

The Empire in Famine-Stricken Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen



By Maxim Nikolenko. Back at the end of summer in 2016, the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, marked his first trip to Sub-Saharan Africa in Nigeria. He arrived in the megacity of Lagos, in one of the most affluent parts. Lasting a few days, this short trip was precisely attributed to meeting **“entrepreneurs and learning about the startup ecosystem in Nigeria.”** The corporate press celebrated this event as monumental. Digital economy, business, and programming were on list for discussion. 2 months prior to the trip, Zuckerberg’s so-called **“issues-minded fund”** gestured \$24 million to Andela, a Nigerian software training platform, of course, headquartered in New York. Classifying **Andela** as competitive is not even close. Out of **186.5 million Nigerians**, only **15,000** had submitted application to the program. From them, only **100 or 0.7%** of the total applicants received an approval.

Indeed, this what Herbert Spencer’s social Darwinism looks like.

While the man worth \$62 billion was discovering the **“startup ecosystem”** and felt

inspired by engineers using **“mobile money to build businesses and help their community”**, the reality of a capitalist-minded system and its impact on the Nigerian **“community”** reflects a perfect oxymoron.

Capitalism in Nigeria is run by robber barons. It is neoliberal to the core, with a small contingent of local millionaires, three **‘officially’** recognized **billionaires**, and multinational corporations maintaining control over a dominant share of the country’s gross domestic product. Natural resources are extracted; the government, supportive of the neocolonial scheme, grants **Western corporations** impunity to run the environmentally destructive plundering of oil reserve, devastating livelihoods of entire communities in the process.

New York and London are the spiritual homes for those few Nigerians who benefit from the system. **“Afropreneurs”** are their **answer** for development. In contrast, the vision presented by National Bureau of Statistics is poverty. In Africa’s biggest economy, where the GDP per capita exceeds that of India, almost **61%** of the population makes a living on just \$1 per day. Over **40%** of adults **are illiterate** and **8,290,000** children **are out of school**. Those who do attend school are likely to enroll in **private institutions**. The poorest pupils are forced to pay for gaining basic knowledge, with the public education system resting in virtual ruins.

Apart from the neoliberal economics of extraordinary inequality, there is a constant shadow of war. When Zuckerberg’s **“issues-minded fund”** provided \$24 million to Andela, a starving refugee camp was **discovered** in Borno State, Northeastern Nigeria. It housed **24,000** desperately hungry civilians and **1233** graves of those who already died from illness and malnutrition. They represent a small fraction of the millions displaced and perhaps hundreds of thousands killed amidst the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency. The change-maker Zuckerberg had no interest, or perhaps even knowledge, about the severe humanitarian crisis. Regional oligarchs shared similar attitude. By time Zuckerberg arrived in Africa’s biggest economy, its Northeast was already experiencing **famine**.

65,000 people living in famine-like conditions was the estimate, released back in

September 2016. The situation has only escalated since, yet the official famine has never been declared. A well-established media blackout accompanies this crisis. Occasional articles appear in the press, only to be succeeded by weeks of silence. No one knows how many people have died from hunger.

Another unspoken is American military expansion in the region, formally legitimized by the insurgency of radical medievalists. This increasing military presence in Mali, Niger and Nigeria has hardly anything to do with extremists, and perhaps everything to do with region's vast natural resources. The true intentions are vividly portrayed in Niger, where Washington, with approval from President Obama, allocated \$100 million on the construction and maintenance of a **drone base in Agadez**. Formally, the base was justified as a staging point in the fight against regional extremists. Informally, the project aims to secure uranium sites in a segment of widening competition with China. Forgotten and desperately deprived, Agadez was chosen for its **geographic** proximity to the uranium mines.

Thus, regional instability is beneficial; **“controlled chaos”** works fine for the Empire and the corporate machine that runs it.

This might answer why the efforts of 5 countries (Nigeria, Chad, Benin, Cameroon and Niger) failed to eliminate Boko Haram. A **“technical”** victory against the group was **declared** by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, back in December 2015. One year and 6 months later, the group still conducts atrocities and bombings across the Northeast and bordering countries.

A combination of reports suggest that CIA and the American embassy in Nigeria played a significant role in **fostering fanatics**. Whether that is true or not, their fellow Islamists, the CIA-fostered Al Qaeda and its branch of the medievalist Daesh, the NATO-empowered Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, have all been contributing support to Boko Haram.

Niger perhaps completes this mosaic of regional instability and collaborating extremists. This is where both Al Qaeda and Boko Haram are operating. This is where

France and the U.S. are partnering in the neocolonial plunder of countries' resources. This is where thousands of migrants from the region are risking death while crossing into the NATO-installed chaos in Libya.

With the situation being as such, there is limited possibility of restoring peace in the neglected Nigerian northeast. At the time of writing, **Al-Masdar News** reported on a successful Al Qaeda raid against the Nigerian troops stationed near the border with Niger.

A technical victory is once again postponed, terrorist attacks persist, humanitarian crises goes unreported, and unspeakable crimes committed by the armed forces who fight Boko Haram remain virtually unchallenged.

