

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF GHANA AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE GHANA ARMED FORCES, HIS EXCELLENCY NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO

Dear President,

YOUR SILENCE AND STONEWALLING IS UNDEMOCRATIC AND NOT IN OUR NATIONAL INTEREST

I humbly and respectfully convey to you very warm compliments.

May I also afford this opportunity to extend to you heartfelt belated happy birthday wishes of good health, happiness and a deeper patriotic love for Ghana.

Your Excellency, I am compelled to write this open letter for your urgent attention due to your rather unusual, strange and uncharacteristic but determined cold silence on the most crucial issue agitating the minds of Ghanaians, thus *“the agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Ghana on Defence Cooperation, the Status of United States Forces, and Access to and Use of Agreed Facilities and Areas in the Republic of Ghana”* which your majority Members of Parliament defiantly ratified on the 23rd of March, 2018 to conclude the processes you and your Government initiated.

Sir, I must state from the outset that as has never been in doubt, we in the National Democratic Congress (NDC) cherish and value Ghana’s long-standing relations with the United States of America. It is therefore not surprising that the NDC has hosted two of the three high level US Presidential State visits of this Fourth Republic – that is the visit of President Bill Clinton and that of President Barack Obama. That said, we believe relations with the United States of America and all other countries are nourished and better anchored on mutual respect, trust, fairness, shared values and the recognition of the sovereignty of nations. It is these cardinal principles within our nation’s foreign policy paradigm of positive neutrality and non-alignment as clearly espoused and established by our country’s founding President, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah that continues to inspire us, especially as they have served this nation very well over the ages.

As you well know Mr. President, just a day before your birthday, precisely on the 28th of March, 2018, a mammoth demonstration took place in Accra which was a culmination of your refusal to listen to the people you serve after weeks of persistent pressure and appeals to you from Ghanaians of diverse backgrounds and varying political persuasion seeking your executive intervention in at least addressing the genuine fears of the people emanating from the agreement in issue.

The “Put Ghana First Demonstration” organized by the Ghana Fist Patriotic Front (GFPPF) with support from the Interparty Coalition for National Sovereignty and the Minority caucus in Parliament attracted the masses, progressive forces, student leaders, unions, experts, high ranking former public officials including former Vice President and former Chairman of the Police Council, His Excellency Kwesi Bekoe Amissah-Arthur, former National Security Minister Hon. Kofi Totobi Quakyi and a host of former

Ministers, Ambassadors and academics who, I humbly submit, cannot all be ignorant as your Government Communicators have arrogantly and offensively sought to portray.

Mr. President, as a longtime political activist (for which you earned the “yenim no fri titi” accolade) and a celebrated serial organizer of demonstrations --including those of the “Kumipreko” and “Siemipreko” fame — I am sure you will be the first to admit that the several thousands of Ghanaians who participated in that massive march and the overwhelming number of Ghanaians, some of whom voted for you who are either through newspaper or online articles, media discussions or social media commentary pleading with you to listen, cannot and do not deserve to be ignored. Other eminent persons of enormous experience such as former President Jerry John Rawlings, Ghana’s longest serving Foreign Minister, Dr. Obed Asamoah, former Council of State Member and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Prof. Akilakpa Sawyerr who have all cautioned against this agreement do not deserve to be dismissed by the way and manner their concerns have been brushed aside and this agreement railroaded.

Sir, your decision to strangely adopt a silent posture on the outside while there was a lot of activity behind the scenes to hurriedly negotiate and ratify this agreement by abusing your parliamentary majority without taking on board the concerns of the people who gave you your mandate is most deplorable.

With all due respect, Sir, we have all come to know you in the 14 months of your Presidency as the President who does not hesitate to speak. Indeed, you have often flaunted your gift of the gab both home and abroad and we all know you love it when the feedback is great – I am reminded of a recent testimony of this when you met journalists to commemorate your first anniversary as President and went on about how your remarks during a media event with the visiting French President, Emmanuel Macron had assumed a life of its own with very rare reviews.

