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INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

NOT YOUR WAR GAME ZONE:

A Primer on the Violation of People's Rights Under US-Led Military Build Up in the Philippines

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This educational primer was created by the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines. ICHRP is a global network of organizations, concerned about the human rights situation in the Philippines, and committed to campaign for just and lasting peace in the country.

It aims to inform the international community about the grave human rights situation in the Philippines today.

Beyond information dissemination, it calls on freedom loving peoples, organizations, political parties, and governments all over the world to express their concern about the still deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines and to help the tens of thousands of victims in their quest for justice.

ICHRP operates in 15 countries around the world. Our more than 50 member organizations include churches, trade unions, environmental advocacy groups, and grassroots Philippine solidarity groups, among others.

To get involved in ICHRP, please send us a message on our website at ichrp.net/contact, or direct message us on one of our socials @ICHRPGlobal.

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RED-ALERT: US MILITARY BUILD UP IN THE PHILIPPINES

Through the escalating crisis of the world system we are seeing today, one thing has remained constant: intensifying economic and military conflict between the US and its allies on one hand, and China and its allies on the other. In this conflict Marcos Jr. has dutifully submitted himself to US interests by opening up the Philippines to US investments and new US military bases, making the Filipino people potential cannon fodder in US war efforts and provocations. The Philippines continues to host military exercises with foreign forces, strike up new Visiting Forces Agreements (VFAs) with various countries, and collaborate with foreign military forces on surveillance inside the country.

As the US prepares for war against China, counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns continue to intensify against the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army - National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP) and with devastating precision against civilian non-combatants, as the government attempts to wipe out dissent and activism, allegedly to focus the attention of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) wholly on China. The current US provocation of war against China demonstrates once again ongoing US dominance over Philippine economy and politics, and indicates the US will undermine the foundations of a just peace to the detriment of the Filipino people.

This primer aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the growing military relationships between the Philippines and its allies in the dual context of containing China and suppressing internal dissent and resistance. It covers the long history of American intervention and military occupation of the Philippines, as well as the longstanding resistance of the Filipino people to foreign power. The primer then details the various military agreements between the US and US allies with the Philippines. Finally, it describes the various social impacts of foreign military presence and COIN in the Philippines, and the ways in which these violate the Filipino people's collective rights.

The International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines calls on members of the international community to use this resource to strengthen their understanding of the situation, and carry forward our campaigns to expose and oppose military collaboration with the brutal US-Marcos Jr. regime.

SHORT HISTORY OF US OCCUPATION AND DOMINATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

A persistent thread in Philippine history since the dawn of the 20th Century has been the impact of the 1898-1914 US war of conquest of the Philippines, the US occupation of the Philippines up to 1946, and the subsequent neo-colonial relationship that emerged in the post-WWII Cold War era under a series of US puppet governments.

The initial US foray into the Philippines was a bloody affair. Filipinos who were fighting an anti-colonial war against Spain were on the verge of victory when the American navy arrived and 'destroyed' the Spanish Fleet in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, followed by a staged battle in Manila on August 13, 1898[1], which precipitated the Spanish surrender to the US. By that time, there was an agreement in place for the Spaniards to cede the Philippines to the United States, along with a few other Spanish colonies (Guam, Puerto Rico, and Cuba), for $20 million. On February 4, 1899, the US attempted to take the Philippines by force, which precipitated the bloody Philippine-American war and a decade of guerrilla resistance in which an estimated 500,000 to 1 million civilians perished in a genocidal US pacification campaign.[2]

Even during the Philippine-American War, the US used its foothold in the Philippines as a launching pad to project its growing power toward Asia. General Arthur MacArthur ordered troop deployments to China (June 1900) to join an eight-nation coalition to put down the Boxer Rebellion.[3] The US contribution eventually numbered 2,500, the vast majority of which were deployed from the Philippines.[4]

The social impacts of US colonialism in the Philippines have been profound. The US colonial administration reinforced systems of inequality that were institutionalized through 300 years of Spanish colonial rule. It maintained the hacienda system and brought in big agri-business corporations that have contributed to massive landlessness among the peasant population. This ultimately entrenched a system of elite landlord democracy and kleptocracy which continues to the present day.

In the post-war era, the US crippled the Philippine economy by stifling industrial development through a series of treaties which created a dependency on agricultural exports and manufactured imports. The Bell Trade Act (1947) set quotas on Philippine exports to the US, and pegged the Philippine peso to the US dollar at a rate of 2:1. The Parity Amendment (1947) gave American citizens and businesses parity rights in the Philippines, in order to enable the US monopolies to plunder Philippine natural resources and operate public utilities.[5]

Through the 1947 Military Bases Agreement, the US was allowed to maintain its presence in the Philippines for 99 years through 16 bases spread throughout the archipelago.[6] This covers areas such as Pampanga, Bataan, Cavite, Rizal, Manila, Baguio, Zambales, and Pampanga. It was not until the 1990s that the US military bases in the country would be significantly challenged and subsequently removed.

