

ALLIES OF NECESSITY:  
U.S.-PHILIPPINE STRATEGIC RELATIONS, 1898-2013

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## Abstract

The U.S.-Philippine relationship, established in 1898, has a complex history that spans colonialism, World War Two, the Cold War, and the War on Terror. Through a history of partnership and shared enemies, the Philippines have proven to be a reliable ally of the United States. This paper argues that the U.S.-Philippine relationship has been one of partnership and of seeking mutual state interest, rather than a relationship marked by oppression and domination. Throughout the history of this bilateral relationship, the United States has sought to build up and assist the development of the Philippine state, while the Philippines have provided invaluable geopolitical resources and power projection capabilities to the United States. In light of the continued rise of China, the growing importance of Southeast Asia, and the Obama Administration's current "Pivot to Asia," an evaluation of the U.S.-Philippine relationship is vitally important, not only to understand current U.S. foreign policy in Asia, but also to inform the future decisions of U.S. policy makers.

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## Introduction

The story of U.S.-Philippine relations is a long and complex one, spanning more than a century of direct, intimate involvement. The relationship touches on nearly every facet of politics and foreign affairs, which makes it both a blessing and a curse to approach as a scholar. Some aspects of this relationship are studied and criticized more often than others. In public schools, the only mentions of the U.S.-Philippine relationship are found in discussions about the Spanish-American War and the “White Man’s Burden.” We are taught that yellow journalism and a desire to liberate Cuba compelled the United States to declare war on Spain. The Philippines is mentioned as an aside, a byproduct of the war, something that the United States was thrown into and graciously accepted as part of the “White Man’s Burden.” Because of this, discussions about the U.S.-Philippine relationship tend to revolve around race and empire. Such emphasis on race relations imposes a sort of tunnel vision that limits one from seeing the wider geopolitical implications of the relationship between the United States and the Philippines. As a response, this paper seeks to understand and reveal the geopolitical and strategic reasons that the United States and the Philippines have long been and continue to be “allies of necessity”. By focusing on interstate relations the conversation about race gives way to a conversation about strategic relations, state interests, and geopolitics, all of which have much more bearing on the current status of U.S.-Philippine relations.

The study of the strategic relationship between the United States and the Philippines continues to be of great importance to understanding U.S. foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific. The U.S.-Philippine relationship touches on issues including international terrorism, the economic, political, and military rise of China, and conflict on the Korean peninsula. The Philippines' role in these issues is vital to U.S. interests and must be studied and understood in order to make good policy. Conversely, the United States' role in Philippine interests is also of great importance. The Philippines has faced internal threats from insurgents, separatists, and terrorists, and externally the Philippines is finding it difficult to maintain its territorial integrity in the face of China's rise as a regional great power. This interweaving of dependence is what makes the U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship a necessity to security in the Asia-Pacific. By keeping the dual issues of the historical relationship between the United States and Philippines and their current strategic relationship in mind, the thesis of this paper is that the U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship is necessary to achieving both states' current security interests, and that this bilateral relationship will continue to be necessary in the future.

The thesis will be argued in four separate chapters addressing the major time periods and issues of the U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship. The first chapter begins with the U.S. occupation and subsequent colonization of the Philippines following the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War. An analysis of treaty documents and presidential messages provides an understanding of the motivations of the U.S. government in the Philippines. Jeremi Suri's book entitled "Liberty's Surest Guardian" serves as a backbone to the argument in chapter one by arguing that the United States holds a nation-building creed as one of its primary foreign policy objectives, and

that the colonization of the Philippines was more about geopolitical interests and strategy rather than race. Furthermore, chapter one discusses the U.S. and Philippine relationship during World War II and the Japanese Occupation.

Chapter two explores the nature of the U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship during the Cold War. The newly independent Philippines depended on the United States to provide for its security interests and the United States depended on the Philippines for power projection capabilities in Southeast Asia. Communist actions in China, Korea, Indochina, and even in the Philippines itself brought the United States and the Philippine government closer together as they rallied around the anti-communist cause. Chapter two takes a particularly close look at the Philippines under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos was a poster child of anti-communism in Asia and worked closely with the United States. Even when he plunged the Philippines into martial law and operated the country as a dictatorship, U.S.-Philippine relations stayed strong. The People Power Revolution of 1986 brought Marcos's rule to an end and the United States quickly supported the new president, showing that the necessity of the relationship meant that the Philippines as a whole was more important than whomever happened to be ruling it.

The end of the Cold War brought about significant change to the nature of global politics and the U.S.-Philippine relationship was not immune from such systemic changes. The early 1990s proved to be an unstable time for U.S.-Philippine strategic relations. The U.S. lost its lease on Clark Air Force Base and the Subic Bay Naval Base, and the relationship began to weaken. However, a gradual recognition of the importance of the bilateral relationship brought the two countries closer together by the end of the

1990s. The focus of chapter three is the rapid strengthening of the U.S.-Philippine relationship after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Philippines had been dealing with various Muslim separatists and terrorist groups for years, and even some militant communists were still active in the Philippine countryside. By using the increased U.S. interest in terrorism, the Philippines was able to bolster the U.S.-Philippine relationship during the War on Terror. The Philippines was in need of U.S. assistance to help combat terrorists and insurgents at home and the United States saw the Philippines as a key battleground for the struggle against global terrorism because of the links between local terrorist groups and the more global Al-Qaeda terrorist network. The fight against terrorism increased cooperation between the U.S. and Philippine militaries and once again reminded the respective countries how necessary their strategic relationship was for the security interests of both parties.

Chapter four addresses the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region to U.S. interests and the Philippine's role in the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia." Two major security issues in recent years clearly demonstrate the importance and continued need of U.S.-Philippine cooperation. The first concerns territorial disputes in the South China Sea over the Spratly Islands and other surrounding islands. Although several Southeast Asian countries have claim on the islands, this paper focuses on the Chinese and Philippine claims and how the conflict between the two countries has impacted U.S.-Philippine relations. As China continues to challenge the Philippines in the South China Sea the Philippines has reached out to the U.S. military for tighter cooperation and even a semi-permanent presence on the former U.S. base at Subic Bay. Recent events in the



Korean Peninsula have also brought the United States and the Philippines closer together, highlighting the regional implications of the U.S.-Philippine relationship.

## Chapter 1: The Early Occupation to WWII, 1898-1946

During the 1898-1946 period, the Philippines were mostly under U.S. control aside from the Japanese occupation during WWII. During the colonial period the United States laid the foundation for the future U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship that would emerge upon Filipino independence in 1946. This chapter seeks to illuminate the foreign policy convictions of the U.S. government and its attempt to create a pro-U.S. space in Southeast Asia. The U.S.-Philippine relationship during the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, the colonial administration, and World War Two reveal the historical underpinnings that define this important bilateral relationship.

1898 marked the beginning of the U.S.-Philippines relationship. After the sinking of the *Maine* near Cuba, the United States declared war on Spain. The Spanish-American War set forth a series of events that led the United States to colonize the Philippines. The stated goal of the Spanish-American War was to free the Cuban people from Spanish oppression, and thus the conflict largely took place on Cuban soil. However, a young assistant secretary in the Navy Department, Theodore Roosevelt, had his eyes on the Philippines. During this time the United States was in the process of coming out on the world stage. One thing that the United States lacked that other great powers had was a colonial presence abroad. Inspired by the works of naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan on the importance of geopolitics and fueled by the success of westward expansion, Roosevelt saw an opportunity to expand American influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Previously made contingency plans for a war with Spain allowed for the U.S. Asiatic fleet to be dispatched to the Philippines from Hong Kong in order to protect the U.S. Pacific Coast. Timing was everything for Roosevelt. In 1897 Roosevelt had taken advantage of his superior's absence during a vacation to appoint the aggressive Commodore George Dewey to lead the Asiatic fleet. Now that war was declared against Spain all the pieces were in place for Roosevelt's Mahanian agenda.<sup>1</sup>

When the Spanish-American War in the Pacific began, the United States Asiatic fleet quickly overtook Manila Bay and destroyed the antiquated Spanish fleet on May 1<sup>st</sup>. With the loss of Manila Bay the Spanish effectively lost control of their entire colony, as much of their territory had been lost to the revolutionary Emilio Aguinaldo during the Tagalog War in the years leading up to the Spanish-American War. Meetings between Dewey and Aguinaldo led Aguinaldo to believe that once a Spanish surrender was achieved the Philippines would be granted independence and he would become president. Emboldened by thoughts of an independent Philippine Republic, Aguinaldo began a land offensive against the Spanish around Manila. However, deliberation in Washington in regards to the U.S. future in the Philippines led President McKinley to send the U.S. Army to the Philippines. Both Aguinaldo's forces and the U.S. forces were united in fighting the Spanish, but were soon at odds with one another. The victor in Manila would become the negotiating party with the Spanish in the coming peace. In the end, the Americans managed to secure the city. The United States and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris in December of 1898, and under that peace the United States became sovereign over the Philippines. Despite having raised a successful insurgent army and controlling

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2008, 34-35.

large portions of the islands, Aguinaldo was cut out of any peace deal between the United States and Spain.<sup>2</sup>

Through the Treaty of Paris-1898 the United States became sovereign over the archipelago, yet the peace would not hold. Aguinaldo's forces did not accept U.S. sovereignty and began an insurgent campaign against the United States. These insurgent activities and U.S. counterinsurgency against Aguinaldo's forces constituted the Philippine-American War, which lasted from 1898-1902. The struggles and costs of the Philippine-American War raise questions as to what the U.S. motivation was for such an endeavor. The Philippines held great geopolitical interest to the United States, which was seeking to increase U.S. economic influence and expand markets for a rapidly growing capitalist system.

