

South Sudan government approves 4,000-strong UN force

Thomas Gaist
16 August 2016

On Monday, the government of South Sudan approved plans for expanded foreign military intervention on its own soil, including 4,000 soldiers drawn from East and Central African militaries, to be organized under a United Nations mandate. The UN troops will be assembled under a newly formed “Force Intervention Brigade,” a multinational force proposed during an emergency meeting of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Addis Ababa earlier in August, and approved by the UN Security Council last Friday.

The African troops, committed during the IGAD summit by delegations of Africa’s national bourgeois elites from Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Djibouti and Somalia, will join the 12,000 nominal “peacekeepers” already present in country. They will operate with unusually broad authority to conduct offensive operations in and around the capital of Juba, and employ “all necessary means,” including “proactive” attacks against military units loyal to both the government and the opposition.

The deployment of the offensive-oriented Force Intervention Brigade comes amid mounting instability and chaos in Juba, including clashes between supporters of the ruling clique, led by President Salva Kiir Mayardit, and opposition elements organized around former Vice President Riek Machar, which have led to the deaths of hundreds of soldiers on both sides.

Mayardit and Machar lead opposed ethnically-based—the Dinka and Nuer people respectively—political factions, and their rivalry has been exploited by the imperialist powers to deepen their political control over the country. Since President Kiir Mayardit’s dismissal of Machar from his cabinet in 2013, the newly formed country has been plunged into a grinding civil war, killing over 10,000 South Sudanese in the past three years.

Gun battles have broken out in recent weeks between Mayardit’s and Machar’s fighters at key checkpoints, and

in front of the central government compound in Juba. The skirmishes have been seized upon by Washington to escalate its direct military presence, with the US military’s Africa Command (AFRICOM) sending scores of Marines to the capital last month. In a sign of increasing imperialist pressure against Mayardit, Western media have played up reports of gruesome atrocities by government troops against residential areas of Juba, accusing forces loyal to the president of extrajudicial killings and rapes of foreign aid workers.

The South Sudan government is clearly ambivalent about the prospect of hosting additional foreign troops. There are signs that Juba has accepted the deployment only under the threat that refusal would be met with stepped-up support to the opposition. While President Mayardit said Monday that his government “welcomes assistance,” he went on to express concerns that Juba was being “presented with a fait accompli from outsiders” and that the “intervention should not turn into an imposition that becomes an intervention in which our sovereignty is compromised and our ability to govern effectively diminishes.”

Mayardit’s concerns are well justified. Though conducted under the formal banner of the United Nations, the deployment of the “Force Intervention Brigade” marks the latest stage in Washington’s protracted political and military intervention in Sudan. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the American ruling class has worked relentlessly to leverage conflicts between factions of the national ruling elite to its advantage, especially through the cultivation of pro-US elements in the south, where most of the country’s oil wealth is located.

The separation of South Sudan was placed on the agenda by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), a US-brokered peace deal between Khartoum and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM).

Backed by Washington, the SPLM secured provisions

laying out a phased process leading to greater autonomy for the south, and paving the way for the establishment of Juba as a fully autonomous sovereign, in 2011.

Far from representing any advance of the African masses toward genuine independence from imperialism, however, the breakup of Sudan emerged out of the drive of the US and European powers to open the country's oil resources, previously controlled largely by Chinese firms, to exploitation by Western capital, and the willing collaboration of the national bourgeoisie therein.

The scale of Chinese financial and commercial ties to Sudan insures that, however the present crisis develops, it will result in a major intensification of US-Chinese strategic competition in Africa. Beijing, which has invested tens of billions of dollars over decades, providing Khartoum with cheap cash and weaponry in return for petroleum, is clearly concerned over the implications of the latest US and UN troop deployments.

Chinese special representatives, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi, traveled repeatedly to Juba in recent weeks, discussing requests by the Juba government for loans, valued at some \$2 billion. On Monday, Yi said that Beijing would pursue stepped-up diplomatic and political interventions in South Sudan and a number of other regional hotspots.

The fact that the Force Intervention Brigade troops will arrive under a UN flag, and will wear the international body's signature blue helmets, should not mislead anyone as to the destructive and predatory purposes to which they will be put. Special multinational intervention forces, often deployed under UN mandate, became a staple of Africa's political scene during the postcolonial era, providing a "neutral" and "international" gloss for the efforts of American and European imperialism, as they sought to maintain their hegemony over the continent, despite the transfer of power, at least formally, to independent African nation-states.

Throughout the past seven and a half decades, blue-helmeted forces have served as instruments of imperialist power projection throughout the continent, insuring "order" on behalf of Western corporations and enforcing political transitions between sections of the national bourgeoisie in accordance with the strategic needs of Washington and the former colonial powers.

The very first such UN mission boldly illustrates the true content of the UN's numerous "peacekeeping" operations during the subsequent decades, which have included missions in Angola (1988-1991), Mozambique (1992-1994), Liberia (1993-1997), Sierra Leone

(1998-1999), Central African Republic (1998-2000), Democratic Republic of Congo (1999-2010), and Chad (2007-2010).

The United Nations Operations in the Congo (ONUC), begun in 1960, was launched just months after Congo gained formal independence, and in the immediate aftermath of a CIA-backed coup against the country's first democratically elected president, Patrice Lumumba. The UN Congo intervention continued for the next four years, serving to maintain "internal stability" amid the withdrawal of Belgian troops, and was ended in 1964, just months before a new, imperialist-backed military dictatorship was consolidated under the control of Colonel Joseph-Desire Mobutu.

Mobutu, who conspired with the CIA to bring about Lumumba's murder while serving as the first Congolese president's Army Chief of Staff, would subsequently rule the country as military dictator for three decades, until his own overthrow in May 1997, in an insurgency led by Laurent-Desire Kabila.

The deepening of the South Sudan civil war, spurred on by the predatory efforts of Washington and a handful of other global and regional powers to enhance their interests in the world's newest nation-state, is a sharp expression of the explosive geopolitical tensions building up throughout the world system. In every corner of the globe, American imperialism is stoking regional conflicts, dismembering or preparing to dismember national governments, and generally fostering conditions that are leading humanity rapidly to the precipice of a third, and nuclear, world war.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact