

**IT IS CONTINUOUS: IMPERIALISM IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AFRICA:
LIBYA IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Chinedu N. Mbalisi, Ph.D

Department of History and International Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: cn.mbalisi@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The struggle for wealth and natural resources is not new in the history of Africa. From the days of Alexander in Macedonia in the 4th century B.C., the looting of African knowledge and resources of any sort has been continuous. The vulnerability of Africa to the whims and caprices of the ceaseless invasions by the European imperialists is not unconnected to the continued Scientific and Industrial Revolution and expansionism. The invention of sophisticated weapons of mass destruction, helped to ensure the subjection of the weaker nations under the monitored influence of the stronger military European nations. The invention of technologically advanced weapons of mass destruction, the atomic bombs, the precision bombers, the unmanned drones and the inexhaustible list of many others, accounts for increased new militarized imperialism. This paper argues that the existing gap in the knowledge of science and technology puts Africa and indeed all the developing nations in a grossly disadvantaged position. The matter is further worsened by the inability of Africa to close this knowledge gap and evolve a strong indigenous defensive mechanism. The absence of strong Black Brigade of the European type and nuclear war-heads is responsible for the ever increasing militarization of European imperialism against Africa. It submits that what Africa needs most is strong leadership that will invest in raising human resources for improved indigenous scientific knowledge and a strong Organization of African Black Power (OABP). Strong leadership and army are desiderata to Africa's protection and political/economic development. Failure to invest in the development of such institutions, militarized imperialism would be a continuum. This paper adopts descriptive analysis of data which are presented in time perspective.

Keywords: Imperialism, Twenty-First-Century, Africa, Libya

Introduction

Africa and other developing countries of the world derogatively referred to as the '**Third World**' countries today seem to be in dismal state of development due to imperialism. The slow pace of development also appears to be getting worse by the day, and hope seems not to be insight. The origin of this bizarre situation dates to the days of Aristotle and Alexander in Macedonia in the 4th century B.C. (Bronowski; 1973: 73). There are several factors that contribute to this vicious circle of African predicament. History gives the insight that all these began with African leaders and their inability to protect their natural resources as exemplified in their failure to avoid the extravagance and ineptitude that characterized African leadership style. Another could be seen in Africa's contact with the outside world - Europeans. One major factor is the Trans-Atlantic slave trade controlled by Europeans. Another is Colonialism born out of European expansionism and search for raw materials and markets for finished goods. The Geographic setting and natural resources endowments also contribute to Africa's being a soft target for Europe. The wide knowledge gap in science and technology between Africa and the West has been a challenge since the era of the Industrial Revolution.

Ogunwezeh (2004:1) writes that, the face of Africa has been so brutally battered by a cross-pollination of fatally unfriendly, man-made forces, that she is today lying prostrate aground and marooned in the sand-banks of underdevelopment.

Achebe (1975:79) contends that, Africa has been the most insulted continent in the world. Africa's claim to humanity has been questioned at various times, their persons abused, their intelligence insulted. No part of the continent of Africa has been spared in this dehumanizing assault. In a similar vein, Emmanuel Franklyne (2004:151) expresses the view that,

Sub-Saharan Africa from the fringes of the Sahara desert in the North, down to the Cape of Good Hope in the furthest South, and from the Island of No Return in the West Atlantic to Somalia in the Horn of Africa, in the furthest East; has remained a long sad tale of woes ever since. Nowhere is poverty, ignorance and disease most clearly evident in concentrated and more consolidated and more pervasive dimensions, than in Africa south of the Sahara.

Chinweizu, (1978: xv) did not mince words about the precarious situation of Africa when he stated in concrete rhetorical question thus,

The hard realities of the Black condition kept insisting that I ask: Where did our poverty, our material backwardness, our cultural inferiority complexes begin and why? And why do they persist in spite of political independence?

