US military basing deal in the Philippines: A step towards neocolonial rule

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The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between Washington and Manila, signed on April 28, starkly exposes the reactionary character of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia." As US imperialism sets out to militarily encircle and isolate China, posing the risk of global war, it is seeking to impose neocolonial rule on oppressed countries throughout Asia.

The EDCA's ten pages effectively convert the Philippines, a former US colony, into a US military base, under a legal framework virtually indistinguishable from the neocolonial decrees Washington imposed during hated wars in US-occupied Iraq or Afghanistan. This deal was prepared behind the backs of the US and Filipino working class, by the Obama administration and the corrupt regime of President Benigno Aquino III.

The deal grants to the United States exclusive use of an undisclosed number of "agreed locations," for which no rent shall be paid and on which the Pentagon can base an unlimited number of forces. US forces and contractors in the country are not subject to Philippine law, having extraterritorial immunity from local jurisdiction. Only one designated Filipino will be allowed access to US bases in the country, and that only after he has obtained permission from US forces.

The ten-year deal renews automatically, and the Philippine judiciary and other branches of government are explicitly prohibited by Article XI of the document from reviewing any disputes pertaining to the EDCA.

In content and in form, the EDCA is a reactionary and illegal document. It does an end run around the Philippine Senate, which is constitutionally required to authorize any foreign troops or bases in the country, presenting the deal as an agreement between the Pentagon and the Philippine military. The semblance of independent Philippine partnership in the deal is a political fiction: the Philippine military was created by the United States during its fifty-year colonial rule, and much of the current top brass was trained at the US Military Academy at West Point.

The formulation of the EDCA and its adoption by Washington and Manila without any significant protest is a warning to the international working class.

The move to establish US neocolonial rule in the Middle East, which under the presidency of George W. Bush took the form of the invasion of Iraq, was not an aberration, but an expression of the world strategy of the American ruling class. Looking to shore up its eroded position within the world economy, Washington is bent on militarily controlling the world. Under Obama, the Democratic Party has taken up the neocolonial policy of the Bush administration and expanded it into a drive for domination over all of Eurasia.

The only social force opposed to the recolonization of Asia is the working class. Workers in the United States, and in other imperialist countries such as Japan and Australia allied to the US "pivot to Asia," are deeply hostile to new military occupations and wars. As for the Philippine workers and toiling masses, they will bitterly resist attempts by Washington and Manila to turn the neocolonial agenda laid out in the EDCA into reality.

This opposition finds no expression in any section of the Philippine political establishment, which is signing national sovereignty away to Washington without any significant protest.

One senator expressed reservations about the constitutionality of the way the EDCA was enacted, and a small cohort of opposition senators has expressed a desire to negotiate better terms with the United States. Since the announcement of the EDCA, however, these

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senators and their allies in the House have faced a wave of corruption charges brought by the Aquino administration, which has threatened them with arrest on charges of plunder.

The EDCA and the Obama administration rely on petty-bourgeois "left" groups on both sides of the Pacific. While groups in the United States such as the International Socialist Organization function as thinly-veiled propagandists for Obama's foreign policy, the Philippine Maoists have worked up noxious anti-Chinese hysteria that serves to justify Manila's collaboration with the "pivot to Asia."

They feed off the broader atmosphere stoked by the Philippine press, which publishes headlines alleging invasions by Beijing of Philippine territory in the South China Sea on a weekly basis.

These events are a remarkable validation of Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, which maintains that the bourgeoisie in countries of belated capitalist development are incapable of establishing democratic rule and are bound to imperialism by a thousand threads. The struggle against imperialism falls therefore to the working class, waging an international revolutionary struggle for socialism.

Amid deepening global economic crises and military tensions, the Philippine bourgeoisie has reached a historic dead end. In a country where the United States massacred hundreds of thousands of people in a bloody colonial war at the turn of the twentieth century, the ruling elite is desperate for an alliance with Washington—even of a neocolonial character—to resolve social and political conflicts for which they see no solutions.

In this, the Philippine bourgeoisie and significant layers in the petty-bourgeoisie, who have enriched themselves by exploiting cheap labor producing for the world market, are driven above all by their fear of the working class. Decades of populist false promises since the collapse of the US-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and grotesque levels of inequality exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis have produced explosive social anger and political disillusionment.

As they try to deal with escalating international and social conflicts by permanently stationing US troops in the Philippines, Washington and Manila have a rendezvous with disaster. They cannot re-impose colonial shackles on the workers and peasants of Asia. What is being prepared is an explosive confrontation between US imperialism, assisted by its various local allies, and the international working class.

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