

South Africa's ANC silent after US-led strikes in Nigeria

US-China conflict and the way forward for the working class

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The Christmas Day US missile strikes on Nigeria were a major escalation of US imperialism on the African continent, carried out under the fraudulent banner of “counter-terrorism” against the Islamist armed group ISIS and justified with fabricated claims of a Christian genocide.

The reality on the ground exposes the criminality of the whole operation. In villages such as Jabo in Sokoto State, missile debris landed meters from a primary health centre, terrorising residents in a community with no known ISIS presence and a long history of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians.

While US-led AFRICOM and Nigerian officials insist there were no civilian casualties, they have provided no transparent accounting of targets or victims. US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has said there is “more to come”.

Independent data contradict Washington's claim of a “Christian genocide”, showing that armed violence stems from decades of imperialist-imposed underdevelopment, social collapse, and state repression. Working people of all faiths are the victims, their lives are treated as expendable in US military calculations and by the Nigerian national bourgeoisie.

The invocation of a “Christian genocide” follows a well-worn pattern of imperialist lies covering for economic and geopolitical interests: “weapons of mass destruction” to justify the destruction of Iraq, “protecting civilians” to justify the NATO dismemberment of Libya, the intervention in Syria under the banner of the fight against terrorism. Entire societies have been left in ruins, with tens of millions displaced and more than a million dead.

The same method is now being deployed against Venezuela, where Washington has kidnapped President Nicolás Maduro on fabricated charges of “narco-terrorism”.

Amid this open imperialist criminality, the South African government has remained silent. Led by the African National Congress (ANC), the largest economy in sub-Saharan Africa and a state that routinely postures as a spokesperson for the continent in international forums has refused to issue any condemnation of the strikes on Nigeria.

The struggle for resources and influence in Africa

Since assuming power in 1994, the ANC has sought to balance between US and European imperialism and, over the past decade and a half, the rising influence of China—a policy it describes as “non-alignment”. This is aimed at safeguarding capitalist interests in South Africa.

In 2024, total US goods and services trade with Africa stood at approximately 104.9 billion dollars, while China-Africa trade reached

295.56 billion dollars, nearly three times higher.

This is reflected in South Africa itself, where China has for years been the country's largest bilateral trading partner. Two-way trade was estimated at more than 55 billion dollars in 2024, compared to roughly 20 to 25 billion dollars in US-South Africa trade. Chinese investment in South Africa was estimated at \$13 billion in 2024, compared to around \$7.5 billion in US investment based on the latest available data from 2021.

Africa is also central to the intensifying global struggle over energy and critical minerals vital to advanced manufacturing, defence industries and new technologies. DR Congo produces the majority of the world's mined cobalt, much of which is exported to China for processing. China also leads key refining stages for graphite and rare earths. Chinese lenders extended approximately \$182 billion in loans to African borrowers between 2000 and 2023, largely for energy and transport projects.

South Africa occupies a strategic position in this contest. It produces roughly 70 percent of the world's platinum group metals and is among the leading global producers of manganese and chromium, essential for batteries, steelmaking and military applications. It also functions as a regional logistical, financial and industrial hub, with ports, rail networks and capital markets channeling mineral exports from across Southern Africa.

The ANC's “non-alignment” policy is rapidly breaking down as the US seeks to halt China's expanding influence on the continent, amid its own historic decline. Washington is increasingly concerned that Pretoria is serving as a gateway for Beijing's access to strategic minerals and supply chains, with China having expanded its footprint in South African mining, energy and infrastructure.

US imperialism piles pressure on South Africa

Over the past year, the US has put immense pressure on South Africa to fall into line. Trump has repeatedly accused the ANC of promoting a “white genocide” and provocatively provided 59 white Afrikaners with refugee status, even as his administration stripped refugee protections from people fleeing war.

Economic warfare has followed. Trump imposed two waves of tariffs on South Africa and threatened a third. The first included a 10 percent universal baseline tariff, a 25 percent automotive tariff and a 50 percent steel and aluminium tariff. The second imposed a 30 percent reciprocal tariff on all South African exports, replacing the baseline tariff.

Trump then allowed African Growth and Opportunity Act benefits to expire in September, so that goods that had previously entered the US

market duty free were subjected to standard World Trade Organization rates or the reciprocal tariff.

The US has also imposed \$436 million cuts to HIV-related assistance through USAID and programmes linked to PEPFAR. The cuts, combined with funding withdrawn from the World Health Organisation, have led to the loss of more than 8,000 health worker jobs, the closure of specialised clinics, and a significant decline in services such as viral load testing, seriously undermining HIV treatment in the country with the world's largest population living with HIV.

