

140 years since the Berlin Congress: The new Scramble for Africa—Part Three

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The struggle against imperialism and war

Today, a large group of the pseudo-left parties representing well-off layers of the middle class of North America, Western Europe and Australasia openly embrace imperialist war, utilising slogans of “human rights” and railing against so-called Russian and Chinese “imperialism” to legitimise, and even directly support, neo-colonialist military operations. They have aligned themselves with the US and NATO and defended their wars in Yugoslavia, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and Russia and imperialist provocations across Southeast Asia against China.

Another wing of pseudo-left tendencies has updated Kautsky’s “ultra-imperialism”—claiming the possibility of the peaceful, non-violent, non-imperialist regulation of world economy and the relations between the major capitalist powers—through the concept of “multi-polarity”. They insist that the US and European powers can gradually and peacefully accept their eclipse by their competitors, above all, those led by China.

This is also the official state policy of the capitalist regimes of Russia and China, which, fearing nothing more than the emergence of a revolutionary movement in their respective countries and the international working class, appeal to other states everywhere to form a counterweight to the imperialist powers. This, they hope, will increase their bargaining position at the negotiating table with imperialism.

Capitalist and Stalinist politicians across the African continent have also embraced “multi-polarity”. An example is South Africa’s Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) leader Julius Malema who advances the BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—as a counterweight to imperialism. He defines BRICS as “a progressive and forward-looking” group with a mandate to end the “imperialist domination of the world” and “as an alternative to the G7 and NATO war alliance”. Likewise, Booker Ngesa Omole, the leader of the Communist Party of Kenya—Marxist (CPK-M), has said, “The transition from unipolarity to multipolarity in global politics presents an opportunity for revolutionaries to reshape the world order in favour of the oppressed and marginalized.”

Such a perspective is bankrupt. It assumes that US imperialism will accept its natural demotion. Reality proves the opposite. Washington has been in unending wars for the past three decades across Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa in an attempt to offset its economic decline. In the preface of *A Quarter Century of War: The US drive for global hegemony: 1990-2016*, David North, the Chairman of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, wrote:

The last quarter century of US-instigated wars must be studied as a chain of interconnected events. The strategic logic of the US drive for global hegemony extends beyond the neocolonial operations in the Middle East and Africa. The ongoing regional wars are component elements of the rapidly escalating confrontation of the United States with Russia and China.^[1]

Today, the US and NATO powers are relentlessly escalating their war in Ukraine, aimed at inflicting a decisive US-NATO defeat over Russia, including regime change and ultimately the theft of its vast natural resources.

At the same time, Washington and its allies are preparing a new front against China, which is viewed by the strategists of American imperialism as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

The Israeli-led genocide against Palestinians, the invasion of Lebanon, regime change in Syria and the bombing of Yemen backed by NATO powers are part of a region-wide war in the Middle East, particularly targeting Iran, an ally of China and Russia. The aim is to control the oil-rich region.

The new Scramble for Africa

Another front is rapidly emerging which takes the form of a new Scramble for Africa. Driven by internal crises and faced with the rapidly declining position of US and European imperialism on the world scale, the African continent and its rich resources are increasingly seen as a necessary means for their other war fronts.

Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo supply cobalt, vital for lithium-ion batteries used in advanced military hardware, while rare earth elements from South Africa and Madagascar are indispensable in the manufacture of electronics, lasers, and sensors used in military applications. Similarly, uranium deposits in nations like Niger and Namibia are crucial for both nuclear energy and weaponry. Metals like tantalum, abundant across the continent, are vital for missile guidance systems. Additionally, Africa’s abundant oil and natural gas reserves in countries such as Nigeria and Angola are key to fuelling military operations worldwide.

Identifying Africa as an important geopolitical region for its campaign for global hegemony, the US has launched wars across the continent for the last three decades. Between 1992 and 1994, Washington deployed troops to occupy Somalia. Following its withdrawal, the US supported Ethiopia’s invasion of Somalia in 2006, which was later followed by Kenya’s in 2011. These interventions, aimed at controlling the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, one of the world’s most critical maritime chokepoints,

have resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Somalis.

