

The Philippines and the U.S.: change with continuity?

by Julio S. Amador III and Deryk Baladjay



Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte (C) and Chinese President Xi Jinping review the guard of honors as they attend a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on October 20, 2016. (THOMAS PETER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

From colonial rule, to commonwealth, and finally ally, the relationship of the Philippines and the United States is enduring but oftentimes quixotic. For the Philippines, there seems to be no other country that can hold it in thrall like the United States. The relationship between the United States and the Philippines goes back more than a century. The two countries have shared a long history of military, political, and economic ties, despite the geographical distance between them. Both countries addressed the communist threat during the Cold War in the 1960s, and their relationship with one another became even closer during the Reagan era, when the Kirkpatrick doctrine (named for UN Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick) complemented the rise of

authoritarianism in the Philippines during the late 1970s—a period marked by an increase in U.S. economic and military aid transfers. Moreover, transfer of military support from

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the United States to the Philippines during the late 1990s also increased when both countries brokered an addendum of a visiting forces agreement to the pre-existing mutual defense treaty. This relationship carried over to the 21st century when both countries expressed support for one another in the war against terrorism beginning in 2001 and, decades later, when both countries saw to the enhancement of their respective armed forces' interoperability within the Asia Pacific region. Since the early 20th century, the Philippines' foreign policy tradition has been emblematic of a close association with the United States. Then the introduction of Rodrigo Duterte changed the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relationship and challenged the status quo. Or did it, really?

The election of Rodrigo Roa Duterte as the new commander in chief of the Philippines in 2016 was a game-changer. Rodrigo Duterte represented many firsts, including being the first president to have come from the southern island of Mindanao and being the first president to have come from a mayoral position (he served as the Mayor of Davao city for over 22 years). His election as president effectively placed southern voices into the fore of the national agenda. This was important because the central bureaucracy is heavily criticized for the overconcentration of its delivery of public services in the capital and its provincial peripheries. Rodrigo Duterte is also a metaphorical game-changer because he was the manifestation of the rise and legitimization of populism in Philippine democratic politics. During his campaign for the presidency, Duterte made 30 promises, including to address social issues like corruption and drug addiction within a timetable of some 3 months up to 6 years. These promises were received by applause but also doubts from civil society.

During the long history between the countries, the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relationship has been subject to various domestic and foreign pressures. During his campaign, Duterte's populist rhetoric was directed against then U.S. President Barack Obama. Critics of the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations have labeled the mutual friendship as having imperialistic undertones and have, on multiple occasions, actively protested it. One prominent challenge to this ebbing relationship is Duterte's foreign policy calibration when, four months into office, he announced a pivot to China and a relative distancing from the United States. This was a great departure from the Philippine foreign policy tradition of his predecessors who largely believed in the critical role that the United States played in the country and in the region.

This pivot to China further exacerbated the already tumultuous situation in the West Philippine Sea (the Philip-

pinas officially calls parts of the South China Sea up to its 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone the West Philippine Sea) when China's nine-dash line claim provided it impetus for military build-up in the region. Since 2012 China has tried to claim maritime domain in the large expanse of the West Philippine Sea and has also been encroaching on the exclusive economic zones of neighboring Southeast Asian states. This development constantly challenges the principle of freedom of navigation as Chinese maritime and naval forces have, on multiple occasions, threatened the use of force in enforcing its illegal claims over the disputed regions.

These pressing geopolitical developments have tested U.S. military commitment to its historical ally. All these contributed to Duterte's pragmatic rebalancing. But to understand the logic of Duterte's foreign policy initiatives, a look at the history of U.S.-Philippine relations is essential.

