

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**PHILIPPINE – US SECURITY RELATIONS:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AFTER THE 9/11**

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ABSTRACT

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The Philippines shares common principles with the United States of America such as freedom, democracy, free enterprise and respect for human rights. Over the years, the two countries nurtured the relationship encompassing historical, political, economic and socio-cultural aspects. The Philippines fought side-by-side with America during the Spanish-American War, against the Japanese during the Second World War, in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and the latest US led Global War on Terrorism.

Since 1946 to date, the United States and the Philippines maintain an existing agreement entitled Mutual Defense Treaty. However, the US - Philippine Military Bases Agreement of 1947 was terminated in 1991 and eventually US forces were pulled out of the Philippines. Since then, both countries maintained a low-key alliance.

After the September 11 terrorist attack in the United States, the US - Philippine security alliance was once again reinvigorated by the Global War on Terrorism. The Philippines was the first ASEAN country to openly support the American led campaign against terrorism. The pullout of the Philippine humanitarian contingent in Iraq last July 2004, caused tension in US – Philippine relations. It is of mutual interest for both countries to explore the security challenges in order to determine what commitment the Philippines can make and what US should realistically expect.

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PHILIPPINE – US SECURITY RELATIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AFTER THE 9/11

Our soldiers fought and died together in places like Bataan and Corregidor. And on this foundation of common sacrifice, America and the Philippines built an alliance that remains strong, an alliance that is essential to the peace of the Pacific.

- US President George W. Bush
May 20, 2003

US – Philippine relations are based on shared history, common values, a commitment to freedom and democracy and vigorous military ties.¹ For the Philippines, the link with the U.S. continues to be its single most important bilateral relationship. The US holds a special relationship with the Philippines due to the following: mutual defense pact, the fact that it is one of its top investors and providers of development assistance, and the US is home to over two million Filipinos and Filipino-Americans.²

This unique relationship traces its beginnings from the Spanish-American War where Filipinos and Americans fought side by side against Spanish forces to liberate the Philippines from Spanish domination. With the defeat of Spain, the Philippines was ceded to the US under the terms of the Treaty of Paris.³

Even before American sovereignty could be fully established, events took dramatic turns that further defined the character of the Philippine-US relationship. These included the establishment of a Commonwealth government, fighting the Japanese forces during the Second World War, granting of independence to the Philippines in 1946, and the forging of a strategic alliance during the Cold War under the terms of the bilateral Philippine-US 1947 Military Bases Agreement (MBA) and the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).

After the Philippine Senate terminated the MBA in 1991, the Philippine-American relationships took a downturn ending almost a century of US military presence. The Philippine ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement with the US in 1999 signified a rebound in security ties between both countries.

It was after the September 11 terrorist attacks, however, that the Philippine-US security alliance was truly revived. Once again, the two countries found themselves fighting a common enemy in terrorism. But not long after, the Philippines' commitment as a security partner to the US and consequently to the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), was put to a test when the Philippine government pulled out its troops from Iraq, resulting in the disappointment of the US.

With more recent developments such as the reelection of President George Bush and the designation of the Philippines as chair of the Anti-Terrorism Task Force during the November

2004 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Conference, the Philippine-US security relationship truly faces crucial challenges and various opportunities. It is to the mutual benefit of both countries to examine these opportunities in the context of changing security scenarios, yet anchored on their deep historical, economic and cultural ties.

EARLY HISTORY OF PHILIPPINE - US RELATIONS

SPANISH-AMERICAN PERIOD

The Spanish-American War at the end of the 19th century paved the way for the beginning of Philippine-American relations. When the US declared war on Spain on April 25, 1898; Theodore Roosevelt, the Acting Secretary of the Navy, ordered Commodore George Dewey, Commander of the Asiatic Squadron, to sail to the Philippines and destroy the Spanish fleet.⁴ During this period, Filipino revolutionaries and American forces collaborated to end over three centuries of Spanish domination. The Spanish fleet was defeated by the American Navy in the Battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898. During the "Battle of Manila", Spanish forces surrendered to the United States. Eventually, Spain ceded the Philippines to the US pursuant to the Treaty of Paris.

