

Latin America and West Africa - Patterns of Neocolonialism

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The patterns of neocolonial intervention in the majority world by the United States and its allies since their victories over Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in 1945 are very clear. Almost immediately the Western countries started a cycle of bloody aggression against peoples resisting colonialism, followed later by the dependence of most African and Asian countries on the ruthless Western economic system. In all this time, the United States and Europe demonstrated the most crude and brutal determination to guarantee at all costs control of the natural resources required by their capitalist system. Until the developments of recent years, they were able to achieve their goal through commercial and financial domination at the global level and, at the regional level, political co-optation of local elites. Whenever they have found it necessary, they have never hesitated to use military aggression either directly or indirectly.

However, in the last twenty-five years, the old imperialist regime imposed by the American and European powers has entered into crisis. It is instructive to make the comparison between the contemporary history of West Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a period that began approximately with the election of our Eternal Comandante **Hugo Chávez Frías** in 1998 as president of Venezuela and our comrade **Laurent Gbagbo** as president of the Ivory Coast in 2000. Both leaders promoted socialist ideas that threatened the customary imperial control of their respective regions.

In both cases, the Western powers mounted campaigns to destabilize the new governments with repeated attacks and interventions of one kind or another. The intensification of the imperial aggression reached its peak in 2011 with the destruction of the Libyan Jamahiriya and the assassination of Brother Guide **Muammar al Gaddafi**; with the French attack in Ivory Coast to overthrow Laurent Gbagbo, with the treacherous complicity of the United Nations, and also the beginning of unilateral coercive measures by the United States against Venezuela and its oil company PDVSA. The institutional context of both regions of the world

contains very similar components.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Organization of American States has served as the United States Ministry of Colonies since 1948. But in West Africa, it was not until the 1970s that the countries of the region completed their independence from the colonial powers, France, the United Kingdom and Portugal. So, it was not until 1975 that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded. The ostensible objective of both institutions – the OAS and ECOWAS – is to promote regional cooperation, socio-economic development and political stability. In both cases, the dominant influence of the respective Western powers has distorted the practice of the institutions so that they serve in effect as tools of imperial regional control.

Throughout its history, the OAS has given its institutional support to imperial rule in the region, from supporting the 1954 coup in Guatemala and the exclusion of revolutionary Cuba to the illegal recognition of **Juan Guaidó** to represent Venezuela. After Cuba, only Venezuela and Nicaragua have had the courage to refuse to be members of this neocolonial institution. In the case of ECOWAS, while it is true that none of the former colonial powers is an actual member, France, and therefore the European Union, wields great influence because it dominates one of the main economic components of ECOWAS, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and also because most of the countries of the region use the CFA Franc currency, a direct inheritance from the colonial era.

The scope of ECOWAS has expanded beyond its original goal of “collective self-sufficiency” in a way similar to the development of the OAS, to now include the organization of peacekeeping missions in its member countries and the promotion of Western-style electoral democracy. ECOWAS now has a total population of over 440 million with a Gross Domestic Product of almost two trillion dollars (PPP). (It should be noted that if Nigeria’s oil wealth is subtracted that GDP drops dramatically to only US\$600 billion indicating the relative poverty of the region). Almost all of the ECOWAS governments have faithfully fulfilled their neocolonial role in relation to the recent military insurrection in Niger, which has broad support among that country’s population, as is also the case with the other recent similar military insurrections in Guinea in 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Mali in 2020.

The reasons for these coups include the presence of French and American military personnel on national territory, systemic corruption for the benefit of a small national elite and their foreign owners, and the lack of social and economic development for the population in general. However, perhaps even more urgently than these other factors has been the development of pseudo-Islamist terrorist forces such as Boko Haram and Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) as a destabilizing factor in the entire region. In fact, the immediate origin of this component of regional instability was the destruction of Libya in 2011 and the consequent destabilization of the huge northern territory of Mali after the massacre in January 2012 of more than 100 Malian soldiers in the village of Aguelhok by terrorist movements.

In response to the lack of support from its government to defend its territory, the Malian army took power in a very similar way to what has just happened in Niger. A Committee for the Return of Democracy and the Restoration of the State was appointed. As now in the case of Niger, ECOWAS implemented economic coercive measures and threatened possible military intervention. Then came an agreement mediated by the United Nations, among others, and the intervention of a French military force. As in Niger this year (where the

military has formed a National Council for Defense of the Nation), the 2020 military insurrection in Mali was largely a reaction against the presence of the French military. The fundamental difference between the events of 2012 and 2013 in Mali and the situation now ten years later is the united front agreed between Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Guinea, all ECOWAS member countries.

In this context, Guinea's action could be crucial because its support for its three land-locked neighbors gives them access to commercial transit through the important port of Conakry, the capital of Guinea. Whereas in previous years, ECOWAS was always able to put more intense pressure and with greater ease on military insurrections in Burkina Faso or Mali, and now in Niger, because these countries lack access to the sea. The militaries of all four countries have concluded that the US and French military presence promotes neither stability nor security and, moreover, they suspect that the imperialist powers themselves covertly and indirectly support the terrorist forces they are supposedly fighting. Certainly, in 2012 a close Western ally at the time, Qatar, sent planes with armaments for the pseudo-Islamist groups via the city of Gao in northern Mali.

In West Africa, the recent military uprisings have been in support of nationalist and popular demands in the context of this counterproductive foreign military occupation and the cynicism of the predatory Western powers. In Latin America only Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, the only countries to have rejected the OAS, have anti-imperialist armed forces defending their governments. The United States and its NATO allies have more than 70 military bases throughout the region, with most concentrated in Central America and the Caribbean, thus encircling Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. As in Africa, this regional military occupation is camouflaged under the spurious motif of security cooperation.

As in Africa too, this imperialist military harassment of the region goes hand in hand with endless pressure from giant Western energy and mining multinationals to ensure they get priority in controlling the region's natural resources. It is also about ensuring the imposition of inappropriate economic priorities through international and regional financial institutions. Both the United States and the European Union are now intensifying their focus on Latin America and West Africa because they are afraid of losing their customary control over the natural resources of these regions to governments which, first, prioritize the needs and aspirations of their own peoples and, secondly, for the same reason want to seal more favorable agreements with China and Russia. This is the fundamental dynamic that will define the successful development of a genuine new world order.

It is a dynamic in which the corporate elites of the United States and the European Union will not be able to prevail because they still think they can impose their interests over the needs and aspirations of the peoples of the majority world whom they want to continue marginalizing. They think they can forever keep entire populations in political impotence and economic distress by means of endless psychological warfare and its corollary, spreading malicious calumny to promote division and disunity. Many examples show how demented this assumption has become, whether the rejection in a country like Argentina of its subjugation to Western financial structures or the determined popular resistance in Haiti to systematic institutional destruction and grotesque exploitation by local private sector and foreign corporate predators.

Also relevant is Cuba's heroic resistance to the genocidal US blockade and too, Venezuela's and Nicaragua's resistance to coup attempts and to constant US and EU provocation and intimidation or, elsewhere, the resistance to the coups in Bolivia and Peru. The advance of

the political right in the region between 2015 and 2022 was brief and fragile. The Latin American and Caribbean nations continue the unstoppable development of their relations with the People's Republic of China. All this is also reflected in the development of various similar events in West Africa. Resistance to the empire is inevitable among the peoples of the majority world who live the reality of all these processes. As our President Comandante Daniel noted in 2021, "Those countries that still dream of imposing their colonialist, neocolonialist policies on the world are simply out of touch with reality. That's not possible anymore."

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