A complicated history

U.S.-Philippine relations can be traced as far back as the 1898 Spanish-American War. The United States, which had engaged militarily with the Spanish forces based in Cuba, declared war against Spain on February 15, 1898, and deployed its armed forces to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines which, coincidentally, was also undergoing its social revolution against the Spanish colonizers. When the Malolos Republic of the Philippines announced its independence from Spanish rule on June 12, neither the United States nor Spain, the two belligerents of the 1898 Spanish-American War, recognized it. A peace protocol was reached between the two war belligerents on August 12, 1898, followed by the Treaty of Paris, agreed to within the same year. The Treaty of Paris formalized Spain's ceding of territories to the United States, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine archipelago. In the case of the Philippine exchange, Spain was paid the sum of \$20 million. Problems erupted when

Felipe Agoncillo, the Filipino lawyer who was supposed to represent the First Philippine Republic in the Paris Treaty signing, was denied participation in the negotiation. Having learned of the America's betrayal of trust, President Emilio Aguinaldo formally declared war against the United States on February 5, 1899.

The U.S.-Philippine War would go on for three years, only to falter on March 1901 with Emilio Aguinaldo's capture. US President William McKinley (1897–1901) pursued a policy of benevolent assimilation actively superseding and undermining Spanish colonial elements at the time. In spite of its imperfections, the United States' colonization of the Philippines presented itself as an opportunity for national reimagination. Thanks to the three pillars of American colonial statecraft, social policies took form and were jumpstarted in the archipelago: introduction of the public education system, competent civil service recruitment, and the replacement of the Spanish guardia civil



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with the Philippine Constabulary in 1901. Newly inaugurated US President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–09) officially ended the Philippine insurrection on July 1902, despite lingering sporadic guerilla resistance in the archipelago. While the touted pillars of American colonial statecraft provided the initial framework for the early Philippine so-

ciety, it was not without failures. Land redistribution policies that were enacted lacked support mechanisms and only perpetuated ownership within the American and Filipino business class who had vested interests in land and natural resources. Instituted tax policies that replaced the Spanish taxation system remained burdensome as well.

Moreover, governance in the southern island of Mindanao had become more militaristic than that in Luzon, the largest and most populous island in the Philippines.

A significant contribution of the American colonization period was the contour of an early Philippine government. Much like the American system,

the early form of a Philippine government employed the distribution of powers that greatly favored the smaller provincial constituents. This was in conjunction with the transactional merits of American patrons that post-colonial Filipinos took after. The first municipal elections of December 1901 and, later on, the first provincial governor elections of February 1902, segmented a Philippine Assembly that embodied this transactional dynamic. More importantly, the formation of the early national elite and ruling class was patterned after this transaction dynamic. Nevertheless, the institutional reforms ensured that the Philippine Assembly would take on representative features.

Republican presidents McKinley, Roosevelt and William Howard Taft (1909–13) argued that the benevolent assimilation of the Philippines would take long periods of time and therefore require a piecemeal, guided approach to the administration of the archipelago. But this was not shared by democrat President Woodrow Wilson (1913–21), who sought the immedi-

ate democratization of the Philippines. Alongside Wilson's Philippine counterpart, Manuel Quezon, the move for the filipinization and democratization of the colonial government gained momentum. On March 1934, the Tydings-McDuffie Act was passed, which would provide the Philippines with a decades' worth of preparation for a scheduled 1946 independence declaration. A constitutional plebiscite was also held on May 1934 for the approval of the 1935 Constitution. With the election of Manuel Luis Quezon (1935–44) as the second Philippine president, the Commonwealth of the Philippines was inaugurated in 1935.

The period of relative peace enjoyed under the Commonwealth government came to an abrupt halt when Imperial Japan launched air raids from the island of Formosa (Taiwan) on Pearl Harbor and on some of Philippines' military facilities on December 7, 1941. This resulted in the United States entering the Second World War. The Japanese invasion of the Philippines and of Southeast Asia challenged Western colonial rule and further sparked nationalist anticolonial movements for independence. Imperial Japan declared Philippine independence on October 1943 and installed the Second Republic with José Paciano Laurel (1943–45) as the new president. Widespread fighting by the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East against the Imperial Japanese Army was sustained throughout 1943 and toward late 1944. Only one organized resistance group—the Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (colloquially known as HUKBALAHAP or HUKs, literally translated as, "People's Army against the Japanese")—was able to sustain an insurgent revolution against the Japanese. On October 20, 1944, General MacArthur landed on Samar and began the military operations that eventually liberated the Philippines from Japanese occupation. The Republic of the Philippines was inaugurated as scheduled on July 4, 1946, fulfilling the decade-old Tydings-McDuffie Act. The inauguration also marked the start of the Third Republic of the Philippines.

