

Africa in Review 2015: Economic Stagnation, Hegemonic Militarization and Neo-Colonial Dominance

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Global Research, December 22, 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Militarization and WMD](#)

Five years ago in Tunisia a nationwide rebellion erupted against the government of Zine Abideen Ben Ali. Youth, students, workers and small businesspeople rose up demanding an end to the system of dictatorship and subservience to France and the United States.

By mid-January of 2011, Ben Ali's regime had fallen forcing him to flee to Saudi Arabia. An interim government took over promising to hold elections and draft a new constitution for the North African state.

A longtime opposition political figure Moncef Marzouki, the founder of the Congress of the Republic, was elected by the Constituent Assembly to be president in December 2011. Marzouki appointed Hamadi Jebali of the moderate Islamist Ennahda Movement, dominated by Rashid al-Ghannushi, which established a government by the end of the same month.

Nonetheless, these developments did not bring stability to Tunisia. Tensions between left, centrists and Islamist forces were evident from the beginning of 2012.

In 2013, two leading leftist politicians from the Popular Front Coalition, Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmin, were assassinated. Violence and unrest erupted again with strikes across the country demanding the resignation of the government.

These assassinations were blamed on a Salafist group called Ansar al-Sharia. Contributing to the decline in confidence in the government was the failure to deal with the rise of such organizations.

In addition there were attacks on security personnel and state institutions. These events resulted in the government listing the group as a terrorist organization.

By the end of 2013, the post-Ben Ali political dispensation was collapsing. A year later in 2014, the reconstitution of political elements from the Ben Ali era appeared in the form of Nidaa Tounes, the party which won the elections catapulting 88-year-old Beji Caid Essebsi to the presidency.

Consequently, one could ask quite honestly, where is the Tunisian revolution in 2015? A deadly attack on a tourist beach at Sousse during the year revealed further that deep divisions exist over the future direction of the state and society.

In neighboring Egypt, which was the center of unrest beginning in late January 2011 leading to the removal of the-then President Hosni Mubarak, stability has still not been achieved. The Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) Muslim Brotherhood-allied government elected in 2012, was overthrown a year later by the military headed by Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, who took off his military uniform and ran successfully for president in 2014.

Eliminating the political and social networks of the FJP-Muslim Brotherhood through mass assassinations, imprisonment and forced exile, paved the way for the political hegemony of the military but created the conditions for a growing Islamist insurgency in the Sinai. Egypt remains within the orbit of U.S. imperialist domination of the region.

During late December, it was announced that the World Bank had agreed to extend \$8 billion of credit to the Egyptian government. The Egyptian state and national bourgeoisie, including the military apparatus, has been heavily dependent upon subsidization from the Pentagon which supplies \$1.3 billion annually in order to maintain the status-quo.

Despite the close links between the U.S. defense establishment and the Egyptian military, the masses of workers, youth and farmers remain extremely poor and underdeveloped. The purpose of the World Bank loan is to further this dependency bringing into clear view the absence of any diversion from the neo-liberal model of economic growth.

According to the state-owned Al-Ahram website, "Egypt, which is currently experiencing a foreign liquidity crunch, requires foreign currency for imports of basic foodstuffs and raw materials for industries.... Egypt embarked on a politically sensitive fiscal reform program following the election of President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi in June 2014. The first phase of the program saw fuel subsidy cuts, raising prices at the pump by up to 78 percent." (Dec. 20)

The situation in neighboring Libya exposes the character of Washington's foreign policy in North Africa in its most extreme manifestation. After creating a false premise for military intervention and the backing of counter-revolutionary elements which destroyed the continent's most prosperous state turning it into the major source for instability, human trafficking and poverty throughout the region, at present the imperialists are planning to deploy a 6,000-person occupation force ostensibly headed by Italy, the former colonial power, and bolstered by British troops and U.S. Special Forces.

Efforts aimed at establishing coordinates for another aerial campaign in Libya are well underway. France, Britain and the U.S. have warplanes on standby to bomb the country under the guise of enforcing an imposed unity accord between two neo-colonial dominated regimes as well as targeting the so-called Islamic State which has set up a base in Sirte and is expanding its influence in other areas of Libya.

West Africa and the Fallacy of Economic Growth Under Neo-Colonialism

Egypt, Tunisia and Libya are not the only states in Africa contending with worsening economies and Islamist rebels, circumstances which have grown directly out of the destabilization created by U.S. and NATO military interventions on the continent and in the Middle East.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria was designated as having the largest economy in Africa by the western-based financial publications during 2014. Ostensibly surpassing the Republic of South Africa, the continent's most industrialized state, the West African country has been

dependent upon the production and marketing of oil and natural gas for the last five decades.

