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Daily Nation On The Web

Kenya: Is It Possible Raila is Being Set Up for Failure?

Makau Mutua

5 June 2010

OPINION

Nairobi — This is a warning to Prime Minister Raila Odinga. Call it a yellow card. Mr Odinga needs to remember the biblical proverb that "pride cometh before a fall". It is a law of gravity that whatever goes up must come down.

He should know that it's a bad omen to count one's chickens before they hatch. The exuberance in the Yes camp is irrational because it belies some irreconcilable contradictions.

Some senior PNU members - who are ostensibly in the Yes camp - are setting Mr Odinga up for a hard fall. They are fattening his ego for slaughter. Mr Odinga must remember that the leopard never changes its spots.

It's now a fact that the referendum is a contest to succeed President Kibaki. It is no longer only about reform. The leader of the camp that wins the referendum will easily jog to State House in 2012.

This is where Mr Odinga becomes an endangered species. There is no doubt that he is the clear leader of the Yes camp.

Nor is there any question about President Kibaki's unequivocal support for the proposed constitution. Mr Kibaki is fully behind Mr Odinga.

But the two plausible PNU presidential candidates - Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka and Finance minister Uhuru Kenyatta - have only given tepid support to the proposed constitution.

Mr Musyoka has refused to unequivocally back the constitution, or vigorously campaign for it.

Mr Kenyatta has practically gone into hiding - like a witness protection programme - and has been reluctant to release the funds for civic education. The two have no intention of accepting Mr Odinga's unchallenged leadership for the new law.

Mr Musyoka and Mr Kenyatta are green with envy, but don't know how to wrest the leadership of the constitution from Mr Odinga.

They won't risk opposing the new law because polls show that the public overwhelmingly supports it.

They dare not cross President Kibaki who has staked his legacy on the passage of a new constitution. They are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

It is not outlandish to think that Mr Musyoka and Mr Kenyatta are the "secret" leaders of the No camp.

Minister William Ruto may be the public face of the No camp, but chances are that he is working with his fellow KKK leaders. Think about it.

Why would Mr Musyoka support the Yes camp to facilitate Mr Odinga's ascendancy to the presidency? Why would he annoy the "naysaying" Christian clergy to whom he is beholden?

Would he not be unwise to oppose Mr Ruto when he desperately needs the Kalenjin vote to defeat Mr Odinga in 2012?

Mr Kenyatta is in a terrible quandary - he could become irrelevant if he abandons Mr Musyoka and Mr Ruto.

PNU's opposition to Mr Odinga explains why the draft constitution is doing poorly in Central and Eastern provinces.

My bet is that a conspiracy is brewing in PNU to defeat the proposed constitution to steal Mr Odinga's thunder.

Mr Kibaki knows about this plot although he is not a part of it. But he is powerless to stop it.

The truth is that there is a "quiet revolt" within PNU against the proposed constitution.

Mr Musyoka and Mr Kenyatta are probably at the centre of that revolt. Several PNU leading lights are in the Yes camp in the day, but they campaign for the No team at night.

It is these forces that were behind the illegal edit and the ruling on kadhis' courts.

Mr Odinga must devise a strategy to counter the trap being laid for him. I suggest that he thinks not only out of the box, but against it.

He should split the PNU-KKK alliance by luring Mr Kenyatta away. He needs to convince Mr Kenyatta that the KKK alliance is doomed.

Mr Odinga needs to convince Mr Kenyatta that Kenyans will not elect a Kikuyu for president in 2012.

He should dangle the carrot of the vice-presidency to induce Mr Kenyatta to break free from Mr Musyoka.

The only condition is that Mr Kenyatta must commit to aggressively support the proposed constitution.

Mr Odinga should enlist Mr Kibaki's help in this plot. This will checkmate Mr Musyoka and Mr Ruto.

Polls today show overwhelming public support for the proposed constitution. Mr Odinga should enjoy the hoopla, but shouldn't believe it.

He would be unwise to take any comfort in polls months before the main event. The public is fickle and the polls could flip. The referendum will not be a cakewalk for the Yes camp.

That's why Mr Odinga needs to strategise as though the Yes camp is trailing. Overcoming opposition to the constitution in Central and Eastern provinces must be a top priority.

He should "turn" Mr Kenyatta and use Minister Charity Ngilu more effectively in Ukambani. He should write off Rift Valley as a lost cause.

Makau Mutua is Dean and SUNY Distinguished Professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo Law School and Chair of the KHRC.

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