In the early years of the American regime, however, Filipino nationalists stood their ground against another foreign rule, calling instead for absolute independence. This led to a short period of Philippine-American War, from 1898 to 1902, which ended with the establishment of American sovereignty over the Philippines.⁵ The episode marked a pivotal point in the American experience. For the first time, US forces fought overseas and for the first time, US acquired a territory – the former colony itself becoming a colonialist.⁶

The succeeding years witnessed the rebuilding of Philippine-American relations. US administration of the Philippines was declared to be temporary and intended to develop institutions that would permit the establishment of a free and democratic government.⁷ American authorities pushed for the development of the Philippines which, in turn, encouraged Filipinos to work for eventual independence. The Americans introduced political, economic and social services. Under American tutelage, the first Philippine legislative assembly was elected in 1907 while public education, health and other services were modernized.⁸

COMMONWEALTH

In 1916, the US Congress passed the Philippine Autonomy Act, also known as the Jones Law, giving the Philippines considerable home rule and promised independence after the

establishment of a stable government. US Governor General Francis Harrison (1913-21) started the "Filipinization" of the civil service, much to the anger of Americans residing in the Philippines.⁹ The Jones Act brought the legislative branch of government under Filipino control, but laws were subject to veto of the governor general. Under the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1935, the Philippines became a fully self-governing commonwealth in preparation for complete independence after ten years.¹⁰

Manuel L. Quezon was elected President of the Commonwealth government. He was to take over a country beset by problems compounded from the Spanish and American regimes. Among these problems, national security appeared the most urgent, as Japanese foreign aggression seemed imminent. Recognizing this development, the National Assembly enacted its first law, the National Defense Act (Commonwealth Act No. 1), which provided for the establishment of national defense for the Philippines. In formulating the Philippine defense plan and system, President Quezon requested the services of General Douglas MacArthur. The defense plan involved the organization of a citizen army (regular and reserve forces); a Navy and an Army Air Corps.¹¹ This would later be the basis for the modern Philippine armed forces.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION

The progress towards full independence for the Philippines was momentarily disrupted during the Second World War. Japanese launched a surprise attack on the Philippines in December 1941, just about ten hours after naval bombers attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.¹² US declared war against Japan. War in the Pacific ensued and despite the heroic defense by American and Filipino soldiers in Bataan and Corregidor; the Philippines, then the US' stronghold in the Pacific, fell to Japanese control.¹³ The Japanese established a puppet government when Japan declared the end of US rule in the Philippines.

The war to regain the Philippines began when American forces led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur landed in Leyte on October 1944. American and Filipino forces fought together until the Japanese surrendered in September 1945.¹⁴

PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE

Following the liberation from the Japanese, the Philippines suffered great damage and a complete organizational breakdown. Despite the bad state of the country, US and the Philippines decided to go on with plans for independence.¹⁵ Many Americans and Filipinos doubted if the Philippines could cope with the challenges of independence. The ceremony was indeed unprecedented as an imperial nation was voluntarily relinquishing a possession as the US

fulfilled its pledge to grant self rule.¹⁶ The Philippines became the independent Republic of the Philippines on July 4, 1946.

PHILIPPINE - US SECURITY ALLIANCE

MILITARY BASES AGREEMENT

Bilateral relations with the US overwhelmingly influenced Philippine foreign relations after the Second World War. These relations were further reinforced with the signing by the Philippine and American governments of agreements governing their economic, trade and security relations. To many critics, these agreements were lopsided, primarily serving American economic and security interests in the Asia Pacific region.

One of most significant of these treaties is the Philippine-American MBA which was signed on 14 March 1947, only months after the declaration of Philippine independence by the US. The Philippine-US MBA was “a military agreement by which the former granted the latter the right to retain the use of bases in the Philippines for a period of 99 years, to permit the US to use such bases as the latter may determine according to military necessity, and to enter into negotiations with the US concerning the expansion of such bases.”¹⁷

Under the terms of the MBA, the Philippines gave outright support to the forward deployment of US forces in the Pacific region – a key pillar of regional stability, by hosting US military bases, mainly Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base. Clark Air Base, located north of Manila, was a logistical hub for the US Thirteenth Air Force while Subic Naval Base was an extremely valuable repair and re-supply facility for the US Seventh Fleet. The US maintained that both bases were vital for power projection in the Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Middle Eastern theaters.¹⁸

The utility of the US bases sprang from its strategic location in the Asia-Pacific region and the depth and range of crucial support facilities and inexpensive workforce these bases provided.¹⁹ When the US forces withdrew from Vietnam, American facilities in the Philippines served as the only US overseas bases in the Southeast which supported American forward defense strategy in Asia and the Pacific.²⁰

After several years of operation, the US bases, which had long been regarded as the “linchpin of a partnership built around a network of bilateral and multilateral arrangements between the Philippines and the US”, was set to expire on September 1991.²¹ With emotional issues of Philippine nationalism often outweighing economic or strategic arguments, the Philippine Senate rejected the proposed Philippine-American Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation

and Security that could have extended the stay of US forces in the country.²² Consequently, the Americans withdrew its forces from the Philippines.