That is not all, we have seen how you have quite often ignored good counsel and chosen to comment on matters that many consider prejudicial and awkward. Just two examples will suffice for now; your lengthy intervention during the Parliamentary Probe on the Cash for Seats Scandal and the praises you heaped on Mr. Joseph Siaw Agyepong of Zoomlion. We do know that both acts attracted condemnation from anti-corruption crusaders.

Mr. President, as you will concede, Ghanaians watch their leaders very closely and in our often quintessential humorous fashion provide a nick name which aptly describes their leaders. A few examples: Kwame Nkrumah earned “Nkrumah Show Boy,” John Evans Atta Mills earned “Asomdwehene,” John Mahama earned “Commissioner General,” and Sir, you have fast earned “King Promise.” So with all due respect, Sir, Ghanaians know you love to talk and that even long after your successful 2016 campaign, you continue to “talk big” by making more promises.

Respectfully, Mr. President, you can therefore understand why most of us are extremely surprised at your sudden belief in silence. Your silence on the agreement in issue is very much out of character and we are sincerely befuddled. Everybody is saying this is not the man we have known from “titi.”

As you have noted, Sir, your silence and the attempt to divert attention from the debate on the Ghana-US Military Cooperation Agreement by the high-handed and dramatic arrest of Koku Anyidoho and the change of name of the Flagstaff House to Jubilee House have so far not worked according to plan. As I write to you, Sir, discussions on this matter and its related concerns have been escalating both at the domestic level and on the foreign front. The international media (BBC, Reuters, Fox News, Al Jazeera, RT, the New York Times, etc.) are awash with reports of a general feeling of betrayal of the Ghanaian people by your Government and you.

Mr President, we have to be honest, the cold silence and stone-walling approach does not only amount to a dereliction of duty, it is making matters worse by impairing your international image and I really feel sad about this. When it comes to the international image of our Presidents, partisanship has no place. I was really taking pride in your international rise – the claims by some world leaders that you are the new Nkrumah – the assertion that you were emerging as one of the top 5 African leaders - the hope you were offering the African Continent with your “Ghana Beyond Aid” agenda. It’s a real tragedy that this singular agreement and US\$20 million dollars threaten to destroy everything. A similar defence cooperation agreement between the Kenyan Government and the British Government which has gone viral on social media has deepened our woes and Ghana, a country used to being the trail blazer and shining example for other African countries is now becoming an object of ridicule on the continent.

Your Excellency, I am still struggling to understand the *raison d’être* of your uncharacteristic loud silence in the face of the following facts:

Paragraph 4 of the Preamble of the agreement in issue reveals that this agreement was triggered by your conversation with your counterpart, President Trump. The paragraph states: *“Reaffirming the recent dialogue between the Presidents of the United States and Ghana on the importance of the bilateral defense relationship.”*

Subsequently and as admitted by the signed memorandum from your Defence Minister to Parliament dated 14th March, 2018, your Government negotiated the terms of this agreement with US officials here in Accra under your watch on the 7th and 8th of August, 2017.

Further to this, Secretary to the Cabinet Mercy Debrah-Karikari in a letter dated 12th March, 2018 and which was dispatched to Parliament, conveyed the decision of Cabinet at its twenty-eighth meeting held on Thursday, 8th March, 2018 at which Cabinet approved this agreement. In all humility, Sir, it is well known that Article 77 (1) of the Constitution provides: *“The Cabinet shall be summoned by the President who shall preside at all meetings; and in the absence of the President, the Vice-President shall preside.”*

Even more fundamental, we do know that Ghana operates an Executive Presidency. Article 58 (1) through to (4) provides as follows:

The executive authority of Ghana shall vest in the President and shall be exercised in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution

The executive authority of Ghana shall extend to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution and all laws made under or continued in force by this Constitution.

Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the functions conferred on the President by clause (1) of this article may be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him.

Except as otherwise provided in this Constitution or by a law not inconsistent with this Constitution, all executive acts of Government shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the President.

