

ANG

Pahayagan ng Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas
Pinapatnubayan ng Marxismo-Leninismo-Maoismo

Bayan

English Edition
Special issue
April 23, 2014

www.philippinerevolution.net

Confront Obama's visit and US military basing with protests!

On April 28, Barack Obama, current US imperialist chief will be visiting the country to inaugurate the newest military agreement between the US and the Philippines. After a series of meetings since March, US and Philippine government and military officials finalized the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) on April 11.

The US and the Philippines first began negotiations for the new agreement in January 2011, right after the US announced plans to "pivot" towards Asia and declared the New Pacific Century. With the declaration, the US considers as key to the US' recovery from crisis the strengthening of trade and investments in Asia through a stronger military presence in the region.

The US' planned "pivot" involves deploying to Asia up to 60% of its naval forces and 50% of its land forces abroad. This is equivalent to maintaining hundreds of thousands of troops in various parts of Asia. In this manner, it could project its military strength at any time and in any place in the region.

Also part of the US "pivot" to Asia is the forging of regional and bilateral agreements with countries in the Asia-Pacific to facilitate coordination. The US

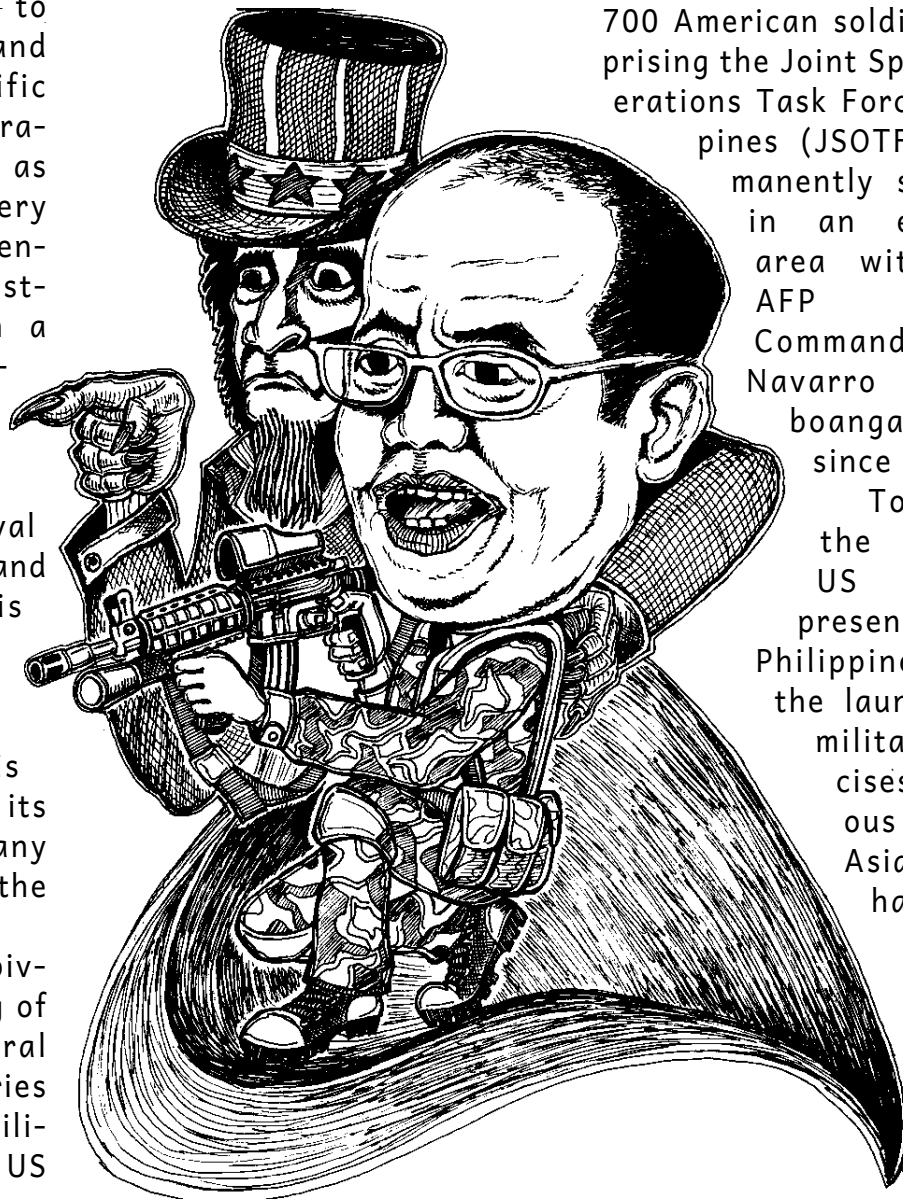
estimates that the "pivot" would be completed in the next decade.

