

Amid surging refugee crisis in East Africa

US backs deployment of UN military unit for offensive operations in South Sudan

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Tens of thousands of refugees from South Sudan flooded into Kenya, Uganda and Sudan last week, amid an eruption of civil strife in the South Sudanese capital at Juba.

Nearly 60,000 South Sudanese are reported to have crossed into neighboring countries in August alone. Kenya reported the arrival of around 1,000, while 7,000 crossed into Sudan and 52,000 traversed to Uganda, bringing the total number of South Sudanese currently displaced into neighboring countries to 900,000. More than 85 percent of the number of refugees entering Uganda are women and children, with many children having lost one or both parents to the violence.

The clashes in the streets of Juba last week represent the latest outburst in a factional conflict between the South Sudanese government of President Salva Kiir Mayardit and former Vice President Riek Machar that has increasingly destabilized the country since Machar led a failed coup attempt in December 2013. The clashes have already been seized upon by the American and German governments as a pretext for new deployments of ground and air forces to South Sudan, including the dispatch of dozens of US Marines. Since July, flareups of the Mayardit-Machar conflict have been accompanied by growing reports of armed militants carrying out acts of mass violence, including scores of rapes, killings, and looting of villages.

South Sudan is increasingly becoming a leading contributor to the world-historic refugee crisis gripping world society. The explosion of the world refugee total, now estimated at over 60 million by the Global Peace Index, has sent entire peoples streaming across national borders, in a desperate effort to escape the destruction of their societies at the hands of the American military and its allies.

Violence and instability has racked the country of South Sudan since its formation and independence in 2011. The country's formation, through secession from the Khartoum government in the north, was brought together under the close direction of Washington and Britain, in an effort to install a puppet government in Juba by manipulating the decades-long civil war between the north and south—a war that culminated in the Darfur genocide—to force Khartoum to accept a 2005 peace agreement that included an initial framework for separating off South Sudan as an independent state.

Washington fueled and stoked the civil war, cultivating allies among the southern elites, as a means of gaining control over the oil resources in the country, mostly located in the south. The US supported the south economically and militarily, including shipments of arms in order to neutralize Khartoum and counter Chinese influence.

The government of Omar al-Bashir in Khartoum has been the subject of long-standing geopolitical tensions in the Horn of Africa, running afoul of the Western powers as his government turned toward a partnership with China, whose growing influence in Africa is driving Washington to step up its military and strategic interventions across the continent.

China is currently the leading recipient of Sudan's oil. The Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) is the major oil investor in Sudan, and agreed to a major expansion of north Sudan's largest oil refinery last October. The CNPC relies on the Greater Nile Oil Pipeline, which traverses through Sudan to the Red Sea coast, to export its oil to the world market.

The growth of Chinese interests in the Horn of Africa, abutting the sea lanes for shipment of the world's largest petroleum reserves through the Gulf of Aden from the

Middle East, is turning the region into an area of great strategic importance to Washington.

Last week the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) convened an emergency summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in response to the sharpening of the crisis of the US-backed regime in Juba. A delegation from South Sudan attended, as did the presidents of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, and Djibouti.

IGAD, an eight-country trade bloc in Eastern Africa, was created under the auspices of the African Union in 1996, essentially as an instrument for enhancing the grip of US and European capital over the region.

The nature of IGAD and its aims are clear enough from its founding mission documents, which commit the membership to “harmonize policies with regard to trade, customs, transport, communications, agriculture, and natural resources,” “promote free movement of goods, services, and people within the region,” and “create an enabling environment for foreign, cross-border and domestic trade and investment.” The United States and the World Bank are among the leading “international partners” acknowledged by IGAD’s constitution.

The explicit purpose of the gathering in Addis Ababa was to hammer out an agreement to deploy a “Force Intervention Brigade” to South Sudan, patterned after a similar brigade that was deployed to Congo in 2013, in operations to crush the M23 rebels. A military brigade organized under these auspices has a mandate that is much more aggressive than the current UN peacekeeping mission (UNMISS) currently deployed to South Sudan. UNMISS’ mandate is to protect civilians but is forbidden to carry out offensive operations. The Force Intervention Brigade will have a mandate to engage in such targeted offensive operations, much like an invading military force.

The deployment of such a force will most certainly lead to far greater bloodshed. The brigade has the backing of Washington and the eight-country trade bloc, but is vehemently contested publicly by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, although he has been effectively forced to agree to its deployment by US pressure.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power urged the UN security council to back the special intervention brigade, saying: “The United States believes the region’s proposal offers a basis to re-establish a secure environment in Juba, which is critical for the parties to make progress on implementing the peace agreement.”

The *New York Times*, the voice of the foreign policy

establishment in the United States, expressed agreement for the more brutal policy in South Sudan in an editorial on August 9 titled, “Time to get serious with South Sudan.” The *Times* lent support to the bloody operational mandate, appealing to the false pretext of “humanitarianism” with its usual hypocrisy-soaked moralizing over the horrific violence brought about by the conflict.

In an expression aimed at the recalcitrance of the government in Juba to support the brigade, the *Times*’ editors brandished previous ultimatums by Washington to impose an arms embargo against Juba if the terms of the deployment of the brigade are not met.

In a clear signal that support among the US elite may shift in favor of the Machar faction, and that powerful factions in Washington soon turn to a different puppet to carry out their neo-colonial enterprises in South Sudan, the *Times* went on to parrot growing accusations by Western leaders that the government of Salva Kiir Mayardit is responsible for a large part of the current bloodshed.

The turmoil in South Sudan is only one part of the mosaic of destruction Washington has created across the continent and the Middle East as it strives to utilize its military as a means of reversing its declining global economic position. In this, American imperialism relies on the eager collaboration of sections of the national elites, who are being whipped up into ever more violent fratricidal conflicts, as they seek to cement their own strategic ties to Washington and push aside their rivals. Like all other such “national independence” movements of the present day, the secession of South Sudan, far from securing any form of independence or autonomy for its inhabitants, has served as the basis for ever greater imperialist penetration of the country.



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