The Revitalized Philippine-U.S. Security Relations: A Ghost from the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century?

Renato Cruz De Castro


Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0004-4687%28200311%2F12%2943%3A6%3C971%3ATRPSRA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-%23

*Asian Survey* is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
THE REVITALIZED PHILIPPINE-U.S. SECURITY RELATIONS

A Ghost from the Cold War or an Alliance for the 21st Century?

Renato Cruz De Castro

Abstract

This article contends that the Philippine-U.S. post-9/11 security relationship is characterized by temporary and limited American troop deployment aimed at developing the Armed Forces of the Philippines' counterterrorism capability and fostering interoperability between the Philippine and American armed forces. The article concludes that the post-9/11 alliance is significantly different from the two countries' security relationship during the Cold War.

In the last 10 years, the Philippine-U.S. security relationship has gone through a process of breakdown, impasse, revival, and revitalization. As a result of the Philippine Senate's decision not to ratify a new base treaty, the United States government had no choice but to turn over Clark Air Base to the Philippines on November 26, 1991. A year later, Washington withdrew its forces from Subic Naval Base. These events marked the end of almost 100 years of American military presence in the Philippines and caused the cooling-off of the so-called "special relationship" between the two allies. The alliance remained essentially moribund in the mid-1990s, as the two countries adjusted to the post-Cold War security environment. Their security relationship, however, was revived in the late 1990s...
in the face of an emerging "China challenge." Currently, this alliance is being revitalized, as both Manila and Washington find themselves together in a coalition against global terrorism.

This article explains the dynamics of the Philippine-United States security relationship as it went through these various stages. Specifically, the article examines the differences in security arrangements between the two countries during the Cold War, and under the current revitalized alliance. It reviews the events that led to the withdrawal of the U.S. forces in 1992, and the standoff in Philippine-U.S. security relations in the mid-1990s, as well as the factors that hastened the alliance's revival in the 21st century, and the features of the post-9/11 security ties. Hence, this article raises the following questions: How did the end of the Cold War affect U.S.-Philippine security relations? What was the state of the Philippine-U.S. alliance after the 1992 withdrawal of American forces from the Philippines? What events led to the revitalization of the two countries' security relationship in the post-Cold War era? What are the features of post-9/11 security relations between Manila and Washington? And what are the political issues and problems in this revitalized security relationship?

The Breakdown of the Cold War Alliance, 1990–1991

As a kind of inter-state cooperation, states form alliances primarily for the purpose of aggregation of power. They enter into alliances to enhance their individual capacities, either through a deterrent guarantee provided by a more powerful state, or by increasing the allies' own defense capabilities by pooling their collective resources, abilities, and efforts in the process of creating security relations.1 Allies usually combine their resources against a specific and common enemy that may be more powerful than each of the allies individually. However, each member state of a security alliance still possesses sovereignty. While each ally may be constrained by its security ties and relations with the other members of the alliance, each sovereign member state determines its role and responsibilities in areas not included in the alliance's contract. This creates a centrifugal tendency within an alliance as each member state tries to minimize its own obligations and to maximize those of its partners.2

Another cause of the centrifugal action within any alliance is the disappearance of a common threat. A prevailing assumption is that once the mutual threat is gone, states lose the interest in and rationale to beef up their forces and enhance the capabilities to deter or defeat a common enemy. It is a widely held belief that alliances are disbanded when the cause of the dispute is gone, and that they are far less enduring than other forms of political communities above the nation-state level. A number of scholars have observed that alliances disband once they have achieved their objective because they have been formed essentially "against, and only derivatively for, someone and something," and that although a sense of community may reinforce alliances or coalitions, alliances seldom bring these into existence.

This condition became apparent in the case of the Philippine-U.S. alliance during the late 1980s. The aftermath of the 1988 base review and Soviet military retrenchment in Southeast Asia in 1990 made Washington reassess its overall security strategy in the Pacific. American defense planners looked more seriously at the feasibility of redeployment options without U.S. reliance on the Philippine bases. The Pentagon studied and proposed alternative solutions to the closure of Philippine bases, taking into account the disappearance of the Soviet threat and the fact that the U.S. capability to counter a superpower military was no longer necessary in the post-Cold War period. In the post-Soviet era, the United States was confronted by new, but smaller, threats requiring less American military power. This meant a reduction in forward-deployed forces and less need for overseas bases, and thus, a decline in the strategic value of the Philippine bases and a corresponding decrease in the possible negative consequences of their closure. The U.S. defense establishment, which found the imperative for reliance on forward-deployed forces in places like the Philippines during the Cold War, realized the need for a new strategy. This strategy focused less on the Soviet threat and more on the smaller but multiple threats from other sources—risks to oil supplies, maritime interdiction, regional hegemons, and territorial disputes. Moreover, the strategy entailed fewer forward-deployed forces supported by power projection from continental United States (CONUS)-based military units.

Adoption of this new strategy did away with the stationing of permanent large combat forces within the Asia-Pacific rim. The new strategy involved setting up a series of smaller bases, establishing more bilateral and multilateral defense treaties, conducting joint or combined training exercises, and the occasional deployment of the U.S. Navy within the region to accomplish its forward-presence mission. The emergence of this strategy meant that the U.S. government in 1990 was already seriously considering the removal of its military forces from the Philippines. Washington could prudently disperse its forces in the region and stimulate greater collaboration from its Asian allies and friends. These measures could best guarantee the stabilizing role of the U.S. in East Asia, without relying on the Philippine bases.

On the other hand, to Manila, shared security concerns with Washington hardly mattered. This was because Manila’s defense planners saw no external threats to the country for the next five years. The Philippine government’s primer on the U.S. military facilities succinctly expressed Manila’s view that “... the Philippines faced no external enemies or threats, and that threats arising from both communist insurgency and the right-wing military rebels could not be addressed by U.S. military presence in the country.” From the Philippine government’s point of view, Manila’s security relations with Washington were simply a matter of commercial transaction, requiring monetary compensation from Washington for the Philippines’ hosting of the U.S. facilities, rather than a mutual venture arising from the two countries’ common security interests. The Philippine government’s public position regarding the bases emphasized the economic dimension of these facilities. To the Aquino administration, what mattered was increased U.S. economic and military assistance. This, hopefully, could palliate domestic sensitivities over the issue of sovereignty and would entice the Philippine Senate to ratify any new base agreement. To a majority of Filipinos who favored the continued presence of American military facilities, economic compensation became an important (and to a certain degree, the only) consideration.

From 1990 to 1991, the Philippines and the United States conducted a two-phase negotiation aimed at establishing the framework for discussing the future of the Philippine bases, the nature of so-called new U.S.-R.P. (Republic of the Philippines) relations, and a new bases treaty. Washington and Manila found themselves without any clear consensus on the alliance’s raison d’être, during these negotiations. Nevertheless, after nearly 11 months of hard and

---

tedious bargaining, Washington and Manila forged a new accord to replace the 1947 military base agreement—the “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Security,” or “Pact of 1991.” However, the predominantly anti-base Philippine Senate had to approve this treaty. A majority of the senators were upset by the low base-related compensation of $203 million for the American use of Subic Naval Base. They were also bitterly opposed to the phase-out period of 10 years, instead of the seven-year period without any extension. In addition, the senators were indignant that the arrangement had maintained the status quo and had barely changed the provisions of the 1947 military base agreement. The Pact offered window dressing to the old protectorate arrangement, in which the Philippines provided the platform for American forces in exchange for financial and military assistance. On September 16, 1991, the Philippine Senate, by a vote of 12 against to 11 for, rejected the Pact. This legislative act rendered the 11-month negotiating process futile. Manila proffered a three-year phased withdrawal to Washington. The George Bush, Sr., administration, however, declined the offer. Instead, the U.S. Navy implemented the one-year time-phased withdrawal plan. Developments in the mid-1990s, however, forced both countries to reassess the utility of their alliance in the face of the uncertainties of the post-Cold War era.

