

US-backed Kenyan forces invade Somalia

By Eddie Haywood
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Kenya sent military forces into Somalia last week, vowing to fight al-Shabaab militants it blamed for a spate of abductions of foreign nationals in recent weeks in northern Kenya, near the Somali border. The operation, involving 1,600 soldiers, is the first foreign intervention carried out by Kenya in its history.

Al-Shabaab spokesman Sheikh Ali Mohamud Rage warned Kenya: “We know fighting more than you and defeated other invaders before... We shall inflict on you the same damage you inflicted on us. You have to see what happened to the other aggressors, like [Ugandan President Yoweri] Museveni and his country when they invaded us. We hit them in their country.”

The intervention by Kenyan military forces was requested and welcomed by the US-backed Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu. Somali government spokesman Abdirahman Omar Osman said: “The governments of Kenya and Somalia are now cooperating in the fight against al Shabaab, which is an enemy of both countries.”

US officials said last week that they have been pressuring Kenya to “do something” in response to a string of security incidents along the Kenya-Somalia border, while at the same time maintaining that the Kenyan invasion into Somalia caught them by surprise.

Claims that the US was surprised by Kenya’s incursion are preposterous. It has CIA listening posts in Kenya and a military base in nearby Djibouti monitoring regional troop movements via satellite.

On October 19—just three days after the advance into Somalia by Kenyan troops—the US launched two aerial drone attacks near Kismayo, an al-Shabaab stronghold located in the coastal area of southern Somalia, and in Musa Haji. According to Iran’s Press TV, some 64 people were reported killed in the twin attacks and many others injured. Numerous sightings of military aircraft have been reported in recent days over southern Somalia. This suggests that the US is providing

coordinated air support for advancing Kenyan forces.

On October 23, the French Navy also reportedly bombarded the town of Kuday, near Kismayo.

The same day, US Ambassador to Kenya Scott Gration said Washington “would go out of its way to help Kenya restore its territorial integrity” and that the US “respected Kenya’s decision to go into Somalia to rout out Al-Shabaab militants.”

The border region of Kenya and Somalia has been wracked by militant violence and criminal activities over the last two decades. The history of al-Shabaab is bound up with the long and sordid history of interventions and proxy wars planned by US imperialism and its allies over the past 20 years.

In the Cold War era Washington supported the dictatorship of Mohamed Siad Barre with arms and money to counter Soviet influence on the continent. The dictatorship was overthrown in 1991 by clan-based forces led by Mohamed Farrah Aidid. Washington invaded Somalia in 1992, though the Clinton administration subsequently pulled US troops out in March of 1994 amid rising US casualties and popular opposition in Somalia to the American intervention.

Washington switched tactics to relying on proxy military forces—initially clan-based Somali warlords hostile to Aidid, and later proxy forces from Ethiopia or other African Union (AU) member nations. The TFG, placed in Mogadishu in 2004 with US blessing, has little popular support in Somalia. The chaos that ensued after the overthrow of the US-backed dictatorship in 1991 has continued up to the present, as the TFG’s attempts to impose its authority by military repression have failed.

The Islamic Courts Union (ICU) developed as a judiciary system and then a fighting force in this political vacuum in Somalia. It was reportedly backed by Eritrea. It challenged the US-backed TFG warlords for power, briefly capturing Mogadishu in street

fighting in 2006.

The US responded by backing an Ethiopian invasion to crush the ICU and return the TFG to power. It also began regularly bombing Somalia and mounting naval operations along the Somali coast.

Al-Shabaab was formed in 2006 as an offshoot of the ICU after the ICU splintered into several smaller groups following its removal from power by Ethiopian invaders.

AMISOM, the African Union's military force sponsored by the US and the UN, took over control of security from Ethiopian forces in 2007. It includes 9,000 troops from Uganda and Burundi. Its operational mandate is to prop up the TFG in Mogadishu by using military force against al-Shabaab and other militant groups.

Kenyan forces now in Somalia augment the AMISOM forces. Kenyan Foreign Affairs Minister Moses Wetangula went to Mogadishu last week as part of a delegation of Kenyan officials to discuss the invasion with his Somali counterparts and AU Commission Chairman Jean Ping. Wetangula told the media: "We also briefed the chairman of the AU on the events occurring on the Kenya-Somalia frontier and he fully appreciated and further voiced AU's full support to Kenya in whatever endeavor we take to defend our territory for the sake of peace and security of our people."

Kenya's incursion into Somalia is part of a broader campaign by the US and other Western powers to reassert their imperialist interests on the continent and counter the rising influence of their global rivals, particularly China. The latter's deepening integration into the global economy has seen its emergence as a major economic power in Africa, heightening concerns in Washington that China could threaten its hegemony on the continent.

In 2008, the Pentagon established its AFRICOM command, reflecting preparations for military intervention in Africa by the US and the NATO powers. These interventions now include the US-led war in Libya, the French-led overthrow of Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo in April, and the recent deployment of US troops to the Central African region. US Special Forces are deploying to the Congo, Uganda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

The imperialist takeover of Libya by the US and its European NATO allies underscores the threat to the toiling masses of Africa. The indiscriminate bombing of Libyan cities and the murder of Muammar Gaddafi send a sinister message to any political force that contemplates defying US imperialism's power grab in Africa.

This imperialist scramble for strategic advantage and key economic resources plays a central role in the current fighting in Somalia.

Somalia—with its more than 1,000-mile coastline overlooking the navigation routes of oil-bearing vessels traversing the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea—is both strategically and economically vital to the world economy. US imperialism aims to dominate this vast waterway, which transports much of the world's oil, particularly Persian Gulf oil headed to European markets. The US not only intervenes in Somalia, but maintains together with France a military base in Djibouti, near the straits connecting the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea.

There are also several recently discovered deposits of oil in nearby countries, including Uganda and South Sudan. An oil pipeline is slated for construction to transport oil to Mombasa, a port on Kenya's Indian Ocean coast. The proposed pipeline would run from a refinery in Kampala, Uganda and meet a projected pipeline coming from newly independent South Sudan to traverse northern Kenya and end in Mombasa.

China's state-owned oil companies are among the investors lining up to exploit both Uganda's and South Sudan's oil deposits.

The planned oil pipeline passes through the unstable regions in northern Kenya where the Kenyan government alleges al Shabaab attacks have occurred.

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