Military relations between the two

countries had improved during the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. It was under Philippine President Sergio Osmeña (1944–46) that the earliest attempt to broker a military base agreement between the two governments took place. The agreed mandate between presidents Osmeña and Harry S. Truman (1945–53) called for the territorial integrity of the Philippines, the mutual protection of both the United States and the Philippines and the maintenance of peace in the Pacific region. After all hostilities against Japan ceased, President Truman signed the Philippine Military Assistance Act, which saw to the training of Philippine military and naval personnel and the transfer and maintenance of military equipment. President Roxas shifted his foreign policy toward a stronger alliance with the United States. This move was strengthened when the Military Bases Agreement of 1947 was reached.

The aftermath of the Second World War saw the persistence of Communist elements in the Philippines and in the rest of East and Southeast Asia. The HUKs that were once determined to overthrow Imperial Japan's colonial efforts now took on Communist, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial elements. President Truman and Philippine President Elpidio Quirino (1948–53) brokered the Mutual Defense Treaty on August 30, 1951—the quintessential military treaty that guided the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations up to the 21st century. The United States maintained close rapport with the Philippine government by offering military support against the Communist insurgency of the HUKs. The first official signs of dissatisfaction with U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations were hinted at under President Diosdado Macapagal's (1961–65) administration when the Philippines War Damage Claims Bill was rejected by the on May 1962. The Macapagal administration retaliated by cancelling an official visit in 1963. Moreover, the administration's Proclamation No. 28 saw the transfer of Independence celebration from the 4th of July (as per the Tydings-McDuffie Act)



"Take Your Choice", William McKinley raising U.S. flag in the Philippines, and William Jennings Bryan chopping it down, with U.S. flags flying over Puerto Rico and Cuba, as Uncle Sam and another man watch from U.S. soil, (ARTWORK BY VICTOR GILLAM, JUDGE MAGAZINE, MAY 12, 1900; CREDIT: JT VINTAGE/GLASSHOUSE/ ZUMA WIRE/NEWS.COM)

to June 12 (as per the Malolos Republic's 1898 independence declaration).

Beginning in the 1960s, Philippines' domestic concerns were complicated by international financial institutions. The Philippine economy was unsustainable, especially because its export revenue could not finance debt repayment. Philippine exports were driven by raw materials. From 1967 to 1971, sugar, coconut, and forestry products made up 70% of Philippine exports. Also, American development assistance had drastically declined in the late 1960s. The entrance of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund into the fray offered hope for salvation but did not, in any manner, guarantee it. In particular, the presence of the World Bank had become massive in the Philippines from 1970 to 1982—spanning the leaderships of presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan. To implement and satisfy the radical stabilization measures needed to enforce the structural adjustments set forth by the international financial institutions, President Ferdinand Marcos (1965–86) declared martial law on September 21, 1972. Within a year of declaring martial law, President Marcos won increased American military support, which jumped from \$18.5 million to \$45.3 million in 1973, and was accompanied by an increase in the supply of war materiel along with capacity and personnel training by the United States to combat Communist and Muslim insurgencies. Speculations suggest that the Marcos administration exploited these security concerns to ensure the continuation of American military and economic aid to the Philippines. Adding fuel to the fire, during the Marcos years' public spending was fueled by public debt. The military and economic aid from the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations to the Philippines were minimal, but continued the trend of doling out foreign assistance in spite of human rights violations.