Sir, without a doubt and in all reverence, both the facts and the law render your current silence and attempts to distance yourself from this agreement as disappointing, negligent, unprincipled and even more worrying, portray an unacceptable refusal to take responsibility.

Mr. President, it does also appear that it is this mindset that convinces your Government that it can make Ghanaians blame the NDC and not you for the current agreement when your own documents submitted to Parliament insist that previous agreements were “temporary”, for “limited operations” and that they have all “expired.” Indeed, as most Ghanaians have found out, the current agreement is not materially the same when compared to previous agreements contrary to claims by your Ministers of Defence and Information. Also the false claims that the current agreement was only a consolidation of previous agreements have been badly exposed. That the current agreement is an “enhanced” and “newly negotiated” agreement further exposes this propaganda. In any case, Sir, if the previous NDC Government has short-changed Ghanaians in any way or engaged in acts not in our strategic national interest, is it right to continue with it when presented with an opportunity to re-negotiate a new agreement as you were presented on the 7th and 8th of August 2017? Is it right to thereafter turn round and ask Ghanaians to blame the NDC? Respectfully, this cannot be the change those who voted for change were looking for.

It is now clear that unlike the current agreement in issue, the 1998 agreement, derived from an exchange of diplomatic notes, imposed an obligation on the US Armed Forces “to pay reasonable charges for services requested and received.” US aircrafts were also obliged to “observe local air traffic control regulations while in Ghana.” On the other hand, the 2015 Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement which was basically a logistic support, supplies, and services agreement expressly exempted for transfer: weapon systems; guided missiles; naval mines and torpedoes; nuclear ammunition; guidance kits for bombs or other ammunition; chemical munitions or ammunition and source, byproduct, or special nuclear materials. The current agreement makes no exemptions and does not even allow an inspection of what may be brought into our country. Nothing can be more frightening especially in this era where it is alleged Russian military type nerve agent was used on British soil in an attempt to assassinate Sergei Skripal and his daughter. This comes on the back of a latest UN report on the Syrian conflict which confirms that significant amounts of chemical weapons are being used in violation of international law.

Your Excellency, based on your conduct so far, several questions arise:

Why are you, Mr. President, distancing yourself from your own agreement? Is Mr. President not proud of his own agreement and therefore not bold to man up and defend it with all your acclaimed reputation in advocacy? What did President Trump tell you in that “recent dialogue” that suddenly makes you so averse to listening to and speaking to your own people on this particular issue? What really is in this agreement for you, Mr. President? Is your silence borne out of an effort to hide something from Ghanaians? Is your silence driven by selfish political tactics to avoid the wrath of Ghanaians and at the same time remain President Trump’s darling in Africa in order that you can have your cake and eat it? We the people you lead deserve answers to these nagging questions.

Sir, the principles of Good Governance and Democratic Accountability which you promised under oath on the 7th January, 2017 to uphold demand of you to be transparent and to engage us on our fears and concerns as per this Agreement.

It is quite ironic that though no Ghanaian voted for the US Ambassador in Accra, Ambassador Robert Jackson has done more to reach out to Ghanaians even if with limited success as compared to you – the man directly accountable to us.

Your Excellency, the people of this country know that international relations must be conducted within international law and in the national interest of Ghana. They are not oblivious of Article 73 of the Constitution which directs that – *“The Government of Ghana shall conduct its international affairs in consonance with the accepted principles of public international law and diplomacy in a manner consistent with the national interest of Ghana.”*

Sir, as you are aware, the good people of this country are unable to ever forget that sovereignty resides in them and NOT with a few ruling elite. The very first Article of the Constitution of Ghana stipulates: *“The Sovereignty of Ghana resides in the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised in the manner and within the limits laid down in this Constitution.”* It is for this reason, Mr. President, that a higher obligation is imposed on you to engage Ghanaians and take steps to renegotiate with the Americans those articles in the Agreement that the overwhelming majority of Ghanaians are affronted by and believe compromises their sacred sovereignty.