During the 1990s, the US and European powers also backed the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) against the pro-French Hutu-led government in power, which erupted into a genocide in 1994. It was followed by the US backing of the Rwandan RPF and Ugandan invasions of mineral-rich Zaire (today DR Congo), to install a pro-US regime, which led to the First and Second Congo wars in the 1990s and 2000s, that left over 5 million dead.

In 2006, the US created AFRICOM with the mission of exerting greater military influence over Africa in order to maintain and facilitate Washington's exploitation of the continent's vast economic resources and its working masses. Since then, Washington has waged war across the continent, using AFRICOM's dozens of outposts and working with local proxy forces to launch commando raids, drone strikes, and secret assassination programmes. Between 2013 and 2017, US special operations forces saw combat in at least 13 African countries.

In 2011, the US and European powers launched a regime-change operation against oil-rich Libya that killed 50,000 people and left the country in chaos, with no functioning central government and an apocalyptic landscape of instability. Rival tribal factions emerged, competing for dominance over the country's vast oil reserves. To this day, various global powers continue to vie for control, leveraging local proxies to advance their interests.

Washington's key concern in the region is the rise of its main competitor, China. With a trade volume of \$204 billion, Beijing is already Africa's largest trading partner. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has poured billions into large-scale infrastructure projects, including railways, ports, and energy facilities, while extending substantial loans to African states, undermining the influence of the US-dominated World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Beijing's state-backed companies have secured key contracts for natural resource extraction, ensuring access to critical minerals and energy supplies. In the telecommunications and technology sectors, Chinese companies such as Huawei are increasingly dominant in the building of 5G networks.

Washington has made clear it will not allow Africa to fall to China. The US has signed hundreds of deals worth \$14.2 billion with African countries in an initial bid to counter its growing influence. In December, outgoing President Joe Biden visited Angola where he said, "The United States is all in on Africa." A central focus of Biden was the US-funded Lobito Corridor railway project aimed to facilitate the transport of critical minerals from the DR Congo and Zambia through Angola to global markets.

Given the diminishing US ability to compete with China economically, voices within the US establishment are demanding a more aggressive military approach. As US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said recently, "We need to do more, and we have to contest Chinese actions, not only in terms of their forward basing strategy, but their desire to go after Africa's rare earths that will be critical for our industrial and technological capabilities".

The US is the most aggressive of the imperialist powers on the continent, but the same dynamic that drives Washington toward war also operates among European imperialist states. Beset by the same political and economic diseases that afflict Washington, they possess even fewer financial resources to deal with them.

France has waged war in the Sahel zone for over a decade, in attempts to maintain its dwindling influence across Africa. Paris intervened in Libya (2011) and Mali (2013), followed by interventions in Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania in 2014. In Burkina Faso, France played a key role in the removal of President Blaise Compaoré in 2015. Despite this, mass protests have forced French troops to leave Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, as the new regimes sought closer military aid from Russia and economic ties with China. Senegal, Chad and the Ivory Coast are now planning the

same.

Germany, which never forgave the loss of its colonies to Britain and France in Africa following the First World War, has intervened in Mali and Niger. For the past two years, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has aggressively toured Africa with high-ranking business representatives to announce billion-euro investments. Berlin is trying to secure access to African energy and raw materials and lucrative sales markets and cheap labour.

British imperialism, once the dominant power across Africa, is trying to reestablish its influence. British Foreign Secretary, David Lammy said "it would be a huge mistake for Labour to overlook the importance of Africa." The UK holds the BATUK base in Kenya, the UK's largest African base. Its troops have waged war in Mali and South Sudan, and regularly train African forces as proxies across the continent. Data on Britain's foreign direct investment (FDI) position in Africa from 2004 to 2019 shows that the FDI in Africa peaked in 2019 at £50.5 billion, nearly double with respect to 2004.

The permanent presence of European armies on the continent demonstrates that these powers are not solely relying on proxy forces and the African bourgeoisie to enforce their interests in Africa. They are preparing for a massive escalation of war across the continent.