1 https://usa.inquirer.net/134305/the-staged-battle-of-manila-august-13-1898
2 https://philippines.michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/s/exhibit/page/filipinos-during-the-war. The United States Office of the Historian states that "As many as 200,000 Filipino civilians died from violence, famine, and disease."In contrast, Filipino historian Luzviminda Francisco places the number at least 1,000,000.
3 https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/early-20th-century-conflicts/boxer-rebellion.html
4 https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/early-20th-century-conflicts/boxer-rebellion.html
5 https://kahimyang.com/kauswagan/articles/995/today-in-philippine-history-march-11-1947-the-parity-amendment-to-the-1935-constitution-was-ratified
6 https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2158andcontext=ils

PEOPLE'S CLAMOR FOR NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AGAINST FOREIGN AGGRESSION

The Filipino people's struggle for national sovereignty and resistance to US military presence in the Philippines in the neocolonial era significantly gained steam during the 1960s[7]. During this decade, a reinvigorated mass movement led anti-US protests across the country. The establishment in 1964 of Kabataang Makabayan (Patriotic Youth), an anti-imperialist youth group, played a major role in mobilizing Filipino youth and subsequently paved the way for the formation of the national democratic movement in the Philippines.

The burgeoning strength of the mass movement culminated in the First Quarter Storm of 1970[8], a series of massive demonstrations which occurred from January to March 1970. These actions were markedly anti-US. Protesters condemned the continued presence of US military bases in the country, as well as the deployment of Filipino soldiers in the US' war against the Vietnamese people.

When Martial Law was declared by dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. in September 1972, the resistance to US bases was initially forced underground, but was later picked up by the budding national democratic movement in the early 1980s. Sectors such as the youth, women, workers, and others took to the streets to sharply denounce the role of the US in violating the sovereignty and human rights of the Filipino people.

After Marcos Sr. was deposed in the historic 1986 People Power uprising, resistance to the US bases intensified. One concrete victory achieved by the Filipino people was the inclusion of Article XVIII, Section 25 in the 1987 constitution, which prohibits foreign military bases, troops, or facilities except under a treaty duly concurred by the Senate[9].

As the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) neared its expiration in 1991, progressive and patriotic groups united to form the Anti-Bases Coalition in 1986 to campaign for its repeal. The people's clamor to end the US' military presence in the country was getting stronger every day. Protests and demonstrations that sought for the removal of US bases intensified[10].

On September 10, 1991, 50,000 people rallied in front of the Senate. On September 16, 1991, up to 170,000 people mobilized in front of the Senate to call for an end to the treaty. That same day, the Philippine Senate voted 12-11 in favor of rejecting the renewal of the bases agreement, ending a century of US military presence in the country. This historic victory however, was short lived, as within a decade subsequent military agreements signed by the Philippine government allowed the US military to return to the country[11].

Today, the resistance continues against treaties that continue to violate Philippine sovereignty and allow the presence of US troops in the Philippines: the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, the 1998 VFA, and the more recent EDCA signed in 2014 that essentially turns the whole Philippine archipelago into a huge US military base[12].

7 https://web.archive.org/web/20170705180022/http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/edsa/the-ph-protest-appendix/
8 https://www.bulatlat.com/news/2-49/2-49-fqs.html
9 https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/
10 https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/05/02/protesters-in-philippines-seek-removal-of-us-bases/8d6787a3-d667-4e8c-85d8-76b555e6d988/
11 https://www.bulatlat.com/news/2-32/2-32-bases.html
12 https://www.arabnews.com/node/2479226/world

US INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY AND MILITARY BUILD UP IN THE PHILIPPINES

Throughout the 20th century[13], the United States has sought to exert military might over the Indo-Pacific due to the region's rich natural resources and key commercial straights and chokepoints for global shipping, such as the Strait of Malacca and Straight of Hormuz[14]. The geographic location of the Philippines, its proximity to China, its key shipping lanes for the movement of commercial vessels, and its standing as the 5th most mineral-rich country in the world has made the country particularly vulnerable to US imperialist aggression.

In 1901, US Senator Albert Beverege said as much, stating: "the power that rules the Pacific… is the power that rules the world." The Senator further said the "lines of navigation from our ports to the Orient and Australia… converge at and separate from the Philippines." Beveridge's outlook, which justified US war in the Philippines based on its importance to trade in the region, typifies US policy towards the Philippines and Indo-Pacific that has remained to this day.

To entrench its military positioning in the Indo-Pacific, the US established in 1947 its "Indo-Pacific Command," which remains the oldest and largest unified military command today[15]. In the 1950's the US commenced its policy of "containing" China and developed the island chain strategy to surround China and the Soviet Union, which at the time represented the most significant threats to the US' economic and ideological hegemony. The US has repeatedly intervened and launched wars of aggression in places like Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines – where national liberation struggles' assertions of people's rights to self-determination and sovereignty threatened US access to resources and trade.

13 "America's Pacific Century" by Hillary Clinton https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release article/3349257/philippines-us-announce-locations-of-four-new-edca-sites/ https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/questions/uspolicy/ https://www.ibon.org/non-alignment-west-ph-sea/

14 https://www.forestshipping.com/global-shipping-map#:~:text=The%20Strait%20of%20Malacca%2C%20between%20the%20Malay,trade%20between%20Asia%20and%20the%20Middle%20East.