Both countries tried to project normalcy in their security relations, but neither party could conceal that this once close and vibrant bilateral alliance had been relegated to the sidelines.²³

MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY

To complement and further strengthen the 1947 MBA, the Philippines and the US concluded a MDT on 30 August 1951. The 1951 MDT provides the overall framework of the defense relationship between the Philippines and the US. Significantly, it provides that “each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes.”²⁴ To effectively achieve the objective of the treaty, the parties separately and jointly, by self-help and mutual aid, agreed to maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.²⁵ The security alliance, with the MDT as cornerstone, had been tested in the crucible of the Korean and Vietnam War, and the Cold War.

Proponents and supporters of the 1951 MDT maintained that the bilateral Philippine – US defense relationship provided for the Philippines external defense and contributed in maintaining regional security. On a practical level, the MDT gave the Philippines, to a considerable extent, deterrence against potential aggressors. Likewise, through the military training and exercises conducted, the Philippines was given the opportunity to develop its defense capabilities.²⁶

Despite the termination of the 1947 MBA in 1992, the 1951 MDT remained in effect as the latter is an independent treaty, and as such, the Philippines and the US remain defense allies. In fact, the 1951 MDT is the only legal framework guiding Philippine-American security relations in the post-bases period, with both countries repeatedly re-affirming the MDT to be the anchor of their security relations.²⁷

However, the US downgraded its political and military relations with the Philippines as it could not guarantee the external defense of the country since American forces lost a significant facility from which they could operate.²⁸

PHILIPPINE - US ALLIANCE AFTER US BASES PULLOUT

POST-COLD WAR ENVIRONMENT

Despite the MDT remaining in force, the Philippine-US security relations waned after the pullout of the US bases from the Philippines. This was due not only to the circumstances in which the pullout was made, but also to the new challenges posed by the volatile security environment.

The termination of the MBA came at the time that the US and the rest of the world were adjusting to the post-Soviet era. With the end of the Cold War, the international community witnessed new trends and threats to security that required less military power. Emerging contemporary threats took the forms of border and territorial disputes, transnational crimes, regional hegemony and terrorism.

Given these developments, the US did not see much need for forward deployment of forces and the maintenance of major US bases in the region. Consequently, it adopted a new strategy that involved series of smaller bases, bilateral and multilateral defense treaties, and joint and combined training exercises and occasional deployment of US Navy within the region.²⁹

Similarly, the Philippines at that time did not see a pressing security interest that would prompt it to strengthen its security alliance with the US, until the so-called “China challenge” emerged. In the face of China's creeping occupation in the disputed islands in the South China Sea and its reported arms modernization and military build-up that concerned the Philippines and the US, respectively, both countries saw the need to revive their security relations. The Philippines realized the importance of US presence to preserve the balance of power in the region while the US found it necessary to contemplate on its security relations to counter efforts that would upset such balance of power.

Against this background, the Philippines and US reassessed their security alliance and eventually pursued ways to revive it.

VISITING FORCES AGREEMENT

The landmark of the renewed Philippine-US relations during the post-Cold War era was the ratification by the Philippine Senate in 1999 of the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). With this agreement, the once seemingly obligatory military exercises under the terms of the MDT soon found renewed strength and significance. The Agreement paved the way for the

conduct of more constant and regular military exercises between the Philippines and the US in fulfillment of their strategic defense objectives.

The VFA is an agreement that provided the legal framework for the treatment of US personnel visiting the Philippines as approved by the Philippine government.³⁰ In response to the criticisms against the VFA, proponents of the Agreement stressed that "the fundamental and incontrovertible framework of the VFA is that all military exercises to be conducted in the Philippines and any activities of US defense and military personnel in the country are always subject to the prior approval of the Philippine Government. The Philippine Government will not allow any visit by the US personnel in whatever shape or form to be conducted in derogation of Philippine sovereignty."³¹ Likewise, contrary to many critics' impression, the VFA does not constitute the permanent stationing of US forces in the Philippines, as the US troop visits are merely temporary.

