

# Briefing: The new 'scramble' for Africa



## Background

- The original 'scramble for Africa', at the end of the nineteenth century saw the division of the continent amongst the imperialist powers and precipitated the first imperialist war in 1914, with the re-division of natural resources and economic control at its core.
- The twenty first century scramble for Africa is no less significant and is potentially even more dangerous, due to the increased magnitude of firepower possessed by the imperialist powers and the heightened stakes in the race for the new re-division of Africa.
- In terms of natural resources political and economic control of Africa is a huge prize. The continent has 30% of the world's mineral reserves, crucial components in the manufacture of electronic goods and armaments. Africa also has 8% of the world's natural gas and 12% of the world's oil. In a period where energy costs are soaring and control over energy resources is at a premium, reserves on such a scale are significant.

## Ongoing conflicts

- The continent has continued to experience regional wars, often stoked and supported by the West out of economic and political self-interest. The insurgents in northern Mozambique, for example, have weakened the ability of the state to fully address the challenges confronting the country.
- The continued crisis in Ethiopia is also undermining the integrity and

sovereignty of the

country. The spill-overs into South Sudan and horn of Africa, point to much broader regional instability which could lead to external Western intervention, as has been seen in Libya, resulting in its destruction and partition.

- The roots of the current situation in Sudan have their origins in the neo-colonial grip of trans-national corporations, which exercised control over Sudanese resources and were happy to prop up the corrupt government of Omar Al-Bashir until his popular overthrow in 2019.
- More positively, in Mali, the military coup has seen France and its military expelled. The new government is aiming to unify the country and overcome historic tribal divisions.

## Imperialist intervention and responses

- There is growing evidence that the United States is attempting to increase its hegemony in Africa, with a significant presence of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), with 29 bases across the continent, and military drills, often in cooperation with the EU and NATO. France also continues to have a military presence in about ten countries on the continent.
- The occupation of the Western Sahara by Morocco, effectively with the backing of the United States, continues to be a blight on the movement towards democracy on the continent. The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), led by the Polisario Front, has for decades been engaged in an independence

struggle for the former Spanish colony. SADR is recognised by many African countries but not by Morocco or the West.

- During his presidency Donald Trump took things a step further by approving US recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over the territory claimed by Polisario. In return Morocco resumed diplomatic ties with Israel.
- In April 2022 the House of Representatives in the United States passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, aimed at sanctioning African states if they trade with Russia.
- There is a strong anti-imperialist legacy in many African states, determined to be free of the neo-liberal diktats of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. For example, trade between Africa and China rose to a record high in 2021. The jump was massive: 35% between 2020 and 2021, reaching a total of \$254 billion. China is by far Africa's biggest trade partner.

- The political and economic instability forced upon much of the African continent has resulted in migration being one of the key issues shaping relations between European countries and Africa.
- Large numbers of young African migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean are lost through drowning. Even if they manage to reach the coastline of Europe, they are often subjected to inhumane treatment.

### Priority Demands

- An end to the ongoing intervention of the US and NATO through the increase in military bases and action on the continent.
- Recognition of the right of African nations to choose trade partners without fear of sanctions from the West and restrictions on access to credit through international banks
- An end to the 'hostile environment' approach in the policy of European countries towards migrants from Africa.

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### About Liberation:

Liberation opposes new forms of imperialism, or "neocolonialism" that intervenes and lays waste to the global south, perpetuating economic exploitation, inequality and racism. We work to address the legacies of colonialism. Democracy, human rights, peace and social justice are central to our goals. We reject foreign interventionism and militarism. We support popular sovereignty. We believe international solidarity and co-operation are the means to make a better world. Our main focus is Britain's former colonies and the Anglo-American sphere of influence.

Liberation organises public meetings to raise awareness of current events and stimulate action. We run seminars, webinars and other educational activities. We work with UK parliamentarians to influence UK foreign policy and engage at an international level through the UN Human Rights Council. We publish a quarterly journal, and comment and analysis on relevant matters on our website, giving voice to progressive popular organisations in the Global South.