

Africa: Contradictions between Regional Security and Imperialist Interventions

Assessing the 31st Ordinary African Union Summit in Mauritania

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Global Research, July 18, 2018

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

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Featured image: French President Emmanuel Macron meets with African leaders at AU summit in Mauritania, July 2, 2018

On July 1-2, 2018, the [31st Ordinary Summit of the African Union \(AU\)](#) was held in the Mauritanian capital of Nouakchott under the theme of “Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation.”

This gathering took place amid the burgeoning challenges facing the African continent involving the efforts to realize a meaningful peace process in the Republic of South Sudan, an ongoing independence movement to liberate the Western Sahara from Moroccan occupation, gender equality and end to violence against women, the recently-announced African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the role of imperialism as it relates to the question of national and regional security.

An Elusive Peace in South Sudan

Several days prior to the convening of the AU Summit, a peace agreement was signed in Khartoum, Republic of Sudan, bringing together **President Salva Kiir** and opposition leader **Reik Machar**. For over three years, the government and ruling party, Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in Juba, has been split leading to the declaration of the SPLM in Opposition (SPLM-IO) headed by Machar.

Under the June 23 deal which was designed to go into effect on June 27, Machar is to be reinstated as Vice President of South Sudan. Nonetheless, just hours after the ceasefire was scheduled to begin there were reports of violations from both the SPLM and the SPLM (I-O).

During the week of July 16 the United Nations Security Council imposed an arms embargo against Juba. Nonetheless, neighboring head-of-state **President Yoweri Museveni** has called for the lifting of sanctions by European states on South Sudan. Museveni made this statement while he met with a visiting official delegation from Britain which included the **Minister of State for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster**.

Despite these promising developments, other opposition groups within South Sudan have complained of not being consulted by the two main tendencies, SPLM and SPLM (I-O). The South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA) has stated that it is awaiting the governance agreement that was scheduled to go into effect on July 17. Meanwhile the SPLM Leaders

Former Political Detainees (SPLM—FPD) is calling for greater AU involvement in the discussions expressing distrust over what they claim to be the lack of transparency in the process being primarily led by the East African Inter-regional Authority on Development (IGAD).

Western Sahara: The Quest for National Independence

A major anti-colonial struggle being waged by the Polisario Front and the Sahwari Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which is recognized by the AU, has become a more complicated situation in light of the readmission of the Kingdom of Morocco in 2017. Morocco had remained outside the former Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the AU for more than three decades due to its support for the liberation of the people in this former Spanish colony which has been occupied for over 40 years by the neighboring monarchy.

According to a report on the AU Summit in Mauritania published by the [Journal of Cameroon](#), it says:

“The African Union has renewed its resolve to seek more engagement with the United Nations to resolve the unresolved question of the Western Sahara, a territory under Moroccan control. In a communiqué at the end of the 31st AU Heads of State Summit in the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott on Monday, the 54-member continental body said its members have agreed to support ongoing efforts led by the UN to broker a lasting and mutually agreeable solution to the decades-old crisis.”

This same article continues in regard to the AU position noting the regional body is:

“encouraging parties to the crisis to demonstrate flexibility and resume talks without preconditions as the only way to addressing the protracted controversy surrounding the destiny of the enclave, which straddles Morocco in the north and Mauritania in the south. Emerging from several hours of talks on the issue, AU leaders agreed that the UN’s role will be crucial drawing up the details that would form the basis of a durable compromise between the protagonists to the conflict, which is one of Africa’s forgotten crises.”

Gender Equality and the AU

A joint session of the preliminary meetings of the 31st Ordinary summit was held on June 30 between current AU Chairperson **President Paul Kagame** of Rwanda and European Union (EU) Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica of Croatia. Kagame, who heads the Central and East African state with the largest representation of women within the parliamentary system than any other country in the world, noted that women can contribute far more to society when they are empowered.

During the “Women in Power” symposium the [Rwandan leader said](#):

“Women can deliver more when they are enjoying their full rights. But with men and women working together using their talents to the maximum the effect is not just additive, it multiplies. All of society benefits. The sum is indeed much greater than the parts.”

Kagame continued by emphasizing:

“Despite the goodwill, substantial problems remain in the way of women’s whether cultural, legal and economic empowerment. There are important policy changes to advocate for and that will always be important and must continue to be a priority as will be discussed today.”