These measures are having devastating consequences for an economy that has averaged barely 1.3 percent growth a year since 2010. Automaker Nissan is considering the closure of its Rosslyn plant. Ford has announced plans to retrench 474 workers at its Silverton and Struandale facilities. BMW and Mercedes Benz are weighing a shift of production to other markets as their price advantage in the US has been eroded. The steel and aluminium tariff has likely contributed to 4,000 job cuts at ArcelorMittal South Africa this year.

Agriculture has also been hit, with citrus and wine exports facing higher costs and macadamia nuts, largely destined for the US, priced out by competitors such as Australia, which benefits from a free trade agreement.

The situation may deteriorate further as Trump considers a third wave of tariffs tied to South Africa's role in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). Member states are exploring measures to reduce dependence on the dollar by conducting trade in their own currencies. Trump has made clear that any country pursuing such a course will face an additional 10 percent tariff on top of all existing duties.

ANC capitulation, and the pro-capitalist politics of the SACP and EFF

The ANC's silence reflects a fear that condemning the attacks in Nigeria would provoke further retaliation from Washington. The Democratic Alliance (DA), traditionally the most openly pro-US faction of the ruling elite and a key coalition partner of the ANC in the Government of National Unity, has refrained from defending the strikes, aware that ANC silence renders such a statement unnecessary.

In the past, the DA has criticised the ANC for authorising South Africa's participation in joint naval exercises with Russia and China off its coast in November, exercises that were ultimately cancelled, and for deepening military and diplomatic ties with Iran.

The ANC's other coalition partners, the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Freedom Front Plus, have also maintained a calculated silence. The sole exception is the xenophobic Patriotic Alliance, which openly praised Trump for acting "in defence of persecuted Christians", competing with the DA for Washington's favour.

Some splinters and factions of the ANC have condemned the missile strikes but they offer no genuine anti-imperialist alternative.

The South African Communist Party (SACP), a Stalinist party which has served as a faction of the ANC since the 1950s, denounced the attack without condemning ANC's silence, and asserted that the solution to Nigeria's "national security concern... lies in national and African continental political interventions and not imperialists' impositions from the West." It concluded with a call for "diplomatic action by the structures of the African Union to prevent any further damage of Nigeria and undermining of its sovereignty."

Similarly, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a bourgeois black nationalist splinter of the ANC, called for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union to intervene, condemning Nigeria's collaboration with the US.

"The EFF stands firmly with the people of Nigeria, not with imperial forces and not with compliant elites," the party said. "We call on African states, regional bodies such as ECOWAS and the African Union (AU), and progressive movements to recognise this moment as a turning point and intervene in this situation. If Africa does not resist now, it will once again become a battlefield for foreign powers seeking relevance through destruction".

For the political independence of the working class

The SACP and EFF's positions share the common premise that imperialist interventions and violence can be restrained through African pro-imperialist organisations.

In reality, bodies such as the African Union, ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are not neutral. They are instruments of the African bourgeoisie, designed to permit intervention in member states under the guise of peacekeeping and stability. Their function is to police the African masses, suppress social unrest and secure conditions favourable to foreign investment on behalf of imperialism and the local bourgeoisie.

The real content of such appeals can be seen clearly in the intervention by Rwanda's military in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, deployed under a bilateral arrangement with Maputo sanctioned by the SADC.

Presented by Pretoria and Kigali as a military campaign against Islamist militias, the operation has in reality served to secure a \$20 billion liquefied natural gas project led by the French giant TotalEnergies, and the broader involvement of US and international banks in the region's gas reserves, minerals and transport corridors—plus some business contracts for Rwandan companies.

Within this same thoroughly pro-capitalist framework, the EFF is attempting to reorient South Africa's foreign policy to China as an alternative to the US and Europe. Before the strikes on Nigeria, leader Julius Malema praised Beijing as South Africa's largest trading partner for sixteen consecutive years and portrayed Chinese investment as a source of jobs and stability, while denouncing Trump a "modern-day Adolf Hitler".

Looking to China and BRICS as a counterweight to imperialism and alternative to the G7 and NATO is a politically bankrupt perspective. The US will not accept decline peacefully. Washington has responded with continuous wars and interventions across Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa and beyond. Africa has become a central arena in this struggle, as capitalist powers seek to secure resources and strategic positions.

Imperialism and military violence cannot be fought by turning to the African bourgeoisie or the Chinese ruling class, but only through the struggle of the international working class against capitalism and the nation state system which make war inevitable. Workers in South Africa and across the continent must build independent political parties based on socialist internationalism, rejecting all illusions in capitalist states, continental institutions or rival powers. This requires the founding of new sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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