During the Carter administration (1977–81), a thin line was drawn between economic and military assistance after the signing of the Arms Export Control Act of 1976. The U.S.-Phil-



President Reagan and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, along with First Ladies Imelda Marcos and Nancy Reagan, walk into the White House after the arrival ceremonies on the South Lawn September 16, 1982. (BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES)

ippine Military Bases Agreement was renewed on 1979 with the promise of \$500 million in U.S. foreign aid to the Marcos administration. The line drawn between economic and military aid was erased under the Reagan administration. Under Ronald Reagan (1981–89), the U.S. government bundled foreign aid, including both economic and military. The Communist threat, which had been the rallying cry of the governments of the United States and the Philippines during the onset of the Cold War, played a large role in the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations. This was especially highlighted when U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger visited Manila in April 1982 and affirmed the role of U.S. military bases in quelling the Communist threat. During this period President Reagan's foreign policy had increased support for repressive right-wing regimes throughout the developing and underdeveloped countries, dubbed chiefly as the Kirkpatrick Doctrine.

Corazon Aquino and the EDSA "People Power" Revolution (named after the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a major Philippine thoroughfare) overthrew the Marcos dictatorship—characterized as aberrant in the latter years of its lifespan. Under the first Aquino administration the U.S.

government was assured that all military and security commitments and financial obligations would be honored. The Philippine government was keen not to over-borrow in the late 1980s due to domestic developments: domestic debt of some \$12.3 billion that comprised some 40–50% of the national budget; natural disasters, an earthquake in 1990 and the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991; and the Gulf



Corazon Aquino in Manila, Philippines, on January 31, 1987. (ERIC BOUVET/GAMMA-RAPHO/GETTY IMAGES)



Filipino soldiers participate in the Amphibious Landing training as part of the 2018 Balikatan exercises between the Philippines and the United States in Zambales Province, the Philippines, on May 9, 2018. (XINHUA/ROUELLE UMALI/GETTY IMAGES)

war that impeded and reduced Filipino remittances. But by this time, support for the renewal of the U.S.-Philippine Military Bases Agreement had declined. The military bases agreement was not renewed by the Philippine Senate on September 1991 by a slim margin and the bilateral relations of the United States and the Philippines hit an all-time low.

During the administration of President Fidel Ramos (1992–98) the Philippines and other East Asian countries, especially its treaty allies Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand and, quasi-ally Singapore, still saw the United States as the prime guarantor of security against an emerging China. All are strategically situated along the peripheries of China. The Status of Forces Agreement, a precursor to the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement, was reached by the U.S. and the Philippine governments but was not put into effect due to growing anti-U.S. sentiments in the Philippines. The 1993 East Asian Miracle confirmed the market-governed economy approach of Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. But then the 1997 Asian financial crisis hit most of the Asian countries, sowing the seeds for populist governance. Despite losing

foreign investments in the process, the Philippines was largely resilient throughout the crisis.

It was only under President Joseph Estrada (1998–2001) that the Visiting Forces Agreement was revisited, resulting in two agreements that came into force in May 1999, outlining parameters for U.S. Armed Forces visiting the Philippines and for Filipino

personnel visiting the United States.

President Benigno Aquino III's (2010–16) foreign relations with China were conflict-ridden due to boundary spats in the West Philippine Sea. Although China had long been known to engage in maritime disputes, territorial disputes worsened under the second Aquino administration when in 2012, Philippine and Chinese vessels engaged in a stand-off in the Reed and Scarborough shoals—maritime areas located within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. On January 22, 2013, the Aquino administration filed a landmark case in The Hague and an Arbitral Tribunal under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was constituted. In 2016, the tribunal ruled that China's expansive claim to sovereignty over the waters of the South China Sea had no legal basis. However, there is no mechanism for enforcing the decision. Coupled with this separation from China, President Aquino III intensified relations with the United States. In 2014, the governments of the United States and the Philippines brokered the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) on April 28, after eight months of negotiations.

Current issues besetting U.S.-Philippine relations

Contemporary U.S.-Philippine relations is beset with challenges. A key domestic issue that strikes at the heart of bilateral relations is the prevailing human rights crisis brought about by President Duterte's war on drugs. As of August 2017, the Philippine National Police were responsible for some 9,000 drug-related killings, although human rights watchdogs say the figure is closer to 14,000. Based on officially reported statistics, the poor were noted to have been the number one victims of the drug war. While the United States could have responded through its 1997 Leahy Law, which limits or prevents the U.S. government from transferring foreign assistance to countries with gross human rights violations, this has not happened. During

the 31st ASEAN Summit on November 2017, held in Manila, there was no discussion of human rights as President Donald Trump expressed his full support of the Philippine government's war on drugs.

