

Kerry visits Somalia as US prepares expanded intervention in East Africa

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US Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to Somalia's capital of Mogadishu for discussions with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and other officials Tuesday. The visit, celebrated in the corporate media as the first ever to Somalia by the highest-ranking US diplomatic official, was conducted entirely within the blast walls and barbed wire that ring Mogadishu's airport.

During his three-hour stay in the country, Kerry met with Somali leaders inside a small building surrounded by walls of sandbags. Discussions centered on the expansion of Somalia's fledgling police-military apparatus and its incorporation into the US-led militarization of the region being carried out in the name of fighting "terrorism," as well as on upcoming Somali elections, which experts suggest will be carefully managed by Washington.

In brief public remarks during the visit, Kerry signaled that the US is escalating its economic, political and military intervention in Somalia. "The US is prepared to do whatever we can to get you the prosperity and the security you deserve," Kerry said.

"More than 20 years ago the United States was forced to pull back from your country," Kerry said. "Now we are returning in collaboration with the international community."

"The next time I come, we have to be able to just walk downtown," Kerry joked, just moments after promising that Somalia can now look forward to a "bright future."

In contradiction to Kerry's assertion that the US "pulled back" from Somalia 20 years ago, US imperialism has continually intervened in Somali politics during the past two decades, sponsoring invasion forces and proxy occupation armies in an effort to maintain its grip over the desperately poor country, while raining down a steady stream of missiles and bombs.

In July 2006, faced with the collapse of the US-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG), installed in power in 2004 by Washington and Nairobi, the US

sponsored an Ethiopian-led invasion against the Islamist Islamic Courts Union (ICU).

After the Ethiopian-led ground force retook the capital, the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) was established to defend a re-established TFG, whose actual zone of control has not extended far beyond portions of Mogadishu. TFG President Mohamud boasted to Kerry Tuesday that small traffic jams have begun forming in parts of the capital city during the past year, illustrating a return to somewhat normal conditions.

AMISOM has continued to occupy the country since the US-backed 2006 invasion, serving as the backbone of the TFG rump state. AMISOM, which is headquartered inside the same Mogadishu airport where Kerry's entire visit was staged, is nominally under the command of the African Union, and includes soldiers from the militaries of Burundi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, and Djibouti.

The multinational occupation force has received some \$500 million from the US since 2007, and benefits from close collaboration with the US, including air support provided by US warplanes and drones.

Statements to the press by an unnamed US State Department official strongly suggest that Kerry's visit was bound up with preparations for a new US-orchestrated reorganization of the TFG regime, to be carried out through some type of stage-managed "democratic transition" process.

During the upcoming 2016 Somali elections, the US government will help implement "some form of election or selection, different from what they've done before," a US State Department official told *Middle East Eye*.

As underscored by the content of Kerry's previous stop in Kenya, US intervention in Somalia is part of a regional agenda aimed at militarizing East Africa and building US imperialism's political and military ties to the region, under conditions of growing Chinese economic influence.

On Monday, Kerry announced a \$100 million package

for Kenya's security and "counter-terrorism" forces during a visit to Nairobi. The announcement came as Kerry met with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta to discuss his government's involvement in the AMISOM occupation and other US operations in the Horn of Africa. Kerry appealed to the Kenyan public to "be patient with their government's troop presence in Somalia."

Less than one year ago, when it remained unclear whether the newly elected Kenyatta would favor a strategic tilt toward the US or to its strategic rival in Beijing, the Obama administration and the International Criminal Court (ICC) brandished the threat of prosecution against the Kenyan president for his involvement in mass killings that erupted after the country's 2007-2008 elections.

Since taking power, Kenyatta's government has proven its counter-terror credentials and readiness to terrorize opposition by ordering security forces to carry out round-ups against ethnic Somalis. The Kenyatta government has launched attacks against Somali NGOs and civil society organizations, and frozen money transfers by Somali immigrant workers, all in the name of fighting Somali-based extremist groups.

Having demonstrated its commitment to the struggle against "terrorism," Kenyatta is now being openly courted as an A-list regional partner of US imperialism. Kerry's visit was arranged to signal "the importance of Kenya to the US's counterterrorism strategy in Africa," according to sources cited by the *Wall Street Journal*.

With the dismissal of ICC charges against Kenyatta last December, the US government now considers Kenyatta's government to be "a bulwark of stability in a restive East African region," according to the *Journal*.

Kerry also announced \$45 million for Kenya's efforts to manage a growing refugee crisis Monday, funds which will supposedly be used to avert the looming closure of the largest refugee camp in the world, Kenya's Dadaab facility, where some 350,000 Somali refugees are housed.

The recent attack on Garissa University by alleged al Shabaab gunmen has been seized on by Kenyatta's government to accelerate its turn to mass repression and police-state measures. In the wake of the April 2 attack, Kenya's Deputy President William Ruto proposed to evict some 500,000 Somali refugees from Kenyan emergency facilities, plans which included the complete closure of Dadaab.

Many children and teenagers have spent their entire lives inside the Dadaab camp, established in the early 1990s as Somali refugees fled the collapse of the US-

backed Siad Barre dictatorship. Dadaab's sudden closure by the Kenyan government would force hundreds of thousands to attempt a desperate return to their war-ravaged homelands.

Washington has devoted increasing attention to East Africa as the region has taken on greater strategic value under conditions of the global power struggle by US imperialism against China. Heavy Chinese investment has taken place in regional economic projects such as the Northern Transport Corridor, which links East Africa port facilities with Chinese economic projects, including substantial oil ventures, in Central and West Africa.

The new transport infrastructure will enable Chinese firms to transport raw materials and commodities from Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, and the eastern portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to Indian Ocean ports such as Tanzania's Bagamoyo, where Beijing has recently authorized plans for an \$11 billion deepwater port facility.

In tandem with the similar \$46 billion Chinese transport development project announced during President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan last week, growing Chinese commercial dominance in East Africa enable Beijing to develop reliable commercial routes connecting to Africa via the Indian Ocean, where US forces are relatively less concentrated as a result of the "pivot to Asia."

As the Center for International Maritime Security recently noted, China is increasingly turning to its "geographic back door" in response to US preparations to impose a naval blockade aimed at strangling the flow of essential resources to Chinese ports.

Kerry will also visit Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti later this week. The military camp is the largest US outpost on the continent, and coordinates US operations and drone wars in the Arabian Peninsula and Horn of Africa.



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