In the past three years,

US warships, jetfighters and armed troops have been arriving in the Philippines with greater frequency and in greater numbers. In 2012, warships docked at Philippine ports at least 80 times, growing to 150 in 2013 and even more often in succeeding years.

Aside from rotational US military troops, there are 700 American soldiers comprising the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) permanently stationed in an exclusive area within the AFP Western Command's Camp Navarro in Zamboanga City since 2002.

To justify the growing US military presence in the Philippines and the launching of military exercises in various parts of Asia, the US has been stoking diplomatic tensions regarding



multi-country claims to islands and land formations in the South China Sea, including the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. Benigno Aquino III's government has played a distinct role in this fracas by taking the lead in hurling verbal challenges at China.

Aquino and the US government have invoked "tensions with China" to justify the growing US presence in the Philippines. The Aquino regime portrays the US as a "friend" of the Philippines regarding the conflict with China. Aquino's officials have also been claiming that under the 1956 Mutual Defense Treaty, the US has an "obligation" to support the Philippines once conflict erupts in the South China Sea.

While the US continues to strengthen its military relations with China (which includes its participation in the Rim of Pacific Exercise

or RIMPAC in June), it also repeatedly states that it would "come to the aid of its friend," to the delight of its gullible puppets in the Philippines. In fact, the ruling monopoly bureaucrat capitalist class in China is a close ally of US imperialism, even if the US keeps a watchful eye on and blocks China's growth and domination over Asia.

The US and Philippine governments began to frame the EDCA to lay down the legal basis for the continued and growing US military presence in the Philippines. Described as an aid to strengthening the country's maritime security, it is anchored on, and is an elaboration of, the Mutual Defense Treaty, the Visiting Forces Agreement and the Military Logistics Support Agreement.

To justify the EDCA, the US military presence in the Philippines is likewise presented as an adjunct of "other security-related issues" such as "humanitarian aid/disaster response" or HA/DR. The US strengthened the HA/DR aspect of the agreement after it was able to invoke it to justify the mass deployment of its troops and military hardware. In one example, the US' biggest warship docked in Leyte Gulf in November 2013 in the name of providing assistance to the victims of typhoon Yolanda.

The US will be invoking this same provision to justify plans to bring in its troops to Eastern Visayas under the cloak of Pacific Partnership 2014, a naval exercise to be held in Tacloban City and nearby

areas in June.

After months of negotiations, EDCA's details remain secret. With the limited information being shared by Aquino officials, its contents will likely contain the following:

1) the US military will be allowed to maintain bases or enclaves within military camps of the Armed Forces of the Philippines;

2) US military forces will enjoy more extensive rights and authority to use any facility, especially seaports and airports, to achieve a "minimum credible defense" against "Chinese aggression" regarding Philippine territories in the South China Sea; and

3) the US military will be able to conduct military exercises and operations anywhere in the Philippines in the name of "humanitarian aid/disaster response."