What may come as a shock is the prevailing paradox of Duterte's sustained high approval ratings in spite of the drug killings. There are two plausible explanations. First, Duterte positioned himself as the repudiating demagogue, casting himself as an anti-establishment populist. His promotion of radical social response to the drug problem strategically positions himself as a man of action—something that appeals to Filipinos. His administration has also effectively managed the mass discontent with the previous administration's supposed

inaction on social issues. The Duterte administration has also strategically deployed the politics of fear. This return to national “bossism” on the local level and the use of executive policing powers have spurred possible state-sanctioned violence. President Duterte’s popularity was not because of a revolt of the poor masses but rather a protest of the new middle class that had failed to reap the benefits of good governance of the previous administration. In an attempt to quell the criticisms of the drug war, the Duterte administration has named Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo, staunch critic of the government’s drug war program, to be anti-drug czar after she accepted Duterte’s offer to lead and co-chair the Philippines’ Inter-Agency Committee on Anti-Illegal Drugs (ICAD).

Another issue that strikes at the heart of the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relation is the Duterte administration’s pivot to China and Russia, paralleled with a proactive distancing from the United States. President Duterte manipulated the fragile public perception of the Filipinos on the historical atrocities committed by the United States in the Philippines and, through his angry remarks, galvanized support for his foreign policy preference. President Duterte’s attempts at loosening the ties with the United States is a postcolonial epudiation of America; to liberate the Philippines from its status as some sort of neocolonial ward.

Duterte’s pivot away from the U.S. need not be construed as complete severance of ties, but rather as a recalibration of interests. Despite the hints of historical revenge, the Philippines’ defense posture in the region is optimally maintained. The Duterte administration’s acceptance of the 2014 EDCA, which affirms mutual cooperation to promote peace and security in the region, is indicative of the government’s policy response to the uncertainties posed by China’s regional preponderance. Nevertheless, the recent Philippine policy approach to China (which some label as appeasement) is straining U.S.-Philippine relations. But this policy is not ill-informed, at least on the

part of the Philippine government. The Philippine government’s inaction on the Arbitral ruling on the West Philippine Sea is attributed to one particular circumstance. According to the Philippine national government, the inaction on the ruling can be attributed to the country’s attempts to gain soft Chinese material inducements, especially in the advent of China’s Belt and Road Initiative coupled with its foreign loans en masse. The visit of U.S. State Secretary John Kerry on July 26, 2016, in fact, played a critical role in the Duterte administration’s foreign policy strategy. Secretary Kerry advised lessening the emphasis on the Arbitral ruling when dealing with maritime disputes, further suggesting that a more strategic approach toward China is afoot. While the Philippines’ relationship with the United States is strained, it does not mean that the latter will abandon the former. While U.S. Asian alliances maintain concerns of security risks, the United States remains the prime guarantor of security to its peripheral allies. This is especially true for a long-time treaty ally like the Philippines.

A third challenge to the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations is the Philippines’ withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC). In con-

junction with the drug war that Duterte initiated in the latter half of 2016, the international community took notice of the drastic handling of drug prevalence and the subsequent decline of human rights conditions in the Philippines. President Duterte’s vocal protests, some spanning sovereignty concerns and political independence of public administration, have been met with harsh criticism from the international community as the death toll of the drug war kept rising. On March 17, 2018, the Philippines submitted a written notification to the United Nations of an intent to withdraw from the Rome Statute (the treaty that established the ICC) to which it had been a party since 2011. The ICC was notified a day later. The Duterte administration’s withdrawal from the Rome Statute followed a preliminary examination launched by the ICC—a course of action to warrant whether an investigation is needed—on the Duterte administration’s drug war. As of March 17, 2019, the Philippines is officially no longer a party to said statute. The United States is not a party to the statute, either.

