

Harris visits Philippines President Marcos: Human rights hypocrisy and war mongering

John Malvar
22 November 2022

US Vice President Kamala Harris concluded a two-day visit to the Philippines on Tuesday. She had a busy schedule: meeting with both President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte, arranging for the expanded basing of US military forces in the country, and escalating preparations for war with China. But she managed to squeeze in speaking at an event on the importance of defending human rights.

There is no country like the United States for hypocrisy. Washington accuses its geopolitical opponents—Russia, China, Iran, the list is long—of violating human rights, carrying out war crimes, even committing “genocide.” But it pardons human rights violations, condones dictatorship, and facilitates mass repression by forces that serve its interests. Blood-soaked sanctimoniousness is the raw material of American empire.

Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son of the dead dictator, ran an election campaign dedicated to the rehabilitation of his father’s brutal military rule, which lasted from 1972 until the ouster of the Marcos family in 1986. Since taking office on June 30, Marcos Jr. has overseen a steady encroachment on basic democratic rights. It is a policy of creeping martial law.

His vice president, Sara Duterte, is the daughter of the former president Rodrigo Duterte, a fascistic thug who launched and oversaw a campaign of mass murder against the poor, which he termed a “war on drugs,” which killed over 30,000 people. Sara Duterte embraces and carries forward her father’s fascist legacy.

Harris signaled clearly that the Biden administration is prepared to embrace these figures and all the crimes that they represent, provided they will lead Manila back into the camp of Washington and its war plans against China.

Any visit by a top American official to the Philippines represents a return to the scene of a crime. The Philippines was the official colony of the United States for nearly 50 years. Washington brutally conquered the Filipino people, who had just declared their independence in an anti-colonial uprising against Spain. The bloody war waged by US imperialism killed over 200,000 Filipinos, placed entire provinces in concentration camps, tortured and executed prisoners, and burned entire villages to the ground. It was on the charred grounds of Philippine independence that Washington erected its “showcase of democracy” in Asia.

When social unrest in the post-war Philippines grew to levels that could not be peaceably contained, Washington abandoned its democratic pretensions and facilitated the martial law regime of Marcos Sr. As Ferdinand and Imelda oversaw the mass arrest, torture and murder of ordinary Filipinos, as the Marcos family pillaged the country, each successive US administration backed them to the hilt.

The Philippines represented a critical foothold for US empire in Asia. It was from Clark airbase and Subic Bay naval base that Washington staged much of its war in Vietnam. American planes launched from the Philippines carpet-bombed Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos.

These military bases, large and vital portions of Philippine territory ruled by the United States, were a standing affront to any semblance of national sovereignty. In 1991, the Philippine Senate voted, by a margin of one, not to renew the lease.

When the Obama administration launched its Pivot to Asia, it sought by military means to contain and reverse the rising economic power of China. The restoration of bases in the Philippines, so vital to the projection of US military power, was a critical component of these plans. The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), concluded in 2014 between the Obama and Benigno Aquino III administrations, was drawn up to restore US military bases to the former colony.

Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016, however, and looking to pursue closer economic ties with Beijing, he rejected many of Washington’s most aggressive proposals and threatened to cancel the EDCA. Relations between the US and the Philippines soured.

The new Marcos administration finds itself caught between the United States and China and claims to seek friendly ties with both countries. Such a balancing act is impossible, however, as Washington’s trade war measures and provocations over Taiwan have rendered the entire Asia Pacific region fundamentally unstable.

Looking to secure the loyalty of the Marcos administration, the Biden administration signaled that it would turn a blind eye to his attacks on democratic rights. Marcos Jr. faces over \$350 million in charges for contempt of court in the United States in cases associated with his family’s gross violations of human rights. He should have faced subpoena and arrest for criminal

contempt on traveling to the United States in September, but the Biden administration arranged for Marcos' safe travel to New York, where he held a friendly meeting with the US president. The thousands of murdered and tortured Filipinos represented in the legal cases against Marcos Jr. stood in the way of the interests of US imperialism, and Biden coldly buried their rights.

In her visit to the Philippines, Harris carried with her both the arrogant demands of US imperialism and its human rights pretensions. The most critical of Washington's demands was for additional locations to be granted by the Marcos government for use as US military bases. The Pentagon had selected five locations in the Philippines that it wanted to have and drew up a list of the territory that it was requesting. Harris presented the list to Marcos.

The EDCA deal, which nearly died during the six-year term of Duterte, is a document of unbridled neocolonialism. It is an executive agreement that undermines the constitutional power of the Philippine Senate to supervise any foreign troop presence in the country.

The EDCA grants portions of Philippine territory to the control of the US military, but attempts to maintain the pretense of Philippine sovereignty by authorizing a single Filipino to access the bases upon requesting permission from US officers. All US personnel have extrajudicial immunity from local jurisdiction; they are not subject to Philippine law. Washington pays no rent for the use of bases, and if the US chooses to abandon a base, the Philippine government is required to pay for any "improvements." Filipino staff working on the base are subject to American policing. There is no limit to the number of military personnel the US may deploy.

Philippine military Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Bartolome Bacarro told the press that the areas newly requested by the US under the EDCA included two locations on the Luzon Strait, which separates the Philippines from Taiwan, while the rest bordered the South China Sea. The selections are made in preparation for war with China.

Harris left her meetings with Marcos and Duterte to address a conference on human rights and the rights of women. "Remember," she told the assembled audience, "you are not alone in your fight for our god-given rights." She said that she was particularly committed to fighting for the rights of women and girls to live lives free from violence.

Along with the rule of the Catholic Church and the brutal Japanese occupation during World War II, no force wreaked more violence on Filipino women than US imperialism and its military. The bases, whose return Harris is demanding, fostered entire cities at the core of whose economy was the prostitution that serviced tens of thousands of US troops.

The commingled hypocrisy and war-mongering, Washington's peculiar specialty, reached its apogee the next morning when Harris flew to the island of Palawan. She was the first high-ranking US official to ever travel to the island,

which is famed mostly for its jungles and beach resorts. The closest point to the South China Sea, the island is the site of one of the locations that Washington is claiming under the EDCA.

Harris boarded a Philippine Coast Guard vessel, the *Teresa Magbanua*, and, unaccompanied by any ranking Philippine civilian official, delivered a speech to this branch of the Philippine military as they stood at attention. The vessel was named after a Filipino woman who was a general in the Philippine-American war and led organized guerrilla resistance against the forces of US occupation, but Washington does not let such historical trifles interfere with its ambitions.

"You are on the frontlines," she told them, "standing up for the international rules-based order." She made clear whose interests she was summoning them to defend, declaring, "America's prosperity relies on the billions of dollars that flow through these waters every day." The United States rejected "China's expansive South China Sea maritime claims," she asserted. This was a fight "for national sovereignty."

What a farce! No other country in the world would dream of acting with the level of audacity and hypocrisy routinely displayed by the United States. Harris had just presented a list of portions of Philippine territory over which the US military proposed to exercise unquestioned rule. As representative of a foreign power, the former colonial ruler, she boarded a vessel of the Philippine armed forces and addressed the assembled uniformed personnel on the subject of... "national sovereignty." The single greatest threat in Philippine history to the country's national sovereignty has always been US imperialism.

Harris' visit to the Philippines, meeting with Marcos and demanding military bases, vividly expose the essence of Washington's plans. No matter the tactical maneuvers the Biden administration engages in with China, no matter the changes it may temporarily adopt in its rhetoric, Washington is committed to a strategy that leads to war and is actively making material preparations for the outbreak of armed conflict.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact