

Washington's Summit for Democracy reaches new heights of hypocrisy

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29 March 2023

If there were a shred of honesty, let alone intelligence, in the media, the Biden administration's second "Summit for Democracy," which began Wednesday, would be designated the Summit of Authoritarian and Prowar Hypocrites or the Summit of Imperialist Stooges Willing to Prostrate Themselves before America's Posterior, or something even less dignified, but nonetheless accurate.

To say that this cynical affair was an exercise in going through the motions, even for President Biden, its chief sponsor and host, would not be an exaggeration. Despite the Biden administration's public claim that the COVID-19 pandemic is over, the summit was virtual, and no head of state was required to leave home and travel to Washington. All that was necessary was to sacrifice a few hours of one's time in order to curry favor with the leader of the most powerful imperialist state. More than 100 governments were willing to do so.

Biden opened the meeting with a pledge to devote \$690 million to a special democracy-promotion initiative. The perfunctory character of this pledge is demonstrated by its size: less than one-hundredth of the amount spent by US imperialism for the war in Ukraine last year. The Pentagon will spend \$690 million every seven hours under the budget submitted by the Biden administration earlier this month.

The corporate media, acknowledging the emptiness of the event, provided little coverage and no analysis. The motto seemed to be, the less said about this dismal affair the better. But this means the media is joining in a cover-up of the gross hypocrisy of American foreign policy. The event is worth examination, as an object lesson of the falsity of US claims to be leading the struggle of the "democracies" against the "authoritarians," a recycling of the Cold War claim that the US was acting as the representative of the "free world" against totalitarian Stalinist regimes.

The double standard, of course, is breathtaking. Some key US allies are so brutally repressive they could not be invited. It would be hard to argue that Saudi Arabia or Egypt are more democratic than Iran or Russia, or that Thailand and Myanmar afford greater rights to their peoples than China.

The Summit for Democracy was actually a thoroughly undemocratic affair. The Biden administration, alone, decided which governments would be invited. This decision was not

based on any democratic criterion—Otherwise, how could regimes that have jailed, expelled or outlawed political opponents have been welcomed? Governments were invited based on whether they were in support of American foreign policy, particularly the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, or the US military build-up against China.

How else to explain the attendance of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose record of promoting Hindu communal violence against the Muslim minority goes back more than 20 years, to the pogrom in Gujarat where he headed the state government? Since he became head of the national government in 2014, his Hindu chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has built up an authoritarian state that systematically suppresses popular opposition, shuts down newspapers and jails opponents.

Most recently, the regime imposed a two-year prison sentence on Rahul Gandhi, who leads the Congress Party and is the son and grandson of prime ministers, on bogus charges of defamation for a speech he gave criticizing Modi. On March 23, Gandhi was expelled from parliament for this insult to the prime minister, essentially a charge of *lèse majesté*. Yet India is still routinely described as the "world's largest democracy."

Other "democracies" by the standards of the US State Department include the Philippines, now headed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who hails the brutal military dictatorship of his father as the country's "golden age"; Peru, where a right-wing majority in Congress, backed by the military, deposed and jailed the elected president and carried out massacres of rural workers and peasants who rose up in protest; Kenya, whose president has ordered savage police attacks on opposition protests claiming his election was fraudulent; and Poland, where the ultra-right PiS government has outlawed abortion, criminalized scholarly research into the role of Polish fascists in the Holocaust and worked systematically to create a one-party state dominated by the Catholic Church.

Taiwan has been invited, although it is not a country but part of China, which is recognized as the legal ruler of the island by the vast majority of countries in the world, and even by the United States itself. Nonetheless, the Taipei government was welcome to attend, as a further provocation against Beijing, part of the US incitement of a military conflict in East Asia.

Then there are two of the closest US allies, Israel and Ukraine. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended, after facing the largest protests in the country's history and a full-scale general strike, triggered by his attempt to straitjacket the courts and impose an effective dictatorship of the ultra-right settlers and religious extremists.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky spoke to the summit Wednesday, repeating his well-worn appeals for outside military aid for the US-NATO war against Russia. His government operates a de facto police state, in which World War II-era Nazi collaborators like Stepan Bandera are hailed as the country's founding fathers, and the Russian language—spoken at home by nearly half the country's population—is effectively outlawed.

The state of democratic rights is no better in the imperialist centers. Biden declared in his remarks that when the first summit was held in 2021, "the sentiment in too many places around the world was that democracy's best days were behind us." Now he claimed, "thanks to the commitment of [global] leaders" and "the persistence of people in every region of the world," there were "real indications" that the tide was turning.

This only days after French President Emmanuel Macron, a featured speaker at the summit, imposed pension cuts in direct opposition to "the persistence of people" engaged in mass demonstrations, via the methods of dictatorial fiat and police violence.

And what of the state of democracy in the United States? Biden claimed, "We're also demonstrating the resilience of American democracy," citing the defeat of the most extreme pro-Trump candidates in the 2022 midterm elections. But he made no reference to the fact that one of the two main parties in official American politics, the Republican Party, has become a fascist party in all but name, with Trump himself the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination.

While hundreds of lower-level participants in the failed coup of January 6, 2021 have been tried, convicted and in some cases jailed, the organizers and political leaders of the violent attack on Congress, above all, Trump himself and his inner circle, have gone scot-free and are threatening similar actions in 2024 or even earlier. A similar free pass has been given to officials of the military-intelligence apparatus who permitted the attack to take place and even aided it.

Moreover, the Biden administration and the Democratic Party are themselves enemies of the democratic rights of working people. Their claims, during the mass protests over the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, to oppose police violence have been scrapped, in favor of the politics of law and order, including Biden's own pledge to pour billions more into arming the police.

On the US-Mexico border, there is for all practical purposes a police-state regime, with migrants fleeing repression and poverty trapped between Border Patrol thugs on one side and the Mexican police and military on the other. The terrible

conditions facing migrants, for which the Biden administration now bears the main responsibility, were shown most starkly this week in the fire that engulfed a refugee detention camp in Ciudad Juarez, within sight of El Paso, Texas, killing 40 men and gravely injuring 28 others.

As for workers' rights, less than four months ago the Democratic-controlled Congress passed a bill to outlaw a strike by 110,000 railroad workers and impose on them a contract they had voted to reject. Biden signed the bill into law enthusiastically. His administration is working with the unions to suppress strikes by dock workers, teachers, autoworkers, health care workers and this summer by 350,000 Teamsters at United Parcel Service.

The latest initiative on "democracy," highlighted in Biden's remarks and a supporting document issued by the White House, is the issuance of a new executive order to prohibit government officials from using commercial spyware. Biden presented this as a measure to restrict illegal surveillance, but its actual purpose is to reserve the power of spying on Americans to the US intelligence agencies. The CIA and FBI already have far greater surveillance capabilities than any private company, as Edward Snowden showed in his courageous release of intelligence documents in 2013.

The supposedly democratic government of the United States is devoting all its efforts to arrest and imprison figures like Snowden and particularly Julian Assange of WikiLeaks, who have exposed the antidemocratic conspiracies of the American government against the entire population of the world.

At the center of all the attacks on democratic rights is the Biden administration's policy of war with Russia and build-up towards war with China. The American people have not voted for these wars, and they do not support them, but their lives are being put into dire jeopardy in conflicts that threaten to spiral into a nuclear holocaust.

As the history of the 20th century repeatedly demonstrated, democracy is the first casualty of war. There is no defense of democratic rights outside of the most intransigent struggle against imperialist war. And both of these struggles, against war and for democratic rights, require the independent mobilization of the working class against the capitalist system, on the basis of a socialist program.



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