During the Philippine-American War in 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt summed up his convictions concerning U.S. efforts in the Philippines in an annual message to the U.S. Congress.

What has taken us thirty generations to achieve, we cannot expect to see another race accomplish out of hand. . . In dealing with the Philippine people we must show both patience and strength, forbearance and steadfast resolution. Our aim is high. We do not desire to do for the islanders merely what has elsewhere been done for tropic peoples by even the best foreign governments. We hope to do for them what has never before been done for any people of the tropics—to make them fit for self-government after the fashion of the really free nations.<sup>3</sup>

Roosevelt envisioned a future in which the Philippines would be an independent, free, and self-governing country that would be friendly to U.S. interests. He wished to reshape Filipino society in the image of the United States, and by doing so increase U.S. influence

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<sup>2</sup> Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire*, 40-59.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of State, *Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, with the annual message of the president transmitted to Congress December 3, 1901*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1901, XXXII.

in the region as well as provide opportunities for economic growth. This type of rhetoric has been echoed throughout U.S. foreign policy, and it has its roots in U.S. revolutionary past. Jeremi Suri argues in his book *Liberty's Surest Guardian* that the United States holds a "nation-building creed" that began with the founding fathers' attempts to create a united nation out of a diverse group of people and polities. He states that "Nothing could be more American than to pursue global peace through the spread of American-style institutions. Nothing could be more American than to expect ready support for this process from a mix of local populations."<sup>4</sup> U.S. officials at the highest levels of government in the late 1800s held this mindset. They expected the locals to embrace U.S. rule and work towards becoming the type of state that Roosevelt envisioned for the archipelago. Suri goes on to say that "Americans imagine a global future that reflects their own national history."<sup>5</sup> This entails a global order in which states are ruled representatively with strong constitutions. These states would then naturally seek to preserve their independence and cooperate with similar states, promoting peace. This is what Suri calls the "society of states."<sup>6</sup> In President Roosevelt's message we can see references to this "society of states" in his desire to create a self-governing Philippines "after the fashion of the really free nations."

Roosevelt's desire for the Philippines to become a self governing nation-state modeled after the United States was not just an exercise in altruism. The United States also had clear geopolitical interest in the region. Creating a U.S.-friendly space in Southeast Asia was important to the growth of U.S. naval power and access to growing

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian: Rebuilding Nations after War from the Founders to Obama*, New York: Free Press, 2011, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian*, 29-30.

trade in Asia. A naval outpost in the Philippines would give the United States power projection capabilities in the Asia-Pacific that it did not have previously, and it would give American merchants easier access to lucrative trade in China. It was Roosevelt's desire for a more powerful and assertive United States, a world modeled after the U.S., and his view that the Philippines were geopolitically important that led him to send the Navy to the Philippines when he was Undersecretary of the Navy in 1898. Throughout his tenure as U.S. president he continued his commitment to development in the Philippines.

One of the most telling signs of the U.S. desire to create a representative and pro-U.S. society even during the Philippine-American War was the U.S. government's cooperation with protestant missionaries. During this time protestant missionaries worked hand in hand with the American government, especially in Asia. Their views and observations offer further evidence of the nation-building goals of the United States and give insight into civil society's opinion of the U.S. role in the Philippines. Having been a Spanish colony for more than three hundred years, the Philippines was largely Roman Catholic, and the Catholic faith was in opposition to the Anglo-Saxon protestant ideal that was popular in the United States at the time. Especially active in missionary efforts was the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had cooperated with U.S. expansionary policy in the western Native American territories.<sup>7</sup> Methodist commentators at the time "argued that God expected the United States to introduce 'Western civilization of the Anglo-Saxon type' to the East, to 'transform the Filipinos into a modern and free people' (and then to move on to other Asians), to bring 'a new and brighter day' to the islands,

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<sup>7</sup> Kenton J Clymer, "Religion and American Imperialism: Methodist Missionaries in the Philippine Islands, 1899- 1913," *Pacific Historical Review*, 35.

and to ‘spread the idea of democracy around the world.’<sup>8</sup> James M. Thoburn was the missionary bishop of India and reported on the situation in the Philippines. “Two weeks in the capital had convinced him that Filipinos in Manila, ‘apparently without exception,’ seemed satisfied with American rule. Parents wanted their children taught English he reported.”<sup>9</sup> His observations convinced him that the violence during the Philippine-American War was only because a minority of Filipinos resisted American rule. This view held true to the U.S. government’s view of the conflict.

The U.S. attempt to pacify the Philippines was long and brutal. After three years of fighting and struggle, President Roosevelt declared on July 4, 1902 that peace was achieved and now was the time to move forward as:

Now, therefore, be it known that I, Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States of America[. . .]declare, without reservation or condition, except as hereinafter provided, a full and complete pardon and amnesty to all persons in the Philippine Archipelago who have participated in the insurrections aforesaid, or who have given aid and comfort to persons participating in said insurrections, for the offenses of treason or sedition and for all offenses political in their character committed in the course of such insurrections pursuant to orders issued by the civil or military insurrectionary authorities.<sup>10</sup>

The declaration of peace and more important, the offer of amnesty shows President Roosevelt’s resolve to move past the pain and bloodshed of the Philippine-American War. Roosevelt did not shut out his former enemies from the nation-building process. He sought to create partnerships and move into a new era of American colonization, an era marked by investments in education and political development that would benefit the United States for years to come.

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<sup>8</sup> Clymer, “Religion and American Imperialism,” 35.

<sup>9</sup> Clymer, “Religion and American Imperialism,” 36.

<sup>10</sup> Melvin E. Page, *Colonialism: An International Social, Cultural, and Political Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003, 1147-1148.

In 1900, during the Philippine-American War, President McKinley sent a reluctant federal circuit court judge named William Howard Taft to run the Philippines as its first civilian governor. This choice of appointment speaks to the McKinley administration's intentions in the Philippines. McKinley could have continued the military rule that had been in place since the Americans first occupied the islands, or he could have chosen a militaristic leader to oversee the ruling of the islands. However, McKinley chose Taft. Taft was not a merchant or soldier. He was a man of the law. In the Philippines, he would serve as governor and start the process of nation-building, or in President McKinley's words "benevolent assimilation," even before the war was over.<sup>11</sup>

One of Taft's key goals was to reform the civil service in the Philippines. According to Taft, Filipino governance was plagued by favoritism, corruption, and incompetence. Taft worked to create a new, merit-based civil service that would promote social mobility, in contrast to the system that was in place when the Spanish left. The new system of governance was put into place by the Civil Service Act of the Philippine Commission in September of 1900. The Civil Service Act gave hiring preference to qualified Filipinos over foreigners and created a board of overseers which included Filipinos in its membership. Taft also incorporated former insurgents in his work with the Philippine Commission. Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera and Benito Legarda were of the *ilustrado* class and had ties to Emilio Aguinaldo and the larger Filipino community. By including people like de Tavera and Legarda in his government, Taft was able to build domestic legitimacy for the Commission and more easily transfer policy decisions to the general public.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian*, 94.

<sup>12</sup> Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian*, 104.



Taft's Philippine Commission also made strides in education which was considered a vital part of the U.S. colonization effort. Education in the Philippines focused on increasing literacy, numeracy, and creating productive members of society in a public, secular manner. The Commission's goals included establishing mandatory, primary education across the entirety of the Philippines. Furthermore, the schools established by the commission sought to teach English to their students. The large amount of ethnic diversity in the Philippines made communication difficult. Encouraging the nation-wide use of English worked towards the end goal of constructing a unified and U.S.-friendly Philippine state.<sup>13</sup>

Much like the Methodist missionaries, the U.S. teachers in the Philippines saw a political, nation-building purpose to their goals. Arthur Griffiths was one of many U.S. teachers who held these convictions. Aware of the poor reputations of empires in Asia, Griffiths sought to prove that the United States was different. "He contrasted what he viewed as the 'Spanish purpose to keep the Filipinos in ignorance' with the American aim to share 'the uplift and education that has been given me.' 'For only upon knowledge is any progress made. The strength of democracy is knowledge and the power of serfdom is ignorance.'"<sup>14</sup>

A common theme throughout all the reforms in Philippine society was an assumption that eventually the Philippines would stand alongside the United States as an independent state. This is in stark contrast to other empires at the time that saw their colonial possessions as something to be owned, exploited, or extracted from permanently. Americans were working to create a Philippine Republic, one that was representative and

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<sup>13</sup> Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian*, 108-110.

<sup>14</sup> Suri, *Liberty's Surest Guardian*, 115.

in the United States' image. Two important pieces of legislation passed during the colonial period worked to make that goal a reality.

Passed in August of 1916, the Philippine Autonomy Act set forth guidelines and requirements for the creation of an independent Philippines. The perambulatory clauses reiterate the American purpose in the Philippines. It states that "it was never the intention of the people of the United States in the . . . war with Spain to make it a war of conquest. . . it has always been the purpose of the people of the United States . . . to recognize their [the Philippines'] independence as soon as a stable government can be established therein."<sup>15</sup> This law set forth the path to a more stable form of government. The Philippine Autonomy Act created legislative, executive, and judicial branches of a new Government of the Philippines that would replace the Philippine Commission when all parts of the act were implemented. In addition to creating branches of government, the Philippine Autonomy Act also laid forth laws concerning taxes, districting, property rights, voting rights, and basic freedoms. This foundation, based off the American model, would lead the Philippines to independence.

