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## IMPERIALISM AND ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: A STUDY OF SUDAN

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**ABSTRACT:** *This work attempts to examine the connection between imperialism and the socio-economic challenges that have hindered development in post-independence Sudan. With data derived extensively from secondary source materials on the subject, the paper reveals that the Sudanese have been victims of the struggles among contending imperialist powers in the country, which has over the years, resulted in political destabilisation and economic stagnation in the country. The contention of this paper is that while Anglo-Egyptian imperialism, laid the foundation for the present political and economic turmoil experienced in the country, the trend has been sustained in recent times, by China-US rivalry for the control of Sudan's oil industry. The paper further reveals that the recent media propaganda and economic sanctions of the US against the Sudanese government in Khartoum, is not a humanitarian gesture. Rather it is part of US Strategy to force the regime of Omar Al-Bashir to sever economic and diplomatic ties with China, who is a major threat to US economic interest in the country. The paper concludes by stating that unless constitutionalism, the rule of law and true nationalism is promoted in the region, the Sudanese (both North and South) would remain pliant and amenable to the interest and subtle machination of contemporary imperialist powers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Imperialism, Underdevelopment, Africa, Sudan

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### INTRODUCTION

The nexus between European imperialism and economic underdevelopment in Africa has remained a contentious ground among scholars of African history. This has culminated in panoply of views, opinions and theories on the subject. The debate has produced two major schools of thought- the Modernisation school and the Dependency school (Russet et al, 2010). While the modernisation theorists opine that economic underdevelopment in Africa stems from the inability of African leaders to modernise and open up to socio-economic changes in line with western civilisation, the Dependency scholars are quick to point at the devastating consequences of the age long asymmetrical ties between Africa and European imperialists which has conditioned the economies of African states to serve the needs of the western capitalist economies thereby entrenching the dependency syndrome (Russet et al, 2010).

However, the plausibility of the views expressed by the modernisation theorists notwithstanding, it cannot be gainsaid, on the basis of historical evidence and empirical realities, that the economic engagements between Europe and Africa (which dates back to the 15th century) resulted in unfavourable balance of trade for the latter, which manifested in different forms, at different places and at different times given the socio-cultural and economic peculiarities of the various African states and societies.

This paper, thus, sets out to explore the enterprise of European imperialism in Africa, and how it has affected Sudan. The paper, takes a holistic look at Sudan as one geo-political region, not minding the recent political dichotomy. The paper also examines how the economic interest of the major world powers in the region has combined to circumscribe the political and economic progress of the region since attainment of independence.

The paper has been organised and structured thematically with four sub headings. The first looks at Sudan: the land and its people, the second part narrates the events leading up to British occupation of Sudan. Imperialism and economic development in Sudan since independence was examined under the third sub heading while the twin issues of constitutionalism and the rule of law in post -independence Sudan was discussed in the last part of the paper.

### **Sudan: The Land and its People**

The present-day Republic of Sudan was formed in 1956. It inherited its boundaries from Anglo-Egyptian colony established in the region in 1899. It is the largest country in Africa (in terms of land mass), sprawling over one million square miles. It is bordered in the north by Egypt, in the west by Libya and Chad and Ethiopia in the south east. With a population of about thirty eight million people, Sudan has numerous ethnic groups divided into clans and sub-clans. Each group speaks a different language or dialect. In terms of religion, majority of the Sudanese are muslims, but most of the southern peoples follow traditional religious practices and many have converted to Christianity.

Politically, due to protracted civil wars and crisis, the country was split into two when the South gained political independence in 2011. Thus, the geographical region, hitherto known as Sudan is now made up of – the Republic of Sudan (North) with capital at Khartoum, and the Republic of South Sudan with its capital at Juba

### **British Occupation of Sudan**

Sudan like most African states has a long and chequered political history replete with tales of occupation by foreign imperialist powers. First of these imperialist powers to conquer and administer Sudan was Egypt. According to some sources, the political conquest and subsequent colonisation of Sudan by Turko-Egyptian forces in the early 19th century was informed by the need for the Ottoman Empire and Egypt to control trade and commerce along the Nile. Consequently, Sudan remained under the suzerainty of Egypt until 1882 when British colonial administration was imposed on Egypt (Ayandele et al, 1971).