The election of Donald Trump will further accelerate this militarisation on the continent, as European capitals, facing the threat of additional trade war measures from Washington and increased competition from China, aggressively pursue new markets, raw materials, investment opportunities, and cheap labour.

Socialism versus bourgeois nationalism

The capitalist and nationalist regimes in Russia and China, representing the interests of oligarchs spawned by the Stalinist restoration of capitalism, have no progressive response. They do not represent a path for peaceful development for the African masses. Rather, they alternate between sabre-rattling and bankrupt appeals for "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism.

As for the African ruling elites, nothing exposes their bankruptcy more than them offering themselves as stooges for imperialism. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi is a key military ally of US imperialism and is playing a crucial role in the Palestinian genocide. Rwanda's Paul Kagame has deployed troops to crush an Islamist-led insurgency in northern Mozambique to protect the billion-dollar gas investments of French energy giant Total. Uganda's Yoweri Museveni has sent troops to Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, DR Congo and Somalia to further US interests. And Kenya's President William Ruto has grovelled to Washington to become a non-NATO ally, as Kenyan police are deployed to Haiti to terrorise the population into submission on behalf of US and Canadian imperialism.

In West Africa, Nigeria threatened to launch a military intervention against neighbouring Niger last year following the overthrow of pro-French President Mohamed Bazoum by the military. The threat was aimed at preserving Washington and Paris's influence over the impoverished yet resource-rich nation. However, Nigeria ultimately refrained, wary that such an intervention could ignite widespread social unrest within its own borders.

In Southern Africa, the former national bourgeois liberation movements that once waged an armed struggle on Portugal's colonies and the US and British-backed settler states of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South Africa have transformed themselves into key instruments for imperialism to sustain its stranglehold over the mineral-rich region.

The African National Congress (ANC) has governed South Africa since 1994; the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and Frelimo have controlled Angola and Mozambique respectively since 1975; the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) has ruled Zimbabwe since 1980; and the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) has been in power in Namibia since 1990.

In all cases, they have gutted social services, laid off public sector workers, devalued their currencies and privatised national industries to receive loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Poverty and social inequality have only increased after independence, as so-called “free market reforms” have assured that those at the top have accumulated immense wealth.

Ultimately, the struggle over Africa will not be settled through economics alone but will be driven by military considerations. Renewed military aggression and the danger of a Third World War can be averted only by the mobilisation of the international working class on the basis of a socialist and revolutionary programme.

Across the world, a surge of working-class opposition to inequality and capitalist exploitation is developing in the form of strikes and protests. Africa is rapidly becoming a social powder keg.

Between 2016 and 2023, the number of protests across African nations more than doubled. Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) indicates that from January 2016 to May 2023, there were approximately 7,164 protests related to issues such as food, wages, and prices—5,039 of these occurred after the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Sub-Saharan Africa has also seen the fastest growth rate in mass political protests globally, with an annual increase of 11.5 percent between 2009 and 2019.

In Kenya, what started as nationwide protests against tax hikes on workers rapidly escalated into an insurgency. In north Africa, this year alone Moroccan workers have held more than 100 protests over wages and the soaring cost of living. Protests have broken out against IMF-austerity in Nigeria and Ghana, and opposition has mounted against US-backed authoritarian regimes in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mozambique.

The movement of workers across Africa in alliance with workers in the imperialist centers has the power to stop imperialist war and the new Scramble for Africa, and to redistribute the world's wealth to meet the social needs of the working class. The critical task is to bring into these struggles an understanding of the crisis of capitalism as a whole, which finds its most dangerous expression in imperialist war. It is necessary to develop a political leadership in the working class that can unify separate struggles and lay the foundation for the overthrow of the entire socioeconomic system through world socialist revolution.

Workers and youth across Africa need a party that is completely independent of all the factions of the African bourgeoisie, the imperialist powers and China and Russia, and which fights for the historical interests of the international working class. Only the world Trotskyist movement, which is embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International, represents such a party. Its building is therefore the most urgent task in the fight to unite workers internationally around the programme of world socialist revolution.

Concluded

David North, *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony*, (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2016), p. xix.

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[1] David North, *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony*, (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2016), p. xix.

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