

Washington funds death squads, concentration camps in the Philippines

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US Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to Manila on Tuesday and spent Wednesday meeting with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay. In an effort to secure continued Philippine support for Washington's war drive against China, Kerry committed \$32 million in funding for Duterte's fascistic crackdown on drugs and alleged criminality.

Since Duterte took office on June 30, over 440 people have been killed and the daily death toll is accelerating. During the less than the 48 hours that Kerry was in Manila, 42 people were reported killed by police and vigilantes.

Duterte has called for the reinstatement of the death penalty by hanging, and for the lowering of the age of criminal accountability to nine. Bills to this effect are before both houses of the newly-opened legislature, where Duterte has a super-majority. The legislature has also introduced a bill granting the president unspecified "emergency powers," ostensibly to deal with the traffic situation in Manila.

Duterte has implemented a curfew for minors throughout Metro Manila and is moving to expand it nationwide. Youth found on the streets after 10 p.m. at night may be subject to arrest. The parents of unescorted minors may likewise be arrested.

Duterte announced on Wednesday that he will set up what are in effect concentration camps throughout the country, where citizens deemed by the state to be "no longer of service to humanity" may be held indefinitely, without legal recourse, in wired-off camps within existing military bases.

Kerry did not breathe a word of criticism against these police-state measures. On the contrary, he publicly announced Washington's support for Duterte's anti-drug campaign, and provided funding for its implementation. In return, Kerry made clear that Washington expects Duterte to continue his predecessor's support for the US "pivot to Asia," aimed against China.

The Duterte administration has responded with hesitancy to the sweeping ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, which declared on July 12 that China's nine-dash-line claim in the South China Sea was

invalid and its land reclamation activities on islets unlawful. Duterte is attempting to balance between the country's economic dependence on China and the political and military might of the US.

Washington is seeking to use the PCA ruling as a pretext for a dramatic escalation of its confrontation with China. The White House is looking for the ostensible claimant in the case—the Philippines—to assert its rights in some way on the basis of the ruling.

As the PCA ruling was handed down, US State Department Counselor Kristie Kenney, a former ambassador to the Philippines, traveled to Manila to push for a strong stance. The new government did not oblige, but publicly said it would "research the ruling carefully." Duterte announced he was appointing former President Fidel Ramos to head a delegation to Beijing to carry out bilateral negotiations over the South China Sea and trade ties.

A week later, a US congressional delegation, headed by Senator Chris Murphy, met with Duterte, and told him the PCA ruling was "non-negotiable" and he should not be engaged in negotiations with China.

Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers met from July 21 to 26. Fierce disputes broke out over whether the ASEAN joint communiqué would include reference to the PCA ruling. Kerry attended the summit, pressing repeatedly on the contentious topic of the South China Sea. It was reported at the time that Cambodia, which has close ties to China, blocked the inclusion of the PCA ruling in the communiqué. Phnom Penh issued a statement on July 28 claiming that it was Manila, and Foreign Secretary Yasay, which had the section on the ruling removed from the communiqué. Manila has denied the claim.

Traveling to Manila from Laos, where the ASEAN summit was held, Kerry was the first foreign minister to meet with the new Philippine president. He adopted the tack of using and supporting Duterte's fascist agenda as a means of securing a stronger position from Manila against China.

On the day of Kerry's arrival, the Philippine Supreme

Court ruled “with finality” that the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which provides the US with military bases in the country, was constitutional. The judges turned down the bogus legal challenge to the deal filed by the Maoist umbrella group BAYAN.

In his meeting with Duterte, Kerry highlighted the fact that he and Duterte had a common past as state prosecutors. Like Duterte, he stated, Washington was “committed to fighting the illegal drug trade.”

US Ambassador to Manila Philip Goldberg, who was present at the meeting, told the press that Duterte’s inaugural speech and State of the Nation address revealed that the president was committed to “following due process and respecting human rights.” This is a flagrant lie. The two speeches repeatedly endorsed, in the most vulgar language, the murder of individuals accused of crimes, and granted immunity to the police and vigilantes who carried this out.

Kerry secured from Duterte and Yasay a public commitment that any talks between Manila and Beijing would open with a discussion of the PCA ruling. Beijing has publicly stated that it would not conduct any discussions with Manila on these grounds. Department of Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre announced on Thursday that the ruling would form the “underlining agendum” in any prospective bilateral talks with China

In return for this commitment, Kerry promised \$32 million for Duterte’s anti-drug campaign, to be spent on training and supplies for the police and military. Evidence strongly suggests that he also provided Duterte with military intelligence that attempts to connect China with the drug trade in the Philippines.

Kerry concluded his public press conference with Yasay by saying: “I speak for President Obama and his entire administration when I say that we look forward to working with President Duterte.”

Duterte left his meeting with Kerry and immediately convened the National Security Council. It was a nearly unprecedented gathering. Former presidents, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Benigno Aquino, joined the heads of the legislature and Duterte’s cabinet to discuss three topics: the South China Sea, the peace deal with the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the war on drugs. This was not a photo-op; they met for over five hours.

Duterte then convened a meeting of the mayors of major cities and governors of provinces, organized under the League of Cities and Provinces (LCP) and League of Provinces of the Philippines (LPP). He announced the funding he had received from Kerry.

Duterte told his audience that “a country friend of ours” has “provided us with intercepts” which revealed that the

transshipment of drugs in the Philippines came from China. He said he could not reveal all the details for security reasons, but the drug wholesale trade was being run entirely by “the Chinese (intsik)” who were based not in the Philippines, but in China. He claimed that the evidence supplied to him revealed that the Chinese were using drug money to “buy judges, fiscals, the police, mayors, governors.”

The president proposed to spend a large portion of the money received from Washington on what he called rehabilitation centers. He described what can only be called concentration camps. Duterte said he was making arrangements for space to be provided in every military facility throughout the country for housing the detained. The detainees “would be placed in barracks” within “high wire encampments.”

Anyone, Duterte stated, “who is no longer of service to humanity” would be detained. Drug users would be rounded up. There were too many for the police to handle. Over 170,000 had surrendered thus far, he claimed. “We don’t need a legal basis for this,” he stated. The state had the right, he asserted, to “lock up” anyone who is insane. And “drug users” were insane.

The next morning, Duterte delivered a speech to members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and police and reiterated his claim that a “friendly country” had given evidence that the Chinese were behind the drug trade.

He ominously told his audience: “I want to confront China over this... We can’t start a war with China, but if they invade us that’s a different matter.”

Kerry’s money does not come without strings attached. One can only conclude that the Duterte administration, in league with Washington, is cooking up a provocation of some sort that will be used by the US to greatly intensify pressure on China.



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