

Politics of Betrayal: Divorce Looms in Kenyan Jubilee Coalition

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Early campaign hostile statements and divisions in Jubilee Coalition are sparking a storm of confusion and fear in Kenya's politics. Some analysts argue that this environment should awake Kenyans, the region and international community to work hand in hand to avoid repeat of previous post-election violence. Others including myself see this situation of alliance, coalition formations and collapse of partnership as usual trend in Kenyan politics. Since 2002 when KANU (Kenya African National Union) lost presidency to NARC (National Rainbow Coalition), we have been watching such scenarios. And from 2007 post-election violence, legal mechanisms and safeguards have been put in place for a peaceful post-election management. For instance, it is under this framework that 2013 post-election crisis was very well handled. The present analysis wants to point out signs of split between President Uhuru Kenyatta and his Deputy President William Samoei Ruto who are key players in Jubilee Coalition.

Two events have changed dynamics in Jubilee Coalition. The first one is the unexpected handshake on the steps of Harambee House on 09th March 2018 between two rivals of 2013 and 2018 elections, President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Amolo Odinga. Second one is the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) report launched on 27th November 2019. A Controversial interpretation surrounding the two events is pushing the race to 2022 presidential succession bid to take a new twist through two conflicting camps: "hustler and dynast nations". The hustler camp is led by Deputy President William Samoei Ruto via his Tanga-Tanga team and has been presenting doubts towards the handshake and reluctance to implement BBI report recommendations. Supporters of handshake and initiators of BBI, spearheaded by Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Amolo Odinga are referred as dynasty camp because of their historical backgrounds in Kenyan politics. Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta is the son of Jomo Kenyatta, the first post-independence president of Kenya, whereas Raila Amolo Odinga is the son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, first Kenya's Vice President in Jomo Kenyatta administration.

Coalition formations and collapse between Kenyan political leaders is something usual when targeting to win upcoming elections. In 2002 presidential elections, there was concern to get rid of KANU's long-period of uninterrupted rule. In this process NARC was formed by key politicians including Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki. After defeating KANU and ascending into power, NARC didn't survive long; it collapsed in 2005 over disagreement about constitutional referendum. The most contentious cause of division originated from the position of prime minister, which has been earmarked for Raila Odinga, perceived as threat by Kibaki and his close allies. Another disagreement emanated from failure to implement the 50-50 power-sharing arrangement between two factions of NARC as initially contemplated in MoU between LDP of Raila Odinga and NAK of Mwai Kibaki.

During 2007 presidential elections, and after collapse of NARC, Mwai Kibaki had to defend his seat on a newly formed party ticket, the PNU (Party of National Unity). On the other hand, Raila Odinga and his allies reached to gain ownership of ODM (Orange Democratic Movement) as their new party. Presidential elections became a two-horse race between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga. Many people remember what happened after the ECK (Electoral Commission of Kenya) declared Mwai Kibaki winner. The announcement sparked violent demonstrations characterized by the destruction of properties and ethnically targeted killings.

Jubilee Coalition came as a surprise in 2013 general elections process. There is a saying that in politics, there is no permanent enemy no permanent friend, all is about interests. Initially, William Ruto was key ally of ODM leader Raila Odinga whereas Uhuru Kenyatta was on the side of Mwai Kibaki. Their reconciliation took origin from ICC (International Criminal Court) 2007 postelection violence investigations and pre-trial. After ICC released the names of six suspects, commonly known as “Ocampo Six”, thought to be most responsible for investigating of postelection violence, it was found that six key suspects were coming from conflicting camps: three among them including William Ruto were said to have ties with Raila Odinga. Other three including Uhuru Kenyatta were having ties with Mwai Kibaki.

Rapprochement between two political enemies was engineered by two factors. Firstly, divisions within ODM over ICC investigations and pre-trial resulted fall out between Raila Odinga and William Ruto. Then, the two ICC suspect co-perpetrators of 2007 violence were brought together to mobilize support from their two large communities in Kenya to challenge ICC process. The prayer meetings and mass rallies addressed by the two leaders convinced them that they could form a formidable coalition to contest the 2013 general elections. This put together newly created URP (United Republican Party) of William Samoei Ruto and TNA (The National Alliance) of Uhuru Kenyatta into Jubilee coalition which won 2013 and 2018 general elections.

The move by Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga from March 2018 to cease all hostilities, and find common ground in the interest of moving the country forward, through Handshake and BBI report implementation, has changed the status- quo within Jubilee coalition. William Ruto and his allies see handshake and BBI as political tool to lock him out of the 2022 Kenyatta succession matrix. In this regard, Jubilee Vice-Chairman and Uhuru Kenyatta close ally David Murathe states that there exists no Jubilee Party MoU to support Ruto’s 2022 presidential bid. The only deal they had is to support UhuRuto presidency for two terms which was achieved. Murathe continues in advising Ruto to retire alongside Uhuru come to 2022 because they have both served their two terms.

Considering the root motivations and ingredients of Jubilee coalition formation and the current divisions between its high ranked officials, the usual trend in Kenya party alliances and collapse will not spare messy divorce but not violent in Jubilee house.

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