 33 independent states in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963. Nearly four decades later in 2002, the African Union (AU) came into existence with a renewed commitment to greater unity and coordinated development.

The events in Ethiopia during May 1963 represented a watershed in the struggle for national liberation and Pan-Africanism which can be traced back centuries to the heroic resistance against enslavement and colonization. A series of Pan-African Conferences and Congresses took place between 1893 and 1945 which brought together Africans from various geopolitical regions of the globe to discuss their common interests aimed at charting a methodology to win freedom and social justice.

Since 1963, many more colonies have gained their independence while the economic and military liberation of the continent remains elusive. Today, the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) along with French and other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) troops are operating in numerous states throughout the region.

As a direct result of this renewed militarization of the continent by the imperialist centers of global power, there has been deepening levels of instability and displacement. Africans are being human trafficked across North Africa and the Mediterranean in a manner reminiscent of the Atlantic Slave Trade between the 15th and 19th centuries.

The increasing presence of peoples of African descent in the nations of Europe and in North America has provided an ideological rationale for the emergence of neo-fascist organizations and political officials. On the southern border of the U.S., 1,500 troops along with thousands of law-enforcement personnel and vigilantes are patrolling to keep people of

color out of the country.

Despite these harsh realities, there have been awakenings throughout the world in which Africa is very much involved. Although there is the reemergence of military coups in several West African states, the mass sentiment from the workers, farmers and youth is decisively anti-imperialist. This rising consciousness is reflected in many of the foreign policy positions articulated by African heads-of-state and envoys in their speeches annually before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).



This same outlook permeated the anti-imperialist governments in existence at the time of the founding of the OAU. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the then President of the First Republic of Ghana exemplified the concept of “positive action” which was employed in the independence struggle which he led in the British colonial Gold Coast from 1947-1957.

Nkrumah’s pioneering work entitled “Africa Must Unite” was released to coincide with the inaugural summit of the OAU. The book covers all aspects of the struggle for national liberation and the dangers of disunity and the continuing threat of imperialist domination.

In the introduction to Africa Must Unite Nkrumah says

“For freedom is not a commodity which is ‘given’ to the enslaved upon demand. It is a precious reward, the shining trophy of struggle and sacrifice. Nor do the struggle and sacrifice cease with the attainment of freedom. The period of servitude leaves behind tolls beyond what it has already taken. These are the cost of filling in the emptiness that colonialism has left; the struggle and the toil to build the foundation, and then the superstructure, of an economy that will raise up the social levels of our people, that will provide them with a full and satisfying life, from which want and stagnation will have been banished. We have to guard closely our hard-won freedom and keep it safe from the predatory designs of those who wish to reimpose their will upon us.” (p. Introduction xvi)

These words written in 1963 are quite prophetic. The struggle against neo-colonialism—which Nkrumah called the last stage of imperialism, the title of a study he published in book form two years after the first OAU gathering—continues after the acquisition of national independence with the purported “departure” of the colonial powers. It was these same colonial powers in the former Belgian Congo who were instrumental in thwarting the efforts of the first democratically elected Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba during 1960 and early 1961.

The collective imperialism led by Washington and Wall Street were identified by Nkrumah in

1965 as the principal enemies of the African Revolution. Despite the U.S. attempts to distance itself historically from the rise of colonialism in Africa, their ruling interests were also present at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 where the continent was carved up among the leading imperialist centers. Even prior to the establishment of independence for the 13 British colonies in what later became the U.S., Native removal and African enslavement were thoroughly entrenched into the political economy.

Successive administrations in Washington have viewed the movement towards genuine independence in Africa as a threat to U.S. interests. This is why Lumumba, Nkrumah, and many others were targeted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the State Department.

