

2013 and the New Scramble for Africa

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France's military aggression in Mali is only the latest expression of a renewed Scramble for Africa being undertaken by all of the continent's former imperialist overlords. This involves not only those powers that directly ruled Africa from the late nineteenth century through to the 1960s, such as France and Britain, but above all the United States.

Paris has never fully abandoned its imperial designs on Africa, as its recent record in Rwanda and Libya demonstrates all too brutally. It still has 9,000 troops stationed in the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad and Djibouti. Its return to Mali is not about combating Al Qaeda and Islamist fundamentalism, but rather a means of staking its claim to the country's uranium, gold and untapped oil deposits and those of the West African region and throughout a landmass recently proclaimed by President Francois Hollande as "the continent of the future."

It is as yet unclear whether the US will go beyond providing aerial support to France in Mali. But if it does not, it is only because it does not want to help a rival predatory power. 2013 opens amid a whole number of military operations being waged by Washington in a continent upon which America now depends for fully a quarter of the oil and raw materials it consumes—including oil, gold, diamonds, copper, iron and big money crops such as cocoa.

Africa is *in play* as far as Washington and all other major powers are concerned. US aims in Africa centre on securing hegemony over the entire continent, a conflict in which its chief rival is now China.

China has surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner with trade of US\$90 billion in 2009, compared with \$86 billion for the US and foreign direct investments of over \$50 billion. Bilateral trade topped \$160 billion in 2011 and is expected to reach \$200 billion this year. In addition, China has proposed or committed about \$101 billion to commercial projects in Africa since 2010, of which construction and natural resource deals total approximately \$90 billion.

Unable to compete economically with Beijing, Washington is once again turning to militarism to secure its advantage. As Mali demonstrates, the ruinous war against Libya in 2011 should be seen as a pointer for the future.

So many of the region's wars that have claimed the lives of millions are rooted in conflicts over strategic resources in which the rival imperialist powers invariably play their part more or less openly—in the Democratic Republic of Congo, North and South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Mali itself—the list is long.

The US for its part is presently undertaking numerous military operations in Africa, including

in the Somali Basin region, Cameroon, the Gulf of Guinea, Botswana, Senegal, South Africa, Morocco, Ghana, Tunisia, Nigeria and Liberia. It has funded and trained the troops for the African Union Mission protecting the Somali government, and its forces play the central role in patrolling the strategic waters off the Horn of Africa. In addition, AFRICOM's director of public affairs, Colonel Tom Davis boasted, "We also conduct some type of military training or military-to-military engagement or activity with nearly every country on the African continent."

This year the US is to station a brigade of at least 3,000 troops permanently in Africa. They will join at least 2,000 and possibly 5,000 already stationed there on a less formal and sometimes clandestine basis. America is scheduled to hold more than 100 military exercises in 35 countries. It will also begin to operate its own rapid reaction force, with US Africa Command (AFRICOM) head Gen. Carter Ham declaring that America would no longer rely on "a sharing arrangement with what's called the Commander's in-Extremis Force with European Command... now we have our own."

"The absolute imperative for the United States military [is] to protect America, Americans, and American interests," Ham proclaimed.

The number of troops is relatively small, but many are involved in the primary function of training and equipping African militaries to be used as proxy US forces. Indeed all of imperialism's schemes for the plunder of Africa ultimately depend on the role played by the African bourgeoisie.

The governments and corporations based in Washington, Paris, London and Beijing rely upon the myriad corrupt local regimes and movements to man their predatory wars and to police the brutal exploitation of the workers and poor peasants.

Despite Africa's recent economic growth, little if any benefit has flowed to the workers and poor. It remains a continent where 60 percent of its people live on less than \$2 a day. The middle class is defined, without apparent irony, as having between \$2 and \$20 to spend a day and most of these in fact have only between \$2 to \$4. Meanwhile, African nations remain at the bottom of any measure of economic activity, with 34 of the 50 nations on the UN list of least developed countries, and at the top of any list measuring inequality and poverty.

Only the corrupt ruling elite has been enriched because it shares in the spoils that accrue primarily to the imperialist powers. Under such conditions, a social explosion is inevitable.

Any movement of the workers and oppressed masses must therefore inevitably be directed against a ruling class that function as the policemen of grotesque social inequality and the chief advocates of nationalism, ethnic, religious and tribal antagonisms that invariably end in fratricidal slaughter.

The strike wave that engulfed South Africa's mines signals the necessary course future struggles must take. It targeted the African National Congress and the COSATU union federation as lackeys and enforcers for the mining corporations and was met with murderous repression.

As with nationalist regimes and movements across Africa and internationally, the contemporary role of the ANC testifies to the impossibility of opposing imperialist predations

and defending a single social and democratic gain outside of an independent political struggle by the working class.

History has proven that the national bourgeoisie in the oppressed nations, tied as it is organically to capitalism, cannot be entrusted to wage the struggle for democracy and liberation from imperialist domination. Africa's workers and youth must undertake to build their own revolutionary leadership to take power and unite the continent on the basis of socialism, placing the banks, major corporations, strategic extraction industries and the land under the democratic control of the workers and oppressed.

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