After several years of semi-autonomous rule under the Philippine Autonomy Act, the Philippine Independence Act was passed in March of 1934. This was the definitive piece of independence legislation for the Philippines. It set forth clear guidelines for a new constitution that would create the Commonwealth of the Philippines. As Section 10 of the Independence Act states, "On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July immediately following the expiration of a period of ten years from the date of the inauguration of the new government under the constitution provided for in this Act . . . the United States shall recognize the

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<sup>15</sup> Chan Robles Virtual Law Library. "The Philippine Autonomy Act (Jones Law)."

independence of the Philippine Islands as a separate and self-governing nation.”<sup>16</sup> The new Constitution of the Philippines was ratified in 1935, and independence was slated for July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1946. However, the Commonwealth of the Philippines would soon face an existential threat that would put U.S.-Philippine relations to the test, and challenge the nascent nation-state into which the United States had put nearly fifty years of investment and development.

Both the governments of the United States and the Commonwealth of the Philippines had been watching the expansion of the Japanese Empire and its East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere with concern throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. In 1941 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the United States Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE) with General Douglas MacArthur as its head. Concerned by Japanese aggression in Manchuria, Korea, and Vietnam, MacArthur pushed for strengthening the defense of the Philippines. In September of 1941 the War Plans Division of the army approved defensive measures for the islands, and by December the Philippines had fully mobilized its own army. In addition the Philippines received 13,000 U.S. personnel, 74 bombers, 175 fighter planes, 58 other aircraft, and 108 tanks. At this point the Philippines had more aircraft than the U.S. base at Pearl Harbor and a substantial land force for the defense of the colony, a sign of U.S. commitment to its defense obligations.<sup>17</sup>

However, the defenses would not hold. Hours after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the Philippines came under siege. Relentless aggression for several months from the Japanese pushed the U.S. and Philippine defenses into the Bataan peninsula, which would become famous for its “Death March” of prisoners of war. Finally, on April 8 of

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<sup>16</sup> Chan Robles Virtual Law Library, “The Philippine Independence Act (Tydings-McDuffie Act).”

<sup>17</sup> Frank Hindman Golay, *Face of Empire: United States-Philippine Relations, 1898-1946*, Madison: Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998, 404-405.

1942, after three months of fighting on the peninsula, the U.S. and Filipino forces surrendered in a defeat never before experienced by U.S. forces on a foreign battlefield.<sup>18</sup> After the surrender on the Bataan Peninsula the Japanese had effective control of the Philippines. The Japanese went about setting up a puppet government, but despite the disastrous defeat at Bataan, those loyal to the Commonwealth and the United States did not stop resisting Japanese occupation. U.S. and Philippine guerrilla fighters began to attack the Japanese occupying force. These guerillas were supported by ordinary Filipinos who were willing to take the risk to supply and aid the resistance. Despite Japanese offers of independence, the Philippine public remained loyal to the United States, largely due the belief that the U.S. would eventually win the war and stay true to its promise of granting the Commonwealth independence as per the Philippine Independence Act.<sup>19</sup>

The war brought great destruction to the Philippines, but the Filipino leaders were not shaken and still held the relationship with the United States to be productive and worthwhile. Upon the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese, Commonwealth president Manuel Quezon released this statement:

It has been my life's work to promote and realize the freedom of the Filipino people, that is, the recognition by the United States of their right to govern themselves, without disrupting the intimate ties between the American and Filipino peoples which have been so happily forged during the past forty years. . . . [O]ne would be very blind indeed not to see that the post-war relationship between the Republic of the Philippines and the Republic of the United States should be as close if not closer, than the relationship before the war. . . . [S]uch a relationship is vital for the future influence of occidental civilization in the Far East. . . . My advice and counsel to the Filipino people is that they preserve and perpetuate their occidental way of life which that can only do through continued association and cooperation with America and Western world.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Golay, *Face of Empire*, 417.

<sup>19</sup> Golay, *Face of Empire*, 439.

<sup>20</sup> Golay, *Face of Empire*, 444.

The United States' nation-building effort paid off. The U.S.-Philippine relationship survived WWII, and the Commonwealth of the Philippines was on track to become the independent Republic of the Philippines on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1946. The Philippines had adopted Western, specifically U.S., ideals in its government, and those ideals set the stage for the diplomatic future between the U.S. and the Philippines. The first president of the independent Philippines, Manuel Roxas, made statements similar to the outgoing Commonwealth president in a speech he gave in the United States:

If a prosperous and free democracy can be built in the Philippines upon the ruins of war, the prestige of American and the American way of life will be raised to towering heights and millions of people of the Far East will look to us, and to you, as their models. . . . We are not of the Orient, except by geography. We are part of the western world by reasons of culture, religion, ideology, and economics. Although the color of our skin is brown, the temper of our minds and hearts is almost identical with yours. We expect to remain part of the West, possibly as the ideological bridge between the Occident and Orient.<sup>21</sup>

At least nominally, the goals of presidents McKinley and Roosevelt had come to fruition. After nearly half a century of colonial rule and nation building the Philippines became independent and joined the “society of states.” While European imperial powers were either discarding their colonies after WWII or desperately trying to cling to them, the United States let its colonial possession go, as promised, with years of preparation for independence.

The first forty-eight years of the U.S.-Philippine relationship was unique among relations between Western powers and their Asian counterparts at the time. Despite conflicts and other hardships, the United States persevered in creating a new nation in its own image for its own strategic interests. The ties created between the two nations were

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<sup>21</sup> Golay, *Face of Empire*, 481-182.

strong enough to withstand the Second World War, but a new threat was rising in the form of communism. The impending Cold War would put America's nation-building experiment in the Philippines to the test and marks the beginning of relations between the United States and the Philippines as independent, sovereign states each with its own interests.

## Chapter 2: Philippine Independence and the Cold War, 1946-1986

After the end of WWII and the granting of Philippine independence the relationship between the United States and the Philippines operated under different terms. The U.S. no longer claimed sovereignty over the islands, and the two countries began a bilateral relationship as two independent states. Despite this functional change however, the interests of the Philippines and United States were largely shared. Thus began a relationship of mutual benefit, dependency, and necessity. At this time the United States was the only vetted ally that the Philippines had. And for the United States, the Philippines were a democratic, capitalist ally and a bastion of U.S. support in Southeast Asia, an increasingly dangerous neighborhood for U.S. interests. The Philippines would prove crucial to U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.

U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War was defined by “containment.” Containment held that communism was monolithic in nature and spread from country to country unless the capitalist countries worked to contain the communists. Furthermore, there was a “Soviet Conspiracy Theory” that complemented the monolithic image of communism. When several armed insurgencies simultaneously broke out in 1948 throughout Southeast Asia, Western fears of Soviet involvement in Southeast Asia were seemingly confirmed. Thus, the revolution in China, which began in 1946, caused the U.S. government to fear that other Asian nations would fall in time. U.S. attempts to fight the communists in the Korean Peninsula (1950-1953) and Vietnam (1965-1975)

reaffirmed this belief. Thus, the United States would turn to its former colony for assistance in combating the communist threat throughout the entirety of the Cold War. The newly independent Philippine state would live up to the United States' expectation, but not without benefit to the Philippines. Just as the colonial period was not about imperial domination, neither was the Cold War. The U.S.-Philippine relationship in the Cold War was largely marked by mutual state interests.<sup>22</sup>

On July 4, 1946, the same day as Philippine Independence, the U.S. and Philippines signed the Treaty of General Relations and Protocol. This document outlined the new bilateral relationship between the United States and the Philippines. The U.S. military bases played a key role in defining this new relationship, as seen by prominence of the bases in Article I. The treaty recognized the Philippines as an independent state with complete sovereignty over the islands, except for the U.S. military bases. Article I goes on to say that this was pursuant to the wishes of the Republic of the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> Critics may argue that this section of the treaty only sought to serve U.S. interests, but with memories of the Japanese occupation fresh on their minds, Philippine leaders likely believed that continued U.S. military presences would only strengthen their external security. This foundational treaty served both U.S. and Philippine interests. Although the presence of U.S. military bases would later evolve into a contentious issue, from the very beginning it was crucial to U.S.-Philippine strategic relations. The first president of the Philippines, Manuel Roxas, recognized this when he signed a 99-year basing agreement

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Mason, "Revisiting 1948 Insurgencies," *Kaijan Malaysia*, Vol. 27, No. 1&2, 2009, 2-3.

<sup>23</sup> The United States of America and Philippines Treaty of General Relations and Protocol, Signed in Manila 4 July 1947 (No. 8). *United Nations Treaty Series*, 1947, 2.



in 1947.<sup>24</sup> Although the agreement was largely made because Roxas feared the Philippines would lose valuable funds if the bases left, it had the bigger implication of making the Philippines invaluable to the U.S. military. The ability for the United States to maintain its forward position in the Asia-Pacific allowed the U.S. military to better observe and contain the communist threat in Southeast Asia. Out of this deal, the Philippines could count on being protected by the United States and receiving foreign aid, which would allow the Philippines to focus on domestic issues of postwar reconstruction and combat communist insurgency rather than worry about foreign invasion.

The defense commitment of the United States to the Philippines did not stop with the protocol treaty. In 1951 the United States and the Philippines signed the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) which sought to “strengthen the fabric of peace in the Pacific Area.” The treaty invoked the amicable relationship between the signatories “recalling with mutual pride the historic relationship which brought their two peoples together in a common bond of sympathy and mutual ideals to fight side-by-side against imperialist aggression during the last war.” Through “self-help and mutual aid” the two countries would work together to strengthen security in the region and recognize that an attack on either would be an attack on both.<sup>25</sup> The U.S.-Philippine security relationship was further strengthened by the commissioning of Clark Air Force Base to complement the naval base at Subic Bay. Construction lasted from 1951-1956. As a result, U.S. logistical power increased in the Asia-Pacific, and so did the importance of the Philippines to U.S. interests in the region. Troops from the United States, Singapore, and Australia used the

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<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Weekley, “Nation-Building in Post World War II Philippines,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No.1, 2006, 96-97.

