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The United States struck a deal with the Philippines earlier this month to expand its military presence in its former colony to four additional bases, part of a years-long Pentagon buildup in the Asia-Pacific region meant to counter Chinese influence. The U.S. has about 750 overseas military bases in more than 80 countries, and Washington elites are pushing the country ever closer to conflict with China, says researcher David Vine. “I think the people of the United States absolutely do not want war,” says Vine. He is a professor of anthropology at American University and co-founder of the Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition.

**AMY GOODMAN:** This is Democracy Now!, [democracynow.org](#), The War and Peace Report. I’m Amy Goodman, with Juan González.

As we continue to look at U.S.-China relations, we turn to the growing U.S. military presence in the Pacific. The Biden administration recently reached an agreement with the Philippines to give the United States access to four more military bases in the former U.S. colony. This will allow the U.S. greater access to the South China Sea and Taiwan as tensions rise between Washington and Beijing. The deal was announced after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila.

We’re joined now by David Vine, professor of anthropology at American University, co-founder of the Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition. His books include *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*

Welcome to *Democracy Now!* I mean, this is right in line with what you write about, *Base Nation*. Talk about that image of Lloyd Austin, the secretary of defense, standing with the new president of the Philippines, Ferdinand Marcos’s son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., announcing more U.S. military bases in the Philippines; Japan being increasingly militarized; what’s happening in the South China Sea.

**DAVID VINE:** This is precisely what we don’t need. Let me first say happy Valentine’s Day,

happy V-Day, Amy and Juan. It's a pleasure to be with you.

But that image of Lloyd Austin announcing the deployment of U.S. forces to four new bases, in addition to five U.S. bases where U.S. troops are deployed in the Philippines, making a total of nine, potentially, in days and months to come, that's precisely the wrong image and precisely the wrong direction that the U.S. should be going in. The United States, the Biden administration and a larger foreign policy elite, I'm sad to say, has hijacked our foreign policy and is currently escalating military tensions with China at precisely the moment we need to be moving in the other direction. We need to be drawing down U.S. military bases and forces in the region, while building up our diplomatic presence.

There actually is a good sign in recent days. I will give the Biden administration some credit for opening a new embassy in the Solomon Islands. This is in the context of a security deal between the Solomon Islands and China, announced in the last year or so. The United States could have responded militarily. I'm glad that they didn't, and instead opened a new embassy and are sending additional diplomats. And this is the approach we need to take.

I think, actually, the balloon incident offers a rare opportunity for us to consider a really hard and stark question. And that is: Do we want a war with China? I think the people of the United States absolutely do not want war. They are sick of war, sick and tired of war, after 21 years of war launched by the George W. Bush administration with its "war on terror," the catastrophes in Afghanistan and Iraq, following prior catastrophes dating to the War in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. We need to move in another direction.

And I think we're better than the current approach that the Biden administration and this foreign policy blob, a group of elites that have dominated U.S. foreign policy for far too long — they have led us down the wrong path. And we need to push back on our leaders to choose a different path, a path of peaceful, if challenging, coexistence with China, cooperation on the real threats that face us, and moving — and doing everything we can — excuse me — doing everything we can to reduce military tensions, which, most frighteningly of all, raise the real risk of a direct military confrontation and war between the United States and China that could so easily spin completely out of control into a nuclear war that could literally threaten human existence on Earth.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Well, David Vine, you say that most Americans are tired of wars that the U.S. has engaged in, but at the same time they're not really cognizant of the extent to which

U.S. military power through these bases is wielded around the world. Could you remind us how many U.S. bases are there in the world? How does that compare to other countries in terms of having bases, military bases, on foreign soil?

**DAVID VINE:** Yeah, adding U.S. troops to four new bases in the Philippines is simply unnecessary and wasteful, on top of an already astronomically wasteful Pentagon budget. In addition to the potentially nine U.S. bases in the Philippines, the United States already has, by the Pentagon's own count, 313 U.S. military base sites in East Asia alone. And that's part of a larger global network of around 750 U.S. military bases outside the 50 states and Washington, D.C. That's according to a list that the coalition that you mentioned that I'm a part of, the Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition, a transpartisan group of folks, that we've been keeping. And indeed, the 750 U.S. bases in some 80 countries and colonies around the world is more bases than any nation, empire or people in world history.

Compare it to China, again — and I think this helps underline the fact that China is not a conventional military threat to the United States. And that can't be emphasized enough in this moment of ballooning China fearmongering, a kind of really racist fearmongering that's both fueled by anti-Asian racism and fueling anti-Asian racism in this moment. We need to remind people that China is not the threat that the Soviet Union was at the height of the Cold War. China is not about to attack California or Hawaii or Guam or Alaska. China is a threat to neighbors, and they have every right to be afraid. But the response to that fear, the response to any military threat that China does pose regionally, is not to escalate militarily, not to build more bases.