Impasse in the Alliance, 1992–1996

In the aftermath of the Senate’s rejection of the Pact, both Manila and Washington found it prudent to ease their strained security relations. Both allies decided to keep the Mutual Defense Treaty in force without any amendments. The two sides also continued convening the Mutual Defense Board (MDB) every three months, to provide an effective mechanism for consultation on mutual security concerns. In November 1992, the MDB agreed that joint military maneuvers such as the annual Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises would continue. Both allies also agreed to the customary Ameri-

12. Signed in September 1951, this treaty provides the mechanism on how these two allies will respond in the event of an armed attack by foreign forces against the metropolitan or island territories of the Philippines. The treaty also commits both countries, separately or jointly, by self-help and mutual aid, to develop their individual and collective capability to resist armed attacks.
can ship visits, aircraft transits, and continued assistance by U.S. forces to Filipinos during natural disasters and calamities. In August 1994, Washington began to provide Manila with some military equipment under the Foreign Military Sales credit, valued at $148.9 million, in the form of two logistic supply vessels (LSVs). In addition, the Philippines received eight fast patrol crafts (PCFs) through the Military Assistance Program. The following year, the United States gave the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) $100 million worth of military equipment. Both Washington and Manila tried to project a business-as-usual image of their security relations. However, neither could conceal the fact that this once-close and vibrant bilateral alliance against international communism had been relegated to the periodic convening of the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Board, and to the holding of yearly Balikatan exercise. Then, in the mid-1990s, this fragile alliance suffered further blows.

The United States and the Philippines are still allies under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty. However, Washington significantly downgraded its political and military relations with Manila by declaring that the U.S. could not guarantee the external defense of the Philippines since American forces had lost a facility from which they could operate.14 The Pentagon’s 1992 East Asian Strategic Initiative and 1995 East Asian Strategic Review barely mentioned the Philippines as an American ally in East Asia.15 The Strategic Review relegated U.S. security relations with the Philippines under the general heading of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states. It emphasized Washington’s intention and efforts to broaden the American network of access and pre-positioning arrangements with other Southeast Asian states.

After the U.S. military withdrawal in 1992, several prominent Filipinos suggested negotiating a friendship treaty with the United States to serve as a basis for post-Cold War bilateral relations. American diplomats in Manila, however, said that Washington had little interest in the idea, given the uncertainty over the Philippines’ U.S. policy and the United States government’s bitterness after the Philippine Senate’s non-concurrence to the Pact.16 In November 1994, the Philippine government rebuffed an American proposal for a

---


U.S.-Philippines Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement. The Philippine government’s refusal to sign this agreement stemmed from Manila’s sensitivity to domestic criticism against the possible return of American forces to the Philippines. Former President Fidel Ramos also did not actively pursue a Status of Forces Agreement with Washington, as he felt that any further security arrangements would be a political risk, amid strong domestic anti-American sentiment. Consequently, in 1996, the two allies decided to suspend large-scale military exercises, pending an agreement on the legal status of visiting U.S. personnel. Only small-scale exercises involving not more than 20 American personnel were allowed.

**Revival of the Alliance, 1997–2001**

China’s emergence as the foremost regional power in East Asia, Beijing’s promulgation of its Territorial Law claiming a large portion of the South China Sea in 1992, and Manila’s discovery of Chinese construction on the Sea’s disputed Mischief Reef in 1995 occasioned the shift in Philippine perception of the U.S.-Philippine alliance. In 1997, Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Navy (PLAN) vessels were sighted near the Mischief Reef, and in the following year, the Chinese began constructing multistory buildings on concrete platforms to serve as landing pads for helicopters, to be manned by People’s Liberation Army units. Thus, Manila found a militarily strong and irredentist China literally knocking on its door. This led Philippine defense officials and security experts to consider Chinese expansion in the South China Sea as the main long-term security threat to their country. Consequently, the Philippine government realized the importance of an American military presence in maintaining the balance of power in the Southeast Asian region. Philippine decision makers accepted the need to revitalize the alliance with the United States, which had been severely damaged by the failure to conclude a new base agreement in the early 1990s. Furthermore, given the failure of Manila to modernize its armed forces, the Philippine government saw improvement of its security ties with Washington as a key to getting

