

Obama in Africa to defend US strategic and profit interests

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US President Barack Obama met with the president of Senegal, Macky Sall, and judges and lawyers of the country's supreme court Thursday at the start of a three-nation, week-long African tour aimed at promoting US strategic and profit interests on the continent. A key goal is to counter China in what amounts to a new scramble for markets and the substantial energy, mineral and other resources of the continent.

The tour marks the first time that Obama has set foot in Africa since a 20-hour stopover in Ghana en route back to the US from a summit conference in Europe four years ago. Then, the new president declared, "I have the blood of Africa within me."

This rhetorical flourish made explicit the central importance to US imperialism of Obama's presidency: to present a new face to the world, while pursuing the same predatory and criminal policies that had provoked international anger and hatred under his predecessor, George W. Bush.

Four years later, the novelty of the first African-American US president has substantially faded, and, according to media reports from Africa, there is widespread cynicism about Obama's attempts to use his family history to claim some special affinity for the continent. In point of fact, US aid to Africa has declined under Obama, falling from \$8.24 billion during the last year of the Bush presidency to less than \$7 billion today.

His own presidency is even more deeply mired in international criminality than that of Bush, from drone assassinations to the massive NSA spying on the people of the US and the world and the manhunt being mounted against Edward Snowden for exposing this crime. These issues have followed Obama to Africa, rendering a key stated theme of his trip—the promotion of "democracy"—absurd and hypocritical.

According to a White House press release on Obama's Africa tour: "The President will reinforce the importance

that the United States places on our deep and growing ties with countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including through expanding economic growth, investment, and trade; strengthening democratic institutions; and investing in the next generation of African leaders."

US Trade Representative Michael Froman, who is accompanying Obama, said before the trip that, "Africa wants investors, especially American investors." He and other US officials stressed that the emphasis of the trip was on promoting deals for US corporations rather than aid, which has always been employed by Washington as an instrument for subordinating former colonial countries to its interests. While several business executives are accompanying Obama on the tour, it was by no means clear what the US concretely was offering.

Obama's trip is following in the footsteps of a tour made three months ago by China's new president Xi Jinping, who visited the two countries where the US president is going after Senegal—South Africa and Tanzania. In what was his first overseas tour after taking office in Beijing, Xi also visited the Republic of Congo.

During his tour, Xi offered African countries a \$20 billion line of credit and signed major deals that included a \$10 billion port project in Bagamoyo, Tanzania.

China has eclipsed the US in terms of African trade and investment. It is Africa's largest trading partner, with two-way trade nearly doubling in the last five years alone to nearly \$200 billion, twice that of the US with the continent.

Much of Chinese investment involves mining and infrastructure to facilitate the extraction of raw materials and their shipment to China.

Washington's "democracy" mantra is aimed at compelling African governments to carry out free market reforms, including privatizations and the abolition of subsidies and import controls demanded by transnational capital. It is also directed at countering Chinese influence

with the charge that Beijing, supposedly unlike Washington, is uninterested in “democracy” and “human rights.”

Such ideological claims appear to be falling on deaf ears in Africa. On the eve of Obama’s visit, *Foreign Affairs*, a US journal that is closely connected to the foreign policy establishment, asked Senegalese President Macky Sall whether increased Chinese investment was “not good for the prospects of African democracy.”

Sall replied: “Well, I can’t see why the development of Chinese investment would constitute a danger for democracy. The cooperation with China is much more direct and faster than the cooperation we have with Western countries—the United States, European countries, and other bilateral donors. There are a lot of criteria on governance, on this and that, and a lot of procedures ... I’m not saying that what China is doing is better, but at least it’s faster.”

As for Washington’s “democracy” agenda, Obama’s itinerary belies his administration’s claims. It has been widely noted that the US president is not including visits to Washington’s closest African allies: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya.

The first country, which provided its army as a proxy force for US intervention in Somalia, is notorious for internal repression. And in the second, the US is supporting a counterinsurgency campaign against the Boko Haram armed Islamist movement in the northeast of Nigeria, which has seen massacres, summary executions and disappearances.

Uganda, which has also provided proxy troops for the war in Somalia, has violently repressed political opposition, closed down newspapers for criticizing the government and pursued a vicious campaign against gays. And Kenya, the homeland of Obama’s father, while a close ally, is led by a president and vice president who are wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity for their role in orchestrating violence that left more than 1,000 people dead following the 2007-2008 elections. Such are US imperialism’s “democratic” partners.

US imperialism is resorting ever more openly to its residual military superiority to counter China’s rising influence in Africa. The US-NATO war in Libya served to deprive China of billions of dollars’ worth of investments and forced it to evacuate thousands of its citizens. Two years later, however, the Chinese state oil firms Sinopec and PetroChina are aggressively bidding for Libyan petroleum concessions.

The US military’s AFRICOM has set up a drone base in Niger, backing French imperialism intervention in Mali. It has deployed troops in Central Africa, ostensibly in the hunt for militia leader Joseph Kony, and has dispatched special-forces training teams across the continent to solidify US relations with African militaries. In Somalia, meanwhile, it has carried out repeated deadly air strikes.

The growing US militarism on the continent has aroused widespread hostility. US officials had expressed concern that Obama’s trip to South Africa, the second leg of his tour, would be overshadowed by the approaching death of former president and African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, with whom the US president had hoped to stage a photo op.

However, the visit will also face protests over his administration’s policies. While the ANC government of President Jacob Zuma has hailed the visit as a boon to the South African economy, the ruling party’s two political partners, the COSATU union federation and the South African Communist Party, are participating in a “NOObama” protest march in Pretoria on June 28, the day of the US president’s arrival.

And two organizations have gone to court seeking to have Obama arrested for war crimes.

South Africa’s Muslim Lawyers Association filed a motion for the Pretoria High Court to order Obama’s arrest, but their application was dismissed.

And the Society for the Protection of our Constitution filed an affidavit charging the US president with “war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

Mohamed Hussain Vawda of the society said that the affidavit accused Obama of responsibility for the killing of thousands of people, including women and children, in Pakistan, Syria and other countries that “have been no threat to the US.”

The document also indicted Obama for the drone assassinations of people deemed hostile to the US government. “These attacks are not authorized in terms of orders issued in a court of law,” said Vawda.



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