

Kenya: post-election violence continues

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At least 700 people have died in the three weeks of violence that have followed the disputed election that returned President Mwai Kibaki to power in Kenya. It is estimated that a quarter of a million people have been displaced from their homes.

The deaths are the result of intertribal violence and the police opening fire with live rounds on unarmed demonstrators. News footage has shown police chasing youths through the alleyways of Nairobi slums and shooting them in cold blood.

There is mounting evidence that both the intertribal killings and the police repression of working class districts were prepared in advance of the election. The paramilitary police were re-equipped and strengthened prior to the election as though the government were preparing for a post-election clampdown.

Violence against the Kikuyu, which is the largest tribe in Kenya, has been particularly intense in the Rift Valley where some of the country's richest farmland lies. "Some people were even threatened before the election," according to Cornelius Korir, the Catholic bishop of Eldoret, the provincial capital. "They were told that when Raila wins, you have to go back to where you came from."

Raila Odinga campaigned on a slogan of *majimboism*, which means federalism in Swahili, and pledged to tackle inequality. This has encouraged his supporters in the Rift Valley to drive out Kikuyu farmers and seize their land.

Odinga denies that he has encouraged ethnic cleansing, but leaflets have come to light calling for ethnic killings. Tribal elders are known to have organised meetings to discuss attacks on their Kikuyu neighbours. Immediately the election result was known, the killings began in many separate areas of the country.

Initially, the rural areas were inaccessible to the press. A picture has now emerged of systematic ethnic cleansing. Its purpose seems to be to both to seize land and to create homogeneous areas that can be relied upon to provide a vote for the opposition in any rerun of the election.

Ethnic violence is not new in Kenya. It was a feature of the first multiparty elections in 1992. President Arap Moi used communal rivalries to hold on to power. But this time, the very existence of Kenya as a cohesive national entity is threatened.

Quentin Peel of the *Financial Times* has openly questioned whether the army can remain intact against a background of such intertribal hostilities. There are rumours that Ugandan troops are already moving into Kenya. While President Yoweri Museveni has denied the rumours, the mere fact that foreign intervention is being discussed gives an indication of the seriousness of the situation.

The Kenyan economy is losing US\$80 million a day as businesses close and tourists desert the beaches and safari lodges.

Tourism earned US\$941 million in 2007. Up to 250,000 people work in the industry, and many of them face the sack as the crisis continues. Kenya was regarded as one of the success stories of sub-Saharan Africa, with an economy growing at up to 6 percent a year. It had recently opened up to foreign investment to an extent unknown in the past.

Nor is the impact limited to Kenya. Ripples are extending into all the neighbouring countries. Kenya is the economic hub for the whole of East and Central Africa. The port of Mombasa serves all the surrounding countries. It remains at a standstill. Road and rail transport has become precarious after crowds looted trains and trucks. Uganda is running short of fuel.

The long-term implications of a political breakdown in Kenya are incalculable. Kenya has a vital strategic value to the West. It is the base for US intelligence operations in East Africa and especially the Horn of Africa. Kenyan intelligence services cooperated closely with the US in detaining those fleeing from Somalia after the Ethiopian invasion in December 2006.

For the former colonial power Britain, Kenya retains a strategic value. British troops are trained there, and, like the US, the UK uses the country as an intelligence base. The UK has always maintained close relations with the political elite in Kenya, and the country is one of the largest recipients of British aid in Africa.

That close relationship is coming under strain. Last week, both US Ambassador Michael Ranneberger and the British High Commissioner Adam Wood were called in for a dressing down by the Kenyan authorities. Neither Britain nor the US has formally recognised the re-election of Kibaki.

If these two powers fear that they are losing control of Kenya, they may well back a Ugandan intervention. Under Museveni, Uganda has shown itself to be a reliable ally of the US. It was the only African country apart from Ethiopia to send troops into Somalia in support of the US-backed transitional government.

Both Britain and the US have been taken aback by the sudden disintegration of Kenya. It is a country that is essential to both their interests in Africa and beyond. Not only is it key to their struggle to retain their hold on the Horn of Africa, but it is also essential that Kenya be stable if US and British companies are to make a profit out of the vast resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The newly discovered oil reserves of Lake Albert in Eastern Congo are to be brought to the coast at Mombasa through a pipeline that will have to run right across the country. Congo has long been known for its mineral reserves. Now, it is also set to become one of the main suppliers of palm oil, which has taken on a renewed importance because of the demand for bio-fuels. The Kenyan election crisis has thrown an entirely unexpected spanner

into the works for all these plans.