<sup>25</sup> Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of the Philippines, Signed in Washington 30 August 1951 (No.2315). *United Nations Treaty Series*, 1953.

Subic-Clark complex as a logistical center for the Korean War. Interventions in Indonesia, Taiwan, Thailand, and most importantly Vietnam also made use of the Subic-Clark complex.<sup>26</sup>

When communists from North Korea crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1950 and marched into South Korean territory, the United Nations Security Council acted during a Soviet boycott of the council to assemble a U.N. backed force to repel the North Koreans and Chinese. Although it was a nominally U.N. force, the war was largely fought by the United States and on U.S. terms. Eager to demonstrate Philippine commitment to the MDT and the U.S. president, Elpidio Quirino sent the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion Combat Team to aid the United States in the war. While miniscule in comparison to the number of U.S. forces fighting in Korea, President Quirino's gesture showed a willingness to contribute to the United States' cause. More symbolic than anything, the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion Combat Team's presence in Korea indicated that not only could the United States count on the Philippines, but to the rest of the world, it showed that the Philippines would stand for democracy and capitalism in Asia.<sup>27</sup>

The communist threat perceived by the Philippine state did not only exist in mainland Asia, the Philippines also had a communist threat in its own borders. From 1946 to 1953 the Philippines fought against the Hukbalahap in what was called the Huk Rebellion. The Huks were guerrilla fighters that formed a large part of the Japanese resistance during WWII. The Huk ranks mainly consisted of impoverished rural farmers. Despite being anti-Japanese and liberators of Philippines during the war, the Huks were labeled as communists by the state and faced oppression and discrimination. In response

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<sup>26</sup> P.J. Rimmer, "US Western Pacific Geostrategy: Subic Bay Before and After Withdrawal," *Marine Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 328.

<sup>27</sup> James Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998, 164.

to the oppression, the Huks began a guerrilla war against the Philippine government marking the young state's first test of state capacity. The Philippines fought the Huks without direct involvement by the United States. Overt U.S. involvement would have pitted the United States against Filipinos just after WWII had solidified the U.S.-Philippine relationship. By keeping it a domestic issue, the Philippines preserved the U.S. image in the public's eye and was able to prove itself as a newly formed state.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Philippine government alleged that the Huks had ties to the communists, in the words of James Hamilton-Paterson, they “were very far from being the atheist hotheads weaned on Muscovite dogma. They were for the most part devout Catholics, dirt poor peasants.”<sup>29</sup> Despite not being a part of the monolithic communism that the West feared, the defeat of the Huks by the Philippines holds significance for two reasons. First, it showed the Philippines' ability to put down a rebellion and restore order in its borders, thus building the legitimacy of the state. Second, even though the Huks were only allegedly communist, they carried that association. This allowed the Philippines to claim that they had played their part in the fight against communism and showed the United States that, despite costs incurred, the Philippines would remain devoutly anti-communist.

Perhaps the time period of U.S.-Philippine strategic relations that best reflects the complexities of the Cold War is the regime of Ferdinand Marcos, president from 1965 to 1986. As the range of years suggests, the Philippines did not live up to the democratic ideals that the missionaries and teachers of the colonial period had hoped for. Despite the fall from democracy during the Marcos regime the Philippines remained anti-communist,

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<sup>28</sup> John L. Linantud, “Pressure and Protection: Cold War Geopolitics and Nation-Building in South Korea, South Vietnam, Philippines, and Thailand,” *Geopolitics*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2008, 649.

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 168.

which was for the United States the most important stance a state could take. The National Security Council (NSC) lamented that because nationalism in Asia created bad feelings towards the West and slow economic growth kept stable regimes from emerging, the United States was “obligated[,] for one reason or another, to work with unpopular and undemocratic governments.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1966, Marcos went to the United States for a state visit with President Lyndon Johnson. This visit typified Marcos’s relationship with the United States, a relationship of mutual dependence. During the meetings Marcos fought for Philippine state interests, which included limiting the U.S. leases on military bases to appease the nationalists back home while at the same time giving the United States support in its military endeavors. Marcos endeared himself to U.S. politicians by towing the anti-communist line. By touting Philippine success over communist guerrillas, Marcos told U.S. politicians exactly what they wanted to hear. The Vietnam War was ongoing during this trip and was a main topic of discussion at the meetings. In a speech, Marcos criticized U.S. involvement in Vietnam, yet he never wavered in his support of the United States. Marcos decided to send Philippine troops to Vietnam. However, instead of a combat force, he sent a unit of engineers known as the Philcag, the Philippine Civic Action Group. By only sending an engineer unit Marcos had some bargaining room with LBJ. By the end of his trip, Marcos used the issue of assistance in Vietnam to gain several things for the Philippines. In exchange for replacing the Philcag with five construction battalions, Marcos negotiated the previously agreed upon base lease of 99 years down to 27 years, which consolidated nationalist support back home. In addition, the United

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<sup>30</sup> Nick Cullather, “America’s Boy?,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 62, No. 3, 1993, 317.

States gave the Philippines \$20 million to equip the construction battalions, and LBJ also sought to open new lines of credit for the Philippines from the World Bank.<sup>31</sup>

This visit exemplified Marcos's adept political maneuvering. He was able to criticize the U.S. efforts in Vietnam but at the same time support them. He was able to secure an agreement to end the leasing of bases many years ahead of schedule, but he also increased wartime contributions to the United States. Through this visit Marcos was able to satisfy both American and Philippine interests with not too much conceded on either side. This is a case of the two states' mutual respect, a respect that goes back to the Protocol Treaty in 1946 that made it clear that the military bases were to remain on Philippine soil with Philippine permission. Marcos reaffirmed the give-and-take nature of the U.S.-Philippine relationship in a speech during President Richard Nixon's trip to Manila in 1969, saying: "In return for American assistance and friendship, we have allowed the United States certain concessions, including the lease of bases for the use of its armed forces and the grant of certain economic privileges."<sup>32</sup> This type of political posturing turned the tables on the perception that the U.S.-Philippine relationship was completely dominated by the United States. Although the Philippines were clearly the weaker of the two states in political and economic terms, the importance of military bases to the Vietnam War gave Marcos significant political capital. Marcos's privileged position as the leader of Southeast Asia's oldest and most stable democracy was about to come to an end, though.

At the beginning of Marcos's second term, 1969-1970, his popularity was quickly declining, especially among the young. Seeking to capitalize on public sentiment,

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<sup>31</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 211-215.

<sup>32</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 259-261.

communist guerilla groups upped their antagonism of the Philippine state. The New Peoples' Army (NPA), which was the militant arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), sought to garner aid and support from The People's Republic of China. In 1969 China agreed to support the NPA and send material aid.<sup>33</sup> Although Marcos did not know for certain that this was occurring, his government feared for the worst. Beginning in 1966 China's "Cultural Revolution" led by Mao Zedong further inculcated fear in the Philippine state. Marcos feared that the violence and extremism of Mao's revolution would be exported to the Philippines where the NPA would resort to more violence and overthrow the state.

Yet, by 1969 Mao and the communist leadership in China began to recognize that the "Cultural Revolution" was a failing endeavor. In response, the Chinese government decided to reestablish control at home rather exporting communist insurgency across Asia and ceased aiding the NPA. Even with threat of Chinese material support for the NPA gone, Marcos's fears were confirmed on August 21, 1971 when there was an attack at a political rally for the opposition party at Plaza Miranda in downtown Manila. Two grenades lobbed into the crowd killed ten and wounded sixty-six. At that time, and even today, it remains unclear who was behind the attack. Regardless, Marcos placed blame on communist terrorists and used the attack to consolidate his own power.<sup>34</sup>

The decision to declare martial law on September 21, 1972 can be directly traced back to the events of Plaza Miranda and Marcos's continued fear of the communist threat. Citing the Philippine Constitution Marcos sought to establish that his actions were legal and in the best interest of the country. Article 7, section 10 of the constitution reads

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<sup>33</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 273.

<sup>34</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 279.

as follows, “When the public safety requires it, he [the president] may suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus or place the Philippines or any part thereof under martial law.” Marcos also legitimized his actions by using the historical precedent of President Abraham Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus and virtual martial law for the sake of defending the republic.<sup>35</sup>

The declaration of martial law did not adversely affect relations with the United States. The United States had prior knowledge of Marcos’s actions and gave its approval. For the United States, or any state for that matter, state interest trumps any ideological issues. Marcos agreed to protect U.S. business interests and continue the fight against the communists, and that was enough to satisfy the U.S government. Furthermore, many Filipinos supported the declaration of martial law as well. To the public, the threats from the communists were legitimate, and people looked forward to a time without protests, violent demonstrations, and terrorist attacks.<sup>36</sup>

Martial law in the Philippines continued for nine years until 1981. Throughout this time United States support for Marcos remained unwavering even if nine years of martial law seemed to be overkill to restore domestic order. The U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship and business interests were so important to the United States that it unabashedly supported dictators. While such actions may go against commonly held U.S. values, U.S. support of Marcos was a testament to U.S. commitment to both its interests and its strategic allies. However, eventually the Marcos regime began to act in a way that could adversely affect U.S. interests. With his newfound power Marcos began to get rid of political enemies and rivals. Although martial law officially ended in 1981, the

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<sup>35</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America’s Boy*, 284.

<sup>36</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America’s Boy*, 284-286.

assassination of Marcos's political rival, Ninoy Aquino in 1983, served as the turning point in Marcos's relationship with Washington. It has never been proven that the Marcos regime was behind the Aquino assassination, but the death of the popular opposition leader turned public and world opinion against Marcos and catapulted Aquino's widow, Corazon, into the political limelight.<sup>37</sup>

In response to growing public disapproval, Marcos called for snap elections in 1986 to solidify his office and maintain power. Corazon Aquino ran against the incumbent president. The results of the election showed Marcos as the victor, but the people had other plans. Starting on February 23, 1986, the People Power Revolution, also known as the EDSA revolution overthrew Marcos via civil resistance, protests, and mass demonstrations. As a result Marcos stepped down from power and fled to the United States, where he remained in exile for the remainder of his life. Corazon Aquino assumed power and became the next president of the Philippines.<sup>38</sup>

For all its staunch support of Marcos throughout his tenure as president, the United States quickly turned on Marcos as soon as it was apparent that Aquino was going to become and remain the new leader of the Philippines. While the U.S. government may have betrayed Marcos by supporting the People Power Revolution and President Aquino, there were two more important things that the United States did not betray. The United States never wavered from protecting its interests or maintaining the U.S.-Philippine relationship. Marcos was only important to the United States for as long as he secured U.S. interests. When Marcos lost power and public support, he became a liability rather than an asset. The United States saw the tides turning and quickly shifted its support to

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<sup>37</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 372.

<sup>38</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, *America's Boy*, 387-396.



Corazon Aquino. The U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship was too vital to U.S. interests to allow loyalty to a specific leader endanger the relationship. A new head of state meant that the United States and the Philippines would have to redefine their relations and move past the years of martial law and dictatorial leadership. That is exactly what the two states spent the late 1980s and early 1990s doing.

The U.S.-Philippine relationship during the Cold War was one of mutual security benefit, codependence, and necessity. The relationship evolved, but never fundamentally changed. The U.S. depended on the Philippines for its wars of containment in Southeast Asia and the Philippines depended on the U.S. for its economic and security interests. Given the foreign policy goals of each state during the Cold War, the U.S.-Philippine relationship was indispensable. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Sino-Soviet split and the declining Soviet Union proved that the idea of a monolithic, conspiracy theory centered, communist threat no longer existed. The United States and the Philippines had been united by a shared history and common enemies for a century. The coming 21<sup>st</sup> century would test the strength of U.S.-Philippine strategic relations in the post-Marcos and post-communist era as both states searched for a new commonality. Just as they had been in the past, the United States and the Philippines were to become united yet again in another global war against a common enemy.

### Chapter 3: Post-Marcos Philippines and the War on Terror, 1986-2003

The end of the Marcos regime and the People Power Revolution in 1986 led to a resurgent nationalism in the Philippines and a sense that Filipinos were taking back their country from years of repression. The late 1980s and early 1990s was not only a time period of social and political change for the Philippines, but also for the United States and the world. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 altered the nature of international politics and security issues. Without the Soviet Union the world was no longer divided into two camps, one pro-United States and one pro-Soviet Union, instead countries would have to find new reasons to cooperate on security issues. The United States and its relationships with its allies were not immune to the evolving nature of international politics. Even the strong relationship between the United States and the Philippines struggled to define the purpose of the U.S.-Philippine relationship in the absence of a shared threat. This redefinition process took up most of the 1990s and put the U.S.-Philippine relationship to the test once again. However, by 2001 the U.S. and Philippine governments would once again find themselves united against a common enemy as they had in the past with the Japanese and the communists.

The fall of the Soviet Union meant that there was less need for U.S. involvement in world affairs. Many people saw the end of the Cold War as the “End of History”. Western liberal democracy had won out over communism and there were no more clear enemies for the U.S. and its allies. Elements within the Philippine government struggled

to see the need for a continued U.S. military presence in the Philippines. Along with the disagreement within the Philippine government about the U.S. military's role in the Philippines there was also disagreement in public opinion. After the success of the People Power Revolution, Philippine nationalism was on the rise and large parts of Philippine society questioned the continued need for a U.S. military presence in the archipelago. These questions and doubts concerning the U.S.-Philippine relationship resurfaced when the Philippine Senate rejected the proposed Philippine-American Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Security in 1991, forcing the United States to abandon its Navy and Air Force bases. Although some members of Philippine society wished for the United States to continue to station military troops in the archipelago, a nationalist tide that began with the ousting of President Marcos had come to fruition. According to some nationalists the continued presence of U.S. forces in the Philippines was continued colonialism. The newfound nationalism of the Philippine people, combined with a belief that the United States was no longer necessary for the defense of the nation, fueled the sentiment in the Philippines that led to the rejection of the Treaty of Friendship. By 1992 the United States had removed all of its troops from the Philippines.<sup>39</sup> The departure of U.S. military forces from Clark Air Force Base and the Subic Bay Naval Base marked the first time in a century that the United States did not have a military presence in the archipelago. According to Renato Cruz de Castro, "Washington and Manila found themselves without any consensus on the alliance's *raison d'être*."<sup>40</sup> This lack of consensus translated into Washington downplaying the U.S.-Philippine relationship in the early 1990s. In fact, the

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<sup>39</sup> Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2002, 299.

<sup>40</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations: A Ghost from the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, No. 6, 2003, 974.

Philippines went from being the key to U.S. Southeast Asian policy to barely being mentioned as an ally in the Pentagon's East Asian Strategic Initiative (1992) and the East Asian Strategic Review (1995).<sup>41</sup>

Despite the lack of consensus and the lack of U.S. troops on Philippine soil, the security relationship and alliance between the United States and the Philippines was not completely defunct. Longstanding ties, a shared history, and mutual interests kept the two states involved with each other, even if not at the same level as years past. Despite the reassurance of the Mutual Defense Treaty, the security relationship between the United States and the Philippines was on uneasy footing for most of the 1990s. That however did not mean that all parts of the U.S-Philippine relationship suffered. Despite the disagreement concerning the role of the U.S. military in the Philippines, the United States and the Philippines continued to cooperate in the realms of business, foreign aid, and development. Several U.S. foreign aid and development programs that were created in the 1980s were still active and thriving during the early 1990s.

According U.S. Foreign Service Officer Al La Porta:

This effort had two components. One was the Philippine Assistance Program (PAP) that was largely developed in USAID as the bilateral U.S. initiative, which included advisory assistance to the finance ministry and central bank, trade development and investment assistance, restructuring of customs and the tax authority, energy advisory assistance, and regional economic assistance. . . The other half of the program was the Multilateral Assistance Initiative (MAI), essentially consisting of donor coordination through the World Bank, which at the time took a strong hand in marshalling international assistance, harmonizing economic programs, and monitoring Philippine government actions and macro-economic performance.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> De Castro, “The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations,” 976.

<sup>42</sup> Al La Porta, “A Democracy-Building Success Story: U.S. Assistance to the Philippines after Marcos,” *American Diplomacy*, January 2008.

These programs allowed the United States to demonstrate its support of democracy and free market economic principles in the post-Marcos Philippines. In addition to the aforementioned economic and development programs, the MDT of 1951 still defined served as the keystone to the U.S.-Philippine relationship and both states emphasized this fact in the time period following the U.S. withdrawal. This continued reverence for the MDT despite the declining U.S.-Philippine security relationship signals two things. First, it shows that although Philippine nationalists wished to keep U.S. troops off of their soil there was still a desire to keep the United States at arm's reach in the event of a crisis. Second, it shows that the U.S. still valued the relationship. Although some members of the U.S. government may have been displeased with the results of the Treaty of Friendship, the displeasure was not enough for the United States to completely cut ties with the Philippines. The United States and the Philippines once again found themselves in need of each other even if the political climate at the time suggested otherwise.

Although both states were reassured on the strategic level by the commitment to the MDT there were still issues in negotiating the new relationship that the United States and Philippines found themselves in. In 1995 the annual, since 1991, Balikatan joint military exercises were suspended due to disagreements about U.S. troops in Philippine territory.<sup>43</sup> The Balikatan exercises had become central to U.S.-Philippine military cooperation in the first few years of the 1990s. The exercises trained U.S. and Philippine military forces on how to conduct joint military missions as well as improved cooperation on disaster relief and other emergency situations. After already losing rights to house U.S. troops in the military bases, the loss of the Balikatan further put a strain on the day-

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<sup>43</sup> Globalsecurity.org, "Exercise Balikatan: Shouldering the Load Together", March 29, 2012.

to-day operations of the U.S.-Philippine security relationship, even if the relationship was solidified at the strategic level with the MDT.

By the end of the 1990s the Philippine government came to realize that it needed a deeper level of U.S. involvement in its security policy. The Armed Forces of the Philippines was in poor condition, and it lacked the ability to address transnational security threats in the region, such as Chinese assertiveness.<sup>44</sup> Showing recognition of the poor state of the Philippine armed forces and concern about regional threats, the United States and the Philippines signed the Visiting Forces Agreement in 1999.<sup>45</sup> The Visiting Forces Agreement revitalized a decade of flagging U.S.-Philippine security relations. The language of the Visiting Forces Agreement echoes the sentiments of both states concerning their mutual dependency on each other for security in the Pacific, namely the Philippine need for external security and the U.S. need for strong security ties in the Asia-Pacific. The perambulatory clauses of the treaty emphasize that the United States and the Philippines signed the treaty “Reaffirming . . . their desire to strengthen international and regional security in the Pacific area; Reaffirming their obligations under the Mutual Defense Treaty of August 30, 1951; Noting that from time to time elements of the United States armed forces may visit the Republic of the Philippines; [and] Considering that cooperation between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines promotes their common security interests.”<sup>46</sup> The treaty goes on to outline the rights and responsibilities of U.S. forces on Philippine soil, but in regards to the U.S.-Philippine relationship the perambulatory clauses of the treaty seem to say more about

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<sup>44</sup> Chapter 4 entitled “U.S.-Philippine Relations and the Pivot to Asia” will discuss the issue of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea in greater detail.