15 https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/History/

US TIMELINE

1899
US invasion of Philippines

1901
Establishment of Philippine Constabulary

1946
"Independence" of Philippines

1947
Establishment of US-Indo Pacific Command
Signing of Military Bases Agreement

1951
Signing of Mutual Defense Treaty

1991
End of Military Bases Agreement

1998
Signing of Visiting Forces Agreement

2014
Signing of Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement

2023
Expansion of EDCA Bases

2024
Deployment of Typhon Missiles to Philippines

However, much of US foreign policy throughout the latter part of the last century and the early 2000s focused largely on the Middle East and European spheres. This was due in large part to the oil reserves in the former and to the US' traditional diplomatic ties with the latter. The Pivot to Asia, announced in 2011 under President Barack Obama, represented a turning point and a next step in the containment of China. The Obama-era "pivot" or "rebalance" to the Asia-Pacific came on the heels of Hillary Clinton's article "America's Pacific Century" in Foreign Policy, in which the then-Secretary of State wrote "The future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action."

The US ruling class, as represented by those in the highest levels of government, shifted focus to Asia due in large part to China's emergence as a major economic power. China's economy is the world's second largest, and continues to grow rapidly; it is the world's largest exporter by value, and its GDP is almost 17% of the global economy. With its Belt and Road Initiative, China has also been investing in overseas development and infrastructure, making it a major competitor for the US.

Meanwhile, the South China Sea / West Philippine Sea is a vital trade route with about $3 trillion in ship-borne goods and commodities passing through it every year, some 33 percent of global maritime trade. In 2016, over 64 percent of China's maritime trade transited this waterway, nearly 42 percent of Japan's maritime trade, and 14 percent of US maritime trade[16].

China claims all of the South China Sea, while the US-backed Philippine state, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Taiwan lay claim to their 200-nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zones as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)[17]. For instance, the Ayungin Shoal, a submerged reef off the Philippine island of Palawan, is part of the Spratly Islands. It lies within the Philippines' EEZ, but is also claimed by China. Vietnam and Taiwan, also claim parts of the Spratly Islands. The Ayungin Shoal is today occupied by a garrison of Philippine navy personnel whose vessel, the land ship Sierra Madre, was intentionally grounded on the reef in 1999[18].

As part of his Pivot to Asia, Obama developed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, or EDCA, which found a way around the banning of the bases: rather than restrict US military presence to a handful of specific locations, the US would in essence be able to use the entire archipelago as a giant military base. Today under EDCA, the US rotates forces into the Philippines for extended periods, and operates facilities on Philippine bases. In April of 2023, under President Joseph Biden, the US Department of Defense announced the creation of four new EDCA sites in addition to the existing five. Eyewitness accounts from on the ground have also pointed to the existence of numerous other bases and unreported sites.

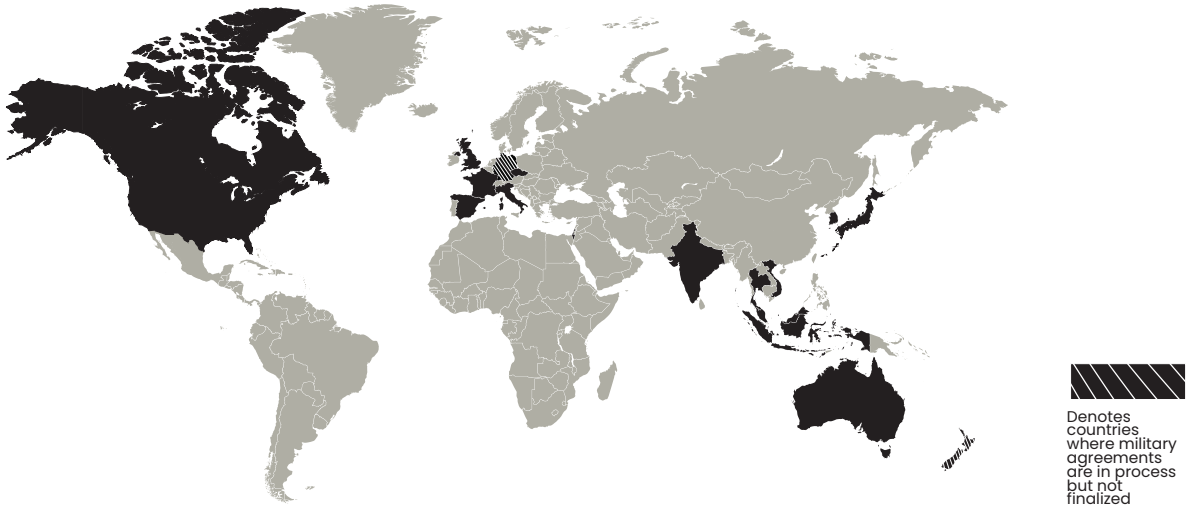
In April 2024, the US military began deploying to a base in Northern Luzon a new intermediate-range land-based missile system, known as Typhoon which includes Tomahawk cruise missiles and Supersonic Standard Missile-6 (SM-06) multipurpose interceptor missiles. This is the first time that the US has introduced offensive land- based mid-range missile systems anywhere in the world since it unilaterally withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia in 2019. The treaty had banned the deployment of such systems. The offensive Typhoon system has a range of 1600 kilometers, capable of reaching the Taiwan strait and military bases in mainland China. The deployment of these once banned systems represents a dangerous escalation of war preparations in the Eastern pacific.

