

Philippine ruling elite whips up anti-China campaign to justify alignment with US war plans

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As the United States steps up its campaign to provoke China into war, the Philippines has lined up behind Washington, increasingly transforming the country into a lead attack dog in the region for American imperialism. Seeking to obscure the fact that the country has now been placed on the front lines of a catastrophic conflict, the Philippine ruling elite is demonizing China and people of Chinese ethnicity with absurd and lurid claims that Beijing is infiltrating spies into the country.

As part of this agenda, Manila has conducted numerous provocative actions in the South China Sea, which in recent months have led to clashes around the Second Thomas Shoal. The most dangerous incident to date occurred on Monday, with Chinese and Philippine vessels engaging in mutual hostilities in an event that could have provoked a war (see: “Collision between Chinese and Philippine vessels in South China Sea brings war tensions in the region to a breaking point”).

To justify its belligerence, on June 15, the Philippine government filed before the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf a claim for an “extended continental shelf” in the South China Sea, which Manila hopes will give it exclusive right to exploit resources in the region. The claim extends beyond Manila’s 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone and could reach up to 350 nautical miles from the Philippines coast.

China’s state-run *Global Times* denounced the move as a way for Manila to “provoke attacks and defamation against China’s South China Sea policies and positions in international multilateral forums and the global public opinion.”

This situation, above all provoked by US imperialism, could explode into a much wider war with Washington pledging to “defend” Manila in any conflict with China.

The reality, however, is that the region is just one flashpoint where the US is seeking to goad Beijing into a war. In doing so, the Biden administration is ratcheting up its military presence.

In April, as part of the joint Salaknib 24 military drills in the central and northern regions of Luzon Island, the US deployed its Typhon Mid-Range Capability missile system abroad for the first time. It is capable of firing SM-6 supersonic missiles at a range of 450 kilometers and Tomahawk cruise missiles with a range of 2,500 kilometers. This not only covers the Taiwan Strait but major Chinese cities like Shanghai, making clear that the system has nothing to do with defending the Philippines.

These types of missile systems were previously banned under the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the US and the Soviet Union. Then-President Donald Trump withdrew from the treaty in 2019, with the express aim of defeating China’s missile capabilities to fend off US military threats off its coasts.

It is within this context that members of the Philippine Congress and media are conducting an anti-China campaign. Senator Risa Hontiveros, for example, has since May denounced Alice Guo, the mayor of Bamban, a small municipality in Tarlac Province on Luzon Island, as a “Chinese asset.” Guo is currently suspended from office by the Department of Interior and Local Government on accusations of graft and corruption in connection with the online gambling operations of the Chinese-owned Zun Yuan Technology Inc.

Hontiveros seized on the case to attack Guo for being unable to provide any official records to prove her nationality as a Filipino except the registration of her birth with the Philippine Statistics Authority when she was 17 years old.

Hontiveros went further and attacked people of Chinese

ethnicity: “Is Mayor Alice and those like her with mysterious pasts assets that China has introduced into our government so that they can have heavy political influence in the Philippines? There are many other cases like that in other countries, so this is not new, and we should investigate.”

Hontiveros is a leader of AKBAYAN, a pseudo-left organization that emerged from the splits in the 1990s within the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines. AKBAYAN served as the left front of the late President Benigno Aquino III administration and has since been in the forefront of promoting the interests of US imperialism, in vulgar displays of nationalist flag-waving and outright warmongering.

Filipinos of Chinese ancestry are a vulnerable population that have been subjected to persecution and even pogroms at various points in the country’s history. Most are born in the country, some come from families that have lived in the Philippines for three or four generations, and yet many are still denied citizenship by racist laws that were originally drafted during US colonial rule.

The charges that people of Chinese ethnicity are Beijing’s “assets” is a vicious and racist campaign designed to justify the fact that the US is turning the country into a base for launching a war against China and to demonize growing anti-war sentiment.

It is even more absurd following revelations by a Reuters investigative report on June 14 of the extent to which the US military interferes in the politics of other countries. The exposures showed that the Pentagon ran an online propaganda operation from 2020, supposedly ending in 2021, to spread misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the Philippines, in order to promote anti-China sentiment.

The media and others in government have joined in the anti-China campaign and are also stoking unfounded fears. Congressman Joseph “Jojo” Lara, a representative for Cagayan Province, put a resolution urging the House of Representatives to investigate a supposed influx of 4,600 Chinese students enrolled in various schools in his province. Lara described the number as “highly suspicious and alarming.”

Lara accused the students of being spies or members of military sleeper cells insidiously inserted into a province at the northern tip of Luzon Island, 681 kilometers from Taiwan, where two bases have been opened up to the US military for troop rotations and warehousing military materiel under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation

Agreement. Lara also accused local government officials of sponsoring the students, of supporting China’s economic Belt and Road Initiative and of opposing the opening up of the local bases to the US military.

Government agencies, including the Commission of Higher Education and the Bureau of Immigration, however, have denied Lara’s figures. According to the bureau, only a total of 1,516 Chinese nationals were granted student visas in Cagayan, all endorsed by a major Philippine university, out of which, only 485 were currently enrolled and only 96 are actually onsite.

These racist campaigns, disguised as asserting the national interests of workers and the poor, have a long, sordid history in the Philippines, dating back to the periods of Spanish and US colonization. The same playbook is now being brought out by US imperialism and the Philippine bourgeoisie. This is meant to divide workers and dragoon the population into war.

The US war aim is to counter its relative economic decline through redividing the world at the expense of its perceived rivals, namely Russia and China.

The Philippine bourgeoisie faces its own economic decline. The Malampaya Gas Field, off the tip of Palawan Island, which delivers and supplies three major power plants in Batangas Province, and fuels about 40-50 percent of power on Luzon Island, is expected to start diminishing in 2024 and be fully consumed by 2029. In May, during a government-sponsored economic forum, local tycoon Robert Ang, owner of one of the three power plants, demanded that the Philippines defend its claims in the South China Sea in the name of “inflation” or in other words, to allow the continued suppression of wages of workers in the Philippines.

In lining up with the US war drive, the Philippine bourgeoisie is determined to stake its claims to the spoils of a US-imperialist war against China, the natural resources, including oil and natural gas, in the South China Sea.



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