

Kony 2012 and the promotion of “humanitarian” wars

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Kony 2012, the 30-minute propaganda video advocating US military intervention in Africa, has become something of a debacle for its creators and media supporters. Millions of people have read and viewed responses debunking the film’s assertions, and some of its early cheerleaders have felt obliged to backpedal and adopt a critical attitude toward it.

Nonetheless, the Kony 2012 campaign, launched by the “human rights” organization Invisible Children, has provided a pretext for new military actions in the region. The US-backed Ugandan government announced the formation of a new brigade of 5,000 troops on March 16, ostensibly to hunt for Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).

The video broke records to become the fastest-spreading online video in history. It accomplished this through a barrage of media coverage and the support of celebrities who endorsed the campaign over social media, including Rihanna, Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, Christina Milian, Nicki Minaj, George Clooney, Bill Gates and Kim Kardashian.

It also gained explicit support from the Obama administration. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney congratulated the film’s supporters and vowed to escalate the US intervention in Uganda and neighboring countries in response to it.

Aside from the film’s crude falsifications, its promotion in the media and the support it won within ruling circles raise deeper issues of global politics.

The central impulse behind US involvement in Uganda is the drive to dominate the region’s recently discovered oil reserves and its other natural resources, as part of the broader struggle for influence in Africa between the US, China and the former colonial European powers. The Kony 2012 campaign served to

advance these imperialist aims.

Since the discovery of sizable oil deposits in Uganda three years ago, the US has sought to increase its presence in the area, using the fight against the LRA as a pretext. Last October, Obama dispatched 100 special forces troops to the area, in a move he said “furthers US national security interests and foreign policy and will be a significant contribution toward counter-LRA efforts in central Africa.”

The motive for the Obama administration’s endorsement of the Kony video is no different from that which led it to escalate the neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan, carry out a war for regime-change in Libya, and threaten Syria: the drive to control strategic areas of the world for the enrichment of US banks and corporations.

Washington has sought to mask its plunder and oppression of former colonies with humanitarian pretenses, claiming its only concern is the protection of civilians. There is nothing fundamentally new in this process, which harkens back to the early days of colonialism, the scramble for Africa, and the “white man’s burden.”

The US intervention in Uganda is only the continuation of a process that came into full swing with the 1995 bombing by the United States and NATO of Serb forces in Bosnia, the 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia, the more recent bombing of Libya, and the civil war stoked up by the US in Syria.

The bloodiest recent example of this process is the war in Libya, in which tens of thousands of people were killed and the country left devastated and convulsed by intertribal murder and torture—all for the noble goal of transferring Libyan oil contracts with Russia and China to France, Britain and the United States.

The grounds for military intervention under humanitarian cover are being prepared in the same fashion against Syria, where the regime of Bashar al-Assad is being subjected to a barrage of propaganda and sanctions by the United States in preparation for some form of intervention, either through NATO or the Arab sheikdoms.

These wars have been facilitated by the sharp movement to the right of the middle-class political organizations that previously dominated the anti-war protest movement. Since the election of Obama, liberal publications like the *Nation* and pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization have openly or tacitly supported imperialist interventions carried out in the name of human rights. They have become leading protagonists of imperialist war and neo-colonial plunder, moving into action virtually on signal to oppose whichever regime is newly targeted for removal by the US military and State Department.

Far from being a force for peace, the US government is the greatest propagator of war, poverty and social misery. It does not respond to or represent the humanitarian and democratic impulses of the people, but seeks only to exploit these sentiments and channel them behind support for military conquest.

Both US political parties are united in their support for military aggression and the neo-colonial carve-up of the former colonies. The struggle against war can go forward only through a political break with the two-party system and the building of a mass socialist movement of the working class.

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