The Trump administration, version 2.0, remains committed to asserting its economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific region, and the Philippines is strategic to ensuring this dominance. This has been made clear through the approval of $336 million USD of aid to the Philippine military, despite massive cuts to US foreign assistance by Trump. On April 1, 2025, it approved the sale of 20 F-16 jets and other related equipment worth $5.5 billion USD to the Philippines.[19]

16 https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/
17 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349
18 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/30/sierra-madre-phillippines-ship-china-blockade
19 https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/philippines-f-16-aircraft

PROFILES OF COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN US MILITARY BUILD UP

COUNTRIES WITH MILITARY CO-OPERATION WITH THE PHILIPPINES



Through increased military aid, joint exercises and arms transfers, the United States is making the Filipino people more vulnerable to the impacts of war with China.The vortex of increasing US military presence in the Philippines is also drawing in US allies, as Japan, Australia, Canada, France, the UK, New Zealand and most recently Germany are all developing military agreements and increasing rotational troops in the Philippines. As part of the overall China containment strategy a long list of nations following the US lead have expanded military cooperation with the Philippines and have begun participating in military exercises in the Philippines.

AUSTRALIA

On August 22, 1995, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Philippines and Australia on Cooperative Defence Activities allowed access to each other's military facilities, the exchange of intelligence and cooperation in military science and technology. In 2012, the countries upgraded the MOU into an international legally binding Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOFVA)[20].

Following the September 11, 2001, attack on the US, Australia commenced support for various "counter-terror" measures in the Philippines, including the deployment of an Australian Special Forces Squadron in Mindanao, and later intelligence and trainer support to the AFP in the Battle of Marawi. This evolved into an Enhanced Defence Cooperation Program (E-DCP)[21] which focuses on counter-terrorism and maritime security and supports a range of training engagements with the AFP.

In October 2002, Australia and the Philippines signed a bilateral MOU on Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism and in 2003, on combating transnational crime, linking the Australian Federal Police and the Philippine National Police.

Australia has provided military training for 150 AFP officers per year since 2005. The most notorious Filipino graduate of Australia's military training programs is Major General Palparan, who was found guilty in 2018 for kidnapping and serious illegal detention in the 2006 disappearance torture and killing of University of the Philippines (UP) students Karen Empeno and Sherlyn Cadapan.

GERMANY

In 2024, Germany and the Philippines deepened their defense relations as part of Berlin's Indo-Pacific strategy, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining free and open sea lanes in the region[22]. The two nations committed to finalizing a

20 https://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2012/31.html
21 https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/philippines/philippines-country-brief

22 Federal Government of Germany, Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific; Germany – Europe – Asia: Shaping the 21st Century Together, 2020, https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/indo-pacific-guidelines/2380510

comprehensive defense cooperation agreement by the end of the year. The defense pact is anticipated to encompass joint training exercises, the sale of advanced weaponry and enhanced security-related information sharing. The collaboration is likely to extend to the transfer of military technology. In recent years, the German navy has also conducted several freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea[23].

FRANCE

The bilateral defense relationship between the two countries is governed by an agreement signed in 2016 which facilitates high-level dialogues and defense consultations, along with visits and exchanges between defense and military authorities. The agreement also emphasizes joint education and training initiatives, as well as collaboration in defense equipment. In May 2024, France and the Philippines began talks on a VFA that would allow troops from each country to hold exercises in the other's territory[24]. French Minister Lecornu said that the primary purpose of the agreement was "to create interoperability or a strategic closeness between both armed forces, see how both navies work together, how air forces work together."

Several stopovers and visits by the French Armed Forces took place in the Philippines. These include the participation of a frigate at the Balikatan exercise in April 2024, the port call of a destroyer in May 2024 and of a frigate in October 2024, the enhanced stopover of the French Air and Space Force PEGASE Mission in July 2024 and the participation of France in Exercise Sama Sama[25].

Furthermore, the two nations convened the 4th France-Philippines Joint Defense Cooperation Committee in May 2024 in Paris.

France has also supported the Philippines through arms transfers and equipment provisions. For instance, it recently funded a project enabling the Philippines to acquire fast patrol craft worth $439 million[26]. France is also currently promoting the sale of Rafale F4 fighter jets to the Philippines.

CANADA

On March 7, 2025, Canada and the Philippines announced that they had concluded negotiations on a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement[27]. The SOFVA is set to "bolster defense and military ties between the two countries, enabling the AFP and the Canadian Armed Forces to operate and train together in each other's territories," essentially placing more Canadian Forces on Philippine soil.

Earlier in January 2024, Canada and the Philippines signed an MOU to foster collaboration in areas such as military education, training exchanges, peacekeeping operations, disaster response, and information sharing[28].

Canada participated as an observer in the large-scale Balikatan exercise between the Philippines and the US in 2024[29]. Canada also annually deploys Royal Canadian Navy ships under Operation Horizon[30]. Furthermore, it participated in the Cooperation Afloat Readiness Training (CARAT) series such as the Exercise Sama Sama in 2024[31].

In late 2023, Canada allowed the Philippines to use its Dark Vessel Detection system, which aids in maritime surveillance, helping the Philippines counter illegal fishing and enhancing its maritime domain awareness in the South China Sea[32].

NEW ZEALAND

The Philippines is a longstanding defence partner of New Zealand in Southeast Asia, with close cooperation across a wide range of areas – both bilateral and under multilateral forums such as ASEAN Defence Ministers Meetings-Plus (ADMM-Plus).

On March 24, 2025, New Zealand and the Philippines governments announced the conclusion of discussions on a VFA and will sign the deal in April, 2025[33].

SOUTH KOREA

Korean-Philippine defence relations have centred on military materiel production. In 1994, South Korea signed an MOU on logistics and defence industry cooperation.