Yet, it is in the final analysis the policies of Britain and America that have produced this crisis. Britain promoted the Kikuyu while it was the colonial power. It handed over political power to the Kikuyu elite, who have held it ever since independence. British settlers forced indigenous people off their land or on to poorer land, creating the land hunger that has now found expression in ethnic cleansing in the Rift Valley.

America has perpetuated the inequalities in Kenyan society by continuing to favour the same political and business elite that British colonialism created. US aid has strengthened the military and paramilitary police that keep Kibaki in power. Successive US administrations and US-dominated international financial institutions have turned a blind eye to rampant corruption that impoverished the mass of the population while the elite lined their pockets.

In the past, the US and the UK have been able to use the threat of the withdrawal of aid to control the situation in Kenya to some degree. They are now reluctant to use this weapon because they know that Kenya can turn to China, India or even Russia. Only last week, Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun held a workshop with Kenyan diplomats and academics in which he expressed China's intention of developing its relations with Kenya. China is currently involved in major highway projects in Kenya. Hence, the humiliating spectacle of US and UK representatives being publicly rebuked by the government of a semi-colonial country.

Kofi Annan, former United Nations secretary general, arrived in Kenya on Tuesday at the head of a team of eminent Africans organised by the African Union. The delegation includes Graca Machel, former first lady of Mozambique and wife of former South African President Mandela, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and President Benjamin Nkapa of Tanzania.

They will attempt to negotiate a settlement between Kibaki and the opposition. The prospects of success are not high. Previous attempts at mediation by John Kufuor of the African Union and Archbishop Desmond Tutu have failed.

The inability of the Kenyan elite and the African political class as a whole to resolve the Kenyan post-election crisis reveals the complete bankruptcy of the pan-African nationalist perspective on which all these figures operate. One of the most stable countries in Africa is spiralling into chaos, and African leaders are incapable of halting the disintegration that is taking place before their eyes.

This deepening crisis has already produced a humanitarian emergency. About 7,000 Kenyans have fled into Uganda, where they are sleeping in schools and makeshift camps. Mary Nyawera, a 72-year-old grandmother, told reporters how her four sons were killed. She had made her way to a refugee camp in Uganda with her 22 grandchildren

John Karanja, 76, fled with his 10 now-orphaned grandchildren. Both these elderly people complained of the difficulty of getting milk and other food for the children who could not eat the food provided by the relief agencies.

Hundred of thousands of other displaced people are still in Kenya camping on show grounds or simply living on the roadside. There is the potential for epidemics and malnutrition the longer the

situation continues.

Aid agencies have been able to respond quickly because they stockpile their supplies for other emergencies in Kenya. But the diversion of resources to this new emergency threatens to deprive displaced people in the Horn of Africa and victims of the 2005 East African drought of essential aid.

Although it is rich businessmen like Kibaki and Odinga who are battling for power, it is the poorest Kenyans who are suffering most. Jonathan Miller of Channel 4 News reported on the police action in the Nairobi slum district of Mathare.

"Much has been made of the tribal nature of this civil conflict," Miller commented, "but the two tribes who've gone to war here are—the haves and the have-nots; it's the poor who are dying."

In Kibera, another Nairobi slum, residents stopped a train loaded with grain. The *New York Times* reported a local barber, Joseph Owira, saying, "The people are scared. There is no food."

Kibaki and Odinga have whipped up communal tensions because neither of them has any perspective for the mass of the Kenyan population who are condemned to live in slums like Kibera. The economic growth of recent years has not improved conditions for the majority of Kenyans. It has only made the elite rich. Those like Odinga who have been excluded from the richest pickings think it is their turn to share in that wealth.

The opposition has made ethnic Kikuyus the scapegoat for the poverty that most Kenyans, whatever their tribal background, endure. As a result, ordinary Kikuyus who have never benefited from the privileges of their fellow tribesmen among the elite have been targeted.

Kibaki has, like Moi before him, turned to the hated paramilitary police who are operating on a shoot-to-kill policy. They are hunting down youths in the slums and executing them in front of journalists, so confident are they that they will not be held to account.

It is this social conflict—between all factions of the rich, who are vying with each other for the privilege of being the local representative of giant corporations for whom Kenya is the gateway to Africa's riches, and the rest of the population—that is the driving force in the present crisis.



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