A fourth challenge to the bilateral relationship is the diminishing presence of the United States in the West Philippine Sea primarily due to mari-



Protesters burn an image of President Rodrigo Duterte near the Philippine Congress on July 22, 2019, in Manila, Philippines. (JES AZNAR/GETTY IMAGES)

time disputes with China, the regional giant. 74,000 U.S. troops are currently deployed in the Asia Pacific across five treaty allies of the United States: Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Aside from the number of troops deployed, the United States has maintained minimal associations with any maritime disputes. To this effect, China has reinforced its territorial claims in the region alongside its bolstering of economic and financial assertions in the Asia Pacific. For example, China's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to boost economic connectivity and infrastructure along the old Silk Road and throughout the Eurasian region. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor alone could amass some \$62 billion worth of revenue in investments. This is further reified by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership between China and the rest of Asia, to which the United States is not a party. In 2015, the creation of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (or AIIB) effectively challenged the West-affiliated regional international financial institutions like the Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Despite the Philippine government's clamor for intervention in the West Philippine Sea debacle, the United States has limited its stance and its position on the matter—one loosely based on verbal agreements reached by the former Obama administration and Xi Jinping's administration. These mutually agreed upon limits serve as constraints to the United States' intervention in the West Philippine Sea, effectively restricting its actions to freedom of navigation initiatives and freedom from maritime coercion, intimidation and threats. A shared coexistence between the United States and China was initially envisioned by both presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping on the matter of China's rise. The United States will allow such for as long as it is peaceful, prosperous, stable, and responsible. But this was effectively reversed under U.S. President Donald Trump.

Lastly, and perhaps the more exigent one, is the challenge of legal ambiguity

and equity in the military agreements between the United States and the Philippines. When Philippine National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana called for the review of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty in December 2018, the United States took great measure in ensuring continued commitments and support for the transfer of military personnel in the Philippines. But this assurance was thinly veiled with the same undertone of maintaining legal ambiguity in the Mutual Defense Treaty, which drew the concern of Secretary Lorenzana. Secretary Lorenzana went so far as to suggest that legal ambiguity in military agreements can lead to confusion and doubt especially when mutual defense obligations are triggered. This active concern is only logical as China aggressively projects its dominance even within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. Moreover, a comparison of the two agreements from 2014—U.S. defense cooperation with Japan and with that of the Philippines—suggests that there exists a disparity in legal specifications and clarifications in the defense obligations between the United States and the Philippines. Secretary Lorenzana's concern remains on point through and through: Ambiguity in military agreements is perilous considering Chinese regional preponderance and territorial aggression. The Philippine government's concerns were quelled when, on March 1, 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo assured the Duterte administration that any armed attack in the West Philippine Sea will trigger defense obligations outlined in the Article 4 of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. While Secretary Pompeo's opportune and timely comment may abate the Philippines' lingering doubts on U.S. commitment in maritime disputes for now, manifestations of the U.S.'s obligations to the treaty remains to be seen.

Policy options

In spite of China's meteoric rise in the region over the past decades, the United States remains as the Philippines' single most credible and trustworthy security partner. The second Obama

administration had maintained a strategic posture with the Philippines due to vested key interests in the bilateral relationship, particularly in the maintenance of external (disputed territories as flashpoints for conflict escalation) and internal security (peaceable resolution to the separatist insurgency) within the Philippines and throughout the Southeast Asian region. The entrance of Rodrigo Duterte definitely shook the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations to the core. Despite the Obama administration's enormous strides in maintaining strategic relations with the Philippine government, it remained critical of the latter's gross human rights violation in the conduct of its drug war. The Trump administration's appeasement of Duterte's policy agenda, on the other hand, may be a strategic response to the Philippines' rebalancing toward China and Russia. The United States' Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 alone is indicative of "the United States' continued commitment to the region" despite the encroaching threats to democratic institutions in Asia. This, in part, also complements the Trump administration's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy/framework in Asia.