Between 2019-2023, South Korea was among the top 3 largest suppliers of weapons to the Philippines by volume, selling FA-50 jets, corvettes, and destroyers.

JAPAN

In June 2023, the National Security Advisors of the United States, Japan and the Philippines met and resolved to advance trilateral defense cooperation

23 Hutt David, "Germany, Philippines eye closer defense ties in Indo-Pacific", Deutsche Welle, August 26, 2024, https://www.dw.com/en/germany-philippines-eye-closer-defense-ties-in-indo-pacific/a-70051283
24 AP News, "France and the Philippines to start talks on a 'visiting forces agreement', French envoy says", April 26, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/france-philippines-defense-agreement-c63eeb735d7a907c5da5a1ad815f9dee
25 Ambassade de France aux Philippines et en Micronésie, Coopération sécurité et défense, October 30, 2024, https://ph.ambafrance.org/Cooperation-securite-et-defense
26 Casimiro Christine, "Philippines to Acquire $439M Fast Patrol Craft Funded by France", The Defense Post, November 7, 2024, https://thedefensepost.com/2024/11/07/philippines-fast-patrol-craft-france
27 https://www.international.gc.ca/country_news-pays_nouvelles/2025-03-08-philippines.aspx?lang=eng
28 Reuters, "Philippines, Canada sign agreement on defence cooperation", January 19, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/philippines-canada-sign-agreement-defence-cooperation-2024-01-19/
29 Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, "Balikatan 2024 Military Exercise a Huge Success", May 20, 2024, https://ipdefenseforum.com/2024/05/balikatan-2024-military-exercise-a-huge-success/
30 The objective of operation horizon is to increase Canada's military activities and maintain a persistent, meaningful presence in the Indo-Pacific, in an area more than 10,000 miles off the Canadian coastline. Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale. CÉRIUM: Chaire d'études asiatiques et indo-pacifiques, Rapport sur le forum de la société civile québécoise sur l'Indo-Pacifique (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 2024).
31 Lt.J.G Moore Rebecca, "Philippine Navy and US Navy commence Sama Sama 2024", US 7th Fleet Official Website, November 20, 2024, https://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3929184/philippine-navy-and-us-navy-commence-sama-sama-2024/
32 Cupin Bea, "What access to Canada's dark vessel detection means for the Philippines", Rappler, October 17, 2024, https://www.rappler.com/philippines/what-access-canada-dark-vessel-means-philippines/
33 https://globalnation.inquirer.net/269726/ph-nz-on-signing-vfa-deal-in-april

based on the recent addition of four military bases to EDCA (between the US and the Philippines).

In December 2023, the Government of Japan revised their Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology and its Implementation Guidelines based on their updated National Security Strategy, citing "changes in the security environment and security necessity", which would facilitate provision of parts and services to countries cooperating with Japan in the security area[34], such as the Philippines.

On April 11 2024, the US, Japan and Philippines convened their first trilateral Summit, cementing their trilateral defense cooperation through combined naval training, joint exercises and supporting the Philippines' defense modernization priorities[35].

Following the trilateral meeting, Japan and the Philippines signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) which establishes procedures for visiting forces in each other's countries, with the goal of facilitating the implementation of cooperative activities, such as joint exercises and disaster relief, and defense cooperation between the two countries[36].

SPAIN

The Spain-Philippines Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation was signed in October 2011. In a November 2019 visit of Philippine defence officials, Spain and the Philippines held their 1st Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting. The JDCC Terms of Reference document provided an implementation plan for the 2011 MOU. As well, both defence departments signed an Memorandum of Agreement on Logistics, Defense Materiel, Armaments, and Defense Industry Cooperation to facilitate arms sales to the Philippines. In 2021, the two countries prepared and signed an agreement on sharing classified information related to technological transfer and military equipment sales.

UNITED KINGDOM

In 2021, UK would sail its HMS Queen Elizabeth II aircraft carrier and strike group on its maiden voyage into the Indo-Pacific region and along the Eastern coast of Taiwan. The "Indo-Pacific Tilt" has seen the UK ramp up naval patrols and military industrial cooperation ramp up in the Indo-Pacific Region. On January 11, 2024, the UK and Philippines signed an MOU on Defence Cooperation, highlighting maritime military cooperation plans in the West Philippine Sea over the next five years, including military exercises, training, and modernization[37]. The agreement was couched in the language of supporting a rules-based international order and a "free and open maritime order" to uphold UNCLOS. By April, the Philippines had purchased UK defence assets including mine detection systems, a floating support bridge, and anti-submarine warfare AW159 helicopters[38]. The U.K. also offered short-range air-defense systems, frigates and combat engineering equipment[39]. In October, UK defence companies held exhibits for the first time at the Asian Defence and Security (ADAS) Exhibition in Metro Manila[40].

ITALY

Prior to 2023, Italy followed the European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy, with a focus on increasing technical, scientific, sustainable development, economic, and investment relations - as well as cooperation with regional organizations such as ASEAN, the Pacific Islands forum, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. In July 2023, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies established the Standing Committee on the Foreign Policy for the Indo-Pacific. By August 2024, Italy had participated with its aircraft carrier Cavour in the Australian Exercise Pitch Black[41] aerial wargame, which included the Philippines.

