

Africa and US Imperialism. America in Competition with China?

First U.S.-Africa Summit Cannot Overshadow Imperialist Aims

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The White House attempts to buy goodwill on the continent amid escalation in militarism

A much-anticipated summit at the State Department and White House was held during Aug. 4-8. Dozens of African heads-of-state and the chair of the African Union (AU) Commission attended.

Nonetheless, several leading countries were not invited or chose not to attend including Zimbabwe, Sudan, Eritrea, Chad, Egypt as well as Liberia and Sierra Leone. Although the AU Commission Chair Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was present at the summit, it was not this continental organization that set the terms for participation.

A similar situation occurred earlier in the year when a European Union (EU)-Africa Summit was held in Belgium. Although the AU had met to determine how the meeting would be approached, in the final analysis the EU made the prevailing decisions.

In a public statement during the summit, Dlamini-Zuma suggested that the U.S. was not fully aware of developments in Africa. She warned that if Washington did not engage the continent then they would effectively be losers in the future character of relations.

The AU Commission Chair said that "It's in their advantage to know what's happening in Africa because if they don't come to the party eventually the party will happen without them. Business people really know about Africa from the media and American media is not really kind on Africa. They tend to report what bleeds and leads." (Sapa, Aug. 7)

In the Southern African state of Zimbabwe, whose leader President Robert Mugabe, was not invited to the summit, an editorial that was published in the government-owned Herald newspaper criticized President Barack Obama for his continuing attempt to blame Africa for its current economic problems. This was a significant theme in his speech before the Republic of Ghana parliament in 2009 after he took office, specifically targeting Zimbabwe claiming that difficulties there where the U.S. carries out sanctions, could not be blamed on the legacy of colonialism.

Mugabe, who is the incoming chairperson of the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC), is disliked by the imperialist countries because he implemented a radical land reform program that returns large portions of the land stolen by the British colonialists during the 19th century to the African people. The Zimbabwe Revolution fought during the 1960s and 1970s, was based on the return of the land to the indigenous people.

The Herald editorial stressed that “President Barack Obama’s recent remarks urging Africa to stop making ‘excuses’ for the continent’s economic doldrums based on the history of colonialism were not only unfortunate and ill-conceived but also insensitive. I’m not sure whether Obama has deliberately developed selective amnesia not to realize that the wealth accumulated by the country he now leads has been through the blood and sweat of those from the cradle of mankind (humanity).” (Aug. 3)

Pointing out the stark contradictions in the Obama administration’s approach to relations with Africa and the Middle East, the Herald goes on to say that “Here is the leader of the free world who has been mum over the unrestrained bombardment and culling of innocent civilians in Gaza yet he wants to walk the moral high ground and lecture the historically and perpetually traumatized Africans on morality and righteousness. Africa’s socio-political and economic problems are a direct consequence of slavery and colonialism.”

In Competition Against China and Others

The U.S. is attempting to buy some goodwill by announcing \$33 billion in new investments, yet there was a strong emphasis on the so-called “war on terrorism.”

After the conclusion of the summit it was announced that the U.S. would be subsidizing French military operations in West Africa. Obama is directing \$10 million in supposed “foreign aid” to Paris to assist in purported “counterterrorism operations” on the African continent. (The Hill, Aug. 11)

The money from the Pentagon will contribute to French military efforts to fight what they describe as “terrorist groups” in Mali, Niger and Chad, the president wrote in a memorandum to Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Secretary of State John Kerry. “I hereby determine that an unforeseen emergency exists that requires immediate military assistance to France in its efforts to secure Mali, Niger, and Chad from terrorists and violent extremists,” Obama declared.

On the contrary a Forum on China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has been existence since 2000, holding five full-fledged summits in both China and Africa. At present China is the number one trading partner with AU member-states. Many African heads-of-state and opinion-makers have stated that the character of investment and trade between Africa and Beijing are more beneficial to the continent than the ongoing neo-colonial relations with the western imperialist states.

AU member-states have also established formal economic and political relations with South American governments through the Africa-South America Summit, having held three meetings in Africa and South America. Many African states are members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) incorporating over 100 countries of the Southern hemisphere.

Iran and Japan have also held meetings with AU-member states on improving relations. South Africa was brought into the Brazil, Russia, India, China (BRICS) Summit where the last gathering was held in Durban.

Imperialist Militarism Takes Priority Over Trade

In fact there is nothing the U.S. can offer Africa other than imperialist militarism and enhanced exploitation by the oil, natural gas and mining firms along with the predatory actions of the banks. Much of the discussion surrounding the U.S.-Africa Summit focused on

“security issues”, in other words what Washington describes as the “war on terrorism.”

The U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) was initiated by the previous government of President George W. Bush but it has been strengthened and enhanced under his successor. The U.S. currently engages in joint military operations with at least three dozen states on the continent.

Countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Nigeria, Niger, Mali and others have substantial U.S. Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) presence through troops on the ground, intelligence field stations and drone operations. Despite this heavy military presence, these states suffer underdevelopment and political instability.

Until Africa moves towards socialism there will not be a general improvement in the living conditions of the majority of workers, farmers and youth. The foreign policy imperatives, including the character of relations with the West, will be determined in the present period not in Addis Ababa and Johannesburg but in Washington and Brussels.

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