In Africa Must Unite Nkrumah goes on to emphasize:

“New nations like ours are confronted with tasks and problems that would certainly tax the experience and ingenuity of much older states. They would be difficult enough if we existed in a peaceful world, free of contending powers and interested countries eager to dabble in our internal affairs and manipulate our domestic and external relations in order to divide us nationally and internationally. As it is, our problems are made more vexed by the devices of neo-colonialists. And when we attempt to deal with them in ways which, having regard to all the facts that are known to us, seem most appropriate in the endeavor to maintain the internal unity upon which our viability and progress depend, we are misrepresented to the outside world to the point of distortion.” (Introduction, xvi)

In the contemporary African context, the states of Sudan and Libya provide a clear illustration of the contradictions which have arisen since the dawn of national independence and the later founding of the OAU. Each nation-state embodies tremendous potential for the economic emancipation, sovereignty and unification of Africa. Nevertheless, the legacy of European colonialism and modern-day neo-colonialism has hampered the capacity of Sudan and Libya to claim their rightful places as leaders in the sustainable development of the AU member-states.

The Crisis of Governance in the Republic of Sudan and the Role of Imperialism

Sudan has been in the international media since the eruption of clashes between the two military structures in charge of the administration of the transitional state on April 15. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have long held a position of authority within various governments since independence from British imperialism in 1956. There have been extended periods in the post-colonial political history of Sudan where the military seized control of the government while ruling in the interests of imperialist states and their allies.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) grew out of the military campaign to end the insurgency in the western Darfur region in the first decade of the 21st century. Both institutions, the SAF and RSF, apparently had no intentions of relinquishing political power to the civilian population which had been organized through the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA), the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) and the Resistance Committees which have been essential to the mobilization of mass demonstrations and strikes since emergence of the democratic movement in 2018-19.



Peace negotiations have taken place between the armed opposition groupings in Darfur and the border areas in the Abyei, Blue Nile and South Kordofan regions of the country with the Transitional Military Council (TMC) which was headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and General Mohamed Hamden Dagalo (Hemitti). The character of these discussions over the last four years has resulted in a reconfiguration of alliances in Sudan. After the October 2021 coup carried out by the TMC against the Transitional Sovereign Council (TSC) represented by the then interim Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, several of the armed opposition groupings within the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) supported the SAF/RSF coup.

The popular resistance committees along with the other mass and professional organizations, opposition groupings, including the Communist Party, have been deliberately sidelined by the imperialist states along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and the United Nations in their extensive deliberations on a transitional framework towards a democratic dispensation. A systematic policy of empowering the military apparatus of the Sudanese state has resulted in the current crisis.

Reports indicate that between 700 and 1,000 people have been killed in the fighting since April 15, with an additional 5,000 or more injured. In addition, over 1 million have been displaced with hundreds of thousands being forced across the borders into neighboring states. Hospitals, residential neighborhoods, educational facilities have been paralyzed by the clashes taking place in the Khartoum-Omdurman twin cities. There have been fierce clashes over the control of the airport, military bases and the defense ministry in and around the capital.

The recent eruptions have reignited the fighting in Darfur. Port Sudan on the Red Sea has been the focus of evacuations by foreign states as well as a further militarization by the Pentagon.

It is to be noted that efforts by the Republic of South Sudan to hold talks aimed at achieving a negotiated settlement in the first few days of the war were rejected by the SAF and RSF. Saudi Arabia and the U.S. were the only two states which were able to bring representatives of the two belligerents together in Jeddah where agreements were signed ostensibly to guarantee safe passage for convoys distributing humanitarian aid and for those wishing to evacuate.

However, heavy fighting continues while a lasting ceasefire and sustainable peace agreement has not been realized. The domination of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in the

internal affairs of Sudan has complicated the transition to a democratic political system.

Since the early phase of the independent African states in the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. intelligence apparatus has often preferred the rule of post-colonial military structures. Ruth First, the South African journalist and social scientist, published a groundbreaking study in 1970 on the role of the armed forces in various states. Her book entitled “Power in Africa”, later renamed, “The Barrel of a Gun”, analyzed the role of the CIA and Pentagon in the destabilization of African states. Even after the eruption of a civil war, U.S. corporations guided by intelligence provided by their operatives set out to control the process of “national reconstruction.”

