

Obama begins East Africa tour with economic and military talks in Nairobi

By Thomas Gaist
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Barack Obama landed in Kenya's capital of Nairobi on Friday for discussions with President Uhuru Kenyatta, as part of a four-day tour of East Africa that will also see the US president travel to the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Discussions will focus on US-Kenyan cooperation on a range of economic and military issues, according to media reports.

After landing in Nairobi, Obama was greeted by the largest mobilization of security forces in the African country's history, with some 10,000 Kenya security forces deployed throughout the city. The US president rode around the city in a heavily armored, explosion-proof limousine known among Kenyan government officials as the "Beast."

The president's militarized reception stood in stark contrast to the sentimental accounts of the US media, which celebrated the event as a return to "Obama's ancestral homeland." In reality, the US president arrived in Kenya with a mercenary agenda aimed at shoring up US domination over the strategic East African nation.

To the extent that Obama's visit will accomplish a "strengthening and deepening of the US relationship to Africa," as National Security Advisor Susan Rice said on Wednesday, it will mean the deepening of US imperialism's efforts to militarize the entire continent.

Hailing Obama's visit as "a milestone in deepening Kenya-US bilateral relations," Kenyan scholars affiliated with the Democratic Party-tied Brookings Institution think tank called Wednesday for greater US involvement in "counterterrorism" operations in the region.

"Kenya is a strategic partner of the US in the counterterrorism initiatives in East Africa and the Horn of Africa—hence the need to develop more innovative

means of counteracting the emerging security threats," Paul Odhiambo and Manaseh Otieno wrote.

"Security cooperation between Nairobi and Washington has included sharing intelligence information, training Kenyan security personnel in the US, receiving equipment from the US, and other logistical support," the authors note.

Nairobi will seek greater US financial support for its security agencies and will negotiate the terms for Kenya's integration into a US-backed regional security bloc, the Security Governance Initiative (SGI), a framework for US imperialism to deepen its "engagement" with military and police forces in Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Niger and Tunisia established by last year's US-Africa Leadership Summit.

For its part, Kenyatta's government appears enthusiastic about the prospect of "closer relations" with US imperialism, and has vigorously advertised its adherence to the US "Global War on Terrorism" since ascending to power.

Kenyatta has pursued an escalating security crackdown since his election in 2013, imposing a slew of new authoritarian measures in the name of fighting the Somali Islamist militant group "al-Shabaab."

The new government has "clamped down using very broad media, civil society and counter-terror laws to shut down any real political dissent," according to Center for Strategic and International Studies Africa director Jennifer Cooke.

Kenyatta, the son of Jomo Kenyatta, the wealthy bourgeois nationalist leader who ruled Kenya between 1964 and 1978, appears ready to deepen the long tradition of collaboration by Kenyan governments with Western imperialism.

Kenya has proven a loyal partner in Washington's drive to maintain its strategic grip over the Horn of

Africa, which has seen the US launch an endless series of interventions, drones and proxy wars inside of Somalia in the years immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, beginning with the direct occupation of areas outside Mogadishu by US ground forces in 1992.

In 2011, US-backed Kenyan ground forces invaded Somalia as part of “Operation Linda Nchi.” The mission, which has seen thousands of Kenyan ground forces dispatched to Somalia in defense of the US-backed rump government in Mogadishu, marked the first ever foreign intervention by Kenya’s military.

Washington has also tasked Kenya with managing the collateral damage produced by its military machinations in the Horn of Africa. Nairobi now administers what has become the largest refugee camp in the world, at Dadaab, where nearly 500,000 Somalis have been forced to take up residence after fleeing the civil war which continues to rage across the border.

During an interview the day before his trip this week, Obama acknowledged that “there are significant human rights violations taking place,” in Kenya, but added that Washington nonetheless desires to “have a conversation and point them in a better direction.”

Far from being concerned about the brutality of the Kenyatta government, Obama travels to East Africa as the political representative of US financial capital. His aim is to facilitate deals between Nairobi and US economic and security interests in the region, under conditions in which growing Chinese investment in resource extraction, infrastructure, and manufacturing in East and Central Africa is threatening to undermine Washington’s position.

Obama’s visit is part of Washington’s efforts to counter the growth of Chinese commercial relationships in Africa, which are now valued at over \$220 billion, a sum three times larger than that of the US.

Obama implied as much on Wednesday when he accused China of “funneling an awful lot of money into Africa, basically in exchange for raw materials.”

The Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” which aims to encircle China and collapse its government through military pressure and commercial strangulation, requires that Washington increasingly confront Beijing’s economic presence in Africa.

In particular, the US is concerned about the

implications of Chinese involvement in economic development centered around the Lamu Port Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) project.

Beijing is financing the construction of a railway and transportation corridor aimed at linking up Nairobi with Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan, as part of comprehensive plans for Chinese-led commercial development in the region. The transport network will enable Chinese firms to ship resources extracted from the interior across the Indian Ocean via Kenya’s port cities of Mombasa and Lamu.

Together with Chinese-funded commercial infrastructure development in Pakistan, the emergence of East Africa as a major supplier of oil and other key natural resources to the Chinese economy threatens to undermine Washington’s plans for an anti-China naval blockade focused on the South China Sea.

As with every US intervention in Africa, Obama’s latest visit is geared to advance the global hegemonic agenda of the US ruling class, which aims to dominate the entire continent as a stepping stone to control over the Eurasian landmass and the entire globe.

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