

# Africa in Review 2019, From Internal Crises and Conflict to Internationalism

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*Since mid-2018, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been stricken with another Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak largely impacting the northeastern region of the vast mineral-rich nation in Central Africa.*

EVD has its origins in the DRC during the late 1970s when the deadly Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (VHF) strain became known to the country and the world.

The epidemic which has been mainly concentrated in the provinces of North Kivu, Ituri and South Kivu, has been difficult to address on a medical level due to the lack of an adequate healthcare and educational system. Despite the enormous strategic mineral wealth of the country of some 81 million people, the historical legacy of imperialism remains a major factor in stifling genuine economic growth and social development.

Since the discovery of this highly contagious disease there have been several major outbreaks in the DRC and other African countries. The largest pandemic occurred in three West African states from late 2014 to early 2016. These nations were Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea-Conakry.

After the West African pandemic was declared over, there were approximately 28,000 cases documented resulting in more than 11,000 deaths. The rapid spread of the disease took a tremendous toll on the people of these three countries along with neighboring states which were compelled to mobilize limited medical resources to prevent the entry of EVD across their borders.

Statistical information compiled by the DRC Health Ministry and various humanitarian organizations indicates that the present outbreak is the second largest in the history of the disease. Due to security concerns on various levels, healthcare workers and researchers have not been able to travel freely in some sections of the affected areas.

A report issued during late December 2019 by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF, Doctors without Borders) places the current outbreak within its historical context saying:

“During the first eight months of the epidemic, until March 2019, more than 1,000 cases of Ebola were reported in the affected region. However, between April and June 2019, this number doubled, with a further 1,000 new cases reported in just those three months. Between early June and the beginning of August, the number of new cases notified per week was high, and averaged between 75 and 100 each week; since August, this rate has been slowly declining, with just 70 cases identified throughout all of October. The latest figures provided by DRC Ministry of Health via World Health Organization are

3,371 total cases; 3,253 confirmed cases and 2,228 total fatalities. While there are positive signs that the number of cases is slowly reducing, the outbreak remains a serious public health concern, and it is unclear when it may end.” (See [this](#))

There has been more than one occasion over the last 18 months when the current EVD pandemic in DRC appears to have been arrested. Nonetheless, other cases surfaced placing additional fears within the medical community and the general population of the disease spreading to broader geographic areas.

MSF in its conclusion to the report referenced above leaves the reader with an unsettling observation: “Overall, the geographic spread of the epidemic appears to be unpredictable, with scattered small clusters potentially occurring anywhere in the region. This pattern, along with the lack of visibility on the epidemiological situation, and the risk of flare-ups in former hotspots, is both extremely worrying and makes ending the outbreak even more challenging.”

Compounding the medical crisis in the eastern DRC provinces impacted by the EVD pandemic are the ongoing conflicts pitting rebel groups against the military forces of the central government in Kinshasa. President Felix Tshisekedi took office last year and has worked out a coalition arrangement with the forces which remain loyal to former head-of-state Joseph Kabila.

Nevertheless, outside of these working relationships at the highest governmental levels there are attacks being carried out by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in North Kivu in the city of Beni, where in late December, 23 people were reportedly hacked to death. The ADF originated in Uganda. However, the group which claims to be at war with both the DRC and Ugandan governments is aggressively waging a war on the civilians in the border regions between the two countries.

Similar problems exist in neighboring Central African Republic (CAR), a former French colony which has undergone considerable political and social turmoil in recent decades. Former President Francois Bozize has returned to the country after fleeing amid a military coup led by the Seleka group which seized control of the government in 2013. Seleka is a Muslim-dominated organization which sprang up in response to the plight of the minority Islamic population in the country of 4.6 million people.

A spokesman for Bozize says he is planning to re-enter CAR politics by running for president in the upcoming 2020 elections. Considering the contentious sectional divisions which have been a reality since 2013, a campaign by Bozize could prompt the resumption of armed conflict in the capital of Bangui.

The World Food Program (WFP) reports in an assessment of the current humanitarian situation in the CAR that:

“Floods affected at least 25,000 people in and around Bangui in late October, as well as in Ouaka, Basse Kotto, Mbomou and Ouham prefectures. More than 10,000 homes were destroyed across the affected areas. The humanitarian community mobilized to meet the most urgent needs of the affected populations. The humanitarian situation in CAR remains alarming. A three percent increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is due in

part to new displacements of more than 20,000 people in Birao following armed clashes at the beginning of September. The number of IDPs in CAR has again exceeded the symbolic threshold of 600,000.”