Thus, with the British colonisation of Egypt, Sudan became a veritable target for British imperialist conquest. British imperialist enterprise in the region met with fierce resistance from the Sudanese who were already groaning under the weight of their Turko-Egyptian overlords who had earlier occupied the territory. The greatest opposition to this new form of imperialism was offered by the Mhadists- an Islamic separatist group at the time, under the leadership of Mohammed Ahmad, fighting to rid Sudan of all imperialist powers and to establish Islam in the region (British in Sudan, 2014). With the defeat of the Mhadists by the Anglo-Egyptian forces, Sudan came under the British Empire and was to be administered through an Anglo-Egyptian condominium. Thus, on January 19th 1899, Britain and Egypt signed an agreement to control Sudan jointly.

As Birt and Lusigna (2014) noted, the condominium agreement merely gave Britain the power to officially colonise Sudan as Egypt was already a British Protectorate. The Anglo-Egyptian condominium was a very significant event in the history of the country. It created the platform, for the first time, for the unification of northern Sudan and the kingdoms and chiefdoms of the south, under one administration (Birt and Lusigna, 2014). However, as most Sudanese historians have observed, this lopsided unity foisted on the disparate peoples of Sudan, by Anglo-Egyptian imperialists, laid the foundation of the ethno-political strife that has vitiated all efforts aimed at national integration in post-independence Sudan (Watson, 2014). In his analysis of British colonial administration in Sudan, Pandhe (2010) noted that the administrative policies of the British deepened the gulf between the North and South. He observed that while the British invested heavily in socio-economic and infrastructural development in the North, it left the south undeveloped. He went further to disclose that while the British allowed Islam and Arabic as the official religion and language of the North, it allowed Christianity and English in the South. The administration also prohibited the operations of Christian missionaries in the North. Consequently, while the North was predominantly Muslims, the south was made up of Christians and animists.

Similarly, in addition to the “divide and rule policy” the British officially introduced the indirect rule system in the south. According to some sources, the rationale underlying the adoption of this system in the south was to ensure the exclusion of the elite from the administrative process. Thus, government was retained in the hands of traditional chiefs and leaders who were less educated. This resulted in the fragmentation of the southern region into numerous chiefdoms and kingdoms with retarded development (Teny-Dhurgon, 2014).

The implication of the above scenario was that the British colonialists prepared and equipped Northern Sudan to become a modern state with a very developed capital at Khartoum while the south was neglected and excluded from the British developmental plan. Thus, British colonial administration systematically prepared the stage for the North to dominate the south. On 1st January, 1956, Britain by way of granting political independence to Sudan, handed the entire country (both North and South) over to the political elites from the North. It is pertinent to note that, while the political conferences that culminated in political independence for the country was going on, the south was not significantly involved. Thus unification of the entire Sudan (in the name of political independence) under the leadership of the North was considered an act of political sabotage by southern leaders. According to Teny-Dhurgon (2014), independence for Sudan meant nothing for South Sudan but a change of masters as the North Sudanese took over the colonial state. Teny-Dhurgon further observed that the political leaders from the North failed to pursue policies that would have consolidated national unity and political stability, hence the gradual descent of the Sudanese state into an unprecedented orgy of political, constitutional, economic and military crises. The above state of affairs culminated in two protracted civil wars - 1955 to 1972 and 1983 to 2005, coups and counter coups, and the proliferation of ethno-political militia groups.

It is not the purpose of this paper to provide a historical account/narration of these conflicts, but to examine the implication of these crises on the socio-economic development of Sudan against

the backdrop of the conflicting interests of major world powers, which has continued to exacerbate political tensions in the country.

### **Imperialism and Economic Underdevelopment in Sudan: A Critical Analysis**

In addition to the large expanse of arable land Sudan has a large deposit of important minerals and natural resources such as iron ore, copper, chromium ore, zinc, and tungsten, uranium, silver and gold. Consequently, the country has played host to numerous imperialist powers whose nefarious interest and enterprise in the region has left the country economically desolate and crippled with life expectancy as low as 49 years (Pandhe, 2000).

