

The roots of the social catastrophe in South Sudan

Eddie Haywood
26 July 2017

The catastrophe that has stricken South Sudan, plunging the country into civil war, and in turn brought about a dire refugee crisis, with millions forced to flee the brutal violence, and coinciding with a devastating famine that threatens the lives of millions, has its roots in Washington.

Since South Sudan was officially carved from Sudan by Western imperial strategists in 2011, the nascent country has been wracked with turmoil.

The government in Juba, the country's capital, was cobbled together with the guiding hand of American officials, and its leadership was taken from an assortment of killers and corrupt politicians from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) together with representatives of the wealthy South Sudanese bourgeoisie. The coalition was riven by bitter divisions and rivalries from the outset.

The triumphal proclamations from Western governments of a new era of democracy and peace which would flow from the formation of the world's newest nation have been completely discredited.

In fact, democracy and peace were never under consideration by the imperial strategists in Washington when the concept of an independent South Sudan was concocted. Rather, capitalist imperatives were the true motivation behind such a puppet state.

More than three million people have been internally or externally displaced due to the ongoing brutal civil war that began in 2013 after disputes between rival factions of the government ruptured into open warfare. Some 2 million of the internally displaced reside in squalid conditions in camps located at United Nations administered bases, and more than one million others have fled the country altogether.

The civil war has devastated a substantial portion of the country's infrastructure. Schools, hospitals, and homes have been destroyed, ransacked, and abandoned. The

conflict has taken on an abhorrent ethnic dimension with people targeted for their tribal affiliation. Whole villages have been destroyed, accompanied by mass indiscriminate killings and widespread incidences of rape.

Inflation has skyrocketed in the country, with food prices so high that many cannot afford to eat. Diseases such as cholera are ravaging the population, a consequence of the destruction of sanitary water facilities. The situation for the South Sudanese masses is so drastic that there are predictions of a 50 percent decline in population.

To understand what has brought about such a catastrophe in South Sudan it is necessary to review the history of the imperialist powers' intervention in the African continent's political and social development, beginning with the colonial period on through to independence, and up to the current period.

Sudan was ruled by British colonialism from the 1890s until 1956, when it gained official independence, with the blessing and recognition of Britain and the United States.

During the period of colonialism, the British administration ignored development in southern Sudan and focused solely on the north, opting to develop Khartoum as the center of colonial power. Consequently, a lopsided economic development occurred, in which northern Sudan became the economic and political center of the country.

Western strategists sought to put in place governments allied with Western capitalism which would continue the capitalist operations already in place on the continent unabated. As such, Washington and the former European colonial powers sought to cultivate a tiny layer of wealthy African leaders who would do their bidding including Mobutu Sese-Seko in Zaire, Idi Amin Dada in Uganda, Gabriel Léon M'ba in Gabon, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and the successive military dictatorships in Nigeria.

Mere months after independence, the First Sudanese

Civil War broke out in 1956 after the post-independence Khartoum government backed out of promises to provide southern Sudan a stake in the new government and an increase in investment. With the promised share in the new state revoked the bourgeoisie in southern Sudan revolted. Approximately half a million people were killed in seventeen years of war.

The period after independence was marked by factional conflicts within the ruling class in Khartoum, resulting in a series of bourgeois-nationalist and pan-African dictatorships over the next three decades. Khartoum's government was characterized by shifting alliances; at various periods making alliances with the Soviet Union, China, and the United States, or all three at once.

Military aid from Washington began to flow into Khartoum in 1976, and reached its peak at \$101 million in 1982, supplying Sudan with a vast array of specialized weaponry and equipment. Washington sought to counter the influence of the Soviet Union and neutralize the Soviet-allied regimes of neighboring Ethiopia and Libya.

In 1983, the Second Civil War erupted after President Gaafar Nimeiry, under enormous pressure from the Islamist elements within the regime, imposed Islamic law throughout the country. Nimeiry's decision incited the population of southern Sudan, which is predominately Christian.

US military aid was completely cut off in 1987 after the shooting death of a US Embassy employee in Khartoum the previous year. Khartoum's close relations with unfavorable regimes to the West, including the government of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, strained Sudan-US relations to the breaking point.

At this point, Washington cast their lot with the South Sudanese SPLM and its military wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and funneled massive amounts of "aid," military armaments and otherwise, to the militant separatist organization. The leader of the militant organization, John Garang, who led the SPLA through the course of the second civil war, was educated in the United States.

In 1989, when Omar Al-Bashir came to power in a coup, relations between Sudan and the US soured even further. Al-Bashir was intractable and uncooperative with the aims of Washington in the region, and supported Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in 1990. The Al-Bashir government continued favorable relations with Libya.

The Second Civil War devastated Sudanese society, in particular southern Sudan. The brutal war dragged on relentlessly until 2005, when the groundwork was laid for

the separation and creation of South Sudan six years later. Nearly two million died as a result of the war, including the resulting famine and spread of disease.

The most significant factor under consideration in South Sudan's creation was the aim of counteracting China's significant economic influence on the al-Bashir government in Khartoum. More broadly, Washington's intensified military presence on the continent is aimed at neutralizing and undermining Beijing's significant economic influence and investment in Africa, which Western capitalism sees as an intolerable capitalist rival.

Chinese companies control 75 percent of Sudan's oil and natural gas reserves, and have singlehandedly constructed Sudan's entire oil extraction and refining facilities. Chinese construction firms have also refurbished and built facilities at the Port of Sudan on Sudan's coast for the transportation of oil by ship through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Last August, plans proposed between Beijing and Khartoum called for further billions of dollars of investment in the oil, agriculture, and mining sectors in Sudan. China has invested billions of dollars across the continent over the last decade in mining, oil, agriculture, infrastructure, including an East African railway already in operation in Kenya. Africa is seen by Beijing as a key component of its far-reaching One Belt, One Road economic initiative.

Beijing is perceived by strategists in Washington as an economic interloper, stealing the continent's spoils which belong to the imperialist powers. The nature of Washington's aims in the creation of South Sudan is made clear by the fact that, after the country's secession in 2011, Sudan lost 75 percent of its oil reserves, a loss totaling in the billions of dollars.

American imperialism, embroiled in an intractable economic crisis, seeks to utilize its massive military strength and turn to war, even with nuclear weapons, to offset its economic and political decline on the global stage, a prospect which threatens to plunge Africa and the entire planet into an unspeakable catastrophe.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)