These questions posed by Chinweizu many years ago, have indeed not improved nor fared any better. Rather, the state of underdevelopment in Africa has assumed a more disturbing posture. The persistent and solution resistant position imposed on Africa through Western imperialism is taking a sophisticated posture. The randy nature of capitalist wealth acquisition by the more scientifically and technologically advanced Europe tutored by the United States of America (USA) since the end of the Cold War and in Africa is, indeed mind troubling. To achieve this purpose, the imperialists adopt any favourable Machiavellian or Leswellian means of who gets what, when and how; and the survival of the fittest approach in imposing their systems and exploitative activities all over Africa. In fact, the political and economic activities of the imperialists espouse the principle of "all man for himself, God for us all, whoever that is slow, may the devil take him". These views highlight the rules of disaster capitalism, which govern imperialism.

In the 21st century, the capitalist West and their cronies have adopted different strategies in pursuing their imperialist interests in Africa. At best, imperialism has become militarized as seen in the recent happenings in Africa and other developing countries. This paper explores the various means adopted by the West in the continued imposition of their hegemony over African states. The activities of these imperial western states account to some reasonable extent, for the precarious situation Africa finds itself, despite the huge presence of natural, material and human resources. This is further helped by bad leadership on the part of African leaders. The truism that Africa is endowed with all the resources that make for greatness, human, ecological and mineral is not in doubt. Mismanagement by Africa's leaders has contributed in wasting these resources. These resources are indeed enormous. Asad Ismi (2000) explains that,

The continent of Africa harbours over 40 percent of the world's potential hydroelectric power supply, the bulk of the world's diamonds and chromium, 30 percent of uranium in the non-communist world; 50 percent of the world's gold; 90 percent of its known petroleum reserves; 12 percent of its natural gas; 3 percent of its iron ore, 64 percent of the world's manganese, 13 percent of its copper, vast bauxite, nickel and lead resources, and millions of acres of untilled farm lands, cannot legitimately and rationally claim or feign to be poor.

Africa appears to be the only continent blessed with such abundance and diversity of natural and mineral resources. Unfortunately, the continent is regarded in the most derogatory description not only as a 'Third World', but as the poorest on planet earth. The questions considered relevant which this paper seeks to provide answers to are; why has Africa remained so poor and underdeveloped with all her natural endowments in an age of globalisation? Is the West led by the US, truly making peace in Africa or creating crisis situation as a means to their continued exploitation of Africa's resources?

Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives on Imperialism:

Different views are expounded on the concept of imperialism. It is often perceived from two worlds apart, usually, the developed and the underdeveloped worlds, or the advantaged and the disadvantaged. This dialectics of advantage versus disadvantage and development versus underdevelopment constitutes the bones and sinews of imperialism. Imperialism refers to the relations of domination and exploitation between states or group of states (Ayodeji, Adebayo & Kehinde, and 2003: 305). Usually, the relations involve two states or two groups of states at different levels of economic and political development, namely the more developed and powerful on the one hand, for instance, Britain or Western Europe and the less developed and weak on the other, for instance, Nigeria or West Africa. The disparity that exist between the two states or groups enables the developed and powerful partner or partners to lord it over the less developed and weak partner or partners, control and dictate the terms, evolution and development of the relations. Through this control, the developed and powerful partners exploit the resources of the less developed and weak partners. Logically, the result is development for the more developed and powerful partner, and gross underdevelopment for the less developed and weak partner. Some Africanist scholars led by Claude Ake (1983) concludes that, there is, therefore,

A dialectical relationship of development at one end and underdevelopment paid for at the opposite end.

This dialectics of development and underdevelopment is in essence the real imperialism. The relations of imperialist domination and exploitation gave rise to the unending struggle by the subordinate people for liberation and self-determination. The concept emphasizes the disparity and unending struggle between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds apart. The continuous conflict situation is as a result of the unequal distribution of natural, material and human resources endowment which accounts for the struggle between the haves and the have not. The study aligns itself with the development theory of the unending struggle for control of natural resources in human society. This has created room for the continued struggle for domination by the developed and powerful nations on one hand and the struggle for resistance by the underdeveloped and weak nations on the other hand.

Foundations and Motives of Western Imperialism in Africa

There is raging debate among scholars on the motives of European imperialism in Africa. Two schools of thought can be identified, namely, strategic economic and non-economic schools. Some scholars have attributed certain European imperialistic activities and acquisition to strategic economic and non-economic considerations. However, most scholars settle for strategic economic considerations more than non-economic concerns. Hence, the *primus movens* of the scramble for Africa and imperialism are largely economic.

