

Trump administration plans economic and military offensive against Africa

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The near-total silence of the Trump administration over its plans for the African continent has become something of a cliché among commenters on African politics. Indeed, the US government is maintaining military-style secrecy over its foreign political activities not only in Africa, but in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and elsewhere around the globe.

Despite the relative secrecy, the general outlines of Trump's Africa policy can nevertheless be deduced from his administration's opening moves on the continent, when these are understood as the outgrowth of the crisis of American imperialism and the worldwide militarist offensive it has waged since the dissolution of the Soviet Union more than a quarter century ago.

From the outset, the selection of key leadership positions overseeing various US operations on the continent has underscored the hardline corporatist and militarist character of Trump's agenda in Africa.

Trump has chosen retired US Air Force Colonel Rudolph Atallah to serve as Africa director on the National Security Council (NSC). Atallah was previously director of the US Special Operations Command Sub-Saharan Africa Orientation Course, which prepares US soldiers and government officials for deployment to the region. Trump's leading choices to head the State Department's Africa Bureau include Jeff Krill, the former vice president of Kosmos Energy, a company with substantial financial interests throughout West Africa, and retired US Army intelligence officer Charles Snyder.

Its initial military moves have made clear the Trump regime's determination to intensify the neocolonial African policies of the previous four administrations, pursuing nothing less than the unconditional subordination of the continent's economies, resources and working masses to the profit-drive of the American ruling class.

During his first three months in office, Trump approved major expansions of the US Africa Command's (AFRICOM) interventions in Somalia, Libya, Nigeria, and several other unnamed Central and West African countries.

Trump reportedly favors giving US commanders in Africa wide latitude to wage war in complete secrecy, and without direct authorization from the civilian government. The White

House has granted American ground forces expanded powers to call in airstrikes against large areas of Somalia, which were officially declared "areas of active hostilities" subject to "war-zone targeting rules" by the Trump White House on Thursday.

The new president is casting aside the pretense, upheld by Obama, that the ever-growing US war operations in Africa are aimed at enabling mutually beneficial economic development. The shape which US-Africa business relations will take under Trump was highlighted in mid-March, when the White House declined to give exemptions from its travel ban to some 100 African business leaders seeking to enter the United States to attend the 2017 African Global Economic and Development Summit.

By contrast, more than 50 African military officials will meet with leaders of AFRICOM at the US military commands headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany in April.

Expressing his enthusiasm at the opportunity to cultivate collaborators among Africa's national elite, US AFRICOM Commander General Thomas D. Waldhauser gushed: "We're very interested in listening to our African partners, what some of their concerns are, what they would like from AFRICOM...We're very, very excited about that."

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a country which has been the site of some of the worst crimes of imperialism against the African continent, has emerged at the center of the Trump administration's counterrevolutionary social and economic agenda for Africa.

In February, the Trump administration struck down minimal restrictions on the collaboration of American corporations with mercenaries in Congo's war-torn eastern provinces. The leaking of the executive order on the "conflict mineral rule," the only substantive Africa policy document to so far emerge from the White House, has the appearance of a calculated political signal. It sends an unmistakable message of "open season" to American corporations, and to their militarist collaborators on the continent. The order also signals the US government's commitment to the violent breakup, if necessary, of Congo's government and the all-out looting of its natural wealth.

The post-Soviet history of the Congo expresses all the essential features of American foreign policy as it has

developed during the past 25 years. Over the past quarter century, Washington has smashed apart the political and social order of much of the semi-colonial and colonial world, breaking up the very political order that underpinned US world rule since 1945 on behalf of short-term economic aims sought by dominant sections of US capital. In Congo, just as in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan, the US government has toppled governments and established new forms of colonial-style rule, administered by stooge governments, mercenaries, extremists and warlords, backed up by US air support, Special Forces “advisers,” and CIA paramilitaries.

Congo, believed to have the most valuable natural resources deposits of any country worldwide, has borne the worst of Washington’s predations. During the 1990s, while bourgeois ideologists celebrated the “End of History,” the American state orchestrated a proxy war that led to the deaths of some 5.5 million Congolese.

Militias, recruited from Uganda and Rwanda and trained by American commandos, were striking deals with American firms even prior to launching the Second Congo War in 1998. Relations became so close that one mercenary commander was loaned the private Lear jet of a US mining firm.

The “rebel” mercenary forces empowered by the US proxy war have remained in direct control of the minerals ever since. Backed by Washington and the US puppet regimes in Rwanda and Uganda, they function as local rentiers, security forces and slave labor contractors on behalf of American capital.

The incessant struggles between the ever-growing number of militias has devastated the civilian population. Over 70 armed groups are presently active in eastern Congo, including fighting groups affiliated with the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces, Burundian National Liberation Forces, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), the March 23 Movement and members of the Rwandan military who organized the brutal genocide in 1994.

Even as the US government stokes wars and corporate plunder across the continent, fueling mass starvation and transforming millions into refugees, the White House has announced billions of dollars’ worth of cuts to famine and disease prevention programs in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Trump administration has proposed to slash the overall US aid budget by one third. Issued in the teeth of historic famine warnings, with 20 million lives threatened between Somalia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen, the cuts are an especially vicious attack against the most oppressed and vulnerable members of society.

Announcing the cuts, Trump vowed to “reduce or end funding for international organizations whose missions do not substantially advance US foreign policy interests.” Any “savings” generated by these cuts will be wiped out several times over by Trump’s commitment of \$54 billion in new military spending.

US foreign aid cuts will fall especially hard on the Congo, whose UN mission is among the leading recipients of US foreign aid worldwide. Rather than financial considerations, the cuts are political measures, aimed at ratcheting up pressure on the government of President Joseph Kabila, under conditions where the Congo is already plunging into ever deeper chaos.

Last week, protests in Kinshasa against the Kabila government led to clashes between demonstrators and state forces. Fighters with the Kamwina Nsapu militia killed and decapitated dozens of Congolese security forces in an ambush in Lulua province. UN investigators have reported discovery of 23 mass graves in eastern Congo this week.

The political purposes of the foreign aid cuts are suggested by the simultaneous demands of the Trump White House for a huge reduction in the UN’s peacekeeping mission in the Congo.

Amid heated rhetorical attacks against the central government by US ambassador Nikki Haley, the UN voted this week to scale down its Congo peacekeeping mission by 20 percent. Haley, who had pressed for a much larger reduction, from 19,000 to 3,000, denounced Kabila’s government in the strongest terms, as “corrupt,” and for “preying on its citizens.”

“The UN is aiding a government that is inflicting predatory behavior against its own people. We should have the decency and common sense to end this,” Haley said on March 29.

Congo’s government served, from 1965 to 1991, as the most important ally of Washington’s anti-Soviet campaigns in Africa. The fact that the American ruling class now demands the total humiliation of the Congo, not long ago a mainstay of the US-postwar order in Africa, is a powerful indicator of the changes that have occurred in the strategic orientation of US imperialism.

In Africa and worldwide, Trump’s policies mark the decisive transformation of Washington into the most destabilizing factor in world politics.



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