

Philippine president angers Beijing by congratulating Taiwan's president-elect

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In a provocative breach of the Philippines' "One China" policy, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. congratulated Taiwan's new president-elect Lai Ching-te on January 14, one day after the election. The move is in line with Manila's growing alignment with US imperialism, as Washington recklessly goads Beijing over Taiwan.

Writing on X/Twitter, Marcos stated, "On behalf of the Filipino people, I congratulate President-elect Lai Ching-te on his election as Taiwan's next President. We look forward to close collaboration, strengthening mutual interests, fostering peace, and ensuring prosperity for our peoples in the years ahead." Marcos was the only head of state internationally to directly congratulate Lai.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was more cautious in congratulating Lai and "the Taiwan people for once again demonstrating the strength of their robust democratic system and electoral process." The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Japan offered a similar message through their foreign ministries.

In response, Beijing protested against these breaches of the One China policy, which regards Taiwan as part of China rather than an independent country. Formally adhered to by countries around the world, including in Washington and Manila, the One China policy underpins all diplomatic relations with Beijing.

Beijing is particularly sensitive to the election of Lai, who won the presidency with just 40 percent of the vote in the first-past-the-post poll. He was the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which advocates greater independence for Taiwan, and is regarded in China as a "dangerous separatist." Beijing has repeatedly warned that it would respond to any formal declaration of independence by Taipei with force.

The Philippines, unsurprisingly, drew particular ire. Manila's envoy to China was summoned to provide a "responsible explanation" for Marcos' remarks, which foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning called "a gross interference in China's internal affairs."

Mao called on the Philippines to "stop immediately its wrongful words and deeds on Taiwan-related issues and sending wrong signals to separatist forces for Taiwan independence." She added, "We suggest that President Marcos read more books to properly understand the ins and outs of the Taiwan issue so as to draw the right conclusions."

The official Philippine response was far from conciliatory. According to press leaks, Marcos' tweet was apparently not vetted by the Department of Foreign Affairs. However, while claiming to reaffirm the One China policy, the department justified Marcos' official recognition of the new president in Taiwan as "his way of thanking [Taipei] for hosting nearly 200,000 Filipino contract workers."

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro was more belligerent. On January 17, he accused Mao of "spouting state-sanctioned propaganda and disinformation" and of stooping to "low and gutter-level talk—resorting to insulting our president and the Filipino nation, and further debasing herself, the ministry, and party she represents in the process."

On January 23, Marcos also responded to China's protests. In an interview with a local TV station, he defended his congratulatory comment to Taiwan's new president-elect as a "common courtesy." He insisted that the "One China policy remains in place" and that he was not "endorsing Taiwanese independence. Taiwan is a province of China."

The Philippine's One China policy is based on the 1975 Joint Communiqué between the government of

Marcos Jr.'s father, Ferdinand Marcos Sr., and the People's Republic of China. In the communiqué, the Philippines recognized Beijing as the "sole legal government of China" and that "Taiwan is an integral part of Chinese territory" while ending all official representation with the island.

The agreement resulted in China's ending its support for the Communist Party of the Philippines and its insurgency. Beijing opened trade and economic relations with Manila, lending legitimacy to the Marcos dictatorship and its brutal suppression of workers and farmers.

China is now the Philippines' top trading partner, export destination, and import source, according to government data. The *Global Times* reported bilateral trade volume between China and the Philippines reached \$US87.725 billion in 2022.

Now, the US and its allies, including the Philippines, are carrying out a coordinated effort to undermine and ultimately overturn the One China policy and provoke war with China, all in the name of defending democracy in Taiwan.

The US is leading this war drive against China which it regards as the chief threat to its global dominance. For their part, the Philippine ruling elites are driven by the thought of gaining access to the natural gas and other mineral resources in the South China Sea where Manila has longstanding territorial disputes with Beijing.

Trillions of pesos are being allocated for Manila's war preparations. On January 29, 2024, Teodoro, announced that President Marcos had approved the revised military procurement program would see the government spend over 2 trillion pesos (\$US35.5 billion) in the next decade. Teodoro stated that the program, called Re-Horizon 3, would enable the Philippine military "to project power into areas where we must, by constitutional fiat and duty, protect and preserve our resources."

Teodoro added that the aim was "to guarantee, as much as possible, Philippine nationals, Philippine corporations, and those authorized by the Philippine government, the unimpeded and peaceful exploration and exploitation of all natural resources within our exclusive economic zone and other areas where we have jurisdiction." For 2024 alone, the defense department is allocating an estimated 278-billion-peso

(\$US5 billion) budget with 40 billion pesos (\$US710 million) for the military's modernization program.

For Manila, the promotion of anti-Chinese chauvinism is also aimed at dividing the working class and directing growing social tensions outwards. Like its capitalist counterparts around the world, the Philippine government is sitting on a social powder keg as it conducts a class war against workers. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), the country's central bank, has ramped up interest rates by 400 basis points since 2022 to 6.5 percent, the highest in 16 years. Ostensibly aimed at taming inflation, the rate hikes are meant to drive up unemployment and suppress workers' demands for higher wages.

In a revealing report, BSP governor Eli Remolina told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* that he was fighting, not inflation, but "inflation expectations" brought about by supply shocks that "lead to second-round effects" of wages and transportation fares going up. "That's the reason we have to tighten," he declared.

More than two million workers are currently unemployed. Approximately 30 percent of all wage workers earn less than two-thirds of the median wage of just \$US326 a month. Officially, just over 22 percent of the population are living in dire poverty. However, a recent OCTA Research poll showed that 45 percent or 11.9 million families rated themselves as living in poverty and 14 percent or 3.7 million families admitted to having gone involuntarily hungry, missing at least one meal a day in the past three months.

As the Marcos administration lines up with Washington's war preparations, the working class is being forced to pay the price for the huge increases in the military budget. The only means of preventing a catastrophic war against China by the US, which is already at war with Russia in Ukraine and backing Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, is a unified anti-war movement of the international working class based on a socialist perspective.



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