Containing China is the policy widely illustrated to those who do not buy into the narrative of the War on Terror. Indeed, China is present in Africa, striking economic deals with countries and providing loans for infrastructure projects. The **Diplomat** declared it **“A Brand-New Type of Neocolonialism.”** The West, in contrast, constructs military bases and pours arms into the arsenals of allied African regimes. Of course, this is not portrayed as a **“brand-new”** or an old type of neocolonialism.

The latest classified documents **published** outline 46 AFRICOM bases and military outposts scattered across 34 African countries. The Armed Forces of these countries are adjusted into the AFRICOM apparatus while allied leaders and elites are encouraged to implement policies of a neoliberal market doctrine.

Beneficiaries of these are expected to apply future development initiatives through the Western schemes, and they will consider the flourishing of Zuckerberg-rich billionaires a healthy indicator of economic progress.

While holding dominance both militarily and economically, the West sees a threat from the growing influence of China and its investments on the African continent. Preventing that influence often means supporting wars – vicious wars.

These days, a tragedy that unfolds in South Sudan perhaps embodies a ground zero of the Western rivalry with China. Unlike northeastern Nigeria and its surroundings, the civil war in South Sudan holds a façade of an ethnic conflict between the Nuer opposition and Dinka-controlled government militias. Oil, however, is the force powering the war engines.

The policy of South Sudanese President Salva Kirr, which allowed Chinese companies access to the country's largest oil fields, was viewed unacceptable in Washington. A **"regime change"** became the goal, with Vice President Riek Machar and his rebel army implementing the coup attempt. Since 2013, the country was engulfed in a civil war. Unspeakable atrocities and ethnic cleansings were committed by both the government-led SPLA and the opposition forces of SPLM. Yet, the U.S.'s pressure is **visibly** aimed against the government of South Sudan, with the United Nations amplifying similar rhetoric. The atrocities committed by rebel armies, and the unhinged existence of 20,000-30,000-strong rebel forces in the first place, remain topics veiled under silence.

Virtually unmentioned is Riek Machar and his legacy of ethnic cleansings. It was his forces who committed the **Bor Massacre** against thousands of Dinka civilians in 1991.

22 years later, Machar was interviewed by an **American crew for VICE** who traveled to South Sudan:

"My President, Salva Kiir, has been corrupted by power. He wanted to create a dictatorship. We want to create a democracy," emphasized the war criminal Machar to a journalist and filmmaker, Robert Young Pelton.

He was later asked, **"Where did you learn your military skills from? Your strategy skills."**

Machar: **"Well, during the liberation struggle I went through First Group."**

Pelton: **“US Special Forces.”**

Machar: **“Yes.”**

Perhaps that’s where he learned the skills of mixing war crimes with democracy.

The **plummeting oil production** and the economic devastation of what already was a desperately marginalized country are the ground results of Machar’s aims to **“create a democracy.”**

Bloomberg **reported** that **“Chinese companies have a 40 percent stake in South Sudan’s largest oil fields”**, with the presence of **“dozens of other Chinese companies”** before the war.

Thus, regional chaos is once again beneficial to the American Empire.

The arms industry also profits from the massacres. International pressure on the South Sudanese government did not prevent a private Canadian company, Streit Group, from selling 173 **armored vehicles** to Salva Kiir’s army. The supply line of arms to the government was **described** in a United Nations report to be flowing from Uganda, a longstanding ally of Washington in regional affairs. The supply line for rebel forces has virtually been out of discussion.

Business as usual reverberates amongst the arrogant indifference. The death toll from the war in South Sudan could be as high as **300,000**. That was reported on **News24** back in March 2016. The World Food Programme reported **40,000** South Sudanese as living in a state of famine back in December 2015. One year and two months later, that figure was updated to **100,000**. A state of famine, according to the **Integrated Food Security Phase Classification**, means acute malnutrition levels exceeding **30%** and over two deaths due to starvation occurring in **10,000** per day. Anyone who wishes can measure the results of this formula on the numbers presented above. Even more striking is the fact that famine is declared only after the situation deteriorates from what the IPC index outlines as stage 4, **Humanitarian**

Emergency. The number of people who fall into this category is measured in hundreds of thousands.

Such details had consistently been ignored in the mainstream press. The war, meanwhile, continues to ravage the country, where even before 2013, an overwhelming majority of people lived in extreme poverty, and **73%** of the population could neither read nor write.

The future of South Sudan, if war persists, can resemble the present reality in Somalia. There, people have seen no peace for over 27 years. In fact, there was time when peace seemed achievable; in 2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC or ICU) took power in Mogadishu, replacing over a decade of lawlessness control by vicious warlords, some of them receiving support from the West. Their brutal maintenance of chaos was supported following a failed Unified Task Force mission, or in practice, the American ground invasion of Somalia back in 1992-93.