Both countries deem the agreement to be pivotal in sustaining the spirit of the Philippine-US "special relations". For the Philippines, effort will be devoted to rebuilt bilateral relations with US in the political-security arena, to generate a political environment conducive to closer defense cooperation. Such effort would benefit the Philippines, not only to boost its external defense posture but to contribute to regional security and stability.³² Philippine defense officials considered China's expansion in the contested South China Sea as a security threat to the country. Consequently, the Philippine government realized the importance of American military presence in maintaining the balance of power in the region.³³

Meanwhile, US defense officials and analysts see a threat to American interests if China were to upset the regional balance of power.³⁴ These regional events became the strong basis for both countries to reassess their alliance and security cooperation. Thomas Hubbard, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, stated that the security relations between "U.S. - R.P. rebounded with the ratification of the VFA."³⁵ This agreement allowed both countries to resume normal military contacts and periodic joint exercises.

MUTUAL LOGISTICS SUPPORT AGREEMENT

In November 2002, the Philippines and the US signed the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA), a "reciprocal logistic support" between the military forces of the two countries for the duration of an "approved activity" such as "combined exercises and training, operations and other deployments."³⁶ Similar to the agreements of the US with 56 other countries, the MLSA aims to lower the cost of security cooperation by minimizing administrative costs and wastage.

As with the other agreements between the Philippines and the US, the MLSA also became the centerpiece of scrutiny of nationalist critics, arguing about the too discreet manner that the Agreement was forged, as well as the underlying content of the Agreement that may carry serious national security implications.

One of the most vocal critics of MLSA was former Philippine Senator and constitution expert Jovito Salonga, who opined that neither “the US Embassy nor Malacanang can usurp the prerogative of the Senate by stating that the MLSA is an executive agreement and, therefore, does need Senate ratification or concurrence.”³⁷

In response, then Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Blas Ople pointed out that the MLSA “would merely facilitate the implementation of existing agreements and does not involve changes in national policy. It makes adjustments of detail in carrying out our established national policy, as reflected in the norms contained in our treaty obligations.”³⁸ Ople added that the MLSA does not contain a legal obligation to grant logistics support but rather a case of “best efforts” obligation to do so.

Amid criticism, the MLSA, which invoked the two other basic agreements governing the Philippine-US security relations – the 1951 MDT and the 1999 VFA – was implemented, further sustaining and strengthening the reinvigorated RP-US strategic alliance.

PHILIPPINE - US ALLIANCE AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

TERRORISM

Reassessment by the US of its bilateral alliances with the East and Southeast Asian nations continued in the later 1990s in the wake of new threats and challenges in the regional security environment. It was not until the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001 that the urgency of forging cooperation with countries in the region surfaced. The Al-Qaeda network, architect of the treacherous attacks, reportedly maintained links with other international terrorist groups based in Southeast Asia such as the Abu Sayaff Group (ASG) in the Philippines and the Jamaah Islamiyah in Indonesia.

After the 9/11 incident, the Philippine government was the first Asian state to declare full support to the international coalition against terrorism led by the United States of America. President Gloria Arroyo offered the use of former U.S. bases in the country as transit points for the international coalition fighting in Afghanistan. President Arroyo quickly announced a fourteen-pillar approach to combat terrorism.³⁹ The Philippines chose to fight terrorism and openly supported the US GWOT. After the fall of the Saddam Regime in Iraq, the Philippines

sent a humanitarian contingent composed of military, policemen, medical and health workers to assist in the reconstruction effort. Prior to this, Pres. Arroyo facilitated the conduct of Joint RP-US Military exercises against terrorism in Mindanao, south of the Philippines, targeting the suspected local and regional networks of AL-Qaeda in the country. In the region, the Philippine government initiated the mutual exchange of information with Malaysia and Indonesia, a regional counter-terrorism measure agreed upon. Committed to fight terrorism within and outside the country, the Philippines upheld its long standing relationship with the US as an ally in the region.