When the initial Transitional Sovereign Council in 2019-2020 was set up, numerous conditions were laid down by the former U.S. administration of President Donald Trump along with his successor, President Joe Biden, for the “reentry” of Khartoum back into the “international community.” These conditions included, and were not limited to, the repayment of restitution to the survivors of those killed in attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the bombing of the USS Cole in the Gulf of Aden in 2000. Sudan was also required to “normalize” relations with the State of Israel as part of the Abraham Accord initiatives aimed at undermining solidarity with the Palestinian national struggle. The commitment to officially recognize Tel Aviv goes against the Sudanese Israel Boycott Act passed by their parliament in 1958.

The absence of any type of representative government in the Republic of Sudan has opened the floodgates for foreign military and intelligence manipulation and subversion. As Ruth First wrote in *Power in Africa* as it relates to the role of imperialism in the former Belgian Congo:

“It was as a result of United States preoccupation with the Congo that we have the single major instance of a coup d’etat—two, in fact, in the same country, at an interval of five years—engineered by external forces. Lumumba’s offense was to have asked the Soviet Union, once the West had refused, for transport for his troops to defeat the Katanga secession. The issue was not whether the Congo should have a government headed by Lumumba, Kasavubu, Mobutu or Tshombe; but whether an African state should seek an option other than dependence on the West.” (*Armies in Stalemate*, p. 420)

The role of the resistance committees has been admirable as reported by some news agencies. They have sought to assist the people in their needs for medical care, food and refuge from the clashes.

An [independent Sudanese news agency reported](#):

“The resistance committees active in the neighborhoods of eastern Khartoum said in a press statement on Tuesday (May 2) that the usual ‘binary position (with/against the army/ militia), does not concern us as civilians in anyway’. According to the resistance committees, ‘the two positions express a direct interest for each of the parties to the conflict in power,’ while ‘our position necessarily favors the only one affected by this war, the Sudanese people – whom the conflicting parties are attempting to get on their side and their allies, in order to gain popular and political support. ‘The most important position now is the preservation of people’s lives and their livelihood, peace and security, and access to basic services’.”

In reality, the people of Sudan will be the entity which determines the future of the country.

The military and its supporters have been thoroughly exposed for their failure to place the interests of the people above their quest to maintain political and economic power in Sudan. Moreover, the imperialist powers and their allies led by Washington have forfeited the right to have any say related to the stability and development of Sudan.

Libya: A Case Study in Modern Neo-Colonial Destabilization

Twelve years ago in 2011, AFRICOM under the administration of President Barack Obama spearheaded and carried out the destruction of the North African state of Libya, the most prosperous and stable country on the continent. The overthrow of the Jamahiriya government led by Col. Muammar Gaddafi represented the first full scale operation of AFRICOM.

The destruction of Libya was given legal cover by two resolutions, 1970 and 1973, passed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). These measures provided a false narrative for the intervention by the imperialist countries prompting a migration trail which has impacted tens of millions in Africa and other geopolitical regions.

In recent years, Libya has been de facto partitioned by two political groupings in the east and west of the country, neither of which represents the national and class interests of the masses. The developments in this oil-rich North African state represents a stark lesson to the rest of the continent that imperialism and its collaborators must be defeated in order to fulfill the Pan-African project enunciated by the founding documents of the OAU and the AU.

Since 2011, the instability and displacement engineered by the CIA and the State Department has impacted the entire regions of North and West Africa. This mass migration has fueled the human trafficking industry while placing pressure on the military and security structures of the nations of Southern, Central and Western Europe. The phenomenon of conservative and neoliberal administrations is undoubtedly a by-product of the displacement caused by the interventions of the NATO countries and their allies. The campaign of former President Donald Trump in 2016, played up the fears of whites in the U.S. of being overwhelmed demographically by migrants from Mexico and Latin America as a whole.