Nkem Onyekpe (2003: 289) writes elaborately on some of these strategic economic considerations which *inter alia*;

- i) Those positioned as good stopping centres for refueling and re-provisioning, for example, the Cape of Good Hope acquired by the Dutch East Indian Company in 1652;
- ii) Those located of the coast and therefore good gateways into the hinterland, as in the cases of African coastal points where different imperial powers and their mercantile representatives built their forts;
- iii) The banks of rivers which provided the only means of communication, as in the cases of forts on African rivers such as the Niger, Senegal, Gambia, Sherbro, all in West Africa, and the Congo, Zambezi, Luapula, Rovuma and Cuanza, all in central Africa;
- iv) Those acquired on the grounds of military necessity, such as Algiers, Tunis, Morocco and Tripoli; the acquisition of Algiers, Tunis and Morocco by France and Tripoli by Italy was on the grounds that, if they were not acquired at the time they were, some other powers would acquire them as military bases “against us”;
- v) Islands which served multiple purposes-healthy for European settlements, good for agricultural production, advantageous trading posts etc. Africa’s most important Islands which attracted European attention included the Canaries, Madeira, the Cape Verde group, Madagascar, Reunion, Fernanda Po, Sao Tome, St Helena, Zanzibar, Pemba, Mauritius etc. The strategic location and importance of these Islands served the economic interests of the various European imperialists. Hence, strategic considerations and the economics of imperial enterprise are inseparable.

Apart from economic considerations, there were political motives and issues of prestige. Many European powers desirably brought some overseas territories under their orbit and suzerainty for purposes of respect and influence in inter-state relations.

At the end of the nineteenth century, there was an unprecedented imperial drive especially in Africa and South-East Asia. (Onyekpe, 2003: 292) The imperial drive of the period was largely attributed to by factors aimed at securing overseas territories as outlet for European industrial products. There was also the issue of shortage of industrial materials and falling rates of profit, which necessitated for overseas territories for the investment of excess or surplus capital accumulated in Europe. It was this struggle for own territories in the form of colonies over which the owner or conqueror state exercised absolute political control and economic monopoly, that is known in imperial history as the new imperialism. It is in contradistinction to old imperialism or imperialism of free trade which had characterized the age of formal empire. (Hargreaves, 1963:128)

The struggle for territories resulted to conflicting interests among the various European nations. The conflicting interests of the imperial nations were especially manifested over; i) territories endowed with natural resources, and (ii) great inland waterways such as the Niger, the Congo, the Zambezi and the Nile. However, the conflicts of the European territorial interests in Africa were diplomatically resolved at the Berlin West African Conference, November 1884 to February 1885 (Crowe: 1942:208). At the conference convened by the German leader, Otto Von Bismarck, the continent of Africa was partitioned among the various imperial states of Europe. Each state was granted the right of exclusive ownership of any areas which had come under its "sphere of influence" at the commencement of the conference. The two evidence of the claim in each case where; (i) effective commercial presence in the area and (ii) treaty of protection with the traditional ruling elite of the area (Onyekpe, 297). There were conflicts between the imperial forces and the African elites. These conflicts began much earlier in the nineteenth century, and had continued far beyond the post independence era. As a result, the various African states and people embarked on anti-colonial resistance from 1885 to 1960s (Crowder, 1971: 134). The imperial nations as far as the Berlin Conference was concerned, believed that the emergent African States were their territorial possessions. Hence, they were determined to employ every means possible to assert the ownership of their various African territories. The trend of foreign domination had continued even after independence, in what is described as neo-colonialism.

On neocolonial imperialism Nkrumah, (197, 67) writes that,

It followed the attainment of political independence by the colonies, with indigenous political classes inheriting the responsibility of leadership from the imperial powers. However, the institutional and structural foundations of foreign economic dominations were generally left untouched. Indeed, since political independence, the institutions and structures inherited from the colonial past have continued to serve the purpose of foreign exploitation as in the period of direct administration.