INDIA

In 2006, India and the Philippines signed a defence cooperation agreement, which formed the framework for the bilateral Joint Defence Cooperation Committee for furthering defence cooperation. Relations since 2006 have centred on defence equipment acquisitions. The fifth JDCC meeting, held in September 2024, focused on co-production of military equipment - as well as maritime security cooperation amongst each other and the United States in the West Philippine Sea. The Philippines concluded a $375 million defence deal with India, with the former purchasing long-range BrahMos supersonic missiles for use against Chinese vessels and installations. The Philippines, which will receive the system in 2024, is in talks to locally produce BrahMos missiles.

ISRAEL

Israel-Philippines defence relations have centred on military equipment sales from the former's arms companies to the latter, as Israel is one of the three largest suppliers of military equipment to the Philippines (alongside the US and South Korea). When President Duterte visited Israel in September 2018, he thanked Israel for "critical support" during the 2017 Siege of Marawi and publicly claimed to have ordered the Philippine military to only buy equipment from Israel. From 2020 to 2024, Israeli equipment sales included: long-range maritime

34 https://www.mod.go.jp/atla/en/policy/pdf/detc_01_03_overview_of_the_revision.pdf
35 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/04/11/joint-vision-statement-from-the-leaders-of-japan-the-philippines-and-the-united-states/
36 https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/ph/pageite_000001_00432.html
37 https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1217069#:~:text=MANILA%20%E2%80%93%20The%20Philippines%20and%20the,to%20be%20among%20the%20priorities
38 https://ipdefenseforum.com/2024/04/philippines-u-k-strengthen-ties-to-boost-maritime-security-cooperation/
39 Ibid.
40 https://www.facebook.com/ukinthephilippines/posts/for-the-first-time-ever-the-uk-defence-and-security-exports-were-exhibited-at-th/943936864433529/
41 Exercise Pitch Black is a biennial warfare exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). The 2024 exercise included Australia, Canada, France, India, Indonesia, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States. For the first time, Brunei, Fiji, Italy, Spain, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines took part in the exercise. It was the largest exercise to take place since Pitch Black began in 1981.

FORMS OF MILITARY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PHILIPPINES PER COUNTRY

	Military Agreements	Intelligence Sharing	Visiting Forces Agreement	Arms Tranfers	Military Training	Joint Military Exercises*
United States	X	X	X	X	X	X
Canada	X	X	X	X	X	X
France	X	X	X	X	X	X
Japan	X	X	X	X	X	X
Australia	X	X	X		X	X
Germany		X			X	X
United Kingdom				X	X	X
Israel				X	X	
Vietnam						X
Thailand		X		X		X
Indonesia		X			X	X
India				X		
Italy						X
New Zealand			X			
Spain		X		X		
Malaysia		X				X
South Korea				X		
Czech Republic				X		
Brunei	X					X

*participates or observes

patrol aircraft, communications equipment, Sabrah light tanks, upgraded armoured personnel carriers, Hermes 900 drones and Hermes 90 THOR mini-drones from Elbit Systems; naval sensors, radar, coastal defence systems, and air defence systems from Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI); and missile systems, naval combat suites, and maintenance support services from Rafael Advanced Defence Systems.

In July 2019, Israel sent 10 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) personnel to train 180 Philippine army personnel and trainers in counter-terrorism in its first training collaboration with the Philippines.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic formed a Joint Defence Commission (JDC) with the Philippine Department of National Defence in 2014. In 2017, both countries would sign a Defence Cooperation Agreement, but disclosed few details. Relations, buoyed by market expansion considerations, have expanded into potential military equipment acquisition as part of military modernization. The first JDC meeting was held in 2019, leading to the establishment of a joint forum on military industrial cooperation. In January, both countries expressed anticipation for the second JDC meeting to be held in 2024. Soon after this announcement, Marcos Jr. would visit the Czech Republic for three days in March 2024 and highlight military modernization in the face of Chinese militarism[42].

COOPERATION WITH COUNTRIES NEIGHBORING THE PHILIPPINES

In addition to Japan and South Korea, a number of countries surrounding the Philippines and within the "first island chain" have military coordination and agreements with the Philippines. These countries include Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia. Coordination between these countries include intelligence sharing, joint training and exercises, arms transfers and observation of the Balikatan exercises.

42 https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/03/15/2340768/philippines-seeking-czech-support-modernize-armed-forces

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE ON THE FILIPINO PEOPLE

The presence of US military bases and foreign military in the Philippines exacerbates landlessness, poverty and inequality for the Filipino people. First of all, the bases take up farm land and indigenous peoples' ancestral domains, and leave toxic waste on these lands. The military exercises further alienate lands and leave unexploded ordnance in the landscape[43]. Further, the US military exploits Filipino women, with many cases of violence and murder and the legacy of abandoned children[44]. The presence of Foreign Military troops contributes to widespread violations of the Filipino people's economic, social and cultural rights, as well as their right to self-determination.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

In a 1992 report, the US government acknowledged[45] that it had "identified contaminated sites and facilities that would not be in compliance with US environmental standards" at Subic and Clark bases. Following the ejection of US military bases from the Philippines in 1991, the US failed to conduct proper clean up of toxic waste, resulting in devastating impacts on surrounding communities,"lead and other heavy metals used in ship repair were drained directly into Subic Bay, or buried as landfill," and that Subic's power plant contained unknown amounts of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) and emitted untreated pollutants directly into the air." Communities near the base have reported a "high incidence" of birth abnormalities and "impaired intelligence" among local children[46]. There were also reportedly high levels of kidney diseases among some 700 families monitored by the International Institute of Concern for Public Health near Clark Air Base in Angeles City, as well as reported cases of asbestosis among shipyard workers.