These two states, the DRC and CAR, although facing different problems, share similarities in relationship to the protracted internal conflicts hampering the ability of the state and society to resolve outstanding issues. Present in the DRC and CAR are United Nations mandated peacekeeping missions which are authorized by the Security Council in cooperation with African Union member-states and their regional affiliates.

However, these UN missions have only been partially effective. The overriding nature of the instability of post-colonial African states remains unresolved.

#### West Africa: Political and Regional Conflicts in Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger

Internal divisions inherited from European colonialism and the contemporary neo-colonial character of international relations, are by no means confined to Central Africa. In the West Africa region the states of Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger are reflective of the general crises of instability and underdevelopment.



Cameroon has been rocked by sectional conflict pitting regions of the oil-producing state which were colonized Britain and France against each other. In southern Cameroon a secessionist movement has arisen calling for the partitioning of the country.

Considering the prevailing rhetoric related to regional and continental unity in Africa, it is highly unlikely that such a position could gain diplomatic support among the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). At present there is much curiosity over the proposal for the abandonment of the CFA franc zone currency system for a regional medium of exchange known as the “ECO.” Several governments have expressed an interest in moving towards this regional currency.

There are criteria for the conversion from the CFA franc pegged to the Euro to a stand alone ECO. An article published by the VOA pointed out that:

“The key demands for entry are to have a deficit of less than 3 percent of gross domestic product, inflation of 10 percent or under and debts worth less than 70 percent of GDP. Economists say they understand the thinking behind the currency plan but believe it is unrealistic and could even be dangerous for the region’s economies which are dominated by one single country, Nigeria, which

accounts for two-thirds of the region's economic output. Nigeria's Finance Minister Zainab Ahmed told AFP 'there's still more work that we need to do individually to meet the convergence criteria'." (See [this](#))

Although Nigeria is the largest economy in the West Africa region and one of the leading states on the continent as whole with a population (200 million) which by far outstrips all other AU nations, the country remains embroiled in the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. President Muhammadu Buhari, now in his second term of office, stated while running in 2015 that he would eliminate the Boko Haram threat within six months. Obviously this has not materialized as the regional impact of the putative "Islamist" movement has extended into Cameroon, Niger and Chad.

Niger, a former French colony, is the source of the world's fourth largest production of uranium. The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) has a presence inside the country along with Paris which is coordinating regional military forces to pursue the targeted "terrorist threat." Insurgents have launched several high-profile attacks on establishments frequented by westerners. In 2017, four AFRICOM Green Berets were killed in Niger under circumstances which have not yet been fully explained.

AFRICOM is building drone capability in Niger while spreading the military and intelligence capability of Washington across the continent. These developments related to the continuing interference of France and the U.S. in West Africa does not bode well for continental unity based upon a program of empowering the majority of workers, farmers and youth.

Joint military operations between France, the European Union (EU), AFRICOM and NATO are annual occurrences in West Africa. Questions of the viability of the ECO aside, there can be no genuine independence and unity in any region of Africa with the growing presence of imperialist military units.

#### The Need for a Fundamental Break with Neo-colonial Arrangements

Therefore, taking into consideration the internal conflicts still raging across various regions within AU member-states, coupled with the incapacity of existing governments to stabilize the situations in Central and West Africa, an approach is required which relies on the strategic positioning, mineral wealth, energy resources and human capital of the more than one billion people on the continent. Such a political program would require the empowerment of the working class, farmers and youth as the principal agents of developmental transformation.

The contradiction between African development and imperialism remains a stark reality well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Europe and subsequently North America were built into world powers due to their exploitation of Africa through the centuries-long Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

To reverse this ongoing disadvantageous situation for Africa, a severing of the tentacles of dependency is required. The AU member-states must build up their economic, political, technological and military capabilities independent of the imperialist states.

Once these decisions are made on a continental level the resolution of internal conflicts based upon issues of language, religion, ethnicity and social status, can be envisioned. The

ultimate objective is the establishment of a unified Africa based upon socialist planning and sustainable economic reconstruction.

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