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Protests erupt in Ghana over US military agreement

Thousands of Ghanaians demonstrated in the capital city Accra on Tuesday against a military agreement between the US and Ghanaian governments that would allow for a significant expansion of the US military's presence in the West African nation. The government deployed a contingent of riot police as massive crowds poured into the streets of Accra's business district chanting, "Ghana is not for sale!"

The military agreement was signed by President Nana Akufo-Addo on Friday of the previous week after its approval in parliament. The agreement faced strong opposition from the minority National Democratic Congress (NDC), who boycotted the vote.

The ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) of President Akufo-Addo, which holds the majority of seats in parliament, characterized the military agreement as a mere continuation of Ghana's two-decade military relationship with the United States. Ghana has hosted US troops in several annually held combat exercises, and has contributed troops to several US-backed interventions across the continent. Ministry of Information Deputy Secretary Kojo Opong Nkrumah told the *New York Times*, "It's the same arrangement we've had in times past."

The key parts of the agreement include Washington's investment of \$20 million to train the Ghanaian military and the granting by the Ghanaian government of an airstrip for use by US military personnel, together with giving over the exclusive use of airwaves in the country to the US military for communications. Additionally, the US military would be allowed to deploy troops throughout the country and granted the ability to import equipment necessary for its operations tax-free.

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The estimated crowd of 3,500 demonstrators carried placards emblazoned with the statements: “Create Jobs, Not Military Base,” “Trump Take Your Military Base Away”, and “Shithole Country,” a reference to Trump’s disparaging remarks towards African countries in January.

Expressing outrage towards the growing militarism the agreement represents, Gifty Yankson, a local trader from Accra, told Africa News, “They [the US military] become a curse everywhere they are, and I am not ready to mortgage my security.”

Another demonstrator, Yaa Yaa Abban, expressed contempt toward the ruling government, “This is an insensitive government. We’ll resist this deal with the US because it does not favor us.”

The protest was called by the opposition party NDC, who have attempted to direct popular opposition to the deal into an appeal for national chauvinism. The NDC organized the protest with the Twitter hash tag #GhanaFirst and have stated the military agreement undermines the country’s sovereignty.

Also pushing this poisonous nationalist perspective was Frank Amoako Hene, president of the National Union of Ghana Students, “Having partaken in the struggle and fight towards our independence, we can never sit unconcerned when it comes to an agreement which has the tendency of compromising our sovereignty and integrity.”

With the NDC’s attempt to frame the protest along chauvinistic lines, the party’s leadership is attempting to bury the economic and social disaster experienced by the Ghanaian masses facilitated by past and current governments of both the NPP and NDC parties.

A tiny layer of Ghanaian elites sits atop a society that is riven by extreme social inequality. With a population of 28 million, the majority of whom subsist on under \$3 per day, there are 10 individuals at the top who hold collectively \$6 billion.

Reigning over this social powder keg, the ruling elite is fearful of a social explosion that threatens its rule. To this end, on Tuesday the Ghana Police Service arrested and detained NDC deputy secretary Koku Anyidoho on a charge of treason for remarks he made during an interview on a radio show in Accra in which he opinionated that President Akufo-Addo would be overthrown through a civil revolt.

Anyidoho stated: “On January 13, 1972, a certain Col. Ignatius Kutu Acheampong led a movement that removed the Progress Party from power. Busia was the Prime Minister and [President] Akufo-Addo’s father was a ceremonial president. Somebody should tell Nana

Akufo-Addo that history has a very interesting way of repeating itself. There'll be a civil revolt.”

The arrest of an opposition political figure on charges of treason for remarks made during an interview testifies not only to the fear of a large-scale uprising from the working masses, but also to the completely antidemocratic character of the ruling government.

For its part, Washington is well aware of growing opposition to its military operations on the continent. Attempting to assuage the eruption of social anger, the US Ambassador to Ghana Robert Jackson made a statement in the wake of the demonstrations, in which he portrayed the military agreement as not materially different from US agreements made with other countries.

“This agreement is about bringing Ghana into deeper security cooperation. It doesn't involve a base; it doesn't endanger Ghana's security and it does not impose any harsh obligations on the government and the people of Ghana. This rather strengthens Ghana's security,” Jackson stated.

The military deal between the US and Ghana comes amid escalation of AFRICOM's military offensive in West Africa, with US forces currently waging war across several countries in the region.

Last week in Libya, US forces for the first time carried out a drone strike against Al-Qaeda militants in the southern part of the country, and in Niger, the Pentagon has finished construction on a military base in Agadez, which it projects will provide AFRICOM the capability of conducting full-spectrum drone surveillance and warfare over Western and Northern Africa.

Beginning in April 2017, the Trump administration issued new rules of engagement that essentially constitute granting blanket authority to AFRICOM to wage open-ended warfare. Along with new rules of engagement, Trump authorized increased drone strikes in Somalia, as well as increased numbers of troops deployed overall across the continent.

With the expansion of its military footprint in West Africa, Washington is seeking to block China's growing economic influence in the region. Last June, Beijing committed to a \$15 billion investment agreement with the Akufo-Addo government for the development of the country's manufacturing sector.