

Ruto deploys Kenyan army onto the streets with US, European Union support

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Yesterday thousands of soldiers from the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) were deployed to patrol major cities and towns across Kenya, particularly the capital, Nairobi, to suppress mass opposition after President William Ruto's massacre of anti-austerity protesters Tuesday.

From early morning Thursday, the military deployed around parliament and on roads leading to State House. Troops also patrolled the Central Business District. The Supreme Court, City Hall, and Nyayo Stadium were all heavily fortified by anti-riot police.

Ruto is keenly aware that many Kenyans have been discussing on social media the experiences and similarities of the 2022 upheaval in Sri Lanka, when workers and the rural masses opposing International Monetary Fund austerity and soaring cost of living stormed the presidential palace and forced the hated President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country. On social media, some sarcastically asked whether Ruto's State House also has a private swimming pool that the masses could bathe in.

Outside the capital, small protests were organised across the country. In Migori town, Western Kenya, police dispersed youth using teargas canisters in running battles. In the coastal town of Kilifi, protesters barricaded the Kilifi-Malindi highway, the main highway running the coast of Kenya. Protests were organised in Kakamega and Kisumu, where demonstrators marched towards Kisumu State Lodge using Jomo Kenyatta Highway. Police used tear gas to disperse protests in Homa Bay Town. In Wote Town, police attacked youth with truncheons.

Ruto beefed up security in Eldoret, his hometown, to crush protests that have become a personal embarrassment given it was once his political stronghold.

The troop deployment can only have been done with the seal of approval of the US and the European Union (EU).

On Wednesday, Ruto withdrew the Finance Bill, in an

attempt to stem social explosion. Soon after, he held a call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Blinken welcomed his refusal to sign the Bill into law. Washington is terrified that the brutal tax hikes threatened the stability of its Kenyan stooge.

Just weeks ago US President Biden rolled out the red carpet for Ruto and nominated Kenya a non-NATO ally, sealed with a dinner attended by Barack Obama, Bill and Hilary Clinton and the great and the good of the Democratic Party. Auma Obama, half-sister of the former president, was among protesters tear-gassed in Nairobi Tuesday.

A statement from the US State Department hailed "President Ruto's commitment to Kenyans' constitutionally-endowed rights, including peaceful assembly and due process for those detained."

European Union Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell posted a statement, "The recent decision of President Ruto to withdraw the Finance Bill contributes to the reduction of the tensions and should help create an environment that is conducive to dialogue."

This is Washington and Brussels' seal of approval for the massacre Ruto committed the day before.

Dozens have died and thousands were injured, in one of the worst single-day massacres since Kenya obtained independence over six decades ago.

In Githurai, on the outskirts of Nairobi, police forces committed a bloodbath against around 6,000 protesters. For six hours, police went on a rampage, admitting that they fired 758 bullets.

Over the past weeks, the Ruto regime has carried out abductions of social media activists, Internet slowdowns and the temporary shutdown of X/Twitter.

Reports of events Thursday are sketchy, but film has emerged of the aftermath of a child being shot in Rongai.

It was the same day that he withdrew the Bill that Ruto announced the official deployment of the army to crush

protests. The operation was begun earlier in parliament, without the media present and without most MPs in their seat, with no public debate and in a record 30 minutes.

Ruto has transformed Kenya into a military state overnight. It is the first time in history of Kenya that troops are being deployed against unarmed civilian protests. Previously, deployments of the KDF personnel have been taken against armed militias with the period and specific areas of operations spelt out.

The scenes of the army deployed across Kenya are reminiscent of the dictatorship of Western-backed Daniel Arap Moi (1978 to 2002), when thousands of KDF forces patrolled the streets of Nairobi in the aftermath of the failed coup of August 1982 led by junior officers in the Kenya Air Force. Moi mobilised thousands of troops to restore order in Nairobi and the country was effectively under military rule for weeks. Nairobi was under curfew until September. Nairobi University and Kenyatta College were closed for a year and soon after, hundreds of left-wing students, intellectuals, lecturers and workers were arrested.

It was only on June 24 that the EU announced it would send military support worth about €20 million (\$21.4 million) to the KDF, “to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and its civilian population against internal and external threats.”

By “external sovereignty” the EU means the use of KDF as mercenary troops to further its imperialist ambitions in East Africa and beyond, including the despatch of troops to Haiti. By “internal threats”, it means the working class and youth whose protests have morphed into an insurgency, targeting not only Ruto’s blood-soaked regime but the entire 60-year-old post-independence edifice backed by the US and NATO imperialist powers.

As Washington and Brussels are fully aware, these class tensions are rooted not in exclusively Kenyan but global conditions. Billions of people worldwide are confronted with soaring prices provoked by NATO’s wars in Ukraine against Russia, the support to Israel’s genocide in Palestine—in itself, part of a broader war to control the resource-rich Middle East—and economic trade wars against China, which threaten to erupt into a full blown war. This criminal policy follows three decades of intensifying austerity after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which has produced levels of social inequality incompatible with democratic rule.

Ruto is offering a tutorial on how to run a fascistic authoritarian regime that both US and EU powers are

hoping to export globally and import back home, amid mounting social anger against social inequality, the relentless escalation of war and attacks on democratic rights.

The deployment of troops is a devastating exposure of the Azimio la Umoja coalition and the trade union bureaucracy led by the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU). Having implored Ruto to withdraw the bill, Ruto is now offering them to be part of a “national dialogue” on how best to impose austerity through cuts in education, healthcare, and other social expenses, while ramming through privatisations.

According to reports, the Wednesday discussion on KDF deployment degenerated into a brawl after MPs of the opposition and those loyal to Ruto exchanged blows. Azimio has refused to mobilise the working class against Ruto. In fact, many of its leaders like Kalonzo Musyoka were part of the Moi regime’s police state.

COTU has said nothing against the deployment of the army. After Ruto’s bloodbath, Secretary General Francis Atwoli indicated that he is perfectly happy to work with the president. In Atwoli’s words, “Kenya is a hub of economic activities in this region, and we must protect it at all costs. We must support the President and the government to ensure that this country remains peaceful.”

The troop deployment is a devastating exposure of pseudo-left tendencies, which hailed Ruto’s tactical maneuver of withdrawing the Finance Bill. The Morenoite Revolutionary Socialist League stated: “The RSL deems it indispensable to recognize this victory, in order to acknowledge and not forget that mass struggle works, that when the people mobilize, we are an unstoppable force.”

Opposing the turn to dictatorship means building an international movement in the working class fighting against capitalism and for socialism. There is nothing for workers to negotiate with Ruto. The critical task is organising workers independently of the unions and the bourgeois opposition parties, and building a political movement fighting for socialism and for the transfer of power to the working class.



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