

Trump deploys troops to central Africa following disputed Congo election

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In the wake of a hotly contested poll December 30 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Trump administration has deployed a contingent of troops to nearby Gabon, for the purpose of “protecting US assets from possible violent demonstrations” following the election to determine a successor to longtime leader Joseph Kabila. Election results which had been expected to be released Sunday by election officials have been delayed indefinitely due to a delay counting all ballots.

Trump sent a letter to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi Friday informing Congress that he had ordered the indefinite deployment of around 80 troops to Gabon to protect US citizens and embassy officials in the DRC. Trump’s letter noted that the first soldiers arrived in the country on Wednesday with the “appropriate combat equipment and supported by military aircraft.” The letter also stated that more troops could be deployed to Gabon, the Republic of Congo and the DRC “as needed.”

By deploying troops to the region, Washington is making it clear that it intends to install a pliant government in Kinshasa that will ensure that America’s economic interests in the country are secured. Trump’s proclamations of “America First” in foreign policy does not mean a retreat from the intervention in the affairs of other nations or the flowering of peace; rather it means the naked pursuit of American imperialist geopolitics by economic and military means against adversaries and allies alike.

The military operation must also be understood within the framework of America’s imperialist aims in Africa of reasserting America’s geopolitical dominance despite its economic decline relative to its global rivals. To this end, Washington has escalated its military operations in nearly every corner of Africa with the key

aim of neutralizing Beijing’s vast economic influence on the continent.

Washington’s latest military maneuver puts into practice the strategy laid out in a speech delivered last month by Trump’s National Security Adviser John Bolton in which he identified the entire African continent as a field of “great power” competition between the United States and its two main competitors, China and Russia, which have been increasing their investments in many Africa countries. Bolton denounced Beijing and Moscow for “predatory practices” that “threaten the financial independence of African nations; inhibit opportunities for US investment; interfere with US military operations; and pose a significant threat to US national security interests.”

In recent years, Kabila has run afoul of the US and Europe by developing closer economic ties to Beijing, hammering out several economic investment agreements worth billions of dollars, something which the imperialist strategists in Washington regard as intolerable.

Also fueling the western imperialists’ lack of confidence has been the inability of the government to secure the Eastern provinces, long wracked by paramilitary skirmishes, home to the greatest concentration of the country’s immense mineral wealth. According to recent estimates, the DRC has \$24 trillion in untapped raw resources, including cobalt and coltan, two metals that are critical to the growing smartphone and electric vehicle industries.

Last month’s poll in the DRC came after a two-year delay in holding elections to determine the successor of President Joseph Kabila, who postponed elections before his term expired in December 2016, which set off a series of demonstrations and social unrest in the

capital city Kinshasa and across the country.

Kabila, who came to power in 2001, has backed his ruling party's candidate, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary to be his successor. Washington in contrast has favored Shadary's opponent, wealthy businessman Martin Fayulu, a former oil executive educated in the United States and France.

Both Shadary and Fayulu belong to the tiny layer of parasitic elites that make up the Congolese bourgeoisie, hoarding the massive resource wealth of the Congo among themselves and cutting lucrative contracts, while the Congolese masses experience widespread social misery, with the majority existing on little more than \$1 per day.

As the Minister of the Interior and Security under the Kabila government, Shadary was tasked with carrying out the regime's violent repression of demonstrators and political opponents, in particular the recent bloody campaign in Kasai province, in which his forces carried out crimes against humanity, including rape, torture, and numerous indiscriminate killings.

Fayulu was employed by American oil giant Exxon-Mobil from 1984 to 2003, first as an auditor, then promoted to director-general, from which he oversaw the company's operations across the African continent. After resigning from Exxon-Mobil, Fayulu returned to Kinshasa and won a parliament seat in 2006.

The presidential contest comes amid an explosion of political and social tensions rocking the central African nation, with recent protests against the deeply unpopular Kabila government, and ongoing rebel skirmishes in the eastern provinces. Adding to this toxic mix is a renewed outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus in recent weeks.

On the day before the poll, Kabila provoked an eruption of social anger as scores of protesters poured into the streets of Kinshasa and various cities after the president's last-minute decision to arbitrarily bar 1 million people from participating in the poll, on the absurd claim that voters afflicted with Ebola could infect hundreds of people participating in the polls.

On Saturday, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), the official body tasked with counting the vote, announced that the results of the poll will be postponed for another week. As of late Sunday, reports suggested that Fayulu had taken a clear lead in the poll.

International election observers have voiced concerns for the potential of irregularities in the vote tally, along with the fear that by postponing the tally the Kabila government is stalling to provide time to ensure a victory for Shadary. The Catholic church, which wields significant power within the Congo, has warned of a large-scale uprising if the poll appears fraudulent.

In the run-up to the poll on Sunday, the Catholic Church organized and placed 41,000 election observers at polls around the country. The church, in rebutting the government's proclamation of a delay, stated to the media that they had determined a clear winner.

Although the Church did not publicly announce Fayulu by name, according to the *Washington Post* a senior Western official and a presidential adviser stated that the Catholic Church had indeed concluded that Fayulu was the victor.

In an interview Friday presidential adviser Kikaya Bin Karubi condemned the Church's conclusion of the tally, and ominously warned the Church was "breaking constitutional and election laws and are looking to start a popular revolt that they will be responsible for."

Tensions with Washington and Europe reached a crescendo on December 29 when Kabila, facing immense pressures from Western governments to step aside peacefully, defiantly booted the European Union ambassador from the country.

For its part, the EU, under an initiative begun by Washington during the Obama administration, has imposed sanctions and travel bans on several key figures in the Kabila government, including Kabila himself, along with freezing the assets in European banks held by several Kabila officials.

The extreme breakdown and deterioration of relations between Washington and Europe and the Kabila government was made clear when during a media interview in the days before the poll, Kabila was asked what advice he would impart to his successor, to which he answered, "The biggest recommendation is that he listen to the voice of the Congolese and not follow that of the United States, Europe or elsewhere."



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