In recognition of the Philippines' contribution to global stability, President Bush designated the Philippines as a major non-NATO ally, joining the list of countries such as Australia, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Argentina, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea.⁴⁰ Likewise, President Arroyo was rewarded with an extensive package of military aid and economic assistance⁴¹ and was informed of the prospect of greater US involvement in the government campaign against the ASG.⁴²

BALIKATAN 2002-1 EXERCISES

The September 11 incident further emphasized the need for unprecedented regional cooperation to defeat terrorism and other similar threats that could upset the stability of the region. As Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander of the US Pacific Command, pointed out: "Regional alliances and partnerships are critical to achieving both on short-term goal of eradicating regional terrorist groups and long-term goal of establishing a security environment throughout the Asia Pacific region that rejects terrorism and addresses underlying factors that breed terrorists."⁴³

Toward this end, the Philippines and the US intensified their effort to enhance their security partnership. The US again saw the importance of enhancing the capabilities and joint interoperability of the Philippine forces to achieve impact on counter-terrorism efforts. Bilateral military exercises were to be the primary tool by which these objectives would be achieved.

Consequently, Balikatan 2002-1 was conducted in 2002. Balikatan 2002-1, while technically a part of the annual Balikatan military exercises, was considered a unique training exercise. It was especially tailored to contribute directly to the Philippine armed forces counter-terrorism efforts in the Southern Philippines. As such, the six-month exercises were conducted in the island of Basilan and Zamboanga, participated in by 660 US troops and 3,800 Filipino soldiers. The objectives of the counter-terrorism exercises were to improve the interoperability of Philippine and US forces against terrorists, to enhance the combat capability of the Armed

Forces of the Philippines Southern Command or infantry battalions based in Mindanao, to ensure quality in intelligence processing, and to upgrade Philippine-US capabilities to wage effective civil, military, and psychological operations.⁴⁴ The US troop deployment in the Philippines was part of the second phase of America's war on terrorism, directed at denying Al-Qaeda a new home base and access to human and material resources.⁴⁵ Both countries viewed the exercise as a military and political success and discussed ways of transforming it into a sustained program of security cooperation and counter-terrorism training and assistance.⁴⁶

PHILIPPINE TROOP PULLOUT FROM IRAQ

In support of coalition efforts after the fall of the Saddam regime, the Philippines sent a humanitarian contingent composed of military, policemen, medical and health workers to assist in the reconstruction efforts. While these developments were taking place internationally; domestically, incumbent Philippine President Arroyo had just assumed presidency in June 2004 and was consolidating her political hold on power after a contested electoral result. She had to initiate reconciliatory moves to unify the people after the elections and to attend to pressing domestic problems like budget deficit and unemployment.

With the domestic agenda in a delicate balance, an event in Iraq would gain international attention and demand the immediate response of President Arroyo. In June 2004, a Filipino migrant worker in Iraq was taken hostage, with the pullout of the Philippine troops as the condition set by the Iraqi terrorists for his release. The Philippine government faced a dilemma, save one life but risk losing its credibility to the international community or reject the demands of the Iraqi terrorists and lose one life but expect the ire of the emotional Filipino populace, many of whom have migrant relatives. The government had to decide either to maintain its international commitment or decide in favor of domestic stability.

As early as November 18, 2003, the Philippine government insinuated that the humanitarian mission would be pulled out if the situation threatened their safety. President Arroyo stated, "We have to balance our international commitment against the safety of our peacekeepers and humanitarian workers."⁴⁷ One of the three main pillars of Philippine foreign policy is the protection of the rights and promotion of the welfare and interest of Filipino overseas.⁴⁸ During the inaugural speech, President Arroyo cited that, "sacrificing Angelo De La Cruz (Filipino hostage) was a pointless provocation as it would put the lives of one million and a half Filipinos in Middle East at risk (4,000 in Iraq), by making them part of the war."⁴⁹ The

existence of this huge work force and its protection weighed heavily in the government's decision to recall its contingent.

In July 2004, the Philippines, citing national interest, withdrew its 52 member humanitarian contingent from Iraq a month ahead of schedule. The incident drew various reactions from both local and international media, as well as strong criticisms from nations of the "coalition of the willing". The US, Australia, and other coalition countries were very vocal in expressing disappointment over the decision of the Philippine government. Similar unfavorable comments and disappointments were expressed in other local and foreign newspapers.

In the case of South Korea and Bulgaria, a number of their nationals were held hostage, but their governments did not accede to the terrorist demands of withdrawing from Iraq. Meanwhile, due to different reasons, Spain, Honduras and the Dominican Republic also withdrew their troops ahead of schedule, but not at the demand of the terrorists.