<sup>45</sup> Balaoi, “The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism,” 299.

<sup>46</sup> RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement, Chan Robles Virtual Law Library, 1999.

the bilateral relationship than the actual articles of the text. The fact that both states came together at the negotiating table after nearly a decade of lessened cooperation on security issues shows that both parties realized their mutual dependency in regards to security. Events in the early 2000s would again demonstrate to the United States and the Philippines how important their bilateral relationship was to their mutual security interests. While the Visiting Forces Agreement helped renew the U.S-Philippine strategic relationship, it was the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> that acted as a catalyst to further increase U.S.-Philippine security cooperation.

On September 11, 2001 terrorists belonging to the Al-Qaeda terrorist network attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon with another attempt resulting in a downed airliner in a field in Pennsylvania. The United States was reeling after the attacks, and the Philippines was quick to respond. When the United States called upon its allies to combat global terrorism, starting the “War on Terror” the Philippines was among the first to respond. The War on Terror is a broad term for all U.S. military actions attempting to dismantle and disrupt international terrorist organizations. Among these organizations, radical Islamic groups like Al Qaeda have taken most of the attention. After the start of the War on Terror, the Philippines not only allowed the United States to fly its military aircraft in Philippine airspace, but also allowed the U.S. led International Coalition Against Terrorism to use Clark Air Field and Subic Bay Naval Base for its operations. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo went on to offer Philippine support for U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Banlaoi, “The Role of Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism,” 294-295.

Two months later, on November 20, President Macapagal-Arroyo visited President George W. Bush in Washington D.C. to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MDT. This provided an excellent opportunity for both heads of state to reaffirm their country's commitment to each other in light of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. In their meeting, the two presidents agreed that, "U.S.-Philippine relations are based on shared history, common values, a commitment to freedom and democracy, and vigorous economic ties," and stated that, "the Mutual Defense Treaty has been vital in advancing peace and stability in the Asia Pacific for the past half century."<sup>48</sup> The speed at which the Philippines came to the aid of the United States, and the level of enthusiasm and consensus shown by both governments, suggest that although security relations had been declining, both states were eager to reinvigorate the relationship that had defined U.S. foreign policy in the Southeast Asia for more than a century. This enthusiasm for cooperation between the two states was apparent again at the six-month anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. In his speech, President Bush made a point of recognizing President Macapagal-Arroyo for her support in combating terror. Even more notable is that President Macapagal-Arroyo was the only head of state personally named in President Bush's speech.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to political and vocal support, the Philippines and the United States helped each other in more tangible ways. The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks brought concerns about radical Islam and its connection to terrorism to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy, but the Philippines were already well versed in the issue. The Philippines had been combating Muslim separatist groups in the southern islands of the archipelago since the

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<sup>48</sup> U.S.-Philippine Joint Statement on Defense Alliance, Office of the Press Secretary, November 20, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Banlaoi, "The Role of the Philippine-American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism," 295.



early years of the American occupation. The U.S. and Spanish colonial presences were never as strong in the southern Philippine islands like Mindanao and Jolo as they were in the main island of Luzon. Because of this, the southern islands retained a distinct culture from the rest of the Philippines and continue to be a source of conflict and tension. The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> provided the Philippines with an excellent opportunity to present itself as a loyal and critically important strategic ally. Not only that, but in helping the United States the Philippine government could count on more foreign aid and military assistance to be sent to the Philippines. The fight against terrorism is just one more example of how the United States and the Philippines needed each other, and how their alliance was mutually beneficial to their respective security interests. An analysis of the main terrorist groups active in the Philippines reveals why both the United States and the Philippines were committed to fighting terrorism in Philippines.

There are three main militant Muslim organizations in the Philippines that became the focus of the U.S. and Philippine governments in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> world. First is the Abu Sayyaf Group. Abu Sayyaf is the smallest of the three organizations but has a strong record of murder and kidnapping. Furthermore there are links between Abu Sayyaf and Al-Qaeda, making Abu Sayyaf a particularly important target for U.S. forces. The other two groups are more related to the history of separatism and discord in the southern Philippines. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are much larger organizations and hold the independence of the Muslim south as their primary objective. There has been an on and off again insurrection against the Philippine state by these two groups for the past several decades. These two groups are connected to the broader War on Terror by their links to the Jemmah

Islamiyah terrorist group which is active in the greater Southeast Asia region. Islamic radicalism is not the only source of terrorism in the Philippines. Another terrorist organization exists that is not related to the separatist struggles of the Islamic terrorist organizations. The Philippine Communist Party (CPP) and its splinter group the New People's Army (NPA) seek a restructuring of Philippine society and have called for and committed violence against Filipinos as well as U.S. citizens, causing the United States to add the CPP and NPA to the official list of terrorist organizations.<sup>50</sup>

To combat these organizations, the United States has aided the Philippines in several ways. During President Macagapal-Arroyo's visit to Washington in November of 2001 the United States pledged \$92 million in military assistance and \$55 million in economic aid to assist the Philippines in its southern, Muslim region for 2001 and 2002. The United States also sent military forces into the Philippines for the first time in a decade. Between January and July of 2002, over 1,000 U.S. military personnel were sent to the Philippines. This action violated the foreign combat troop provision of the 1987 Philippines constitution. However, the United States and Philippines formulated new rules of engagement that kept Filipino troops at the top of the command structure. The joint exercises between U.S. and Philippine troops were actually the reinstated Balikatan from the early 1990s. These exercises proved to be effective against Abu Sayyaf early on, bringing the number of active Abu Sayyaf members from over 1,000 members down to 300-400 members.<sup>51</sup> The Balikatan exercises against Abu Sayyaf were also a political victory. The exercises complemented Philippine efforts for social reform and poverty

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<sup>50</sup> Bruce Vaughn, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia", *Congressional Research Service Reports*, 2005, 20-21.

<sup>51</sup> Vaughn, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia," 19-20.

relief in Mindanao, and thus they increased public support for the revitalization of the U.S.-Philippine alliance.<sup>52</sup>

Negotiations between the United States and Philippines concerning further U.S. actions on Philippine soil faltered in late 2002. The provision of the Philippine Constitution that prevented foreign troops from being on Philippine soil became a point of contention, and the two states could not come up with a plan that involved the United States in an active combat role. The conflict over U.S. troops in the Philippines did not, however, lead to a break-down in cooperation. In May of 2003 Macapagal-Arroyo returned to Washington, where the United States announced a \$65-million plan to train Philippine forces in Mindanao to combat the continuing MILF insurgency and Abu Sayyaf terrorists. At the meeting President Bush also designated the Philippines as a major non-NATO ally, an action that once again reaffirmed the strong alliance between the two countries.<sup>53</sup>

The post-September 11<sup>th</sup> relationship between the United States and the Philippines was not simply about the United States aiding the Philippines, but also the other way around. The Philippines allowed the United States to use its old bases as a staging ground for deployments into Afghanistan, and accepted U.S. assistance in combating Al Qaeda affiliates in the Philippines, but in addition to that the Philippines also contributed troops to the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Much like the Philippines' participation in the Korean and Vietnam wars, Philippine participation in Afghanistan and Iraq was and continues to be limited. Yet the symbolism matters more than the actual number of troops committed. September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent U.S.

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<sup>52</sup> De Castro, "The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations," 985.

<sup>53</sup> Vaughn, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia." 22-23.

actions in Central and Southwest Asia gave the Philippines a chance to prove its commitment to the United States and showed the world that a decade of shaky relations could not dismantle a century-long relationship.

The speed at which the Philippines responded to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks showed that despite the shaky relations during the early 1990s the strong bond between the United States and the Philippines stood resolute. Furthermore, the U.S-Philippine relationship was still fundamental to the security interests of both states. The United States was more than eager to bring the fight to Abu Sayyaf, because of its Al Qaeda links, and the Philippines welcomed U.S. support in combating the terrorist threat along with the decades long insurgency in Mindanao and Jolo. Once again the United States and the Philippines found themselves working together, not only because of their historical alliance, but also because of shared enemies. After a brief experiment in loosening security ties both countries found themselves in need of each other again. This partnership was indispensable and not a simply a relic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Chapter 4: The Pivot to the Asia-Pacific, 1995-2013

The 2010s have brought considerable change to U.S. foreign policy. The two biggest changes have the ending of the Iraq War in 2011 and the continued de-escalation of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. These two factors mean that direct military involvement in the Middle East and South Asia are declining, making more room for the United States to refocus its attention other important regions of the world, notably the Asia-Pacific. The importance of the Asia-Pacific to the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be overstated. Rising economic and political powers like China, Indonesia, and India stand alongside longtime U.S. allies like Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and of course, the Philippines. Current U.S. security concerns in the Asia-Pacific span the North Korean nuclear threat, Chinese-Taiwanese relations, maritime security in the South China Sea, as well as the continued struggle against terrorism in Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, there is great economic opportunity to found in the Asia-Pacific this century. The economic and political rise of China and its relationship with the United States is of vast importance and the two countries will undoubtedly benefit from cooperation and partnership, yet at the same time, China finds itself at the center of all the aforementioned security issues except for terrorism. This quickly changing and complex environment means that U.S. participation in the region on a strategic level is of the utmost importance. While some U.S. citizens may be calling for the United States to “come back home,” the administration of Barack Obama has made it clear that that

withdrawal from the world stage is not in the United State's interest. The United States will remain engaged in the Asia-Pacific and prepared for the challenges this dynamic region presents. At the nexus of all these challenges and opportunities in the Asia-Pacific is the Philippines. Throughout this analysis of U.S.-Philippine relations in regards to the "Pivot to Asia" it is important to remember that events discussed in chapter 3 are largely taking place during the same time.