Rodrigo Duterte currently serves as the single most important factor for the U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations. Under his executive watch, the bilateral relations of the United States and the Philippines may either come out stronger in the end or wither, stagnate even, in the process. But this does not in any way preclude the influence of domestic and international forces. As a matter of fact, the strengthening of U.S.-Philippine relations is anchored on how the United States will respond to the Philippines' recalibration and rebalancing.

Building good-will. One unorthodox process, at least in this case, would be building good-will. Whenever President Duterte invokes instances of American colonial excess, the governments' ties with one another tend to take a beating. One possible way of building good-will is providing for historical reparations. A recent example is the return of the Balangiga bells last December 11, 2018. (the Balangiga

massacre took place in 1901 during the Philippine-American war. American forces took three church bells as trophies of war.) The bells were particularly important for President Duterte as a symbol of colonial oppression by the United States; that unless the church bells of Balangiga were not on Philippine soil, the unjustified massacre of Balangiga remains an affront to U.S.-Philippine relations. This was remedied when U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim and other American political leaders endeavored to arrange the return of the church bells to the Philippines.

Defense cooperation. Like fostering socio-political good-will, the maintenance of a comprehensive defense cooperation in the region, and with the country, is necessary. This may pertain to drafting succinct, timely and relevant defense cooperation guidelines between the United States and the Philippines. But the instance of the 2014 EDCA indicate that this is not the case. In contrast to the 2014 U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation, the 2014 EDCA serves more as logistical transfer and jurisdictional parameter agreements on military equipment and its use. The former, on the other hand, outlines comprehensive defense guidelines under invasion scenarios coupled with bilateral cooperation mechanisms allowing for the similar logistical concerns that makes up the Philippines' 2014 EDCA. To contextualize the Philippines' 2014 EDCA, China's aggressive military build-up in the West Philippine Sea is now allegedly capable of launching missiles in the region alarming both the Philippines' Department of National Defense and the United States' Pentagon. Moreover, an updated VIIRS Visual Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite satellite imagery released by the Philippines' Karagatan Patrol (Sea Patrol) shows that foreign vessels from Vietnam, Taiwan and China are within the exclusive economic zones along the western Philippine coastline, with speculation that Chinese vessels, commercial and non-commercial alike, comprise a majority of these.



Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (R) and U.S. President Donald Trump (L) hold a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the 31st Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit at the Philippine International Convention Center in Manila on November 13, 2017. (ROLEX DELA PENA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

Implementing the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling. When the arbitral tribunal ruling against Chinese expansion in the South China Sea was released on July 12, 2016, it was a remarkable foreign policy victory for the outgoing Aquino administration. It was, however, Rodrigo Duterte's administration that inherited the success. Pursuing the arbitral tribunal ruling is now incumbent on the new government; however, President Duterte's rhetoric indicates that the government will not be pursuing the implementation of the ruling for two reasons: a risk-assessment of conflict escalation with China and Duterte's choice of amicable dispute settlement with China through verbal agreements. President Duterte still maintains his firm position on matters of the Philippines' sovereignty and territorial integrity, as he elaborated in his recent State of the Nation Address last July 22, 2019. This has been a source of concern for many of the critics of Duterte administration. Figures like retired Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio of the Supreme Court of the Philippines have been forthright about the necessity of protecting the West Philippine Sea as a global common from China's grand thievery.

Pivoting to ASEAN. The ASEAN

bloc approach is also the best means of maintaining security and order within and around the West Philippine Sea. Experiences with the ASEAN bloc indicate that it is a good counterbalance to Chinese territorial aggression. All ASEAN countries are within China's peripheral sphere of influence. Each vary in their experiences and relationship with China. But structuralizing an ASEAN bloc as counterbalancing entity against China is not an easy feat especially because the regional bloc is more a convening body than an enforcing one. In 2017, ASEAN was most outspoken in pointing out the controversial missile testing of North Korea, invoking administrative action from countries like Japan and the United States to ensure that Kim Jong-un's government was held accountable. While the preponderant China posits a different case, a viable option remains: for the Philippines (and the United States) to turn to ASEAN countries for a pooling of security capacity. The U.S. and the Philippine governments need not look far from the ASEAN region. It is also important for the Philippines to actively ensure its fellow Asian neighbors that this strategic turn to ASEAN does not go in contravention to their claims in the disputed regions.

discussion questions

1. Under present United States' foreign policy, do the Philippines have a good reason to be suspicious of U.S. assurances given the ambiguities of the Mutual Defense Treaty and the verbal reassurances of the Secretary of State? What factors do you think might cause the United States to hesitate to respond in contravention of the treaty mandates?

