

US, Japan to establish military bases in the Philippines

Joseph Santolan
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On June 27, at a press conference in Quezon City, Philippines, Philippine Defense Minister Voltaire Gazmin and his Japanese counterpart, Itsunori Onodera, announced that the Philippines would establish basing arrangements with both the US and Japanese militaries. China was the explicit target of this move allowing the US and Japan to station military personnel and equipment in the Philippines.

At the press conference, Gazmin called China “the oppressive neighbor” and the “bully at our doorstep.” He stated, “At this point in time, we cannot stand alone. We need allies. If we don’t do this, we will be bullied by bigger powers and that is what is happening now: there is China, sitting on our territory.”

Onodera is in the Philippines on a two-day official visit. In discussions of the disputed waters of the South China Sea, he pledged to help the Philippines defend “its remote islands.”

Onodera also announced that Japan would officially back the Philippines’ claim of territorial sovereignty, which is currently being adjudicated by the United Nations Commission on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). These statements constitute an unprecedented acknowledgement by Japan of the validity of the Philippine claim to the disputed waters.

There is a continuing, two-month armed stand-off between Philippine marines stationed on one of the islands in question and the Chinese navy.

“We agreed that we will further cooperate in terms of the defense of remote islands... the defense of territorial seas as well as protection of maritime interests,” Onodera continued. He stated that Japan was “very concerned that this kind of situation in the South China Sea could affect the situation in the East China Sea,” referring to ongoing Sino-Japanese disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Both Defense Ministers called for an increased US military presence in the region, and specifically for basing US forces in the Philippines. Onodera said that “both sides agreed that the US presence is a very important public asset in East Asia.”

The Chinese embassy in Manila issued a statement Thursday asking the Philippines and the United States “not to exacerbate tensions in the area.” Beijing’s response to the Filipino-Japanese talks was sharper. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi denounced them as the “path of confrontation,” stating that they are “doomed.” He added that countries that “try to reinforce their poorly grounded claims through the help of external forces” would find the strategy a “miscalculation not worth the effort.”

There is an escalating US intervention to include US allies in the region in military alliances directed against China. Recent years have not only seen Washington back Japanese claims on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, but also develop military bases in Australia and basing agreements for US littoral combat ships in Singapore.

Preparations to restore the basing of the US military in the Philippines have been long in the making. They were made public in January 2012, during the 2+2 meeting held in Washington between then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and their Philippine counterparts. The details of the basing arrangements are now becoming clearer. Manila is preparing a 70-acre facility at the former Subic Naval Base to house US warships and fighter planes. Upgrades on the site will cost some US\$230 million. An airbase is being prepared on Cagayan de Oro, on the southern island of Mindanao.

Some of these bases are now being prepared for Japanese troops and equipment as well. While the

troops stationed in the Philippines would be rotated in and out of the country, this would constitute the permanent stationing the so-called ‘self-defense forces’ outside Japan. If carried through, this unprecedented move would mark the reemergence of Japan as a global imperialist military power.

This move is a further step in Tokyo’s long-standing drive to remilitarize Japan, with Washington’s backing. The Philippines have played a key role in this process. In December 2012, Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario told the *Financial Times* that Manila would support the scrapping of the so-called pacifist clause in the Japanese constitution, which has inhibited Japanese remilitarization, citing tensions with China as the justification.

Philippine Defense Minister Gazmin said that Manila would “allow the United States, Japan and other allies access to its military bases under the plan to roll back China’s expansive claims in the West Philippine Sea [South China Sea].” What other “allies” were also discussing basing arrangements with the Philippines was not disclosed.

The twentieth century saw the Philippines subjected to the brutal colonial rule of two imperialist powers, the United States and Japan, both of which the Filipino ruling class collaborated with. Under the leadership of President Benigno Aquino, they are actively functioning as the proxies of the same imperialist powers. As Washington recklessly pursues its drive to encircle China, the Philippines is being prepared as the staging point for a global war.

The Philippine constitution explicitly bans all “foreign military bases, troops, or facilities.” This ban is being cynically circumvented by having the Philippine government maintain the base facilities, at which the foreign troops are stationed as so-called “guests.”

During the meeting between Onodera and Gazmin, Washington launched a six-day joint military training exercise with the Philippines in the South China Sea. Five hundred US military personnel and an equal number of Filipinos are engaged in a series of war games of a calculatedly provocative nature.

The *USS Fitzgerald*, a guided missile destroyer, and the BRP *Gregorio del Pilar*, the Philippine navy's flagship, staged naval maneuvers in waters less than 50 miles from the disputed shoal where Filipino marines

are occupying a facility surrounded by Chinese naval vessels. The exercise’s stated aim was “to intercept suspected enemy ships, board them and seize materials they may be carrying that could pose a danger to allies.”

The use of the terms “enemy ships” and “allies” is a marked escalation of rhetoric previously used to justify the war games. Previous war games allegedly targeted regional piracy, conducted rescue operations, or defended maritime trade. The 2013 Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercises are now couched in the language of global war.

At Cavite naval base, six miles south of Manila, US military personnel trained their Filipino counterparts in the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). They launched and remotely guided Puma surveillance drones from a ship in the South China Sea. The Philippine navy also received training in naval gunnery.

The intensifying US military drive in the region finds expression in the fact that in first five months of 2013, 72 US warships and submarines have visited Subic Bay, compared with 88 for the entirety of 2012; 54 in 2011; and 51 in 2010, according to Filipino government figures.



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