Imperialism and the Shifting Character of World Politics

However, these regime changes and direct occupations have not brought any relief—let alone prosperity—to the working classes of Western Europe, the United Kingdom and the U.S. since the economic conditions have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the supply chain shortages in industry and commerce along with an inflationary spiral which has skyrocketed since the early months of 2020. Consequently, the central banks of the capitalist states have raised interest rates, tightened credit availability, prompting layoffs in the high-tech, real estate and service industries. The Biden administration has not come to grips with the drastic changes within the labor market since 2020. Rather than impose price controls on the capitalist corporations, Biden has concentrated on the war in Ukraine which has drained the national treasury of at least \$115 billion.

The advent of industrial actions in France and the UK in the early months of 2023 portends much for the current volatility of the world capitalist system. In the U.S., a new leadership in the United Auto Workers (UAW) has withheld—at least for now—an endorsement of Biden in the 2024 presidential race. A key player in the delivery sector, United Parcel Services (UPS),

is being threatened with a nationwide strike by workers represented by the Teamsters Union.

At some point it is inevitable that the proletariat in the U.S. will exercise its labor power against the corporate interests. African Americans and Latin Americans, who are mainstays of the Democratic Party electorate, are not content with the institutional and policy neglect of their constituencies by the Biden administration.

The peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are the natural class allies of the working class and oppressed in the imperialist states. Propagandists for capitalism and imperialism have no solid arguments which support their positions related to the expansion of U.S. and NATO influence throughout the world.

Sudan and Libya are continuing to reveal the negative impact of neo-colonialism in the 21st century. As Nkrumah pointed out in his book "Class Struggle in Africa" published in 1970:

"The African Revolution, while still concentrating its main effort on the destruction of imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, is aiming at the same time to bring about a radical transformation of society. It is no longer a question of whether African Independent States should pursue a capitalist or non-capitalist path of development. The choice has already been made by the workers and peasants of Africa. They have chosen liberation and unification; and this can only be achieved through armed struggle under socialist direction. For the political unification of Africa and socialism are synonymous. One cannot be achieved without the other." (p. 84)

These same axioms enunciated in 1970 holds true for the African Diaspora as well. In the U.S. and Western Europe, the intensification of racist repression and super-exploitation serves to further institutionalize the national oppression of peoples of color. Mass demonstrations and urban rebellions which resurfaced in the aftermath of the police execution of George Floyd, three years ago on Africa Liberation Day 2020, illustrates the potential for revolutionary change in the citadel of world imperialism.

However, it will take the mass mobilization and organization of the most oppressed elements within capitalist society to reach the desired abolition of exploitation and oppression. Undoubtedly, based upon the history of African peoples over the previous six decades, they will play a pivotal role in the elimination of imperialism in the modern world.

Author's Note

These remarks were prepared for and delivered in part at a webinar in honor of the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor to the African Union (AU) formed in 2002.

This virtual event was sponsored and organized by the Black Alliance for Peace (BAP) on Thursday May 25, 2023. Other panelists were Dr. Abdiwa



Abdiwahab Sheikh Abdisamad, a Somali Kenyan and Kenyan citizen. He is the Executive Director of the Institute for Horn of Africa Studies and a specialist in political science, conflict resolution, and rural development; Essam Elkorghli, an education specialist who has studied the impact of the United States and NATO destruction of Libya; and the moderator, Yolian Ogbu, a first-generation Eritrean American studying political science and communications. She has served as the youngest Student Government Association (SGA) president in the University of North Texas history on the first all-women of color ticket no less. An organizer at heart, Yolian was also on the National Women's March 2019 Youth Empower Committee and works within her cohort to increase the wave of civic engagement in young women across the country. The live stream of the webinar [can be viewed on Facebook](#)

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