And again, the comparison with China's military presence globally is helpful. China has about eight foreign military bases — one in Djibouti and some on human-made islands in the South China Sea. This, compared to the 750 U.S. military bases outside the 50 states and Washington, D.C., shows again how misdirected our priorities are, because of this foreign policy that has been, in my mind, hijacked by the military-industrial complex, the people who are making a killing, often literally, off war, and a foreign policy elite that has taken us down precisely the wrong path.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** And could you talk, as well, about where are the areas of expansion of U.S. military bases? I'm thinking particularly, for instance, of the U.S. footprint in Africa, in Eastern Europe, of course, and, as a contradiction, the lack of U.S. military presence in Latin America because of the resistance of Latin American nations to such bases.

**DAVID VINE:** There has been pushback in virtually anywhere that you see U.S. military bases. People face daily irritation. There are a range of views about U.S. military bases. In some places, they're absolutely welcomed. But even in places where U.S. bases are welcomed, often there are accidents and crimes that lead to irritation.

And I think the other thing that's really helpful with the balloon incident, you saw again the kind of fearmongering and the understandable, to some extent, fear, even though, of course, the balloon posed no military threat to anyone in the United States. Imagine if China were to announce that it was going to build a single base anywhere near the borders of the United States. We saw the reaction to an unarmed balloon that posed no military threat. Imagine China was to announce that it was going to build a base, for example, in Mexico or Canada or the Caribbean. There would be calls for an immediate military reaction.

And meanwhile, the United States is in the process of encircling China with more and more bases. And this has been a long-standing buildup over years, dating to the Obama administration — the Trump administration continued it — and, before it, the George W. Bush administration. There are, of course, also a buildup of bases in recent months in Eastern and Central Europe in reaction to Putin's invasion of Ukraine. But the buildup in East Asia is one we should be deathly concerned about, I'm sorry to say.

This, again, is escalating military tensions with the buildup of bases not just in the Philippines, but an even larger buildup in Okinawa, in Australia, in Guam, at precisely a moment where we need to be moving in another direction. We need to be moving in a direction of building up embassies and diplomats, not bases and troops, to do everything we can to build a cooperative — again, if challenging — relationship with coexistence, peaceful coexistence, cooperation, to address the threats that face everyone in the region and around the world, beginning with the kinds of territorial disputes one sees between China and the Philippines. These are territorial disputes that don't have to be intractable. We can — the U.S. government can play an effective and constructive role in helping to resolve these sorts of territorial disputes, as well as dealing with the tensions in the relationship with China, moving toward arms treaties, the kind of arms treaties we saw during the Cold War that helped tamp down military tensions between the Soviet Union and China.

So, one of the things I am calling for is the Biden administration — and hopefully they have done this already — the Biden administration should be rescheduling the visit of Secretary of State Antony Blinken to China and engaging in a process of a series of talks between leaders, senior leaders, of the two governments, including Xi and Biden. They can work together, and we must push them to work together, rather than moving in the direction of further military

escalation, that, again, I think we have to be very plain about this. The risk of a even accidental military clash between U.S. and Chinese forces grows by the day as long as we increase the kind of military buildup that we have been pursuing for years, that is only encouraging China to respond in kind, to build up its military forces, raising the risk of a military confrontation, which, again, could so easily spiral out of control into a nuclear war between the two most powerful nations on Earth, that could literally end human existence on Earth. So —

**AMY GOODMAN:** David Vine, I want to just ask, because we just have a minute to go, about something you tweeted yesterday, saying that on Wednesday, tomorrow, Human Rights Watch will release an unprecedented report about crimes against humanity committed by the U.S. and U.K. against Chagossians. That's the people of Chagos and Diego Garcia. Can you explain what this is about, in just a minute?

**DAVID VINE:** So, the United States built a major military base on the island of Diego Garcia in the middle of the Indian Ocean in the 1960s and 1970s, and, in the process, with the help of the British government, forcibly removed the entire Indigenous Chagossian people. They deported them 1,200 miles away, left them in impoverished exile, paid them no compensation, gave them no choice about leaving their homes, and proceeded to build up a major military base that has played key roles in all the U.S. wars in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the Chagossians have been demanding the right to return home, have been demanding proper compensation, and have been ignored, almost completely, completely ignored by the United States by successive administrations.

And tomorrow, Human Rights Watch will be releasing a major report announcing that they are charging both the United States and Britain with crimes against humanity for the forced deportation and the suffering the Chagossians have experienced in exile, as well as racial persecution. This is clearly a racist crime, where U.S. administrations have avoided their responsibility for far too long.

And in addition to moving in a profoundly different direction in terms of our overall foreign policy, a direction of diplomacy and cooperation, the United States government should be finally acknowledging its responsibility for past crimes, like that committed against the Chagossian people, and allowing them to return home and providing proper compensation, as well as assisting in the resettlement of the Chagos Islands, including Diego Garcia.

**AMY GOODMAN:** David Vine, we want to thank you so much for being with us, professor of

anthropology at American University, co-founder of the Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition, author of *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* and *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World*

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