2. China's expansion into the South China Sea has not been significantly challenged by the United States. What suggestions would you propose to counter China's expansionist activities in implementing the Belt and Road program which would reassure the Philippines of our commitment to them?

3. Duterte's authoritarian policies share a lot in common with other authoritarian leaders around the world. The United States policy has been to not condemn these policies. In the case of the Philippines, should the United States use more assertive diplomacy to try to deter increasing assertion of authoritarian rule? If so, what suggestions would you make to the State department?

4. Corruption has been wide spread under the Duterte administration, as has increased use of violence. How much should these conditions impact our relationship with the Philippines? What policies would you suggest given the fact that these are domestic Philippine issues?

5. Human rights, the rule of law and constitutionalism are bedrock principles for democratic nations. Duterte's withdrawal from the Rome Statute opens the door to increased contravention of those principles in his country. What possible strategies could the US develop to persuade the Duterte government to change course?

6. America's past colonial history in the Philippines has not been forgotten by them, especially the middle class and is reflected in part by Duterte's "pivot" to China and Russia. What policies would you propose to promote better U.S. relations with the Philippine people?

suggested readings

Abinales, Patricio N. and Amoroso, Donna J. **State and Society in the Philippines**. 464 pp. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. This clear and nuanced introduction explores the Philippines' ongoing and deeply charged dilemma of state-society relations through a historical treatment of state formation and the corresponding conflicts and collaboration between government leaders and social forces.

Karnow, Stanley. **In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines**. 536 pp. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1990. Stanley Karnow won the Pulitzer Prize for this account of America's imperial experience in the Philippines. In a swiftly paced, brilliantly vivid narrative, Karnow focuses on the relationship that has existed between the two nations since the United States acquired the country from Spain in 1898, examining how we have sought to remake the Philippines "in our image," an experiment marked from the outset by blundering, ignorance, and mutual misunderstanding.

Hamilton-Paterson, James. **America's Boy: The Marcoses and the Philippines**. 502 pp. London, England: Faber and Faber, 1998. James Hamilton-Paterson, who knew the Philippines well having lived there for some years, resolved in *America's Boy* to examine the Marcoses more closely - not to exonerate them but, rather, to explain the political and social roots of their regime, sustained for so long by support from Washington.

Bartholomew, Rafe. **Pacific Rims: Beermen Ballin' in Flip-Flops and the Philippines' Unlikely Love Affair with Basketball**. 416 pp. New York, NY: Berkley Books, 2011. In *Pacific Rims*, Rafe Bartholomew, journalist, New Yorker, and veteran baller, ventures through the Philippines to investigate the country's love of basketball.

Wolff, Leon. **Little Brown Brother: How the United States Purchased and Pacified the Philippines**. 418 pp. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1992. First published in 1960, *Little Brown Brother* won the Francis Parkman Prize from the Society of American Historians in 1962 as the book which "best combined serious historical scholarship and literary distinction." Available again, this book looks at a long history of Filipino struggle for independence.

Miller, Jonathan. **Rodrigo Duterte: fire and fury in the Philippines**. 352 pp. New York, NY: Scribe, 2018. Through interviews with Duterte himself, his sister, daughter and son, two former presidents, old friends, death squad hitmen, and relatives of his victims, Channel 4 News' Asia Correspondent Jonathan Miller shows that far from the media cartoon of The Godfather, John Wayne, Hugo Chavez, and Donald Trump rolled into one, Duterte is a sinister, dangerous man, who should not be taken lightly.

Don't forget: Ballots start on page 98!!!!

To access web links to these readings, as well as links to additional, shorter readings and suggested web sites,

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and click on the topic under Resources, on the right-hand side of the page.