As chapter 3 discussed, the United States and the Philippines found themselves struggling to define their security relationship in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although shared histories and long time friendships can lay the groundwork for an alliance, shared interests create the strongest alliances. While the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks provided an overt and obvious reason for the strategic relations between the United States and the Philippines to be reinvigorated, concerns about the rise of China began to pull the two long-time allies closer together during the mid 1990s.

In 1995 a conflict arose between the Philippines and China regarding Mischief Reef. As a part of the Spratly Island group, which is concurrently claimed by several different powers- the Philippines, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia. The Philippines has made claims on the island of Mischief Reef since 1962, and its claim is reinforced by the fact that the island lies within the Philippines' 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone and on the Philippine-claimed continental shelf. China claims that it has sovereignty over the island because of historical discovery and usage; however, it took no physical action to contest Philippine claims until 1995, when the Chinese began building wooden structures on the reef. The Philippines claimed this was a

violation of international law.<sup>54</sup> During the early stages of this dispute the United States stayed largely silent. The United States claimed that the Mutual Defense Treaty did not apply to the islands as they were claimed by the Philippines after the signing of the treaty.<sup>55</sup> It is possible that U.S. apathy towards this conflict was a direct result of the Philippines forcing the United States to leave its bases in 1991. The realization by the Philippines that it was now responsible for its external defense caused some worry. Traditionally, the main security concerns of the Philippine state were internal insurgencies. Now that China was starting to become more assertive in its maritime claims in the South China Sea, the Philippines sought to pull the United States back into the game. The Mischief Reef dispute is what led the Philippines to advocate for the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). The VFA was designed to strengthen the Mutual Defense Treaty and create a deterrent effect against any external threats. In 1998, the same year the VFA was ratified, China reinforced the structure on the reef and reasserted its claim. This spurred on the ratification of the VFA by the Philippine senate in 1999. By 2000 the Philippine and U.S. navies were conducting joint exercises in the waters near the disputed area.<sup>56</sup> The joint exercises were a show of force to demonstrate the renewed U.S. commitment to Philippine security and to show China that its actions would not go unnoticed.

The Philippine response to Chinese actions was not limited to simply asking the United States for help. Philippine president Joseph Estrada cancelled a state visit to China in 1999. This action was particularly notable because during his campaign Estrada said

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<sup>54</sup> Zha Daojiong and Mark J Valencia, "Mischief Reef: Geopolitics and Implications," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 88.

<sup>55</sup> Zha Daojiong, "Security in the South China Sea," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 45.

<sup>56</sup> Daojiong, "Security in the South China Sea," 45.

that China would be the first country to visit as head of state. The visit was supposed to serve as a study of agricultural policies, meaning that the president had put more importance on the security of small uninhabited islands than on his own country's food security.<sup>57</sup> While it may seem odd that such small islands would warrant such responses from the Philippines, staunch defense of a country's claimed territory is not out of the ordinary. Border disputes occur between dozens of countries, many over the smallest strips of land. For a state, territory is power, especially in an area rich in fishing and possibly natural gas. Philippine passivity in regards to Chinese encroachments would have sent the wrong message to Beijing.

Conflicts between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea have not been limited to Mischief Reef. In January of 2000, the Philippine Navy fired warning shots at Chinese fishing boats near the disputed Scarborough Shoal. The Chinese warned the Philippines against further provocative responses. Instead of letting tensions cool down, the Philippine Senate President Bla Ople cited the Mutual Defense Treaty and stated that the United States would back the Philippines in a war with China. Tensions continued to escalate when in May of 2000 a Philippine marine patrol shot and killed a Chinese fisherman in the Scarborough area.<sup>58</sup> The events on Mischief Reef and Scarborough Shoal are not isolated incidents. Conflicts between the Chinese and Philippines have been ongoing. In March 2011, Chinese naval patrol boats ordered a Philippine oil vessel to vacate the Reed Bank area, but the Chinese left when Philippine air force planes arrived on the scene to support the oil vessel. Afterwards the Philippines stated that it would strengthen its forces in the area. On July 25 of that same year,

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<sup>57</sup> Daojiong, "Security in the South China Sea," 46.

<sup>58</sup> Daojiong and Valencia, "Mischief Reef," 90-91.



Philippine president Benigno Aquino clearly stated Philippine resolve, “[T]here was a time when we couldn’t appropriately respond to threats in our own backyard. Now, our message to the world is clear: What is ours is ours.”<sup>59</sup> The conflicts in the South China Sea are ongoing between the Philippines and China, and there are many more examples of small scale force being used in the disputed waters. While a war seems unlikely at this point, there is no denying that tensions are continuing to escalate, demanding U.S. attention.

The military action taken by the Philippines against Chinese fisherman demonstrates not only Philippine commitment to the defense of its claimed islands, but also its faith in the U.S.-Philippine security relationship. Because of the backing of the United States the Philippines feels empowered to act in its interests in a manner that would normally not be possible for a relatively weak state like the Philippines. The Philippines is able to provoke and punish the Chinese, but the Chinese know that they cannot openly attack the Philippines for fear of a U.S. reprisal. Although this may seem to be only an advantage to the Philippines, this relationship also serves U.S. interests. The United States is clearly concerned about the possibility of Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea, and because of the Philippines’ dedication to its maritime claims the United States has a built-in proxy to check Chinese ambition in the region without directly involving its own forces.

Concern about China’s rise and security in the Asia-Pacific did in fact lead to a complete foreign policy makeover by U.S. President Barack Obama in 2012. The pivot started with an op-ed by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in *Foreign Policy* titled “America’s Pacific Century.” In her article, Clinton explains that with the United States

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<sup>59</sup> David Scott, “Conflict Irresolution in the South China Sea,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 52, No. 6, 1032-1033.

scaling down its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan it is time to pivot and refocus efforts on the Asia-Pacific. By building alliances and institutions in Asia similar to what the United States built in post-WWII Europe the United States would seek to create a more secure and prosperous Asia-Pacific region. Secretary Clinton makes it very clear who is at the core of this “pivot”:

Our treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand are the fulcrum for our strategic turn to the Asia-Pacific. They have underwritten regional peace and security for more than half a century, shaping the environment for the region's remarkable economic ascent. They leverage our regional presence and enhance our regional leadership at a time of evolving security challenges.<sup>60</sup>

Clinton mentions all major U.S. allies in this section from the op-ed, but actions that the United States took after the release of this article that show the Philippines was going to be of particular importance to the pivot.

On November 16, 2011, one month after the publishing of “America’s Pacific Century,” Secretary Clinton met with Philippine Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Albert del Rosario, aboard the USS Fitzgerald in Manila Bay. There, the two leaders signed the Manila Declaration in observation of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty. There are several things to take notice about this meeting. First, the timing was not only symbolic, considering the anniversary, but also considering Clinton’s op-ed in *Foreign Policy* and the year’s previous events in the Reed Bank conflict. A second aspect of this meeting to take note of was the location. Having the meeting aboard the USS Fitzgerald symbolized the military aspects of the declaration. The declaration also discussed mutual economic interests but security is clearly the main topic at hand. The shortest, yet most powerful section of the declaration stated that,

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<sup>60</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy Magazine*, October 11, 2011.

The Republic of the Philippines and the United States today reaffirm our shared obligations under the Mutual Defense Treaty. We expect to maintain a robust, balanced, and responsive security partnership including cooperating to enhance the defense, interdiction, and apprehension capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.<sup>61</sup>

The commitment in this text could be taken as simply diplomatic rhetoric, but actions by the United States in 2012 suggest that the Manila Declaration is much more than just rhetoric.

Shortly after another Chinese incursion into claimed Philippine waters in April 2012, the United States and Philippines conducted their 28<sup>th</sup> Balikatan exercises. Whereas previous Balikatan were concerned with combating insurgency and terrorism in Mindanao, these exercises took place off the coast of Palawan Province. This province is the nearest Philippine island to the disputed Spratly Islands.<sup>62</sup> The location of the exercises is a clear indicator of what the U.S. position is on the Spratly conflict, even if it has remained largely silent regarding the disputed waters in multilateral dialogues. The Balikatan are meant to improve U.S.-Philippine military cooperation during conflict or crisis, and the 28<sup>th</sup> Balikatan off the coast of Palawan shows that the United States is serious about its commitments to the Mutual Defense Treaty as stated in the Manila Declaration.

