

Africa: NATO, AFRICOM And The New White Man's Burden

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“Western countries are once again using feigned concern as pretext for invasion and resource theft.”

As we watched with bewilderment, NATO's military assault on Libya using “humanitarian intervention” as it's pretext, we are reminded of an earlier period of Western European “civilizing” missions into Africa.

Shortly after the Berlin West African Conference of 1884-1885; armed with bibles and bullets, a host of countries: Britain; France; Germany; Belgium; and Portugal, “scrambled” out of Western Europe in a quest to “save Africans from themselves”.

With their claim of intellectual and moral superiority echoed by Rudyard Kipling's infamously imperialistic poem, these European powers took full control of the land and lives of their new African subjects. Africa, having not fully recovered from the ravages of both the Trans-Atlantic and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trades, was ill prepared for what was to follow.

With the exception of Liberia and Ethiopia, every square inch of Africa was to come under the control of European imperialist powers. The result: nearly a hundred years of a brutal occupation; further dehumanization; theft of natural resources while subjecting Africans to internal slavery.

The resulting loss of life was so high that no serious effort has ever been made to quantify it. But if Belgian, which controlled only 7% of Africa, could murder 10-15 million Congolese during this period, one could get a close estimate through extrapolation, the number of African lives destroyed by Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and later Italy. Given this history, coupled with the horrific results of NATO's incursion into Libya, what then are we to make of NATO's new identity as “human rights interventionist.”

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At the end of the 19th century, Western Europe was in the middle of an industrial revolution that it could not sustain with the limited resources and markets within it's own borders. Competition for new resources and markets amongst these European powers was high. With the economic challenges resulting from the “Long Depression of 1873-1896”; overpopulation; a high rate of poverty and unemployment, Europe was in desperate need of an answer to rescue it from this malaise. Africa would prove to be the answer a thousand times over.

Today we find Europe, along with the United States, facing serious economic challenges not

unlike those faced by Europe in the late 1800s.

Like then, Europe and the United States are desperately looking for economic solutions that cannot be found within their national boundaries. With virtually all of the resources required to sustain their economies existing in other parts of the world but particularly in Africa, these Western countries are once again using feigned concern as pretext for invasion and resource theft. With competition now coming from Russia, India and China for these same resources, new and desperate strategies will have to be created in an attempt to justify these invasions. But how new are they?

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a military/security alliance between Western European powers and the United States, was formed shortly after the Second World War in 1949. It came out of the same Atlantic Charter that gave birth to the United Nations. Its stated purpose was to counter what member countries perceived as an expansionist threat coming from the Soviet Union. During its existence there has never been any direct military engagement with the Soviet Union. Instead, proxy wars, mostly fought in Africa and Latin America, would become the order of the day. While the Soviet Union sought to (at times meekly) aid the various Liberation Movements in Africa and the Americas, the NATO countries on the other hand, were interested in maintaining their sphere of economic influence in these regions.

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With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO virtually overnight had become an irrelevant military bureaucracy. Many military and foreign policy experts began to speculate that NATO would soon be relegated to the dustbin of history. To avoid what seemed to be an imminent demise, NATO began looking for new roles to play in world affairs. What has happened as a result, as one foreign policy observer describes, has been “mission creep on a grand scale.”

No longer concerned about guarding against the Red Army rushing across its borders, NATO countries have now armed themselves with a host of new missions (pretexts), from: fighting terrorism; saving the environment; crisis management; to “humanitarian intervention (sic).” With a new futuristic \$1.38 billion building on a 100 acre site in Brussels, and having expanded from its original 16 members to 28 (most of the new member states ironically coming from the former Soviet Union), and with the combined military budgets of member states comprising 70 percent of what the world spends on defense, this “new” NATO is riding high with a renewed sense of purpose, anxious to show the world it still has relevance. Africa (and the world) should be worried.

While significantly controlled by the US, which provides 75 percent of its budget, NATO is headed by the arrogant and opportunistic Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former prime minister of Denmark. With a very aggressive agenda for this made over NATO including offering NATO’s services to the United Nations as a “global peacekeeping” force, he has in recent years already overseen NATO’s involvement in several conflicts outside of Europe. Most notably, its involvement with the US in Afghanistan where it continues to kill innocent people, and is continuously asked to leave by many distraught and outraged Afghans.

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It has also become involved in patrolling the waters off the coast of Somalia to protect foreign vessels from being seajacked by so-called Somali pirates. This campaign has resulted in an avalanche of deaths of Somalis, passengers and crew members of seajacked ships. Keeping in mind, when Somalis started boarding these ships which had illegally begun fishing in their waters seventeen years ago, not one hostage taken by them had ever been killed. All that changed with the Obama administration coming to power in 2009 (the year NATO, with mostly US Naval ships, started patrolling the Somalia coast).

In April of that year, President Obama gave the first orders for snipers to kill Somalis who had boarded the American flagged ship, The Maersk Alabama demanding ransom. France would soon follow with the killing of eight Somalis in another seajacking incident. Now with the U.S. and France with NATO support, seemingly engaged in a full scale war against the Somali nationalist group Al-Shabat, we can only expect the number of dead Somalis to increase even more. This U.S. war in Somalia is also being augmented by troops from Kenya, Uganda and Burundi, with Uganda and Burundi involvement ironically, coming under the auspices of an African Union peace keeping mission. A new U.S. Drone base for this war has just been established in Ethiopia as well. The imperialist powers are obviously up to their old tricks of using treacherous Africans to help in doing their “dirty work.”

Immediately following the murder of Muammar Gaddafi, Chris Coons, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s subcommittee on African affairs was reported as saying “Muammar Gadhafi’s death and the promise of a new Libyan regime are arguments for the measured U.S. military response in central Africa...”. Encouraged by the results in Libya, the U.S. has recently sent roughly 100 troops to Uganda to track down members of the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). U.S. troops are also being sent to the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan’.

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It is obvious Senator Coons made this remark with AFRICOM in mind. This newly created U.S.military command for Africa, conceived by the Heritage Foundation during the Bush administration, could not have come at a more opportunistic time for the imperialistic thinking NATO countries. Working in conjunction with AFRICOM during the Libya campaign, and gloating over it’s alleged success, NATO now sees itself as indispensable in this new war to “save humanity.” The cooperation between these 2 military packs represent a perilous development for Africa. With the Obama administration acknowledging the Libya campaign as AFRICOM’s “first” undertaking, Africans no longer have to guess what the rest of AFRICOM’s endeavors on the Continent will look like.

Like their 19th century predecessors in their mission to take on the “burden” of spreading the benefits of European “enlightenment’,’ this new generation of marauders from the “North” are poised to, once again, impose on Africa the coldness of death, destruction and displacement which so characterized their earlier campaigns of human upliftment on the Continent.

Having failed to effectively respond to NATO’s and AFRICOM’s assault on Libya, Africa must at some point show that it has learned the lessons of the past, and resolve itself to remove this “white man’s burden,” once and for all.

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