In the neocolonial system of imperialism, the independent African states through the indigenous political class, managed the administration and the economy on behalf of the former colonial powers. By this the former colonial leaders not only controlled the affairs in their former colonies, but also exploited their natural resources. They are largely pursued through Western dominated organizations and institutional framework, such as the Multinational and Transnational Organisations, Corporations, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) etc. They are further backed up by strong military power and weapons galvanized under NATO, and employed to keep African states and other developing countries under perpetual control. The sustenance of this new form of neocolonial imperialism, by the force of arms; nuclear warheads is the new face of militarized imperialism.

Implications of Continuous Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Africa

As noted earlier, the imperialist West seem to have achieved their objective of exploiting their dependencies through systematized mechanisms and clearly thought out policy and institutional instruments. The major focus of the imperialist states in their erstwhile overseas territories is primarily on raw materials. Onyekpe (2003: 307) writes that, the primary or extractive production is the production of materials that are not directly useful or of value except they undergo processing or valorization and transformation into finished products or

consumables. Primary products are not an end in themselves but a means to an end. The main primary products of the Imperial dependencies of the southern hemisphere are agricultural products such as cocoa, cotton, groundnuts, coffee and tobacco, sugar, timber, hides and skins, etc, mineral products such as tin, lead, columbite, uranium, gold, silver, zinc, bauxite, diamond, retile, limestone and petroleum etc. These raw materials had continued to attract the western imperialists to Africa for exploration and exploitation. To achieve their continuous exploitation of these mineral resources, these imperialist have pursued several stringent political and economic policies through institutions that guarantee the enforcement of exploitation at all cost.

Onyekpe (2003:308) observed that, a critical feature of imperial economic policies overseas was the refusal to industrialize their overseas territories and introduced new technologies of production. This was expressed through the promulgation of anti-industrialization legislative enactments and the formulation and execution of monetary and fiscal measures and policies which created artificial strictures and fetters against investment in industrial production. This has continued in the neo imperial era through the multinational corporations and transnational organisations.

The concentration of imperial powers on primary production and the consequent absence of an industrial sector within Africa have serious implications for the continent. In the first place, it meant that the primary production appear to be of no use within the underdeveloped countries. Hence, the raw materials must be exported to the metropolitan areas to feed the plants and factories. Secondly, the absence of industrial plants and factories provides for the primary-producers to serve as open market and dumping grounds for the products of the metropolitan plants and factories. The third implication is that the underdeveloped primary producers are forced to depend on external demands for their primary products, as well as for foreign exchange earnings required for the settlement of all import bills. Thus, the well-being of each of the underdeveloped countries depends on the state of the external market for its primary products. The primary producers by this means have no control over price determination for their products. This weakens their bargaining power as they could not influence prices of their products in the international scene. Their weakness could be attributed basically to the structural subjection to the whims and caprices of the all powerful external buyers. The exploitation of the dependencies through unequal terms of trade, strict economic and political policies and the struggle for dominance between the US and China over Africa's resources, has consigned the dependencies to poverty and underdevelopment. As the militarization of the scramble for Africa's resources continues African states are destroyed by the western imperialists in pursuit of their selfish economic and political interests.

Trends in the Neo- Imperialism

In the continuous imperialism for Africa's resources, the US and Europe are the most active participants, but in this new process the entrance of China changed the dynamics. For instance the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in the Libyan conflict that sent Muammar Gaddafi to his untimely death is a case in point. In the effort by the US and its allies to gain access to Libyan oil, Colonel Gaddafi was demonized as a ruthless tyrant. The Libyan case seem to show that the desire of the West for Africa's resources persists is continuous, a process which has become so pervasive in the twenty first century. The wave of revolution blew across several North African states and the Middle East in 2011.

