

South Africa’s ANC clings to “non-alignment” after US attack on Venezuela

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The US attack on Venezuela has dragged the world toward open colonial rule. Washington has declared it intends to seize control of Venezuela’s oil resources, block its relations with Russia and China, and reimpose colonial domination not only over Venezuela but across Latin America and beyond.

Its actions are rapidly imploding South Africa’s post-Apartheid foreign policy of “non-alignment” adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) after it came to power in 1994. The strategy seeks to balance relations with the US, Europe, Russia and China, allowing the ANC to appeal to popular hostility to imperialism—particularly the US, which backed the white supremacist apartheid regime—while maintaining foreign investment and patronage to the benefit of an aspiring Black elite tied to the state.

America’s turn to open colonialism has sharply narrowed the ANC’s room for maneuver. A policy of remaining silent in the face of events like Trump’s air strikes in Nigeria, or President Cyril Ramaphosa’s deference to Trump while he repeated fabricated claims of a “white genocide” in South Africa, is becoming untenable.

The ANC felt forced to comment on Venezuela to appease popular opposition to the war crime, as hashtags such as #HandsOffVenezuela surged across social media and even the conservative bureaucratic leaderships of the COSATU, SAFTU, and NUMSA unions—representing millions of workers—were compelled to denounce the invasion.

However, the ANC still waited three days to release an official statement condemning Washington’s acts as “driven by contests over strategic resources, control of markets, and resistance to the independent development paths chosen by sovereign nations of the Global South.”

It further softened the blow by limiting itself to a call on the United Nations and the UN Security Council to act

“swiftly and decisively”—the very institutions that have repeatedly legitimised US-led wars, from Korea (1950–1953) to the Congo crisis of 1961, the Gulf War of 1990–1991, Somalia in the early 1990s, and Libya in 2011.

The ANC hopes in this way to balance concerns for its reputation at home with efforts to maintain relations with the US, after a year of mounting pressure from the White House. This includes aid cuts in the health sector and punitive tariffs which have destroyed thousands of jobs. The measures are compounded by Trump’s bogus narrative of a “white genocide” in South Africa—an allegation Pretoria understands could be weaponized like the “narco-state” claims made of Venezuela.

Such are the fears that the ruling class is now openly discussing the possibility of US intervention in South Africa. ANC Secretary-General Fikile Mbalula, widely viewed as a contender to succeed President Cyril Ramaphosa, told Newzroom Afrika: “America is the world policeman. They can attack Nigeria, they can attack South Africa. Nobody’s safe from a unipolar state like the United States of America”.

The press is full of opinion pieces like “Can what happened to Venezuela happen to South Africa?” (*Times Live*), in which the author argues that Washington may target South Africa because of its position as the “world’s largest producer of platinum”.

Highlighting the contradiction in its policy of “non-alignment”, the ANC government began the year by hosting week-long “Will for Peace” military exercises at South Africa’s main naval base in Simon’s Town with China, Iran and Russia. Wary of Washington’s ire, it sought to downplay the geopolitical implications—describing the operation as an exercise in maritime safety, interoperability and the protection of shipping and economic activity—and even attempted to persuade Iran to participate only as an observer.

Time is clearly running out for this balancing act, however, as US imperialism demands total allegiance and subordination. That fact has provoked a deep crisis within the South African ruling elite, with one faction calling for closer alignment with Washington, and another looking toward China.

The ANC's own partners in the Government of National Unity have openly welcomed Trump's colonial war.

The right-wing Afrikaner Freedom Front Plus (VF Plus), founded by a former apartheid-era general who opposed the dismantling of apartheid and the end of white minority rule, explicitly endorsed US actions "against the illegitimate regime of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela."

The Democratic Alliance (DA), the second-largest party in parliament, condemned a statement by the ANC-run South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), which opposed the US attack. The statement "smack[ed] of hypocrisy and contradiction" because South Africa "failed to take a similar stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine," the DA claimed, signaling its backing for the NATO-proxy war against Russia.

It is the DA which stinks of hypocrisy. Composed of remnants of apartheid-era formations, including the National Party which ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1994, the party's heritage is of wars waged across southern Africa to crush liberation movements and defend white minority rule. Carried out with the backing of US imperialism and in collaboration with Portuguese colonialism, these crimes cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

That the ANC governs in alliance with these political descendants of the very forces that waged war against it, and today openly endorse colonial wars abroad, is a devastating indictment of the degeneration of the bourgeois national liberation movement into an out-and-out party of capitalist rule.

Among the opposition parties, calls are made for the ANC to break with the DA and VF Plus and make a coalition with Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK), the third largest party in the country, centred on an orientation to China.

Businessperson Kananelo Sexwale, best known as the niece of Tokyo Sexwale—a former anti-apartheid activist, ANC leader, and billionaire businessman—said in an opinion piece in *Sunday Times*, "If the republic is to protect itself in an era of open extraction, the ANC must abandon the Government of National Unity and pursue a

clear, programmatic coalition with the MK Party and the Economic Freedom Fighters."

Its purpose would be "restoring policy coherence, advancing unapologetic positions on land, ownership, industrial strategy and foreign alignment, and closing the internal fractures that external powers exploit."

The EFF and MK have opposed the US attack on Venezuela—MK a year after it pathetically congratulated Trump's inauguration as "a pivotal opportunity for global politics to embrace justice, fairness, and respect for national sovereignty".

Both are orientated to China, South Africa's largest trading partner. Last month, EFF leader Julius Malema, appealed to the ANC: "We are saying to you, trade with China. Let's work with China. [...] We have been saying to you, go to China. [...] So what is it that you [President Ramaphosa] are scared of EFF to be in the GNU (Government of National Unity), is it because it is going to push you to go to China?"

Events in Venezuela deliver a stark warning of the potential consequences of such a policy. Caracas did not break with capitalism or threaten the imperialist order but merely sought room to manoeuvre by deepening ties with Washington's rivals. For this it has been subjected to open colonial subjugation.

There is no peaceful "multipolar" path available to global capitalism, in which oppressed countries can find a same middle ground. Intensifying competition between the imperialist ruling classes, and the ruling capitalist class in China, is waged at the expense of South African and all workers.

In opposition to all these parties of the affluent middle class and factions of the South African ruling elite, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) appeals to the only force capable of preventing a repeat of Venezuela and putting an end to the conditions that lead to war: the international working class.

Workers in South Africa and across the continent must build independent political parties based on socialist internationalism, rejecting all illusions in capitalist states, imperialist institutions like the UN, or capitalist powers like China and Russia. This requires the founding of new sections of the ICFI across Africa.



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