

# Kerry backs Duterte's murderous anti-drug campaign: "Placing a cheapness on the lives of Orientals"

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US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte July 30 in Manila and pledged \$32 million to fund Duterte's anti-drug campaign, an operation that involves death squads, police murders and concentration camps. Since Duterte took office at the end of June, more than 500 alleged criminals have been killed by police and vigilante groups.

Kerry has come a long way since he testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1971 and denounced the conduct of the US military in Vietnam in terms of moral outrage. He told the committee that "we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of Orientals."

Kerry has long since overcome any such moral compunctions, integrating himself into the Democratic party apparatus, running unsuccessfully as the party's presidential candidate, and finally becoming the top diplomatic face of US imperialism. He is now the one who hangs Washington's price tag on the cheapness of human lives.

The \$32 million he dispensed to fund the murder of impoverished Filipinos is meant to secure Manila's support for Washington's anti-Chinese "pivot to Asia."

For US imperialism, "the lives of Orientals" have always been cheap. William McKinley bought the colony of the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million in 1898. The bill of sale was written in the blood of over a million Filipinos who were killed in the war of conquest that marked the entry of the United States onto the world stage as an imperialist power.

From the installation to the presidency of Ramon Magsaysay, hand-picked in 1953 by the "quiet American" CIA operative Edward Lansdale, to the full

support it gave the martial law regime of Ferdinand Marcos, Washington has ruled its former colony with near total control, preserving it as a foothold in the Asia Pacific region.

The United States is seeking to maintain its global hegemonic dominance through military means, encircling Russia and China and escalating tensions to the threshold of a new world war. Under the previous Philippine administration, headed by Benigno Aquino, Manila played a key role in spearheading the US pivot in the South China Sea, filing a legal claim against China before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague and signing a deal to allow the unlimited basing of US forces in the country.

The newly installed Duterte administration has been more hesitant in provoking China, hoping to forge expanded economic ties with Beijing.

Duterte is a fascistic figure, openly contemptuous of human life. He has granted impunity to the police and military and called upon them to exterminate "criminals." He declared in a speech that he would leave office as the Idi Amin of the Philippines, a reference to the Ugandan dictator and mass murderer.

The Obama administration has established a pattern of funding and support for far-right and fascistic forces around the world in pursuit of US imperialist interests. In 2013, it backed the military coup by the Egyptian butcher General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. In 2014, it supported a fascist-led coup in Ukraine as part of its campaign against Moscow. It armed the al-Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, as a proxy in its campaign to oust President Bashar al-Assad.

The Obama administration has no qualms about funding the murderous Duterte government if it will

facilitate the economic, political and military isolation and destabilization of China.

Duterte is putting Washington's funds to good use. The number reported killed by police and vigilantes ranges from fifteen to twenty a day. Those murdered come from the most impoverished layers of the population, the shantytown dwellers and the informally employed, who dwell, in their millions, on the margins and in the interstices of Philippine cities, particularly Manila.

According to the *New York Times*, over 114,000 people, fearful of being killed in the anti-drug drive, have surrendered to the police. They have been crammed into the country's barbaric prison system.

The British *Independent* published a photo essay on July 31 revealing the conditions in these jails. The fetid cells, as well as the open courts and stairwells of the prisons, are so densely packed that there is no room to breathe. Industrial livestock have far better conditions than these human beings.

Duterte proposes to relieve the overcrowding by constructing concentration camps. He is calling for the building of high-wire-enclosed facilities in the center of military bases throughout the country to house those he claims are "no longer of service to humanity." The initial funding Duterte will use for these concentration camps was supplied by John Kerry.

The *New York Times* on August 2 claimed that Duterte's crackdown was "hugely popular" with Filipinos. As evidence, it cited an opinion poll on the new president's trustworthiness conducted before he even took office, as well as his "overwhelming victory" at the polls. In truth, Duterte won the presidency by a plurality, receiving a mere 38 percent of the vote. The base of support for Duterte comes overwhelmingly from the petty-bourgeoisie and big business.

The new president has announced that he supports the basing of US forces in the country, and since Kerry's visit, he has begun to escalate his rhetoric against China. Washington will happily continue funding Duterte's death squads and concentration camps as long as he toes its line against China.

In the 2016 US elections, the Democratic Party is presenting itself as the premiere party of US imperialism, in the interests of which it will continue to promote far-right governments and political forces internationally. The danger represented by the fascistic

Donald Trump cannot be opposed through support for the party that is funding the death squads of Rodrigo Duterte. Only the independent struggle of the working class in the United States, the Philippines and around the world in the fight for socialism can put an end to war and the growing threat of fascism.



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