Thus, the EDCA is no other than an agreement that formally restores the US military bases. Under it, the US military will be enjoying exclusive access to military facilities for docking, landing and stationing its vehicles, equipment and military troops within the country. It revives the hated Military Bases Agreement of 1946 that enabled the US to maintain its huge military bases in the country until 1991.

The EDCA violates Philippine national sovereignty anew and paves the way for further US military domination and control over the country's political, military, diplomatic and economic affairs.



Special Issue April 23, 2014

Ang Bayan is published in Pilipino, Bisaya, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Waray and English editions.

It is available for *downloading* at the Philippine Revolution Web Central located at:

www.philippinerevolution.org.

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Ang Bayan is published fortnightly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines

1) What is "troop rotation" and "increased rotational presence?"

ONE of the key issues in the new treaty involves the Philippines' grant of permission to the US to maintain permanent troop presence in the country in the guise of "troop rotation." Combat troops, warships and warplanes take turns maintaining their presence in areas covered by US military operations.

Within the frame of the US' "Asia pivot," US troops, warships and warplanes will be maintaining "increased rotational presence" in the Asia-Pacific region. A major aspect involves the deployment of 60% of its entire naval fleet to the region, from the current 50-50 division between the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean.

The more frequent and numerous dockings of US warships in the Philippines has been going on since 2010. A US Navy report states that up to 51 of its warships docked in various ports in the country in 2010; fifty-four in 2011; eighty-eight in 2012; and seventy-two in the first half of 2013 alone (January-July).

Simultaneously, military troops will be massively deployed in various bases and base-like facilities in the Asia-Pacific, mainly in Australia (Darwin), Singapore (Changi Bay) and South Korea (Jeju Island) through a series of "port visits," military exercises and other activities.

In the Philippines, the US plans to maintain 4,000-5,000 troops in various local seaports, airports and "joint operational bases." These will comprise rotational forces and units, including US Marines and Navy elements previously based in Okinawa, Japan and now based temporarily in Guam.

2) Why will permanent military bases and facilities be built by American troops in the Philippines if all they will be maintaining is their rotational presence?

A REQUISITE for the US' "increased rotational presence" is the existence of permanent facilities for the US military's exclusive use as docking and landing areas for its growing number of warships and warplanes, and areas with which to station its combat troops for rest and recreation and store its fuel, weapons and equipment.

In actuality, the American troops will be staying in various seaports and exclusive enclaves being prepared for them within AFP military camps. US documents call these "access locations" or "cooperative security locations" in older papers.

Such an arrangement is highly similar to the current arrangement between the US and the Philippines regarding the 700 rotational troops of the US Special Forces based at the headquarters of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (formerly the Joint Task Force-510 of the Special Operations Command, Pacific) in Camp Navarro, Zamboanga City. Although the American troops are here on a rotational basis, they maintain permanent facilities within the camp that could not be easily accessed by Filipino officers.

The US Special Forces have also been maintaining facilities in Camp Malagutay in Malagutay and Camp Andrew Air Base in Sta. Maria, both in Zamboanga City; Camp General Bautista in Busbus, Jolo, Sulu; and at the Philippine Naval Station in Bato-Bato, Panglima, Sugala, Tawi Tawi. Local residents call these

Nature of US rotational troops in the Philippines

THE majority of the military forces to be deployed in Southeast Asia "on rotation" have already been assigned to the region in the past. Foremost among them is the Seventh Fleet, the biggest "forward deployed" US force. Formerly stationed at the Subic Naval Base in Olongapo City, it currently maintains a permanent base in Okinawa, Japan.

The Seventh Fleet comprises 60-70 ships, 300 combat planes and helicopters and 40,000 Marines and Navy forces. Its flagship is the USS George Washington, a nuclear-capable aircraft carrier that has docked several times in the Philippines in the past two years.

These troops are US assault forces. The Seventh Fleet has a long record of intervention and combat in Asia, including Korea, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam; and lately, in the US wars of aggression in the Middle East. The US began reducing its troops in Okinawa and transferring them since 2007 due to the Japanese people's widespread hatred for the heinous crimes committed by American soldiers against children and women.