In 2013, in a completely avoidable situation, a US Navy ship ran aground the Tubbataha Reef, a protected UNESCO world heritage site in the Philippines, causing 2,345 sq m (25,240 sq ft) of damage to corals. Coral reefs around the world are in decline[47].

The impacts of foreign military exercises on Philippine land further impact the livelihood of a predominantly agrarian country. During the 2024 Balikatan exercises, the Philippine government implemented a "no sail zone" preventing fisherfolks in Zambales and Ilocos Norte from fishing for 5 days to allow for military live fire.

IMPACTS ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The presence of US troops has regularly

43 https://fdnbayanihan.org/current-projects/advocacy-report-of-the-need-to-clean-up-toxic-wastes-at-former-us-bases-in-the-philippines/
44 https://time.com/6275367/philippines-amerasian-children-us-military-legacy/
45 https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-92-51.pdf
46 https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/4/28/toxic-trail-shadows-us-philippine-bases-deal
47 https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2014/05/coral-reef-damage-extensive-after-us-navy-ship-ran-aground

proved a source of violence against women and children. There is a high level of prostitution surrounding US military bases in the Philippines; due to the intense poverty in the Philippines, Filipino women, especially those from rural areas[48], are forced into prostitution due to economic circumstances and often face abuse at the hands of the US military. In 2005, US Marine Daniel Smith raped a Filipina, Nicole[49]. Then in 2014, US Marine Joseph Pemberton assaulted and murdered trans woman Jennifer Laude[50]. These are only two cases, but likely thousands of cases go unreported.

According to an ICHRP fact finding team in 2023, the US and Philippine military made use of civilian spaces such as classrooms during the Balikatan joint military exercises. The two military forces engaged in side-by-side exercises framed as "building a classroom", which was in reality training and intelligence work. Soldiers traveled around Alicia, a town in Isabela province, mapping the community, and American soldiers occupied four elementary schools as part of the training. When community members learned of the arrival of the military to "build a classroom," they became afraid and worried that the military presence would entail heavier surveillance.

IMPACTS OF US DIRECT MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Several incidents of US direct involvement in military operations have put the Filipino people at risk, threatening their safety and livelihood.

In 2015, under the Aquino regime, following the Mamasapano massacre which took the lives of civilians in a so-called "counter-terror" operation, Suara Bangsamoro identified the body of a US military officer killed in the operation, despite US denial[51]. Under the Duterte Administration in 2017, the US played an integral role in directing and providing intelligence when the AFP bombarded Marawi City, displacing 400,000 and putting at risk thousands of civilians. Most recently, in 2025, a US spy plane crashed in a rice field near Ampatuan, striking fear among civilians in the area and killing a carabao, a farm animal which peasants, the poorest class of people in the Philippines, use to till the land.

48 https://capiremov.org/en/interview/from-comfort-women-to-prostitution-in-military-bases/
49 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/dec/04/usa.philippines
50 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54063247
51 https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/03/17/1434648/senate-report-confirms-us-involvement-mamasapano-operation; https://ichrp.net/stop-us-meddling-in-the-philippines/

SOCIAL IMPACTS OF US COIN STRATEGY IN THE PHILIPPINES

While the US and Philippine government promote their cooperation as a form of external defense, the reality is the US presence and aid supports a military that is primarily focused on COIN operations. The Philippine National Vision and National Security Policy[52] are applications of the United States' COIN strategy[53]. The stated goal of the COIN Strategy is to "further weaken and defeat the local "terrorist groups", curtail the continuous propagation of violent extremism narratives, and achieve strategic victory" over the communist rebellion (CPP-NPA-NDFP).

While the Philippine military claimed "strategic victory" over the NPA at the end of 2024, the CPP asserts that it is fighting in over 100 guerilla fronts and that the military claims are "dreamland statements"[54]. Credible independent commentators continue to say that military action alone will never resolve the armed rebellion.

In recent years the AFP has killed a significant number of NPA and CPP leaders[55]. And these leaders have been rapidly replaced, and the NPA on its part continues to mount tactical offensives, is welcomed by communities across the archipelago in their effort to win genuine land reform, and enjoys a continuous influx of new recruits[56]. The CPP condemned the widespread use of aerial and artillery bombardment in the countryside, and the NDFP condemned the arrest or murder of many of its peace consultants and even peace panel negotiators by government forces, despite formal immunity guarantees and International Humanitarian Law[57].

This COIN policy is brutal and far-reaching, and was fully exposed at the International People's Tribunal on War Crimes against the Filipino People, held in Brussels in May 2024[58]. The Philippine governments of Rodrigo Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos, and the US Biden Administration, were found guilty of:

- willful killing (murder) of civilians;
- intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects;
- using means and methods of warfare that are indiscriminate, by their nature
- cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, and expected to cause
- widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment;
- forced displacement of the civilian population as a result of military operations;
- impeding humanitarian aid intended for civilians and civilian population;
- acts or threats of violence aimed at spreading terror among civilians;
- willful killing of NPA fighters already rendered hors de combat;
- torture, and other forms of cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment;
- commission of outrages upon personal dignity, and humiliating and degrading