It all began in Tunisia with the deposition of Ben Ali. Egypt was the next with the ouster of Hosni Mubarak from office. Then Morocco had its turn of sporadic mass protests. The wave of revolution however, turned to Yemen, Saudi Arabia Bahrain and Syria. Ronald Chipaika (2012:43) observed that;

In all these revolutions, the basic objective has been to depose dictatorial regimes and replace them with those that are more open and responsive to basic demands for human rights and political space. Among all these countries, however, Libya was worst was affected. What differentiates Libya and the other affected countries is that the United Nations Security Council(UNSC), overwhelmingly approved a resolution that eventually led to the imposition of a 'no-fly-zone' over Libya, that gave NATO the responsibility to bomb strategic government military installations and arsenals. By passing Resolution (1973) the UNSC gave NATO-deliberately or unwillingly- the right to aid rebels in their fight against Gaddafi under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) façade.

Under the aegis of the UNSC empowered NATO, Libya was utterly devastated and destroyed, politically, socially, economically and infrastructure wise by the NATO forces. Chipaika (2012, 44) stated that,

The real ambitions of NATO were not simply protecting civilians from the savage that Gaddafi was, but to lay their hands on Libya's oil, which they have already done, and to get profitable reconstruction contracts. Implicit in all this supposed benevolence is disaster capitalism spreading its tentacles to Africa's resources.

However, NATO member countries and other profit-driven countries will maintain covert and overt presence in the country in order to gain access to Libyan oil and spill-over benefits. For China, it will also increase its influence to access the spoils; its delayed recognition of the National Transition Council (TNC) authority is a reflection of its refusal to play catch up to Europe and the United States of America (USA) in the scramble for African resources (Akonor, 2011, 45). Faced with these problems the African Union seems to be out of solutions to stop the new phenomenon of the new scramble's militarization. The position of the continental body appear highly tenuous since talking too much against the Western donors from where donor funds come, is analogous to biting the proverbial hand that feeds its. (Chipaika; 2012: 44).

The involvement of Western backed NATO and the manner with which they carried their operations in Libya suggests that the imperialist collaborators had extra motives. In an age where the USA is acting like an international war monger on the loose, mainly with economic and security interests in mind, Libya has become another unfortunate example of a country destroyed for purposes of making profit out of the wreckage and debris of war. An initial example is Iraq where different US corporations have snapped profitable oil and reconstruction contracts.

Klein (2007:313) stated that;

Saddam's removal from power has opened vistas of opportunities for the oil giants, including Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, Shell and BP, all of whom has been laying the groundwork for new deals in Iraq, as well as for Halliburton, which with its move to Dubai, is perfectly positioned to sell

its energy services to all these companies. Already the war itself has been the single most profitable event in Halliburton's history.

The above extract suggests the fact that profit motives drive the new generation of wars in which the USA and its European allies are involved in, especially, in Africa and the Middle East. This indeed portrays Pentagon as a profit seeking organization with high ranking officials like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld involved in most of the companies that profit from these wars and militarized scrambles. Klein (2007, 98) again states that, Dick Cheney is a major shareholder in Halliburton, which is a reputable US energy service contractor.

The fact that Libya is the sixth largest oil reserve in the world and the hesitant nature of Gaddafi in allowing the West access to its oil resources, initiated the profit making war against the country.

Smith (2011) supports this view when he stated thus,

Being the country with the sixth largest oil reserves in the world, Libya become an automatic target for destabilization, especially where there is so much competition for access to Africa's resources between US led Western block and China on the other hand. Libya's historically checkered relationship with the West, worsened by the involvement of the country's secret agents in Lockerbie airplane bombing, and his penchant for nationalization, always pointed to a future of uncertainty, though relations had just began to thaw somehow. It is no surprise hence that at the earliest opportunity, Gaddafi, Undependable as he was, had to be taken out of the way.

The popular uprising against Gaddafi in February 2011 provided the West a perfect opportunity under which they could overthrow Gaddafi's regime and install a client regime that would serve their interests. A report by press TV on 14 June 2011 showed that, in Mid-May 2011, a few weeks after the NATO bombing campaign commenced, leaders of the NTC went to Washington for "diplomatic talks". On June 8, 2011, the first shipment of Libyan oil arrived at the USA (Mkwate Mand Ogbuna, O., 2011). The immediate establishment of oil relations between the two parties is aptly summarized in the followings statement by a delegate at the "Rebuilding Iraq 2' Conference, thus, "the best time to invest is when there is still blood on the ground." (Klein, 2007: 326).