In December 2013, the US and Japan's reactionary state agreed to close down the Futenma Base in Okinawa housing tens of thousands of US Marines and transfer them elsewhere on the island. Eight thousand US Marines will also be transferred to Guam, Hawaii and other areas.

facilities "American camps" and US public documents identify them as "small bases."

With the help of its puppet states in Asia, the US plans to build or repair bases/airports/seaports that could be used by its troops on short notice as staging areas, depots for equipment and troops or for resting. A report prepared for the US Army Pacific Command states that in Southeast Asia alone, there are 50 such locations that can be used for these purposes. Among these are old and small airports and seaports and military camps and bases that the US was able to use under the Military Bases Agreement.

3) Which camps and facilities are being prepared by the US-Aquino regime for US troops?

EVEN before the new agreement could be finalized, the Aquino regime had already begun construction on new airports and seaports and repairing camps and other military facilities in the name of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Plan.

Officials of the US-Aquino regime claim that the modernization of Subic and Clark is being done in preparation for the transfer of the Philippine Navy and Philippine Air Force headquarters. Nonetheless, the regime's military officers openly admit that changes being made in the two former bases are focused on servicing US troops, ships and planes and those of its allies (like Japan and India; and lately, South Korea through a parallel military agreement). An estimated ₱10 billion is needed to modernize Subic alone.

The US has been pushing for access to other airports and seaports for the "refuelling and

repair" of its ships and planes. Among these are Poro Point in La Union, Sangley Point in Cavite and commercial ports in the cities of Laoag, Cagayan de Oro and Zamboanga. The US also wants similar facilities in Batanes; Sta. Ana, Cagayan; General Santos City; and Cebu City to be open for use. These seaports and airports form part of a network of facilities that could be reached by their warships from Guam in five days or less.

At the same time, the US itself has been modernizing camps that its troops have been using often. In 2011, then US Ambassador Harry Thomas boasted that the US has provided ₱200 million in military assistance to the Aquino regime to modernize various AFP camps, including ₱42 million for the construction of barracks, toilet facilities and mess halls at Basa Air Base in Pampanga and ₱25 million to repair roads inside Fort Magsaysay (headquarters of the 7th ID) in Nueva Ecija. These two camps are regularly used as venues for US military exercises.

The US plans to permanently base several battalions of US Marines, Navy and Air Force (1,500+ troops) in Subic Bay and Clark Air Base (200) to support the growing number of rotational troops in the region for joint exercises and military operations, among others.

The US likewise plans to build an "advance command post" in Palawan and maintain an undersize company from the Marine Special Operations Battalion (60-70 troops) in the area. The plan includes the formation of a "joint command" with the Philippine Marine Corps Reservation in Samariniana, Brooke's Point in Palawan and extending an airstrip inside from

1 kilometer to 2.4 kilometers to accommodate US warplanes. It will also repair an airstrip in Balabac, southern Palawan formerly used by the US in World War II.

The plan likewise includes the construction (already made public) of a naval base in Oyster Bay, which is just a few kilometers away from the protected Underground River, for the use of US warships. Alongside Filipino soldiers, the US had already begun construction on a naval base in the guise of launching the 13th Philippines-US Amphibious Landing Exercise or PHIBLEX 13 in October 2012. The ₱500 million used for the construction of the so-called Little Subic was sourced from the AFP modernization fund.

The US also plans to build "joint operational bases" in Ulu-gan Bay in Macarascas town and in Tarumpitao Point in Rizal town, both in Palawan. Within the frame of the "joint command" and of building a "joint operational base" (also known as "base-sharing"), hundreds of American soldiers will be able to undertake long-term basing in the guise of "troop rotation" without directly admitting to permanently basing foreign troops in the country.

