

Number of Pentagon Bases in the Philippines Increased Under Outcry Against US Push to War

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Under a renegotiation of an agreement known as the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), the US has been given permission to occupy or build military sites in 9 different locations across the Philippines.

The decision caused an uproar among the population who have been in between the US and her enemies in two different wars, which together may have caused 2 million Filipino dead.

The agreement was signed by **President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** the son of a previous dictator of the country who forged a neutral foreign policy, and significantly scaled back what was then a de-facto US occupation of the Islands following the Second World War.

A joint statement by the Philippines and the US laid out "their plans to accelerate the full implementation of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the agreement to designate four new Agreed Locations in strategic areas of the country and the substantial completion of the projects in the existing five Agreed Locations".

People's Dispatch reports that the locations of the new bases haven't been chosen, but are likely to be on or near Palawan Island, the nearest one to Taiwan.

The Filipino editorial press seems united in their acknowledgment that the [EDCA is a pact to involve their nation in a war over Taiwan](#). While [some acknowledge](#) the continual violation of territorial waters, as well as the long rap sheet of perceived slights over disputed waters in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea, they see these as jobs for the diplomatic corps, and not the marine corps.

EARLIER: [#BayanMuna](#) Partylist members join the multi-sectoral rally to protest the visit of US Defense Secretary Austin. Different sectors call for the junking of

Visiting Forces Agreement and other military agreements with the Philippines.
pic.twitter.com/TSD2Mo4Qa8

— BAYAN MUNA Partylist (@BayanMuna) [February 2, 2023](#)

Hard facts

Unlike the visiting **Sect. of Defense Lloyd Austin**, who like the rest of Biden's cabinet charge all their statements with moral rhetoric, Filipinos are looking at a hard facts approach to the cost/benefit analysis of the expanded EDCA.

Others, like human rights group Karapatan took a harder approach, protesting Austin's arrival outside Camp Aguinaldo, the general headquarters of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. A spokesperson described Austin as "a man whose career and fortune were built on the deaths and destruction resulting from US-driven wars of aggression," adding that he was among those "who led the US's bloody wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan that claimed almost a million lives, most of them civilians, he is the face of the money side of US warmongering".

A Manila-based think tank on statecraft, the Integrated Development Studies Institute, [published an editorial](#) regarding the expansion of the EDCA in which they describe the country as being turned into a "warship" by Sect. Austin.

They first took a look at what the Philippines' only real national security risk is—the dispute with China in the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea, of which they recognize that "many experts agree that for China, the South China Sea dispute is negotiable".

"...There are multiple claimants including Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, of which China already has ongoing negotiations. China has also offered 60-percent profit sharing in favor of the Philippines in disputed areas, far better than what the Philippines received from US and UK partners in the Malampaya deal. While there are occasional incidents, our own fishermen and official government statistics have reported increased fish stocks in the West Philippine Sea since 2016 due to its being protected now during spawning seasons. China has also resolved border issues with 12 of her 14 neighbors, although negotiations took decades and not without minor incidents, but China even gave concessions in pursuit of peace."

But, they continue, Taiwan has repeatedly been singled out as a non-negotiable, national security issue of greatest importance, much like Ukraine is to Russia—comparisons sprinkled throughout the media coverage of the EDCA update.

"Allowing the US bases in the Philippines, located in sites that clearly encircle Taiwan, will put the Philippines squarely in the war calculations of the People's Liberation Army," the institute concludes.

The Institute adds that the "measly" \$82 million in development aid money promised by Austin in his visit pales in comparison to what previous Filipino presidents have extracted for the rights to use their island as a base, including \$900 million in the 1980s, and \$2 billion in the 1990s.

Furthermore, China was the only country to send any medical supplies to the Philippines,

writes the Institute, during the worst of the early pandemic months, and has become the largest importer of Philippine agricultural products.

‘Victory is not enough’

In [a series](#) of 25 war game simulations run by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a DC-based MIC think tank, found that a coalition was able to repel a Chinese amphibious landing of Taiwan, but at a terrible cost of “dozens of ships, hundreds of aircraft, and thousands of servicemembers”.

Furthermore, the conflict would be inconclusive. “Taiwan’s economy was devastated,” they told *The Diplomat*, adding that “the high losses would damage the U.S. global position for many years. Victory is, therefore, not enough”.

Reporting on statements made by US Air Mobility Command, Gen. Mike Minihan that in five years the US will go to war against China based on his gut feeling, *The New York Times* wrote of the Philippines “the plans for a larger US military presence in the Philippines come amid fears about a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan”. *The Times* Southeast Asia bureau chief wrote that the US officials regard the Philippines as a “key strategic partner for Washington in the event of a conflict with China”.

“If there will be a major conflict here, it will be over Taiwan and most certainly not over the Philippine atolls and sandbanks taken and occupied by China from the Philippines and the few tons of fish stolen daily from Philippine waters,” [concludes](#) Father Shay Cullen, an Irish missionary at St. Joseph’s Parish in Olongapo City where he has taught the most disparate children in society—most of whom were fathered by US sailors who eventually left the islands.

“The US military presence in the West Philippine Sea has not deterred China from grabbing more atolls and islands from the Philippines and arming them with missiles,” continues Cullen, writing at the *Manila Times*.

“The Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and the Philippines is of no help. There has to be an act of war by China against the Philippines to trigger a US military response. Any such response will need the approval of the US Congress. The presence of so many US military bases inside Philippine bases is making the Philippines an open and vulnerable target for retaliatory strikes by China”.

Visiting Davos, Switzerland for the World Economic Forum meeting, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said he [wanted to stay away](#) from anything resembling Cold War power struggle in the region.

“The forces of us going back to that Cold War type of scenario where you have to choose one side or the other are strong—I think we are determined... to stay away from that,” he said.

However, Satur Ocampo, [writing for the Philippines Star](#), quotes the president changing tune a month later in a joint press conference with Sect. Austin.

“It seems to me that the future of the Philippines and, for that matter, the Asia-Pacific, will always have to involve the US simply because those partnerships are so strong and so historically embedded in our common psyches that can only be an advantage to both our

countries,” said the president in a rare moment of honesty.

The islands’ media seems to see this as a real coup in their nation, and with the US on the warpath, avoiding a multi-national conflict over Taiwan now in large part hinges on President Marcos Jr.’s future decisions.

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Featured image: President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos Jr. welcomes US Sect. of Defense Lloyd Austin. (Source: [World at Large](#))

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