

Kenyan President Ruto auditions for US and British imperialism

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As the NATO powers escalate against Russia in the Ukraine, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war, and dramatically escalate tensions with China over Taiwan, Kenyan President William Ruto travelled to London and New York.

Ruto's first stop after winning the August presidential election was the UK, to attend the funeral service for Queen Elizabeth in London. Ruto groveled before the late figurehead of British imperialism, stating: "We will miss the cordial ties she enjoyed with Kenya and may her memories continue to inspire us, we join the Commonwealth in mourning and offer our condolences to the Royal Family and the United Kingdom during these difficult moments."

Ruto was silent on British imperialism's brutal role in Kenya. Queen Elizabeth became the monarch in 1952 while visiting Kenya, after her father, King George VI, died. She served as Kenya's head of state as a mass anti-colonial armed revolt broke out from 1952 to 1960, led by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, commonly known as the Mau Mau rebellion.

London's reaction was brutal, claiming an estimated 150,000 Kenyan lives according to historian Caroline Elkins's work *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya*. Her study showed how the UK detained half a million people in camps and fortified villages. Thousands were beaten to death or died from malnutrition, typhoid, tuberculosis or dysentery. Inmates were used as slave labour and subjected to sexual assault. Interrogation under torture was widespread.

The repression was endorsed at the highest levels. The British governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring, regularly intervened to prevent its perpetrators from being brought to justice.

Elkins recently wrote in *Time* magazine: "Beginning with her first prime minister Winston Churchill, the queen's ministers not only knew of systematic British-

directed violence in the empire, they also participated in its crafting, diffusion, and cover-up, which was as routinized as the violence itself. They repeatedly lied to Parliament and the media and, when decolonization was imminent, ordered the widespread removal and burning of incriminating evidence."

Queen Elizabeth returned to Kenya in 1983 and 1991, during the rule of Western-backed dictator President Daniel Arap Moi, Ruto's mentor, as left-wing opponents of the regime were routinely killed and tortured.

After paying his respect to Kenya's former colonial overlord, Ruto travelled to the United States for the 77th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). There, he used his tour to reassure the US ruling establishment that Washington can count on his government as a loyal partner to help it maintain its strategic grip over Eastern and Central Africa, where Washington has launched a long series of interventions, drone strikes and proxy wars.

After meeting US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Ruto tweeted: "We pledged to advance our strategic partnership at both bilateral and multilateral levels. We acknowledge the strong ties between Kenya and the United States and commit to step up cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, food security and stability in the Horn of Africa for the benefit of the people."

Although the details of the meeting have not been revealed, Ruto later promised the 3,500-strong Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) would prolong its decade-long stay in Somalia. He told France24: "those troops will be back home as soon as we've done with the assignment that we have in Somalia."

In recent weeks, the KDF has reportedly worked with the national Somali army, killing hundreds of Al-Shabaab fighters in the Hiiraan, Galgaduud and Bay regions.

Kenya functions a key US proxy against the Al-Shabaab insurgency in Somalia. This strategically located country sits on the Indian Ocean and the entrance to the Red Sea,

through which around \$700 billion in maritime shipping passes every year. This includes nearly all Europe's trade with Asia, including from Washington's rival, China.

Should war with China break out, Washington would seek to use Somalia as a chokepoint to strangle Chinese trade through the Suez Canal with Europe.

Ruto also signed onto a Western-backed East Africa "peacekeeping" force to Congo's mineral-rich east. The aim is to stabilise the war-torn region so Western corporations can plunder the minerals in the region—cassiterite, columbite-tantalite, wolframite, beryl, gold, and monazite, among others. Congo's resources are viewed by Washington and its European imperialist allies as key to waging war against Beijing.

Ruto's alignment with Washington against China and Russia were reflected in two high-level meetings with US Senate delegations in little over a month.

On August 18, he met a delegation of anti-China hawks, signaling that Washington wants Nairobi to align itself against Beijing. It included US ambassador to Kenya and Silicon Valley billionaire Meg Whitman; anti-China hawk and Delaware Senator Chris Coons, known as Biden's proxy in the Senate; US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, who has continued Trump's trade war measures against Beijing; and Mary Catherine Phee, the assistant secretary of state for African Affairs.

Phee has pledged to use US embassies across Africa "to confront the Chinese challenge to the international rules-based order."

Last Monday, Ruto met with another US delegation after speaking with Blinken on phone. Blinken thanked Ruto for supporting a UN Security Council resolution denouncing Moscow's referendums in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in Ukraine.

Nairobi is signing up to the US-NATO war against Russia in the Ukraine. Ruto is backtracking from his comments days before to the BBC, pledging to consider purchasing fuel from Russia, thus bypassing US sanctions.

The US delegation was led by Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Inhofe in the past has urged the Biden administration to fast track the Kenya-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA). In a letter last year, he said the FTA was necessary to "help US security interests in the region." Calling Kenya "an important ally in the Horn of Africa," he added: "A US-Kenya FTA would strengthen trade and commercial ties at a time when China and Russia are seeking economic influence across the African

continent."

Kenya's ruling class aims to make the country a manufacturing hub for U.S. companies looking to diversify or relocate out of China, after successive sanctions against Beijing tech companies, provocations in Taiwan and trade war policies. Kenya is the only African country engaged in bilateral trade talks with Washington.

US businessmen, however, are demanding more concessions from Kenya. Tech giants like Google, Facebook and Amazon want Washington to compel Nairobi to abolish the Digital Services Tax as a condition for a new trade deal. The 1.5 per cent tax was introduced last year by the National Treasury.

Ruto has already shown he can be trusted to impose austerity on the workers. In the first weeks of his presidency, his government has eliminated subsidies on the staple unga (maize flour) and fuel, announced new tax hikes on excisable goods and services, and raised mandatory National Social Security Fund contributions.

He has also ordered the National Treasury to cut at least \$2.5 billion from this financial year's \$27.4 billion budget, a savage 10 percent cut. This is just the beginning; Ruto promised that "next year, we will bring it further down so that, by the third year, we have a recurrent budget surplus."

The Kenyan ruling elites' groveling to imperialism and their attacks on the working class at home again expose the incapacity of the capitalist class in former colonial countries to oppose imperialism. An international wave of struggles is emerging in the working class. The way forward for workers and oppressed masses in Kenya is to unify their struggles with this emerging mass movement and develop it as an international struggle against inflation and imperialist war.



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