52 https://nsc.gov.ph/images/NSS_NSP/National_Security_Policy_Manual_FINAL_E-COPY_with_WATERMARK_140823.pdf
53 https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf
54 https://kodao.org/cpp-on-afps-claim-of-strategic-victory-over-the-npa-dream-on/
55 https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/is-an-end-to-asias-longest-running-communist-insurgency-finally-in-sight/
56 https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/following-red-star-tracking-communist-rebellion-philippines; https://kodao.org/cpp-says-npa-frustrating-afps-claim-of-strategic-victory/
57 https://ndfp.info/jasig-violations-and-grp-war-crimes-subvert-the-essence-of-peace-negotiations/
58 https://peoplestribunal.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/IPT-2024-INITIAL-Verdict-18-May.pdf

- treatment, and desecration of bodies of slain NPA fighters;
- abduction and enforced disappearance;
- arbitrary arrest and detention; and
- deliberate attacks against civilians suspected of having links with a belligerent
- party, including the filing of trumped-up charges, red-tagging, "terrorist" labeling and designation, threats, harassment and intimidation.

Philippine war crimes range from aerial and artillery bombardment in the countryside to the use of armed paramilitary groups to terrorize communities, to targeted extrajudicial killings of civilian political activists, to sustained surveillance, threats to life, and arrests on trumped up charges of these activists. The killing of lawyers, paralegals and judges has largely removed judicial remedies. The killing of journalists and attacks on major media outlets like ABS-CBN and Rappler have greatly limited critical public assessment of government policies. More seriously, the killing of peasant, trade union, indigenous and church leaders has constrained the exercise of democratic rights, deepened and widened landlessness and poverty, and stunted the economic development of the Philippines.

All those organizations and individuals who disagree with or challenge the economic policies of the Philippine government are targets of the COIN strategy. "Red-tagging" is a widely used tool in this strategy. This is state denunciation of individuals as terrorists or communists, through the use of banners, flyers and posters and social media posts, as well as by direct sms or voice calls. Targeted persons have no means to stop state agents from these forms of harassment. The National Task Forces to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) has red-tagged members of the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA), a longstanding and major indigenous people's organization, and even stretched to international platforms[59] alleging that "CPP personalities have infiltrated the United Nations." In other examples, the Philippine government red-tagged and then attempted to assassinate US citizen and environmental activist Brandon Lee in 2019, while living in the Philippines, and in 2023, they assassinated 67-year-old labor leader Jude Fernandez, a survivor of Martial Law.

Despite the massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, the US government, and foreign countries continue to sign new military deals with the Philippines and provide military aid. This is due to their laser focus on maintaining military dominance in the region. As noted in the verdict of the International People's Tribunal in May 2024, "anti-imperialist struggle [in the Philippines] threatens US geopolitical and economic interests in the Asia-Pacific. . . maintaining a US-controlled regime in the Philippines and suppressing efforts by the Filipino people to assert their right of self-determination is essential for the United States to preserve its dominance and to counter any threat in the region."

So, while there is the reason the US government continues to build US military bases in the Philippines and why it is bringing in allies across the world to join the US military build up. It is not for social peace, and it is not merely for fending off China. It is to enable the politicians in the Philippines to continue to profit and serve the interests of US economic dominance in the region, without any concern for the dignity and life of the Filipino people. It is to enable and equip the Philippines to employ US COIN methods to crush any threat to US dominance in the Asia-Pacific.

59 https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1037641

US AND FOREIGN MILITARY PRESENCE VIOLATES PEOPLE'S RIGHTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Despite the long time demand of the Filipino people for genuine sovereignty and the 1991 rejection of US military bases, the US and its allies continue to operate in the Philippines. The impact of foreign military presence is devastating and makes the Filipino people collateral damage amid US war.

There are numerous examples, as stated above, in which US and foreign military presence in the Philippines violates the economic, social and cultural rights of the Filipino people, harming their livelihood and worsening the conditions of poverty in the country. In the end, US and foreign military presence in the Philippines is a violation of the Filipino people's right to self determination and national sovereignty, as enshrined by the United Nations and recognized by the Algiers Declaration on the Rights of People.

As countries across the world join and support the US military build up in the Philippines, it is critical to join in solidarity with the Filipino people and oppose the ongoing expansion of bilateral military agreements that continually violate the people's right to self-determination.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

1. Foreign governments which have military agreements with the Philippines should make these agreements transparent and the details available to the public.
2. People's organizations and civil society organizations should coordinate campaigning and mobilizing, on a global level, against the growing US-led military presence in the Philippines.
3. Civil society, parliamentarians, and representatives of intergovernmental bodies should visit the Philippines to meet with communities, especially from rural areas, to investigate and document the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law related to foreign military presence and the heightened, US-backed COIN plan of the Philippine government.
4. Foreign governments should immediately terminate all military aid and military agreements with the Philippines, including the cessation of talks for new military agreements.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. AFP - Armed Forces of the Philippines
2. COIN - Counterinsurgency
3. CPP-NPA-NDFP -
   Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army - National Democratic Front of the Philippines
4. EDCA - Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
5. EEZ - Exclusive Economic Zone
6. JDC - Joint Defence Commission
7. JDCC - Joint Defence Cooperation Committee
8. MBA - Military Bases Agreement
9. MDT - Mutual Defense Treaty
10. MOU - Memorandum of Understanding
11. NTF-ELCAC - National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict
12. SOFVA - Status of Visiting Forces Agreement
13. UNCLOS - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
14. VFA - Visiting Forces Agreement