RE-ELECTION OF US PRESIDENT BUSH

Last November, US President Bush was again re-elected. This was a critical development particularly for the Philippine government in the aftermath of the Philippine decision to withdraw its troops from Iraq. Many quarters anticipated how the Philippine-US relations would proceed under such circumstances, with the prevailing speculation that a Bush reelection would not be good for the Philippines given the now strained ties between the two heads of states.

As it turned out, however, President Bush told President Arroyo, "let us keep our friendship strong."⁵⁰ Re-affirming President Bush's statement, US Ambassador to the Philippines Francis Ricciardone expressed confidence that the reelection of President Bush would lead to better relations between the two countries. According to him, "there's nowhere to go but even further up in our relations and all the great things that we began." He added that President Bush's reelection assured continued cooperation between the Philippines and the US on global issues and other concerns.⁵¹ President Arroyo in her congratulatory reelection message to President Bush stated that she hoped that the Philippines and the US would continue to be strong partners in the fight against terrorism.⁵²

COUNTER TERRORISM TASK FORCE

President Bush reiterated the US desire to keep its friendship with the Philippines and its strong alliance with the region during an official dinner at the recently concluded APEC conference in Santiago, Chile last November 2004. Further, Bush expressed satisfaction that the intelligence cooperation between the two countries had helped neutralize the important

figures in the Abu Sayaff and the Jemaah Islamiyah groups, yielding 100 arrests and 17 court convictions.⁵³

President Bush's confidence on the Philippines even went as far as nominating the Philippines as chair of the APEC Counter-Terrorism Task Force (CTTF) for the year, which the Philippines immediately assumed by a unanimous vote. The CTTF, created in February 2003, assists economies in identifying and assessing counter-terrorism needs, coordinates capacity building and technical assistance programs, cooperates with international and regional organizations and facilitates cooperation among APEC members on counter-terrorism issues.⁵⁴

The chairmanship of the CTTF was in recognition of the role that the Philippines played in the war against terrorism, first within the country and within the region.⁵⁵ To illustrate, President Arroyo cited the Philippine experience in successfully diminishing the strength of the Abu Sayaff, using its own resources and cooperating with other allies. As the new chair of the CTTF, the Philippines reaffirmed its commitment to defeating terrorism in both the local and regional fronts.

ANALYSIS

In the last ten years, the Philippine-US security alliance has gone through a process of breakdown, impasse, revival, and revitalization in its attempt to constantly adapt to the changes and to confront new challenges in the volatile security environment.⁵⁶ A pivotal development in the Philippine-US security relationship was the pullout of the US bases from the Philippines that caused the relations to become essentially moribund in the early 1990s. However, in the face of China's arms modernization and perceived hegemonic tendencies, as well as the emergence of equally serious non-traditional security threats, the two countries recognized the need to again enhance their cooperation. Consequently, the spirit of the 1951 MDT was revived amid national sentiments, with the resumption of Philippine-US bilateral military exercises that were eventually complemented by the VFA and the MLSA.

The revitalization of the Philippine-US security partnership was further sustained by the US campaign against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. For the Philippines, contributing to the US cause was an opportunity to once again be considered by the US as a significant strategic partner in Southeast Asia and by the international community as a vital player in preserving peace, stability and prosperity in the region. As such, the Philippines stood up to be counted, the first in Southeast Asia that openly declared its support for the US cause, to the dismay of some nationalists.

On a seeming reversal of fate, the same nationalists were later appeased with the decision of the Philippine government to withdraw its troops from the US-led campaign to restore peace in Iraq. On the downside, the Bush administration and most of the international community criticized this decision because it would not only set a bad precedent but more importantly, would boost terrorist confidence thereby putting the credibility of the GWOT in jeopardy.

Despite this, there is not much of a logical action to take for the Philippines and the US but to move past this incident, considering the following:

First, the interest of the Philippines and the US converged in the GWOT, with both countries having the objective of defeating local terrorist networks aligned with the Al-Qaeda. The defeat of the Mindanao-based ASG is of mutual concern of both countries and could be successfully carried out through mutual military support and cooperation.

Second, the Philippines and the US already have standing security agreements in place to provide the framework, guidelines and terms of reference for their defense relationship. Both countries have the benefit of having such legal bases for their security alliance. Initiatives to further curb terrorist activity could easily be advanced under the terms of these agreements.