Mr. President, Ghana’s unique history must continue to guide us all. Sadly, the perception amongst many is that Ghana is being re-colonized. And as Kwame Nkrumah put it; *“We Africans mean to be masters on our own continent.”*

Kwame Nkrumah further stressed: *“The continent of Africa has been drenched in blood in the past; it has been raided for slaves; it has been partitioned and exploited and looted. Precisely because it has had this kind of past, it is determined not to have that kind of future. If we succeed, and succeed we must, the whole of mankind – not Africa alone – will reap immense benefits.”*

Your Excellency, I humbly plead with you to step up and take the bull by the horns. This moment needs your direct leadership. Leadership from the frontlines and not from behind nor from the wings.

Seeing that Article 19 of the ratified agreement does not provide a term limit, it should have been decided in the very beginning to seek the input of all political stakeholders especially those capable of forming Governments. Sir, you should have learned from President Mahama's approach which ensured that you were consulted as then flagbearer of the NPP in 2015 when negotiations were underway for Ghana to host the GITMO 2.

I believe it is not too late to engage our former Presidents, Political Parties, experts, Military Generals and all former Chiefs of Defence Staff alive together with our friends - the Americans, within a transparent, frank, mature and calm framework. Ultimately, all sides should feel that this cooperation is mutually beneficial and not one-sided.

Sir, your continuous silence and abdication will only escalate the ongoing agitations. Already, there is talk of regional demonstrations and other constituency mass actions on the horizon. Then there are legal suits which continue unabated and for which I have lost count. I do not believe it is in the mutual interest of both Ghana and the United States of America to continue under this climate of stonewalling and heated political confrontations with its attendant international media attention. There are inherent scary security consequences given this current situation and the earlier we chart a new progressive, inclusive, responsive, sober and less noisy path, the better for us all.

Mr. President, I am also quite uncomfortable about the potential ramifications for Ghana-US relations if you do not take conscious proactive steps to quickly address the concerns of Ghanaians. If decisive leadership is not exercised at this crucial hour, leadership would have itself to blame if Ghana-US relations become frosty.

Sir, history teaches us that Ghana-US relations, like many other relations, have had its highs and lows. From the 23rd July 1958 official visit of President Nkrumah to the US on the invitation of President Eisenhower and at which Nkrumah addressed the US Senate on the afternoon of the next day where he boldly proclaimed - *"Like you, we believe profoundly in the right of all people to determine their own destinies. We are therefore opposed to all forms of colonialism old or new, and we want to see all nations and their peoples genuinely independent and seeking a higher standard of life."*

We must thereafter duly acknowledge America's support for the Volta River Project and how rather unfortunately, by the mid-1960s relations began to take a sour turn just before Nkrumah's overthrow on February 28, 1966.

Certainly, the 1988 BBC interview at which retired CIA founder Miles Axe Copeland Jr. admitted that the United States had a hand in Nkrumah's removal coupled with CIA declassified files pointing to same which naturally elicited negative sentiments in Ghana all did very little to enhance the trust building process. Then, of course, it is important to recall how the 1985 "Soussoudis Affair" and the 1986 "Nobistor Affair" further strained relations.

It has clearly taken a lot of painstaking effort to build trust and restore Ghana-US relations on the path of positive growth over the last three decades. It is for this reason that good leadership requires that Mr.

President, you take thoughtful deliberate steps out of the shadows and help preserve trust on both sides.

Sir, we must, respectfully, be concerned also about what the current developments mean for our positive neutrality and non-alignment foreign policy imperatives as other nations are observing these developments closely. When President Nkrumah personally presented Ghana's foreign policy for the approval of the National Assembly on 16th December, 1959, he remarked: *"I have always stated that it is our desire to cultivate friendship with all nations and to be enemy to none. In pursuance of our policy of peace and friendship, the Government and people of Ghana are determined not to get themselves entangled in the great ideological conflicts of the Great Powers."* I do hope Mr. President that you do not get us entangled by the way and manner you have gone about this military cooperation agreement.

Sir, you can always count on our support in the pursuit of Ghana's overarching national interest.

With sincere and respectful regards,

Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa (MP)
Ranking Member, Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

[2nd April, 2018]