

Kenya turmoil heartbreaking, damaging

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

I have been to Kenya three times and each time my love for this land and its people grows stronger and stronger. The lush green highlands and the robust savannahs have no rival. The view of Fern Valley from the mountainsides is absolutely astonishing. One can get "high" from watching a sunset before Mount Kilimanjaro. Millions of animals in their natural habitat replete with the stoic Masai warriors walking amongst the wildlife with no fear at all. The city of Nairobi with its impressive skyline is indeed cosmopolitan. The people have the friendliest and most genuine smiles. They are good folks.

The current state of affairs of this nation cannot be considered a shock to me because I have been watching it brew for sometime. The rioting on television brings back the memory of the Rwanda Horror. Hopefully, it will cease soon, but the possibility is causing me to lose sleep. I have made good friends, and we have great plans for the future. Right now, my main concern is their safety.

Kenya is in its third presidential regime. The first was led by their liberator Jomo Kenyatta. His term was long but necessary as they transitioned from colonialism to revolution to democracy. Arap Moi was an inter-

esting leader as he led by tribal coalition versus the Kikuyu dominance of the Kenyatta regime. The current president is Kibaki, who is Kikuyu but is constantly reminded that the other tribes, especially the Luo, have their place in government and power, as well. Personally, I feel the fault of Kibaki's leadership is not tribal-based but due to downright personal greed. Whenever I note a conflict of interest in commercial matters, there appears to be a direct relative of the president involved. It's not coincidental and, of course, any relative of Kibaki would have to be Kikuyu. One should not get the impression that there is an official tribal conspiracy.

We once spent a lovely evening with a cabinet member enjoying libation while looking out over his personal farm — a palatial estate. He told us that President Kibaki had recently sent a military helicopter over his land to assess its beauty and value. Later, the president informed him that he was considering annexing (eminent domain) his land. I asked, "How did you respond?" He retorted, "I told him if he tried I will personally kill him." Confrontation between a president and a cabinet member can become very serious



HARRY C. ALFORD

hardball. Such disputes and mysterious deaths (often reported by the press) becomes a way of life in Kenyan politics, and it makes us appreciate our style of democracy. Another indicator that something bad was about to happen was the recent elections held by the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We learned that our first contact and good friend, Laban, had won the vote. We later learned that he could not be inaugurated because the incumbent was refusing to relinquish the office; it was going to court and that may take years. Laban is Luo, and his rival is Kikuyu, and the opposing sides were starting to assemble in like fashion.

Such is the case in the current national presidential elections. The Kikuyu's want to tie it up in court, which would give Kibaki years of continued reign. The courts in Kenya move at a snail's pace. Thus, there is conflict in the streets.

In Kenya, one would think the tribal deal was all over by now. Every Kenyan is fluent in three languages: English is taught in the schools; each has his own tribal tongue (37 tribal dialects), and Swahili is the third form

of communication. Swahili is a regional language developed for commercial communication over 1,000 years ago. It is spoken from the Congo, Uganda and Southern Sudan down through Tanzania and Malawi. It is truly a "Lingua Franca."

Basically, the Kenyans are united. They tolerate many religions and honor all cultures. It is this political-power thing that is causing the friction. It doesn't help that the United States and Britain, the colonial oppressor for over a century, have been rather silent on this election issue. The U.S. is always poking its "nose" in foreign elections but, for some reason, Jimmy Carter and others weren't around for this last election.

President Kibaki is letting his lust for money (by way of power) get in the way of the democratic process. I say to him: It is time to go to Switzerland and count all the money you already have. The "party" has come to an end. In the name of Jomo Kenyatta, let freedom ring loud in your great nation. Allow an accurate, transparent and honest vote tally to occur. Kenya is greater than you, and freedom has no patience.

My beloved Kenya, I pray for your safety and peace.

Harry Alford is the co-founder and president/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

Troop surge's impact obscures pointless war

By Bill Fletcher Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The national discussion concerning Iraq has taken some very peculiar turns. Ever since the Bush administration launched its Baghdad "surge" [increased U.S. troop presence in Baghdad in order to crush the Iraqi resistance], the discussion has revolved around whether there should be a surge; whether a surge will succeed and how long it should last. This all misses the point. Whether this surge or any surge succeeds and defeats the Iraqi resistance is actually beside the point. The issue is that the war itself is wrong and has been since it was first launched.