The attempt from Somalis to restore order in 2006 was deemed unacceptable. Islamic Courts were a diverse union, with extremist elements of Al Shabaab holding low approval within the population. That changed when Washington's proxies from Ethiopia invaded Somalia to restore the warlords back to power. The War on Terror was the **"smoking gun"** for invasion. Succeeding chaos and famine in 2011, which left 250,000 people dead, was patrolled by U.N-backed African Union **'peacekeepers.'** Another famine is now threatening Somalia, 5 years after the previous tragedy had occurred.

Yet, **our installed** order in Mogadishu even holds a formally established democratic face. The current government under President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed was elected to power with **14,000 voters** representing the voices of **12 million** Somalis. The power of this government practically ends outside the major cities. The Al Shabaab insurgency has never been stronger, while drones, a favorite bird of all the recent American Presidents, continued dropping bombs on the alleged terrorist targets.

Somalis were predestined to this state of perpetual conflict for their country's strategic location in the Horn of Africa. A major global trading route is on their shores, militarized with warships by Western powers and their Gulf allies to curb piracy, as we are told. A sizably small contingent of local pirates who no longer can find sustenance from fishing in the waters polluted by international trade, are not a fundamental threat. Conspicuously, the real **'pirates'** feared are those with Chinese flags.

In fact, oil was discovered recently near Somalia, a grand prize, could be as much as 110 **billion barrels**. Britain has already secured its slice of the pie, a pie first presented in Berlin back in 1884.

Next to Somalia is Yemen. That's where British and American-made bombs are dropped on schools, homes, vital infrastructure, and the alleged terrorists. They are dropped by the Empire's best buddy in the Middle East, the theocratic and autocratic Saudi Arabia.

For more than 27 months, Riyadh has been waging war against the Houthi rebels, the forces known in Western press outlets as **"proxies"** in **"Iran's hybrid warfare."** To combat them, the U.S. helped Saudi Arabia to enforce a grotesque famine-creating naval blockade on 28 million men, women and children, and the U.S. also provides intelligence guidance to the Saudi-led coalition in bombing missions. Of course, this is not reported, even when the coalition campaigns are blamed for gruesome massacres of civilians.

Preventing Iranian weapons from reaching Houthis via **"fishing boats"** was the rhetoric aimed to justify the naval blockade, which also restricts a flow of vital imports such as medicines, equipment for hospitals, and most importantly food. The successes in preventing weapons from reaching Houthis were summed up well in a **Consortium news** article: only **"four interceptions of small fishing boats were made from September 2015 through March 2016."** These boats **"did have illicit weapons, but the crews always said the ship was bound for Somalia."**

This is how the Anglo-American and Saudi propaganda of **“Iran’s hybrid warfare”** appears. It could only match with the statement delivered by the current U.S. Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, **who declared** Iran **“the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world”** – an outright lie. According to WikiLeaks, Hillary Clinton knew about the Saudi and Qatari support for Al Qaeda and ISIS, the Islamists who are causing instability in Western Africa and elsewhere. They are also supporting Boko Haram.

Meanwhile, the actions of Washington and Riyadh resulted in the world’s largest humanitarian disaster, virtually unreported under **‘diplomatic cover’** and ignored with arrogant indifference. The eventual outcome, however, could potentially be worse than a Holocaust of **500,000** Iraqi children, caused by a U.S.-backed embargo on the country in the 1990s.

The conditions experienced by millions of Yemenis are **shocking**. An undeclared famine already consumes thousands of lives. Back in June 2016, an **IPC analysis report** placed **7,000,115** Yemenis under stage 4 Humanitarian Emergency. Again, in a humanitarian emergency **1-2 people** are dying daily within the population of 10,000. The humanitarian situation has not improved; perhaps it has even deteriorated since this report was issued. At the time of writing, the date of report’s release stretches back at least **384 days**. With that in mind, at least **268,804** people could have perished in the crisis, with the assumption that the mortality rate did not exceed **1 person per 10,000**. How many of these men, women and children are direct victims of naval blockade and war? Apart from famine, Yemen also experiences the world’s worst outbreak of cholera. On **Reliefweb**, the latest numbers released are **362,545** suspected cases and **1817** associated deaths. Again, how many of them are direct victims of naval blockade?

These questions were kept in silence when the Trump administration signed a **\$109.7 billion** arms deal with Saudi Arabia. It is doubtful that President Trump had any knowledge of the crisis. Yet the silence was kept, imperial generals applauded, and the stocks of **Lockheed Martin** immediately soared 1%.

These questions were ignored with arrogance when the high court ruled the U.K.'s arms sales to Riyadh **“lawful.”**

These questions, however, are not ignored by the public, with **62% of Brits supporting** the arms ban. They were not ignored when Jeremy Corbyn and his Labor Party scored an unprecedented gain in Parliament.

Perpetual wars and the fundamentalist market laissez-faire doctrine of inequality were not ignored when a recent G20 summit was met with some of the largest demonstrations in years.

The tragedies in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen are the products of a wider global system, sympathetic to the uncontrolled military spending, indifferent to voices of ordinary citizens, laissez-faire to the flow of financial capital which transfers monetary power to the few and misery to the many. There is no conspiracy here. This is just a system.

‘We the People’ can break the silence. **‘We the People’** can change this system.