

# Africa Liberation Day and the Struggle against Imperialism. The African Union in the 21st Century

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*This year's Africa Day, also known as Africa Liberation Day, marked the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union (AU).*

*On May 25, 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, over 30 independent African states gathered to establish the OAU.*

Even at the founding of the continental organization, there were generally two political camps within the independent states. The Casablanca Group consisted of Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Algeria, Morocco, and others which advanced the objectives of continental unity and federation. These states initially met in Casablanca, Morocco in 1961 during the Congo crisis which resulted in the imperialist-engineered overthrow and brutal assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba.

Two additional blocs called the Monrovia and Brazzaville groups rejected the model of rapid unity and its concomitant obligations surrounding economic integration, a military command structure and the imperatives of an anti-imperialist foreign policy. Instead these more moderate and conservative alliances sought to continue their almost complete reliance on the former colonial powers and the leading post World War II imperialist country, the United States.

Consequently, the OAU represented a compromise driven by the upsurge in national independence movements across Africa and the attempts by imperialism to maintain their economic stranglehold over the newly liberated states. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the-then President of the Republic of Ghana issued his pioneering book entitled "Africa Must Unite" to coincide with the first OAU Summit in Ethiopia.

This book made the case for continental unity and warned against the intervention of western military forces in Africa. Based upon developments in Congo and the political capturing of former French and British colonies through international trade, loans, military assistance and diplomatic relations, Nkrumah called for accelerated unification and socialist development.

Image on the right: Kwame Nkrumah speaking at podium



In his address to the founding OAU Summit, Nkrumah emphasized:

“On this continent, it has not taken us long to discover that the struggle against colonialism does not end with the attainment of national independence. Independence is only the prelude to a new and more involved struggle for the right to conduct our own economic and social affairs; to construct our society according to our aspirations, unhampered by crushing and humiliating neo-colonialist controls and interference.”

### **Neo-Colonialism and African Unity**

These words were spoken at a time when numerous African states remained under colonial rule and apartheid. The Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau were nowhere near independence in 1963. Others such as Zambia, Basutoland, Swaziland, Bechuanaland and Malawi (formerly known as Nyasaland), were yet to emerge from British domination.

The call for unification was also designed to launch a frontal attack on the remaining outposts of colonial rule. Nkrumah’s theory of neo-colonialism which took into account the continuing dependency of African economies to the imperialist centers of finance capital was spelled out in “Africa Must Unite.” Just two years later the book “Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism,” served as a comprehensive guide to understanding the plight of independent African states and their subservience to collective imperialism led by Washington and Wall Street.

Nonetheless, at the founding OAU Summit, Nkrumah noted as well almost prophetically:

“Our people call for unity so that they may not lose their patrimony in the perpetual service of neo-colonialism. In their fervent push for unity, they understand that only its realization will give full meaning to their freedom and our African independence. It is this popular determination that must move us on to a union of independent African states. In delay lies danger to our well-being, to our very existence as free states. It has been suggested that our approach to unity should be gradual, that it should go piecemeal. This point of view conceives of Africa as a static entity with ‘frozen’ problems which can be eliminated one by one and when all have been cleared then we can come together and say: ‘Now all is well, let us now unite.’ This view takes no account of the impact of external pressures. Nor does it take cognizance of the danger that delay can deepen our isolations and exclusiveness; that it can enlarge our differences and set us drifting further and further apart into the net of neo-colonialism, so that our union will become nothing but a fading hope, and the great design of Africa’s full redemption will be lost, perhaps, forever.”

## AFRICOM Expands: Events in Niger, Somalia and Nigeria

Three recent examples related to the consolidation of neo-colonialism in Africa involve the presence of Pentagon military troops through the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Niger, Somalia, along with an announced deal by the administration of **President Donald Trump** to sell fighter aircraft and helicopters to the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Niger was the country where four U.S. Green Berets were killed under still inadequately explained circumstances in October 2017. Niger is one of the world's largest producers of uranium. However, the mining and distribution of this strategic energy resource is largely controlled by a French firm Orano (previously Areva). Ostensibly, AFRICOM soldiers are in Niger to assist the national government in security matters in the battle against Islamic extremist. Yet the security situation inside the country and its contiguous states has worsened with the advent of AFRICOM.

The Horn of Africa state of Somalia, located in an oil-rich territory adjacent to the most lucrative shipping lanes in the world, makes it the coveted prize of modern day imperialism. AFRICOM forces have expanded their presence in Somalia leading to greater instability and throughout the East Africa region.

There is still no peace and stability in sight throughout most areas of Somalia. The U.S.-funded African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) after more than a decade on the ground in an attempt to implement western political orthodoxy is now more than war weary. It is only the funding from the West that is sustaining this mission. All the while the people of this nation remain impoverished, underdeveloped and dislocated.



African Union First Ladies Commission at 29th Summit, July 3-4, 2017

**President Muhammadu Buhari** in a May state visit to the White House glossed over the widely-reported racist derogatory comments Trump made in reference to why it was necessary to curb immigration from Africa, Haiti and El Salvador into the U.S. Buhari was seeking weapons from Washington and some commitment to economic cooperation which has been drastically reduced as a result of energy policies begun during the previous

administration of President Barack Obama.

The leading economies on the continent which had experienced phenomenal growth over the last decade are now in recession, near recession and forced to “restructure” their financial obligation to international finance capital. Currency values have declined precipitously in Nigeria, Angola and South Africa among other states. There is a re-emergent debt crisis taking place as well where in countries like Mozambique the state is defaulting on existing financial arrangements with Western banking institutions.

### **Prospects for Liberation and Unity**

One interesting declaration earlier in the year was the signing of an African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) at a summit in Kigali, Rwanda. Some 44 states within the AU signed the protocol and several of the governments involved have ratified the project.

However, some of the leading economic states have not signed or ratified the AfCFTA largely due to considerations stemming from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism. African states have not broken the linkages which undermine their genuine economic and social development. Much of this growth within African states has not been reinvested in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, education and healthcare which would even in the short-term unleash the human potential of over one billion workers, farmers and youth.

In order for there to be a long-term acquisition of continental wealth for the masses of people, the workers, farmers and youth must be empowered bringing their interests and concerns to the forefront of the national and regional agenda. There is no evidence whatsoever that such a monumental transformation in priorities can be achieved under the world capitalist system.

Africa must unite under a socialist program to reclaim the natural resources and strategic waterways which belong to the people by right. Consequently, the struggle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will have to be anti-capitalist in character seeking to eradicate the exploitation inherent in the existing dominant economic system in the advancement towards a truly equitable and just society for all.

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