Perhaps one of the biggest developments in the U.S.-Philippine security relationship in 2012 was the decision that Subic Bay, the former U.S. naval base, was going to be used again for U.S. military purposes, mainly the hosting of ships, marines, and aircraft on a semi-permanent basis. The basing issue had long been a tricky one for U.S.-Philippine relations. The exit of the U.S. military from the bases in 1992 had

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<sup>61</sup> United States Department of State, *Signing of the Manila Declaration on Board the USS Fitzgerald in Manila Bay, Manila, Philippines*, Office of the Spokesperson, November 16, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Mong Palatino, "U.S. Plays Philippines War Games," *The Diplomat*, April 18, 2012.

seemed final. Yet, the VFA came into force at the end of that decade. Then, just a few years later, the United States was being invited back to its old base on a semi-permanent basis. Edilberto Adan, the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs Visiting Forces Agreement Director said that, “As the U.S. begins to implement [the rebalance], Subic will play an important role because it is one of the important facilities that can service its presence in the Pacific.”<sup>63</sup>

The return of the U.S. Navy to Subic Bay, even on a semi-permanent basis, is a huge boon to both the United States and the Philippines. At its height, the U.S. Naval presence at Subic Bay contributed \$507 million to the local economy annually. \$96 million of that was to pay for the 70,500 workers and contractors who worked there, yet under Philippine administration in the 1990s the renamed “Subic Bay Freeport Zone” employed only 44,000 workers including transportation, retail, and tourism jobs.<sup>64</sup> The added involvement on the part of the U.S. Navy will undoubtedly reinvigorate the local economy. Yet more important than the local economy to Philippine strategic concerns is the current state of its armed forces. In a state of the nation address in July of 2012, President Aquino lamented that, “Some have described our Air Force as all air and no force. Lacking the proper equipment, our troops remain vulnerable even as they are expected to be put in harm’s way. We cannot allow things to remain this way.”<sup>65</sup> The presence of U.S. forces in Subic will not completely alleviate the equipment and administration woes of the Philippine military. However, the U.S. presence will take

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<sup>63</sup> James Hardy, “Back to the Future: The U.S. Navy Returns to The Philippines,” *The Diplomat*, October 16, 2012, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Peter J Rimmer, “US Western Pacific Geostrategy: Subic Bay before and after Withdrawal,” *Marine Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 334 and 341.

<sup>65</sup> Mong Palatino, “The Philippine’s Great National Security Challenge (and it’s NOT China),” *The Diplomat*, October 11, 2012.

some of the pressure off of the Philippines to provide for its external defense while it creates an indigenous “deterrent force with an effective but minimal defense capability,”<sup>66</sup> in the words of President Aquino.

The strengthening of the U.S.-Philippine relationship and the U.S. Navy’s return to Subic is important in more than just military terms. In December of 2012, the United States and the Philippines held their 3<sup>rd</sup> Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue. Aside from discussing military issues, the two parties agreed to deepen economic ties through the Partnership for Growth and the Philippines’ compact with the Millennium Challenge Corporation.<sup>67</sup> Another focus at the dialogue and the return to Subic was humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. “The 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and the March 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami all illustrated the value- and importance- of U.S. military logistics in saving civilian lives.”<sup>68</sup> Natural disasters happen in the Philippines quite frequently, and the Philippine military struggles to respond appropriately and in a timely manner. Last December Typhoon Bopha struck the Philippines and claimed more than 900 lives. The United States and the Philippines have emphasized the humanitarian aspect of the increased number of U.S. troops in the Philippines as a way to calm China in regards to a perceived military buildup.<sup>69</sup>

The U.S. pivot to the Asia-Pacific and the reinvigorated security relationship with the Philippines is also not simply about containing or managing the rise of China. It is also concerned with security in the region as a whole. Chapter 3 already discussed how the alliance is working together to combat terrorism and insurgency, but recent events

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<sup>66</sup> Hardy, “Back to the Future,” 2.

<sup>67</sup> The Republic of the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, *3rd Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue*, December 11-12, 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Hardy, “Back to the Future,” 2.

<sup>69</sup> Luke Hunt, “U.S. Increasing Military Presence in the Philippines,” *The Diplomat*, December 18, 2012, 2.

have also made the Philippines a key player in the escalating tensions with North Korea. The United States and Philippines discussed the North Korea issue during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue in December of 2012. Both parties condemned the North Korean ballistic missile launch that occurred during the dialogue itself, and resolved to strengthen and increase their close alliance and coordination to address the regional security threat.<sup>70</sup> In previous times of escalated tensions and rhetoric from North Korea, the Philippines has not played as big a role. However, it seems that now the Philippines is capitalizing on the quickly evolving security relationship between itself and the United States, seeking to establish itself as a more active partner in maintaining regional security. Philippine actions to increase its role in U.S. Asia-Pacific security policy became even more evident in the spring of 2013. Shortly after a nuclear test in February, Pyongyang declared the armistice that brought peace during the Korean War defunct, in addition to cutting off the direct line from Pyongyang to Seoul. Tensions continued to escalate and as of the writing of this paper rumors of heightened conflict on the Korean peninsula are circulating. As a response to this unstable security environment, the Philippines has stepped up again and offered its assistance to the United States to address the threat posed by North Korea. In April, the Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario did what the Philippines always does when a new security challenge arises. He invoked the Mutual Defense Treaty, but this time, Philippine action was not to bring the United States to the Philippines for its own security, but rather to offer something to the United States. Rosario stated that, “Our mutual defense treaty calls for joint action if either the Philippines or the United States is attacked. . . It would then be

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<sup>70</sup> The Republic of the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, *3rd Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue*, December 11-12, 2012.

logical to assume that in the event of an attack on the Philippines or on our treaty ally, the US would be allowed to use our bases.”<sup>71</sup> The Philippines does not seem to be a likely target for any North Korean aggression, but the large number of U.S. troops stationed in the South Korea and in nearby Japan makes it certain that the United States would be involved in any conflict that the North might instigate. At that point the United States could take del Rosario up on his offer and increase U.S. use of Philippine bases giving the United States another platform to project power in the region in addition to the bases in South Korea, Japan, and Guam. The future of the escalating tensions regarding North Korea is still unclear, but the Philippines is undoubtedly positioning itself to play a bigger role in the regional security system led by the United States.

The geostrategic environment in the Asia-Pacific is quickly changing and new developments are occurring every day. Despite this unstable environment one thing has remained constant. The U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship is only growing stronger and more collaborative. Just as September 11<sup>th</sup> and insurgents in Mindanao showed the United States and the Philippines that they must work together, so has the Asian-Pacific geopolitical environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century taught a lesson in cooperation. The relations between the United States and the Philippines during the 1990s were clearly a failed experiment from which both parties have learned. The Philippines needs the U.S. to assist in its external security, and the United States needs the logistical and strategic support that the Philippines can offer. Once again, the two countries have found themselves allies of necessity. As the geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific continues to evolve the Obama administration’s pivot to the region seems like a more prudent and timely policy

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<sup>71</sup> The Associated Foreign Press, “Manila Offers US its Military Bases in Case of N Korea War,” *The Express Tribune*, April 13, 2013.

every day. Once again, the U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship is paying off. The investments made in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century coupled with more than fifty years of active diplomacy and cooperation has provided the United States with a reliable ally in the Asia-Pacific. The Philippines have in return received protection from the United States and are continually aided in their efforts to modernize and advance their own armed forces. If current trends persist, the U.S.-Philippine strategic relationship will only continue to grow stronger and so will security in the region.



## Conclusion

From the beginning of U.S.-Philippine relations geopolitical and strategic concerns have been at the forefront of all policy decisions regarding the two countries' interstate relations. Colonization was undertaken by enterprising personalities like McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft who saw the geopolitical importance of the Philippines and the opportunity to create a space in the Asia-Pacific friendly to U.S. interests. But, it was never a one sided benefit. The experience of World War II showed the Philippines the reality of living in a dangerous neighborhood. U.S. military support was invaluable to Philippine national security.

The same story played out in the Cold War. The United States relied on the Philippines for logistical reasons in its fight against communism in mainland Asia, while the Philippines depended on U.S. support for its external defense so that Manila could focus on combating internal threats. Despite the undemocratic regime of Ferdinand Marcos, the United States continued to support its long term ally because the geopolitical consequences of not doing so were simply too great. From the very beginning the true ally had been the Philippines itself, not Marcos. Marcos failed to take that into consideration and was dismayed when the United States shifted its support to Corazon Aquino following the People Power Revolution in 1986. However, it should come as no surprise to anyone that the United States followed such a policy regarding Marcos. The

United States had invested too much time and money into the country to continue to support a failing dictator.

In the early 1990s when the Philippines decided that the security arrangement that had been in place since independence was no longer necessary U.S.-Philippine strategic relations staggered. Yet the experiment in distancing themselves from each other would not hold. The Philippine military fell into disrepair and the United States lost a valuable forward deployment position in the Asia-Pacific. When the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks occurred both the United States and the Philippines were quickly reminded how important their relationship was to their mutual security interests. Leadership in both countries jumped on the opportunity to strengthen and reaffirm the relationship that had fallen by the wayside in the 1990s. After a brief bout of memory loss, both the United States and the Philippines were reminded that they were in fact allies of necessity.

In addition to the events concerning terrorism, the rise of China and the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region to U.S. interests have also served to strengthen the U.S.-Philippine relationship. Pressure from China is making the Philippines reach out to the United States for more military support, including inviting the United States back to Subic Bay. From the U.S. point of view the future of the 21<sup>st</sup> century lies in the Asia-Pacific and the ability to have a stronger presence in the region is vital for its regional security and foreign policy goals. No other country in the Asia-Pacific lies at the intersection of so many issues that the United States cares about and no other country in the world has the resources to provide the Philippines with the support they need for their own security goals. For what surely won't be the last time, the United States and the Philippines are finding their relationship inseparable from their interests.

This history between the United States and the Philippines must not be ignored in future policy decisions regarding the Asia-Pacific, both for the United States and Philippines governments. The history of both states has been intertwined for more than a century and if the current level of cooperation and military integration persists it seems the next century will also bind the United States and the Philippines together.

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