British imperialism is the most significant of all the imperialist interest in the region. As noted earlier, the administrative policies of the British colonialists created a deep gulf between the North and South. The ideological, political and economic differences engendered by the British between the North and south degenerated into two protracted civil wars. These wars, took an unimaginable toll of human, financial and natural resources resulting in one of the worst humanitarian crises in human history. As Pandhe (2000:3) observed

*The long fratricidal war ended in 1972 but again erupted in 1983 due to the policy pursued by the imperialist's powers who supplied arms to both the sides. According to an estimate, more than 4 million people were displaced in the civil war in Sudan while more than two million people lost their life in the long drawn civil wars.*

Similarly, the discovery of oil in large deposit in Sudan, by an American oil giant - Chevron, added a new twist to the imperialist struggles in Sudan. In a bid to control the proceeds from the country's oil industry, the central government, under the leadership of Nimeiri attempted to change the border of the federal state. This was a clear violation of the 1972 peace agreement which ended the civil war and turned Sudan into a federal state. This attempt by Nimeiri led government re-ignites the civil war in 1980 and this time it lasted for 25 years (Birt and Lusigna, 2014). Some sources have alleged, regarding the Sudanese wars, that the ethnical situation which has been made explosive by the media is not completely true. According to them, the war was about equitable distribution of the oil wealth among the regional bourgeoisies whose socio-political awareness was increasing (Hassan, 2014).

The imbroglio over Sudan's oil wealth was complicated by the involvement of the major world powers who were struggling to control the wealth and economy of the region. In 2011, Amnesty international accused China, Russia and the USA of fuelling conflicts in the region. It condemned the countries for providing weapons and military training to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA). While the USA provided support for the SPLA, Russia and China provided support for the Sudanese government (Ostroumova, 2014).

According to Mohammed Hassan, the entrance of China in the economy of Sudan, added a new dimension to the imperialist struggles by world powers to possess the country over Sudan. As he pointed out, Chevron and other US oil companies left Sudan as a result of political instability and the emergence of a pro-Islamic government (under Omar Al-Bashir) whose policies were anti-west. Consequently, with the exit of US oil companies, China became the

greatest oil buyer in Sudan. The quantum of Chinese investment in Sudan became a source of worry and concern to the US and other western powers who felt that their economic interest in the region nay Africa might be threatened by Chinese expansionism. Thus, in a bid to reduce Chinese influence, the west led by the US, began a systematic plot to destabilize the government of Omar Al-Bashir. As Hassan (2014) puts it,

*They (the west) seek to destabilize the regime (of Omar Al-Bashir), therefore they apply the colonialism golden rule “divide and rule”. During the second civilian war, the United States was financially supporting the Sudanese people’s Army liberation - a rebellious movement of southern Sudan. As this movement had money and weapons and as the government had modernized its army with benefits from oil, the conflict lasted more than twenty years. It finally ended in 2005.*

The implication of the above scenario is that post independence Sudan has been a theatre where major world imperialist powers have flexed their military, diplomatic and economic powers to the detriment of the socio-economic development and political stability of Sudan. Similarly, in a bid to mount pressure on the Sudanese government, probably to discourage its dealings with China and Russia, the United States of America, has over the years imposed economic and financial sanctions with devastating consequences on the economy of Sudan.

The Clinton administration imposed sanctions against Sudan which bars any financial dealing with Sudan or Institutions owned by the government of Sudan. According to US regulations on Sudan sanctions (as quoted in Pandhe, 2000:3):

*...all property and interest in property of the government of Sudan that are in the United States, that come within United States, or that are or come within the possession or control of US persons, including their overseas branches are to be blocked.*

The impact of these sanctions on the Sudanese political economy is better imagined than experienced. The economic hardship that resulted from these sanctions was so intense that poverty, hunger and starvation exacerbated the humanitarian crisis associated with civil war. A. M. Hassan Sayed, one time president of the Sudanese banks, vividly described the situation when he wrote: “Sudanese banks are suffering from endless US regulations on dollar transaction; we are going through extreme difficulties, every day the umbrella of US sanctions and pertaining regulations keep expanding” (as quoted in Pandhe, 2000:3).

This plethora of sanctions on the Sudanese government, no doubt, has constituted the greatest albatross to economic growth and development in Sudan. To a detached observer, there is a great tendency to acclaim US sanctions and demonize the ruling elite in Sudan. This is especially against the backdrop of the US media propaganda and diplomacy aimed at attracting the world’s attention to the atrocities and crimes perpetrated against humanity in the Sudanese civil war, by the incumbent regime in Sudan in conjunction with their Chinese / Russian allies. However, the morality of US activities against the Sudanese government notwithstanding, it is also pertinent not to lose sight of the imperialistic motives underlying US humanitarian stance on the situation in Sudan. If not, how could one explain the US financial and technical aid to

southern Sudanese rebel movements? Or why did the US and her western allies support the independence of south Sudan? These and many more points to the fact that beyond the US humanitarian concerns in Sudan lies a deep ulterior motive which is to become the sole economic/diplomatic power in Sudan.