---


American support for re-arming the ill-equipped Armed Forces of the Philippines.\(^\text{21}\)

These regional events also caused concern in Washington, as they indicated that the PRC was in the midst of a massive naval build-up as part of Beijing’s efforts to claim the entire South China Sea.\(^\text{22}\) Many American defense officials and analysts saw a threat to U.S. interests if China’s arms modernization were to upset the regional balance of power, endanger the interests of U.S. allies Japan and the Philippines, and precipitate a regional arms race.\(^\text{23}\) In the view of the defense analysts, China’s military modernization, coupled with territorial disputes and its perception of what a great power should be and how it should act, made for an uncertain and profoundly dangerous future for Asia and the United States. Washington tried to maintain a hands-off policy with regard to China’s expansive claims to the South China Sea. However, by the mid-1990s, American defense officials had become worried that if the U.S. simply stood by while China consolidated its military position in the Spratly Islands, American relations with all the ASEAN states, Japan, and South Korea would be undermined. These countries would interpret this inaction as a weakening of the U.S. security commitment to them and a de facto American tilt toward China.\(^\text{24}\)

Washington and Manila consequently found it imperative to reassess their alliance and security cooperation, which had been essentially moribund since 1992.\(^\text{25}\) In late 1996, officials from both countries conducted a series of negotiations for an agreement that would provide a legal guarantee for American troops deployed in the Philippines during military exercises and ship visits. It took Manila and Washington almost two years to conclude an accord, since both sides found themselves engaged in very tense and passionate


negotiations. On February 11, 1998, the two sides finally signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), which provides a legal framework for the conduct of combined or joint military exercises.

The VFA has been deemed important for the revival of the alliance after 1992. For the United States, the VFA has facilitated the resumption of naval ship visits to Philippine ports and the conduct of joint exercises. These activities are designed to enhance the U.S. forward-deployment posture in East Asia in the face of China’s strengthening and flexing its military muscle. Washington has been apprehensive over the uneasy relationship between China and Taiwan since the March 1996 standoff. From the U.S. perspective, any improvement in the two countries’ security relations would increase American access to air and naval infrastructures in Luzon and allow for their rehabilitation, with an eye to facilitating the rapid deployment of U.S. forces in case of a crisis in Northern East Asia. The United States also hopes that this would also lead to familiarity, cooperation, and interoperability of the two countries’ armed forces and to the general improvement of the bilateral security partnership.

For Manila, the agreement has been seen as a means of facilitating military-to-military contacts with Washington that could help the AFP acquire operational strategy and develop the interoperability of Philippine-U.S. forces. Manila also has been motivated by self-serving interests—Philippine defense officials have considered a revived alliance with Washington as a hedge against possible conflicts that might erupt from its territorial claims in the Spratlys and general instability in Northeast Asia. And in view of Manila’s inability to modernize its armed forces in the late 1990s, Philippine officials have assumed that any improvement in the security relationship could lead to an increase in the level of U.S. military assistance, perhaps bridging the gap until the country can finance its own military modernization program. In 1999, the Philippine Senate ratified the U.S.-Philippine Visiting Forces Agreement, which paved way for the large-scale Balikatan military exercise in February 2000. The agreement also revitalized the two countries’


security relations by providing the framework for development and implementation of an effective AFP modernization program.

**Revitalization of the Alliance, 2001–2002**

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, and the consequent American response creating a global coalition against international terrorism, created new opportunities for the further revitalization of the U.S.-Philippine alliance. In the aftermath of 9/11, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo quickly offered Washington access to the former U.S. Clark Air and Subic Naval bases for possible military operations. She later issued a 14-stage counterterrorism program to enhance intelligence cooperation with Washington and other members of the global coalition against terrorism. Significantly, Arroyo also announced that the Philippines was ready “to pay a price” to support its ally’s anti-terrorist campaign.30