However, the ongoing war against the Boko Haram sect in the Northeast has illustrated the structural limitations of the military within a neo-colonial dominated capitalist state. The recently-elected administration of Muhammadu Buhari, a former military coup maker in 1984-85, has not resulted in the destruction of the rebels who it is said now have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

A regional coalition of military forces from Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria has cleared out some of the bases of the rebels. However, the rebel tactics have shifted making them just as deadly and disruptive. During 2014, an international campaign demanding the return of hundreds of high school girls who were abducted by Boko Haram at Chibok in Borno state, served to politically weaken the previous government of President Goodluck Jonathan.

Nonetheless, most of the Chibok students have not been returned to their families. The focus on the young women represented a profound symbol of the overall dislocation in the Northeast extending to the contiguous territories of Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

Under the Jonathan administration, officials accused the U.S. of refusing to provide arms and intelligence to the Nigerian defense forces crippling its capacity to fight Boko Haram. Buhari after being elected in 2015, made a state visit to Washington in efforts to mend relations with the Obama government.

Buhari said soon after taking office that the military would defeat Boko Haram by the end of 2015. This has further brought into question the efficacy of the armed forces and political grasp of reality held by the current administration.

Meanwhile, with the decline in petroleum prices internationally, the post-colonial economic crises inherent within the state have become more aggravated. Civil servants, publically-employed healthcare workers, educators and others have gone for months without salaries.

The present administration has stated openly that the Nigerian government is insolvent. Political divisions persist between the ruling All-Progressive Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Although the Buhari administration has launched a campaign against corruption, the source of the financial crisis inside the country has more to do with the overall character of the international division of labor and economic power. As long as Africa remains dependent upon the more advanced capitalist states to purchase their natural resources amid a precipitous decline in commodity prices, these economies will not be able to "diversify" under the predominant capitalist relations of production.

This observation and conclusion is applicable as well in Ghana, which was one of the first British colonies to win national independence in 1957 under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Ghana has also become an oil producer, yet civil servants, physicians and educators have engaged in strikes and mass actions resulting from the non-payment of salaries and the falling value of the cedi, its national currency.

Both the cedi and the Nigerian naira are losing value at a rapid pace. Hardships endured by working people and youth are the source of continuing industrial and public sector unrest.

Both Accra and Abuja are wedded to the neo-colonial model having gone through the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and its variants from the late 1960s through the present period.

The 50th anniversary of the overthrow of the Convention People's Party (CPP) government of Nkrumah will be commemorated on February 24, 2016. This sad and prophetic anniversary which marked the end of the Pan-Africanist and Socialist-oriented experiment under Nkrumah during 1951-1966, was engineered by Washington in order to undermine any genuine independent existence for the African continent after the transition from classical colonialism to neo-colonialism.

In order to revive the Nkrumaist Pan-Africanism of the 1960s, there must be a total break with neo-colonialism, which the CPP under its founder described as the last stage of imperialism. It is quite obvious that imperialism has nothing to offer African people other than continued immiseration and military interventions which foster instability and destabilization.

Niger, which contains the world fourth largest source of uranium, has remained an impoverished state. The West African state is an ally in Washington's so-called "war on terrorism".

Nevertheless, President Mahamadou Issoufou announced on December 18 that an attempted military coup had been foiled. Several high-ranking defense officials were arrested some of whom received training in Britain, France and the U.S.

Burkina Faso, another state in West Africa which is also a participant in the U.S. military operations on the continent, has elected a new government. A national uprising in late October 2014 forced the decades-long military turned civilian ruler Blaise Compaore out of office and into exile in neighboring Ivory Coast.

Compaore led a coup against Capt. Thomas Sankara, the Pan-Africanist and Socialist leader of Burkina Faso, formally known as Upper Volta, who ruled the agriculturally-based country from 1983-1987. Sankara was brutally murdered and buried in a mass grave along with other victims of the reactionary coup in October 1987.

After Sankara's removal the political direction of Burkina Faso shifted sharply to the right. Even after the rebellion during 2014 and the installation of a new elected government, very little has changed. The country under Compaore became a major producer and exporter of gold, the fourth largest in Africa, although the masses have yet to benefit from these developments.

The current leader of Burkina Faso, President Roch Marc Kabore, was a former close collaborator with Compaore. In a profile published by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on December 1, it says "Mr. Kabore, who served as prime minister and speaker of parliament under veteran President Blaise Compaore, won the November 2015 presidential election, easily beating his main rival, former economy and finance minister Zephirin Diabre. A long-standing Compaore loyalist, he quit as chairman of the then-president's Congress for Democracy and Progress in 2014 over the head of state's plans to amend the constitution to extend his 27-year rule."

This same article goes on to note that the new leader is "A French-educated banker, Mr.

Kabore sees himself as a social democrat, and has pledged to reduce youth unemployment, improve education and healthcare, and make health provision for children under six free of charge.”

