

Kenyan president moves to slash wages, continue war in Somalia

Thomas Gaist
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Uhuru Kenyatta was inaugurated as Kenya's president on April 9, after winning 50.07 percent of the vote to defeat Raila Odinga. He ran as the leader of the National Alliance party, launched in May 2012, trying to cultivate an image as a reformer and "visionary" Pan-Africanist leader.

Three months after the election, the anti-working class character of his program and his close ties to the imperialist powers and their war in neighboring Somalia are transparently obvious.

Kenyatta has announced that he will cut public wage costs from 12 percent to 7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in a society with 40 percent overall unemployment and 75 percent youth unemployment.

He has claimed that high wage costs are depleting money necessary for large-scale development projects, in a likely reference to the planned Lamu Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor. This plan aims to facilitate the extraction of oil and mineral resources from nearby Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Workers in Kenya face mass unemployment and staggering economic inequality. "The unemployment crisis is a ticking bomb. Over 60 percent of the population is under 25. You cannot ignore that," noted Yusuf Hassan, a Member of Parliament. "A huge and significant population is restless. And the gap between the rich and poor is getting wider."

Kenya is also a key base of US military operations in East Africa, hosting CIA and US Special Forces personnel. Kenyatta has signaled that he will continue Kenya's US-sponsored war in Somalia, ostensibly a crucial front in the "Global War on Terror."

Speaking at the Summit of Heads of State on April 28, held in Arusha, Tanzania, Kenyatta asserted that every effort must be made in the fight against

"terrorism," according to him the primary cause of regional instability: "Kenya has acted so decisively to combat the scourge of terrorism and restore peace to our neighbor in Somalia. We must continue to combat collectively the threat of terrorism in our region."

Since 2011, Kenya has sent thousands of troops to fight in Somalia, supposedly to defeat the terrorist threat posed by Somalia's Al-Shabaab militia, which is targeted by Washington. These operations aim to shore up the US-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) puppet regime in Somalia, which currently controls the capital, Mogadishu.

The Kenyan invasion was backed by US drone strikes on targets inside Somalia. Both the drone strikes and the Kenyan intervention in Somalia are continuing.

"Just getting rid of the Al-Shabaab would have been simple, but the new challenges like stabilising Jubaland, handing over the region to a new leadership, have made it impossible to tell when we are ever going to leave Somalia," said a Kenyan officer, speaking anonymously. "The truth is we are not leaving this place any time in the near future if events on the ground remain this way."

Kenya's military intervention in Somalia is only the latest US-sponsored war in the strategically critical Horn of Africa. Washington briefly mounted a direct military intervention in 1993 in Somalia. In 2006 the Bush administration green-lighted a full-scale Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, aiming to defeat the Islamist Al-Shabaab militia and the United Islamic Courts, who emerged as the main opponents to the US-backed government.

This month, Kenyatta was invited to meet with British Prime Minister David Cameron in London for a counter-terrorism conference, focusing on the situation in Somalia.

Kenyatta has been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for fomenting inter-communal violence after the presidential election of 2007 between Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki, which Kibaki won. Before the 2013 election, the US and Britain publicly threatened Kenyatta with punitive measures, should he win the presidency. They have backed away from these threats, however, in the wake of conciliatory moves by the new administration.

The 2007 violence was the worst Kenya had seen in decades. Over 1,000 were killed and 600,000 displaced by systematic ethnic killings, in a conflict between rival factions of Kenya's ruling elite.

By aligning himself with the major imperialist powers, Kenyatta appears to have succeeded in evading the ICC case against him, which dominated coverage of the Kenyan election campaign in the Western media.

Analysts are now suggesting that the ICC case against Kenyatta will not go forward at all. On April 5th, three out of 12 prosecution witnesses chose not to testify against Kenyatta. The prosecutor claimed that at least one of the witnesses withdrew over "concerns about retaliation against his family from the accused persons."

While celebrating a "golden jubilee" at an African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa, African leaders passed a resolution urging the ICC to drop charges against Kenyatta and transfer them to Kenyan jurisdiction. Kenyatta commented: "I must say I'm glad that the AU is pulling together and getting common positions."

On May 1, Kenyatta announced that his government will strengthen ties with the UK, especially on security and infrastructure. The administration released a statement on Wednesday saying that Kenyatta announced his desire for a closer relationship with the UK during a visit from British High Commissioner to Kenya Christian Turner.

Turner pledged substantial support for Kenyatta, including a large influx of British investment and the establishment of Nairobi as the "East African capital of financial services." During the months leading up to the election, Turner had insisted that the UK would cut off all but "essential contacts" with the regime should Kenyatta come to power.

Kenyatta's family has a long history of collaboration with imperialism. Kenyatta is the son of long-time head

of state Jomo Kenyatta, and was ranked by *Forbes* as Kenya's richest man. He inherited a fortune based on landed estates, Kenya's largest dairy company, five-star hotels, and substantial holdings in banking, insurance and exclusive schools.

The close relationship between the Kenyatta family and US and British imperialism emerged out of Britain's bloody suppression of the 1952-1960 anti-colonial Mau Mau uprising against British rule. During these eight years, the country was placed under a "state of emergency." London and its local stooges used concentration camps and systematic torture to crush the uprising; hundreds of thousands of people suspected of Mau Mau ties were held in concentration camps, where they faced regular beatings, torture and starvation.

While the official death toll from the insurrection was 12,000, other sources say that many times this amount were killed. The Kenya Human Rights Commission claims that 90,000 Kenyans were executed, tortured or maimed during the crackdown.

Jomo Kenyatta was himself jailed for much of the 1950s as an alleged Mau Mau supporter, but the British authorities concluded that he would be a reliable defender of imperialist interests and that his years in prison would provide useful anti-colonial credentials.

Kenyatta ruled Kenya from independence in 1963 until 1977. After coming to power he positioned himself as a bitter opponent of the Mau Mau and of the anti-colonial struggle. In an April 1963 speech, he declared: "We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again."



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