In the guise of conducting relief and rehabilitation in areas devastated by typhoon Yolanda last year, the US has now been using Guiuan Military Airbase in Eastern Samar anew, which it built during the Second World War.

4) Why is it important for the US to "pivot" towards Asia?

THE Asian region is important to the US. The world's two biggest economies can be found here

(India and China). So can the two biggest importers of US goods—Japan and the ASEAN bloc composed of ten small countries. The two sea routes (the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea) used for 70% of maritime commerce in the Pacific are in Southeast Asia.

The biggest markets for US weapons and other military equipment are also in the Asia-Pacific (Australia and South Korea). The US sold up to \$10 billion worth of firearms to India in the past decade and plans to further expand its share of the market.

In addition, the US needs in a major way to confront China, one of the biggest threats to its economic and military domination of Asia. Its "pivot" towards Asia and its calculated military priorities play a particular role in asserting more neoliberal changes in the Chinese economy in the US' desire to gain more advantages for big American capitalist investors in China.

In strengthening its presence in Asia, the US actively thwarts China's attempts to rule trade and investments as a sole power or set itself up as a regional leader both economically and militarily among countries in the Asia-Pacific.

5) What has the "pivot" so far achieved?

THE US is still in the process of laying the requisites for continually shifting its forces to Asia, which it estimates will be completed in 2020.

Last year, it began rotating a number of Marine battalions in its base in Darwin, Australia. The US is still in the process of negotiating with Australia on the opening of its other military camps to the presence of Ameri-

can forces, repairing a seaport for the docking of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, and using some of its islands as launching pads for warplanes and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV).

In Singapore, four LCS allegedly being used by the US for HA/DR have already begun rotation, with the ships staying for as long as six months in Changi Bay. At the same time, Singapore has opened to the US the use of the nearby airport for aircraft repairs and refuelling.

In 2011, the US signed a related agreement on "maritime security" with Indonesia that led to the launching of 140 "military exercises" within the country.

In 2012, the US and Vietnam forged a military treaty that allegedly covered maritime security, "search and rescue opera-

tions," "peacekeeping operations" and HA/DR.

Meanwhile, the US continues to deploy troops in various parts of the region in the name of joint military exercises, special operations and HA/DR.

Cobra Gold, one of the biggest and longest military exercises in the region, continues to be conducted in Thailand.

In 2013, the US launched one of the biggest "military exercises" along the South Korea-North Korea border. These provocations led to North Korea's revocation of the armistice agreement it signed and its declaration of a state of war between the two countries.

In Japan, a newly built US radar facility was inaugurated on April 20. The military facility is part of the US Missile Defense in Asia. AB

The "pivot to Asia" in military terms

IN military terms, increasing the US naval force means adding one aircraft carrier, seven destroyers and its attached amphibious sea vessels, ten Littoral Combat Ships (LCS or ships that sail along the shores) and two submarines in the waters of the Asia-Pacific. About 60% of US Air Force elements stationed overseas will also be positioned in the region, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) currently being used for combat and surveillance in Afghanistan and new warplanes. It will also mean deploying 60% of the US' space and internet capability to the region.

Likewise, it will mean deploying 60% of the US' space and internet capability to the Asia-Pacific.

In addition, some 60,000 troops previously stationed in Afghanistan will be transferred to Asia while maintaining the previous number of American troops in the region. The bulk of these forces will be stationed in Guam and Hawaii.

At present, there are 325,000 US military and civilian forces based in Asia under the US Pacific Command (PACOM). US PACOM covers the entire India-Asia-Pacific region from the coast of California to the India-Pakistani border.

PACOM comprises 1) two big fleets with 180 ships, 2,000 airplanes and 140,000 troops; 2) a 74,000-strong Marine Corps troop; 3) an Air Force troop with 40,000 pilots in nine bases, with 300 airplanes; 5) an Army troop with 60,000 personnel and groups of special forces conducting operations in 30 countries in the Asia-Pacific.