Obviously, to every conscious African and Middle East citizen, the Libyan conflict has a dual character. It reminds Africans that the continuous scramble has become exceedingly militarized. It also shows that those able to make war and win have a profitable urge over their counterparts who spend much of their time defending values. With the militarization of the continued scramble, the Africa Command (AFRICOM) is bound to be very visible in their operations on the continent (Shah, 2011). The military command may well become an instrument for the West to identify countries to be targeted for destabilization or invasion in the disguise of lack of democracy, human right abuse and other related criminal accusation used by the West to enforce the new face of militarized scramble for Africa's resources. The presence of China even makes matters worse.

The militarized scramble is fast becoming a vicious circle, spreading from one country to another, rich in oil and other natural resources in Africa and the Middle East. It is worthy to mention that, Sudan may well be the next in line, for a repeat of the Libya militarized scramble episode. The Sudanese leader, Al Bashir appears to share in common, an inexhaustible list of similarities with Gaddafi. Al Bashir like Gaddafi has a love-hate relationship with the West. Sudan like Libya has fast oil resources, (though now divided into North and South Sudan). Gaddafi was accused of human rights abuses and war crimes, so is Al Bashir etc, (Chipaike: 2012,46)

Apart from oil, there is huge profit to be made from the reconstruction of the ruins of war. Hence, the belief by some authorities that war, has actually become a markedly profit seeking venture. In addition to gaining access to crude oil (the black gold), the western corporations would benefit through reconstruction tenders and the numerous high interest loans granted African countries. In the area of granting loans, China is challenging the hitherto monopoly enjoyed by the West in loans granting to Africa. The trajectory of continuous imperialism for Africa's resources as seen in operation, arguably, has come upon Africa. Its ingredients of political and social instability and economic dependence on the West and China seem to pose a threat to any development efforts by Africa and their Middle East neighbours.

Recommendations

The continuous scramble for Africa's resources and imperialism exposes the inability of African leaders and African Union (AU) to protect the continent's natural resources from the continuous exploitation by the imperialist West. The knowledge gap in science and technology tend to show that Africa appear unprepared to develop the military arsenal to checkmate the excesses of the West on the African soil. This is largely due to bad leadership and corruption by power drunk despots. African leaders should therefore, desist from political activities and acts that guarantee the west, the opportunities of militarily invading the continent at will. The rights of the citizens should be respected and upheld in line with international best practices. The African Union should strive to establish a strong military brigade that would be able to settle conflict between African states. The need for a strong African black power is long overdue. More efforts should be made towards advancing science and technology in each state in Africa to bridge the knowledge gap responsible for the continuous scramble for Africa's resources by military force. The establishment of a Black Force for Africa would minimize undue interference in African affairs by other nations. African states should seek for progressive partners rather than pinch their development tent with exploiters whose interests are for the well-being of their respective countries. If African countries are able to manage their resources by building industries and avoiding all forms of political instability and political dependence, Africa may well be in a better position to harness and manage the rich natural resources of the continent for her own development. Consequently, real independence exemplified in political and economic self sustenance in Africa will reduce and possibly ward off excessive Western imperialism and Chinese unending interest in the continent.

Conclusion

The paper has been able to explore the various factors responsible for Western imperialist incursion into Africa. The rich untapped mineral and human resources in Africa attracted the West since Industrial Revolution. The inability of Africa states to evolve a formidable force to match the economic interest of the imperialists in the continent is responsible for the new

face of militarized scramble for these resources. Political instability and the 'must rule' and 'sit tight' mentality of African leaders and political elite have not helped matters. The knowledge gap in science and technology which rules the world has caused Africa to depend on the technologically advanced for her technological needs. This has given the Western imperialist, the undue advantage over Africa. Hence, the result is the militarization of the scramble for Africa's resources which is the new face of neo-imperialism. Until the science and technology gap is bridged, Africa may witness worst scenarios akin to modern day colonization. The Libyan example and other happenings in the Middle East should awaken Africa's sense of responsibility to protect what nature has thrust upon the continent. The time is ripe for Africa to rise against the upsurge of continued militarized scramble for her natural resources.

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