

Foreign Interference in Kenya's Elections?

Uhuru Kenyatta wins while facing charges by the International Criminal Court

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Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta has won the national presidential elections in the East African nation of Kenya. Kenyatta, the son of the first president of the country, Jomo Kenyatta, has come under fire from International Criminal Court (ICC) as well as the governments of the United States and Britain.

Kenyatta representing The National Alliance Party (TNA) won 50.07 percent of the vote eliminating the need for a run-off vote. His closest rival Raila Odinga, representing the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) and the son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, a leader as well in the Kenyan liberation movement of the 1950s and 1970s, won 43.2 percent of the vote.

Voter turnout was over 86 percent illustrating the high-level of interest in the poll. Odinga rejected the outcome of the election results and is challenging the electoral commission's tallies through the courts.

The atmosphere surrounding the elections in Kenya was relative peaceful. Five years ago in the aftermath of the voting, violence erupted between supporters of the run-off candidates Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki.

During the unrest in December 2007 and January 2008, some 1,200 people lost their lives. An international team of negotiators from the United Nations and the African Union flew into the country and led talks resulting in the formation of a unity government between Kibaki and Odinga.

This time around both leading candidates have pledged to maintain the peace. Odinga, although challenging the outcome, has said that his opposition to the official results will take place in the courts and not in the streets.

The ICC charges against Kenyatta stem from the unrest in the aftermath of the last election. He is accused of financing and organizing attacks on supporters of Raila Odinga.

The tabulation process for the voting was delayed due to problems associated with a new electronic system. The delay in the results fueled some tensions in the country.

Violence five years ago took on an ethnic character since the majority of supporters of Kibaki were Kikuyu and those of Odinga are Luo. In Kisumu, a stronghold of Odinga, where the violence erupted in December 2007, some began to shout "No Raila, No Peace."

Nonetheless, Odinga was quoted as saying "Any violence now could destroy this nation

forever, but it would not serve anyone interests.” However, he did say that the elections were marked by “rampant illegality” and the electoral process had placed “democracy on trial in Kenya.” ((Reuters, March 9)

Implications for Foreign Interference

Although the Kenyan Supreme Court has stated that it will handle any challenges to the elections fairly and swiftly, the U.S. and Britain have both been accused of using the indictments against Kenyatta and the election results as a leverage to intervene in the internal affairs of the country. Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, who was appointed in 2011, said that “We at the Supreme Court are prepared to hear any petition that may be filed impartially, fairly, justly and without fear, ill-will, favor, prejudice or bias and in accordance with our constitution and our laws.” (Reuters, March 11)

Kenyatta and his running mate, William Ruto, are facing charges before the ICC. Both men have denied the allegations and say that they will work to clear their names.

The fact that the electorate in Kenya voted in favor of Kenyatta is an indication of the rejection of the ICC and the western imperialists’ attempts to influence the voting. Kenyatta accused the British government of trying to shape the outcome of the vote by warning that any contact with his administration would be at a distance.

The U.S. and other imperialist states indicated that a victory by Kenyatta would complicate relations even though Kenya has been a close ally of Washington and London in the neo-colonial war being waged in neighboring Somalia. Kenya has over 2,000 troops in Somalia participating with the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) which is largely financed by Washington and coordinated through the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

According to Alex Perry writing in world.time.com, “If the result withstands Odinga’s challenge, a win for Kenyatta would represent the most stunning articulation to date of a renewed mood of self-assertion in Africa. Half a century ago, Africa echoed with the sound of anticolonial liberation. Today, 10 years of dramatic and sustained economic growth and a growing political maturity coinciding with the economic meltdown in the West and political dysfunction in Washington and Europe have granted Africa’s leaders the authority and means to once again challenge intervention on the continent, whether it comes in the form of foreign diplomatic pressure, foreign aid, foreign rights monitors or even foreign correspondents.” (March 9)

Kenyatta said in his victory speech that “Today, we celebrate the triumph of democracy, the triumph of peace, the triumph of nationhood. We expect the international community to respect the sovereignty and democratic will of the people of Kenya. The Africa star is shining brightly and the destiny of Africa is now in our hands.” (March 9)

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson said prior to the Kenyan elections that “choices have consequences.” This was designed to influence the outcome of the vote.

The ICC has been severely criticized in Africa due to the fact that all of its indictments are centered on leaders and political figures targeted by the U.S. and other imperialist states. Kenyatta will be the second head of state facing indictments by the court based in The Hague.

Republic of Sudan President Omar Hassan al-Bashir has been under indictment by the ICC for several years. He, too, has rejected the indictments as a tool utilized by western powers against Sudan.

Most states in Africa and the Middle East have ignored the indictments against President Bashir along with the African Union and the Arab League. Bashir has traveled to numerous African and Arab states for international conferences in defiance of the ICC and the western imperialist states, some of whom, like the U.S., are not party to the Rome Statute which established the ICC.

In an editorial published by the Zimbabwe Sunday Mail entitled “Lessons From Kenya’s Elections,” it states that “All indications point to the fact that this election will have far-reaching implications—not just for relations between Kenya and Western governments but also for relations between Western governments and the rest of the African continent. “ (March 10)

This same article goes on to point out that although Oginga Odinga, Raila’s father, was a true patriot of Kenya and Africa, his son is quite different in regard to his political orientation. Raila Odinga has served as a mouthpiece for U.S. imperialist interests in Africa attacking Zimbabwe and other states targeted by Washington.

The Zimbabwe Sunday Mail observes that Odinga “has come across as a puppet of the West, a man not given to independent thinking. Despite enjoying the support of some Western powers and benefitting from the advantages of incumbency, Raila has once again flattered to deceive.”

Noting the significance of the developments in Kenya, The Sunday Mail stresses that “Uhuru Kenyatta’s victory sends a strong message to the bullies in Washington, London, Paris and Brussels that the people of Africa will no longer be intimidated by racist overlords. In spite of the International Criminal Court charges that dangled above his head like the proverbial sword of Damocles, Uhuru has gone on to win a tough election. It is a huge achievement.”

It will be very interesting to see how the Obama administration proceeds in regard to its relations with Kenya. The country’s strategic location and role within the region will continue to make it a focal point for Washington’s involvement.

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