Furthermore, China feels threatened by the US political and diplomatic antics over the Sudanese issue. China's position in Sudan has been consolidated over the years by Sudan's domestic instability and international isolation (Shichor, 1969). Consequently, Beijing has sponsored the Sudanese government to continue its onslaught against the rebels and never to yield to international pressure coming mostly from the US and her allies. The lingering political crisis would offered Beijing the opportunity to invest in Sudan as much and as fast as possible so as to gain a solid long-term foothold and fend off potential rivals (Shichor, 1969).

### **Constitutionalism, Rule of Law and Ideological Question in Sudan**

Like most post independence African state, Sudan has been grappling with the tripartite issues of Constitutionalism, Rule of law and National Ideology as part of the horrible legacies of colonialism. The absence of these political ideals, have continued to fan the ambers of political dissension in the country since independence.

Constitutionalism as a political concept presupposes that the constitution of a state is supreme to every other thing. In other words, all political office holders and public servants derive their powers/ authority from the constitution. The constitution stipulates the various arms and levels of government and the limits of their powers. This implies that a country can actually have a constitution (written or unwritten) without experiencing constitutionalism (Mangu, ...:5). This has been the case in Sudan, which has over the years, been trapped in an intractable crises of constitutionalism and the rule of law. Right from the dawn of political independence, the country has witnessed massive violation, abuse and suspension of the constitution by despots who pursue their personal agenda at the expense of national interest.

The first attempt at tampering with the constitution was at the inception of political independence when the central government in Khartoum controlled by Muslim Arabs, attempted to abrogate the federal system with a view to dominating their southern compatriots. This was the basis of the first civil war (1955-1972). This trend has remained recurrent in the chequered history of the country, as each military junta abused and disrespected the constitution in various ways.

Worthy of mention is the case of Gaafar Niemeri who in 1983, as head of state, attempted to incorporate Islamic penal code into the constitution, as part of the systematic *islamisation* of the entire Sudan, an ambition vigorously pursued by the Muslim-Arabs of the north. This policy is also being pursued by the regime of Omar Al-Bashir, under whom the sharia law has become widely implemented, with cases of abuse of the rule of law, constitutionalism and human right. This, no doubt, has exacerbated the spate of political instability and economic stagnation in the country (Pandhe, 2000).

Similarly, with respect to a national ideology, the country has been divided along political and religious lines. This ideological chasm has been a major obstacle to national integration and

nation building efforts since independence. The ideological conflict has been between the North, which is predominantly Arab and Muslims, and the South, predominantly Black and Christians. While the North struggles to dominate the entire country with their Islamic orientation, the south has continued to resist. This state of affairs has been the major reason why the crisis in post independence Sudan has remained intractable defying every political and diplomatic solution. Little respite came with the attainment of political independence by South Sudan in 2011.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, effort has been made to x-ray the enterprise of European imperialism in Africa using Sudan as a case study. From the analysis and facts presented in the work, it is incontrovertible that the imperialistic interest of the British, laid the foundation of the socio-political and economic woes of post independence Sudan.

The divide and rule policy adopted by the British colonial administrators, created a deep gulf between the North and South of the country. This eventually, crystalised into a protracted political, religious and ideological conflict, which has made Sudan the spot for the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Similarly, the paper reveals that the entrance of China into the economy of Sudan in the last three decades, has added a new twist to the challenges experienced by the Sudanese. The imperialistic rivalry between the United State of America and China over the oil industry of Sudan has continued to worsen and elongate the civil war in the country. The media propaganda of the US, as well as her economic and diplomatic sanctions against Sudanese government in Khartoum, in respect of the human right abuses, killings and atrocities committed against humanity, by pro government forces, is not purely borne out of genuine concern for humanity and the rights of innocent Sudanese. However, as evidenced in the work, it is only part of US stratagem to mount political and diplomatic pressure on Khartoum to review its relationship with China whom the US considers an obstacle to her economic interest in Africa nay Sudan.

On the other hand, China who supplies the Sudanese government in Khartoum, with every economic and military aid, is only doing so to gain a strong foothold in the regions, economy particularly in the country's oil industry. As long as the Sudanese government remains isolated from the western countries, it would depend on Chinese support for survival, which will give China an upper hand in the country's economy. Thus, the situation created by the foregoing, has contributed in no small measure to deepening the political and security challenges of Sudan over the years. This is the foundation of the economic underdevelopment of the country

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