Nonetheless, the burning question today related to AU-EU relations center around the so-called “migration crisis.” Millions of Africans are fleeing the continuing imperialist war in Libya and other regions of the continent attempting to travel across the Mediterranean into southern, eastern and central Europe. African women are adversely impacted by this dislocation and displacement through violence, human trafficking and deaths.

Thousands have died annually since 2014 while the influx of large numbers of Africans and Asians in the European states has pushed to the fore right-wing, neo-fascist elements some of whom have increased their presence in parliamentary bodies as well as becoming ruling parties in the governments of Hungary and Italy. In response to this phenomenon of the backlash against migration from the Global South, EU leaders are advancing programs designed to encourage people to either remain in Africa or be repatriated.

Such projects are inherently flawed since they do not address the underlying historical exploitation and national oppression through colonialism and neo-colonialism. Africa remains dependent upon European and North American capitalist regimes where terms of trade, commodity prices and military policy leave the continent at an extreme disadvantage.

Economic turmoil prompted by the destruction of the Libyan state in 2011, the proliferation of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), the undermining of the international energy and strategic minerals markets and the refusal of the imperialists to open up the United Nations Security Council to permanent status for AU governments, illustrates the glaring dubious character of EU foreign policy. Despite the platitudes of EU leaders, their statements ring hollow when the overall character of relations is objectively assessed.

Free Trade and Regional Security: The Irreconcilable Contradictions

As leader of the AU, Rwandan President Kagame has motivated the adoption and ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). More AU states are signing the AfCFTA and taking the initiative to their legislatures for implementation.

The economic plan would theoretically combine a \$US3 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP) constituting the sum total of goods and services within the AU. The program is designed to eliminate tariffs in inter-African trade facilitating the uninhibited movement of resources across the continent.

South African **President Cyril Ramaphosa** signed the agreement in Mauritania during the summit while encouraging his counterpart in the West African state of Nigeria, **President Muhammadu Buhari**, to follow suit. Buhari’s hesitation it is said derives from the trepidation among Nigerian industry fearing an undermining of their financial status both domestically and internationally. Nigeria and South Africa have the two largest economies within the AU and any effective free trade area requires their full participation.

Ironically the AU summit was visited by French **President Emmanuel Macron** who spoke to the members of the G5 Sahel Regional Force nations including Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad. These former colonies of Paris came together in 2014 under the guise of fighting terrorism carried out by Islamist rebels across these states.



G5 Sahel Regional Force map

Attacks on a French military installation in Mali at Sevare along with two other locations, and in southeast Niger, resulting in the deaths of 10 soldiers, highlighted the precarious security situation leading up to the Mauritania AU summit. France admits to having at least 4,500 troops in the Sahel region ostensibly to enhance security.

What are often not discussed are the interests of France and the U.S. within these West African nations. Both AFRICOM and French military forces are escalating their occupations creating further uncertainty among the civilian populations. The British government of Theresa May is also entering the fray assisting French and U.S. forces with surveillance drones and helicopters.

However, the military interventions of Paris, London and Washington are not acts of charity by any means. These policies reflect the degree of underdevelopment in post-colonial Africa. The imperialists are in the region to secure the natural resources including uranium and oil.

The pretext of fighting Islamists cannot be taken at face value in that these same elements were deployed by the EU member-states and Washington in Libya during the overthrow of the government of former leader the late Col. Muammar Gaddafi. Syria has been a focus of destabilization utilizing certain Islamist groups that are armed and trained by western governments.

A free trade zone in order for it to reach its full potential must be secured by the African governments themselves. It would not be rationale for the AU member-states to rely on the imperialist governments to supply them with security assistance without continuing their neo-colonial policies which are the antithesis of genuine economic development and regional sovereignty.

Undoubtedly the ruling classes of Western Europe and North America understand this dilemma quite well. African states should know that the economic renaissance of the continent cannot reach its fruition at the behest of the same imperialist nations which continue to benefit from their systematic underdevelopment and dependency.

Consequently, until the AU makes the decisive turn inward breaking its subservient ties to imperialism there will be the inevitable instability and impoverishment. Any military program aimed at sustainable security requires the formation of an All-African military force which bans the construction of bases, drone stations and open monitoring of its territories by the Pentagon and NATO forces.

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