The Gambia president refuses to accept election result

Eddie Haywood
13 December 2016

After initially conceding defeat to Adama Barrow after the December 1 presidential election, incumbent President Yahya Jammeh announced on Friday that he rejects the results of the poll, citing "serious abnormalities" which he claims occurred during the election.

"After a thorough investigation, I have decided to reject the outcome of the recent election. I lament serious and unacceptable abnormalities which have reportedly transpired during the electoral process," Jammeh announced on state TV. He did not elaborate on what the "serious abnormalities" were, except to claim that the election held on December 1 was "influenced by foreigners."

Jammeh called for new elections, saying, "I recommend fresh and transparent elections which will be officiated by a God-fearing and independent electoral commission."

The veracity of Jammeh's claims cannot be assessed, as the results of the "thorough investigation" have not been released. No evidence exists of the claim of foreign influence in the election.

The inquiry cited by Jammeh was initiated by the official Independent Election Commission (IEC) of The Gambia, which is beholden to Jammeh's ruling government. Late Saturday, Jammeh said he would be preparing a legal challenge to the result of the December 1 vote before the Gambian Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court in a statement said that it would decline to hear the challenge due to a lack of seated judges.

Various international critics over the weekend sharply condemned Jammeh on the news of his decision to challenge the poll.

The United Nations Security Council denounced Jammeh's about-face, and demanded that he hand over power to President-elect Barrow. In a unanimous statement of the 15-member panel, it called on Jammeh to respect the choice of the Gambian people.

The Obama administration via the US State Department condemned Jammeh's reversal, declaring it "a reprehensible and unacceptable breach of faith with the people of The Gambia and an egregious attempt to undermine a credible election process and remain in power illegitimately." It further stated, "We call upon President Jammeh, who accepted the election results on December 2, to carry out an orderly transition of power to President-elect Barrow in accordance with the Gambian Constitution."

After Jammeh made his announcement rejecting the election result, troops were deployed in the streets of the capital city Banjul, and were reported to be setting up sandbags, as if in preparation for a siege.

This prompted the US embassy in Banjul to issue a statement, urging the Gambian army to show "respect for the rule of law and the outcome of the presidential election", adding, "The Gambian people have made a clear choice for change and a new start."

Washington's condemnations are entirely hypocritical and make a mockery of its appeals for Jammeh to adhere to democratic norms, considering Washington's recent history of launching a war with its NATO allies in Libya in 2011 utilizing Al-Qaeda-linked forces to remove and murder Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

There is also Washington's ongoing support of Islamist militias in Syria to foment regime change in order to place a more pliant government in Damascus. The result of these two imperialist excursions have left both countries virtual wastelands, with tens of thousands maimed and killed, and have resulted in the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

© World Socialist Web Site

The leader of the incoming political coalition behind Barrow, Fatoumata Jallow-Tambajang, has vowed that they are preparing to prosecute individuals in Jammeh's regime, including Jammeh himself, if the election is resolved in Barrow's favor.

There is no doubt that this played a role in Jammeh's sudden about-face. Jammeh and his security apparatus have committed acts of repression, disappearances, torture and murder of political opponents, the victims of which include members of the political party of the incoming Barrow administration. Many of these individuals still remain detained at the Mile 2 prison where at least two of the prisoners have died as a result of torture.

There are clear indications that Jammeh has fallen out of favor with Washington and its Western European partners.

In October, Jammeh made moves to withdraw The Gambia's participation in the International Criminal Court (ICC), and in 2013 rescinded The Gambia's participation in the British Commonwealth of Nations, the organization of former British colonies. The Commonwealth was set up after the formal independence of the colonies in order to maintain the framework of economic exploitation set in place during colonialism.

Jammeh's decision to withdraw The Gambia's participation in the ICC is based on his fear that he and his cronies may be brought forth before it like other autocrats that fell out of favor with Washington, such as Liberia's Charles Taylor.

Washington has scathingly criticized Jammeh for his autocratic form of rule in recent years, hypocritically condemning his government's brutal repression of dissent. In reality, Washington and Britain have grown weary of Jammeh and his unpredictability; such behavior is not good for the business of exploiting The Gambia's economic resources.

The human rights abuses committed by the Jammeh regime are giving Western interests a public relations black eye. Since 2014, the European Union has withdrawn millions of dollars in aid to The Gambia. In the same year, Washington booted The Gambia from its African Growth and Opportunity Act, a program aimed at expanding trade on the continent.

Barrow, on the other hand, has demonstrated his willingness to enter a subservient relationship with Washington and its Western European allies, and has stated that he is open to greater economic relations with wealthy international interests, and has promised to restore The Gambia as a member of the Commonwealth.

In response to Jammeh's about-face on the election result, Barrow said, [Jammeh] "is damaging The Gambia's democratic credentials." He went on further: "We are calling on Mr. Jammeh to respect the will of the people and will hold him responsible for anything that happens in this country and its people."

A pall of fear has fell over the Gambian masses with Jammeh's refusal to accept the poll result. Many are expecting a crackdown. In the capital city of Banjul, many shopkeepers closed early on Friday, anticipating unrest. Senegalese fighter jets have been reported flying across the Gambian skies, in what can be interpreted as a warning to Jammeh.

In the event that a new election is called, it will almost certainly result in a Jammeh victory, as the Independent Election Commission is in the back pocket of the ruling government. The IEC arbitrarily decides which parties can run for election, it oversees labyrinthine rules on voter registration and polling locations which result in voter disenfranchisement, and it is the sole monitor and custodian in the country over the counting of the vote. It is certain that Jammeh's security forces will be out in force throughout the country to carry out acts of intimidation and repression of political opponents and voters.

Regardless of whether Jammeh or Barrow takes the reins of power, the exploitation and repression of the Gambian masses will continue unabated. While Barrow is more palatable to Washington and Europe, both men have pledged their undying loyalty to the demand by the tiny wealthy Gambian elite and wealthy international corporate and banking interests that The Gambia is to remain open for capitalist exploitation.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site