A coalition of Sankarist parties failed to win a substantial portion of the vote and until the progressive forces inside the country can organize effectively in the electoral arena, Burkina Faso will remain firmly within the political orbit of neo-colonialism.

Southern Africa in Transition: Harare, Pretoria and the Beijing Factor

In the sub-continent, which was the last region to achieve political independence, much hope grew out of the popular and mass struggles that overthrew white-minority rule in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. The liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa during the course of the armed phase of the revolution appeared to be sympathetic to socialist reconstruction of the post-colonial states.

Nonetheless, with the shift in foreign and domestic policy of the People’s Republic of China during the 1970s and 1980s and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist governments (the COMECON sector), the prospects for socialism receded. South Africa’s independence from the apartheid system in 1994 ushered in a new era of neo-liberalism under the governmental leadership of the African National Congress (ANC).

There was no large-scale nationalization of land as well as the gold, diamond, iron ore, coal and platinum mines in South Africa. In Zimbabwe, a radical land redistribution program initiated in 2000 drew the ire of the imperialist states. Sanctions were imposed by Britain, the U.S., the European Union and Australia.

An opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which sprang up in response to the economic crisis of the post-colonial state, one even led by a genuine national liberation movement turned political party, received large amounts of funding from the imperialists. A western media campaign of vilification against the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) sought to demonize its leader and state President Robert Mugabe.

Nonetheless, ZANU-PF has continued to weather the storms and remains in power 35 years after the winning of the first non-racial elections of 1980. Assistance from China and South Africa has been critical in maintaining political stability in Zimbabwe.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Zimbabwe in early December on a two-day state visit. Pledges of additional assistance in rebuilding the infrastructure of the country and providing much needed credit constituted the character of the discussions between Mugabe and Xi.

Xi then moved on to Johannesburg where the second full summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was held. The conference was preceded by additional agreements signed between the ANC government under President Jacob Zuma and his Chinese counterpart.

The deliberations during Xi’s visit acknowledged the challenges facing the so-called “emerging economies.” China has recently lowered the value of its currency amid the slowing of growth.

South Africa is experiencing perhaps the worst period economically since the ANC took

power twenty one years ago under former President Nelson Mandela. The national currency, rand, has depreciated to over 15-1 against the U.S. dollar.

Leading mining firms have shed thousands of workers while joblessness remains high. Students shut down major universities and colleges across the country in October demanding a moratorium on fee increases, which the ANC government was compelled to honor.

A political controversy has been generated over the dismissal of two finance ministers by the Zuma administration during December. A day of action on December 16, the anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle by the ANC in 1961, saw demonstrations in several cities calling for the resignation of the president.

However, the main opposition party within the South African parliament and local government structures is the Democratic Alliance (DA) which advocates policies far to the right of the ANC. Any yielding to deeper forms of neo-liberalism will not solve the economic and social problems of the South African people and contiguous states throughout the region.

At the same time the ANC government is cognizant of the reaction by international finance capital to the land reform program in Zimbabwe and any such move would evoke a similar response towards South Africa if a shift to left in regard to economic policy was adopted. Facing local governmental elections in 2016, the ANC has very little choice but to implement the moratorium on fee hikes in tertiary institutions and the demands as well for an increase in social spending.

Challenges for 2016: A People-centered Trajectory or Further Steps Backward?

Political and economic developments in all these geo-political regions are at a crossroad. Will North, West and Southern Africa be able to overcome the decline in currency values, capital flight, escalating Pentagon and NATO military interventions along with efforts aimed at destabilization?

The African Union (AU) under the rotating chairpersonship of Zimbabwe President Mugabe has taken a Pan-Africanist view on many burning questions facing the continent. However, the continuing dominance of neo-colonial rule is hampering the forward social movement of the people and their respective governments.

African unity is not a rhetorical question but one of necessity. Divisions within the working class organizations, popular alliances and national liberation movements which have been transformed into political parties will only serve the interests of imperialism.

Overall the world capitalist system is fragile where the leaders of the industrialized states have imposed austerity and political repression on their populations while deflecting attention away from the declining standards of living in Western Europe and North America to the purported urgency of the contrived "war on terrorism." This militarized response to the global crisis of capitalist over-production has had a devastating impact on Africa through the destruction of Libya, the explosion in instability across the Northern and Western regions of the continent, and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the workers, youth and farmers.

Africa must reject this hegemonic militarization of U.S. and European foreign policy.

Continental integration should become the principal policy imperative for the present period.

The continuation of dependency on the neo-colonial system of governance can only lead to worsening crises. AU member-states and their people must move forward in preparation for and anticipation of the actual emerging world situation characterized by capitalist decline and expanding imperialist war.

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