Third, there are clear indications that President Arroyo was able to solidify her relationship with President Bush in her appeal for US support and assistance against local terrorist groups.⁵⁷ President Bush's reelection may be considered as an opportune development for President Arroyo as they have been, from the very start, jointly fighting the terrorist threat. President Bush himself saw the strong support and commitment of the Arroyo administration to champion the US cause, and would have sustained such had the international commitment versus domestic stability dilemma not happened. Indeed, the Philippine contribution to Iraq may have been minimal, but President Arroyo's support for GWOT was valuable and important to the US.

Finally, the nomination by President Bush for the Philippines to chair the APEC CTF manifests his recognition of the Philippines' strategic value as well as its capability to contribute in the GWOT and in regional peace and stability. Even the other heads of APEC member-states expressed their confidence on the Philippines' capability to assume such crucial responsibility.

Given the above as bases for enhancing Philippine – US security alliance, it is very important for the Philippines to review its bilateral commitment and relationship with the United States. The Philippines should clearly define what its national interests are and further analyze the extent of its commitment. Since it is a developing nation, its options are limited; hopefully, the US will understand the vulnerabilities of the country to intense domestic pressures.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Domestic developments in the Philippines and in the US, as well as developments in the international environment in the late 1990s up to 2001, prompted the two countries to reinvigorate their security alliance. Within this period, the alliance achieved a new dynamism based on shared beliefs in democracy, economic prosperity and inter-state cooperation and shared history of unity and heroism in fighting common adversaries.

In the context of contemporary developments, the core of this security alliance is the commitment to preserve regional peace and stability by curbing and defeating elements that threaten it. Among these threats, terrorism and related activities such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have emerged as most serious. The September 11 incident made the world more aware of the magnitude of the terrorist threat. This event changed the security landscape, thus, prompting countries to re-assess their bilateral and multilateral alliances and their capabilities to face the uncertainties and challenges of the modern world. It also paved the way for governments to re-assess or re-define their security interests to enable them to best adapt and contribute to global peace efforts. This is especially true for the Philippines and the US that have the longest security partnership in the region.

The Philippines chose to fight terrorism and openly declared full support to the US-led GWOT. However, in the wake of its unpopular decision to withdraw from its commitment to Iraq, its relations with the US have been strained. Nonetheless, more recent developments such as the reelection of President Bush and the designation of the Philippines as chair of the APEC CTF posed new challenges and opportunities for the Philippines to mend, if not redeem, its damaged credibility to the US and the international community. On the part of the US, these developments offered opportunities for it to secure the strategic objectives of the GWOT. In this light, the following policy options for the Philippines and the US are recommended:

First, the Philippines should carefully assess its national interests that have repercussions on its international commitment. It should carefully weigh the options and possible consequences, and decide a course of action that can be supported and sustained. The Philippines must show consistency in its commitment. Even though the Philippines would like to extend maximum support to its closest ally, it can only do so within its own domestic constraints. Such a realistic outlook must guide Philippine foreign policy.

Second, the Philippines should assure the US that the country remains committed to GWOT. As a beneficiary of security assistance and training, the Philippines should show substantial progress in the local war against groups aligned with the Al-Qaeda. The Philippine military must be able to demonstrate its enhanced capability to fight terrorism while the

Philippine government should attend to the bigger challenge of addressing the root causes of terrorist groups and insurgents. Likewise, progress in counter-terrorism efforts in the local front would boost the Philippine image, especially being the chair of an international task force on counter-terrorism. Focused security cooperation, counter-terrorism exercises and military assistance extended by the US will go a long way in enhancing the capability of government forces to defeat terrorism in the local front.

Third, the US should have realistic expectations from a country beset by pressing domestic problems like budget deficit, unemployment and unification, among others and is vulnerable to intense pressures from a sentimental populace. It should understand that the Philippines can only offer limited support at times given its domestic constraints.

Fourth, while the Philippines could not directly assist the US led military effort in Iraq, it can articulate and support in the diplomatic arena, either independently or jointly, common strategic interests of the US and the Philippines like GWOT and other issues of mutual concern in regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum and the APEC. As an ally, the Philippines have constantly sided with the US and can muster the support of other nations on its behalf.

Finally, relations with the US will remain a major aspect of Philippine foreign policy. The Philippines has an opportunity to design a policy that looks beyond special relationship. Both countries would welcome the evolution of a relationship governed by straightforward economic and strategic considerations.⁵⁸

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