Some people of good will have suggested that the surge, and for that matter continued U.S. military involvement in Iraq, are critical because otherwise Iraq will completely disintegrate. My first response is simple: Have you been watching what has been playing out ever since the U.S. invaded?

My second response is better explained

Clingman

(Continued from Page 8)
has done.

We must "restrain and sustain."

Restrain ourselves from frivolous driving: carpool, walk, scooter or bicycle when and where possible; and stop buying those gas-guzzling behemoths that car manufacturers have convinced us we need to have.

Finally, don't fall for the flowery, "we love the earth," and "we are looking for alternative fuels" advertisements that we see on television; big oil companies are buying those ads to make us feel good, while they continue to take us to the cleaners.

How stupid are we as consumers?

Is there no limit to how much money these thieves can steal from us and how many times

through this analogy. Let's suppose that someone informed the police that there were drugs in your home. In the middle of the night, the police bang down the door and invade your home, ransacking it in search of drugs; handcuffing you and your family and taking you to jail; seizing your money and other assets.

Members of your family have been abused, and they are traumatized as a result of imprisonment. Then, one day, it is 'discovered' that there never were any drugs in your home. The police never apologize, but they do TELL you that they will rebuild your home according to specifications that THEY decide. They will set you and your family free, but, nevertheless, there will be periodic police visits to your home. They will return your money, but they insist that they will tell

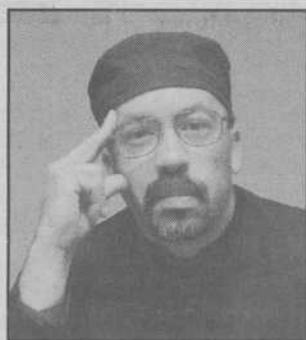
they can do it before we wake up and decide to respond in kind?

That's where the "sustain" part of the strategy comes into play.

On a local level, we must refuse to purchase gasoline from a selected few stations and sustain that effort until either their prices fall or they go out of business. I can hear some of you now. "Jim, that's not fair to the local dealer."

Well, whom do you suggest we mount our efforts against, the \$36 billion annual revenues of Exxon-Mobil, or maybe one of the other four: Royal Dutch Shell, BP, Chevron, or ConocoPhillips?"

Fat chance you'll even get their attention. When prices escalate the way they have



BILL FLETCHER JR.

you how and where to spend it.

Would you call that a good deal? Would you want the police to stay around? Would you trust the police to rebuild your home?

What we in the USA can not step around is a very simple fact, a fact that should control all other facts: the USA had no legal basis to invade Iraq and none to remain as occupier. The

pretexts for the invasion were falsehoods spread by the Bush administration in order to create fear here in the USA and elsewhere. One cannot correct this illegal action by insisting on staying in Iraq until things get "better."

Even if the Iraqi resistance is militarily defeated, it will prove nothing more than that the USA has a stronger military force. The bottom line, which comes through in opin-

ion poll after opinion poll of the Iraqi people is that they want the USA out of Iraq. For this reason, the failure of most of the presidential candidates to declare themselves in favor of an immediate withdrawal is unconscionable. Just as the police would be unable to correct their unjustified action of invading your home by staying around and rebuilding your home according to how THEY would like to see it, so too is it the case that the USA will never be able to build trust and stability — even if it succeeds in defeating the Iraqi resistance.

Each time that the focus moves away from the original illegality of the war and turns to whether the surge will succeed or not, it leads us to avoid responsibility for the disaster that the USA has itself created. Leading the people of this country to believe that only through a continued U.S. military presence will there be peace in Iraq is a reckless course of action and one that we must all oppose.

What is the most likely scenario if the U.S. announced it intended to withdraw from Iraq? Most probably, the United Nations, along with Iraq's neighbors, would get directly involved in peace and reconciliation talks. They would not have a cloud over them as acting in the interests of the USA, a problem that haunts all parties who might currently wish to assist in bringing about peace in Iraq as long as the U.S. remains entrenched in that country.

Since the USA should never have been in Iraq, it is long past time that the U.S. should have withdrawn. We cannot allow ourselves to judge the justice or injustice of the U.S. involvement in Iraq based on today's military successes or failures.

Bill Fletcher, Jr. is a senior scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies and an international labor activist.

James Clingman is an educator and author of a Black economic empowerment book series.