President Arroyo’s declaration of support to the American anti-terrorism campaign injected a new dynamism into the 50-year-old alliance. After 1992, the U.S. government had not initiated any major legislation on two-way security relations. As admitted by the former chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “The [U.S.] Congress as a whole was smarting from what it perceived as the unceremonious booting out of U.S. military bases in the Philippines.”31 However, this attitude changed when Arroyo announced early, principled, and unequivocal support to the United States, granting overflight rights and offering logistical backup and medical personnel to American forces.32 In return, the current Bush administration raised the prospect of greater U.S. involvement in the government campaign on the southern island of Basilan, Mindanao, against the Abu Sayyaf guerrillas, who were linked to the Al-Qaeda terrorist network and at the time were holding two American missionaries for ransom.

During a summit meeting in Washington in November 2001, Bush and Arroyo reaffirmed the validity and strength of the Mutual Defense Agreement and said they regarded it as still vital to the two states, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.33 Bush expressed his appreciation for the Philippine offers, and for Arroyo’s efforts to forge an ASEAN response in addressing terrorism. Bush also proffered direct U.S. military assistance for the


RENAITO CRUZ DE CASTRO 981

rebel-suppression campaign. Arroyo turned down the American offer of troops, and instead asked for new equipment and training for the AFP, so that it could neutralize the Muslim bandit group.

The two leaders approved an integrated plan providing for a robust training package for the AFP, delivery of equipment needed to increase the Philippine military’s mobility, and creation of a new bilateral defense consultative mechanism.34 Washington made provisions for one C-130B Hercules transport aircraft and five UH-1H Iroquois utility helicopters to help allay the Philippine Air Force’s chronic shortage of strategic and tactical lift capabilities, which had hindered the army’s counterterrorist operations.35 Washington also agreed to furnish Manila with grenade launchers, mortars, sniper rifles, night vision and thermal-imaging goggles, and a 360-ton Cyclone-class coastal patrol craft for use in the AFP’s counter-terrorist campaign against the Abu Sayyaf. This assistance is part of Washington’s enhanced aid program for its ally, aid that increased tenfold from $1.9 million in 2001 to $19 million in fiscal year 2002.

More significantly, the Bush administration also approved the participation of 200 U.S. troops in a two-and-a-half-week joint exercise with Filipino forces, as well as 190 Special Forces officers to train the AFP on counterterrorism tactics. On January 16, 2002, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced the deployment of about 600 American troops to the island of Basilan. These troops would act as military advisers to the AFP’s Southern Command and would be based in the country for at least six months.36 The deployment of U.S. troops in the Philippines signified the revitalization of the Philippine-U.S. alliance and the possible return of U.S. forces to Philippine soil after an almost 10-year hiatus in bilateral security relations. Later that month, Manila and Washington agreed on an interim arrangement giving the U.S. military access rights to station weapons and supplies in the Philippines, permanent overflight rights, and approval for temporary camps for American ground troops.37 These moves were part of Washington’s effort to upgrade American military links in Southeast Asia to prevent the region from becoming a haven for international terrorism after 9/

This development, in turn, reinvigorated the alliance, which had been nearly forgotten since September 1991.

**Revitalized Alliance, 2002**

Reminiscent of the tumultuous and chaotic protests preceding the Philippine Senate vote that resulted in the termination of U.S. basing rights in 1992, anti-American and left-wing groups launched a vigorous political campaign against the Arroyo administration in January 2002. The protesters and critics alleged that the Philippine government was colluding with Washington in using the post-9/11 hysteria to justify a heightened and more permanent U.S. military presence in their country. Protesters raised the issue of who would actually do the fighting against the Abu Sayyaf, and who would command the American forces operating in Mindanao. They warned the government that the military exercise could become a bigger and messier operation, and could last longer than its scheduled six months. They were also fearful that American troop deployment in Mindanao would drag the United States into a new conflict with other Muslim rebels groups—the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—that had been negotiating with the Philippine government. However, the critics missed a very significant point in the post-9/11 security relationship: it is significantly different from the pre-1991 U.S.-R.P. alliance.

The U.S. troop deployment in the Philippines has been part of the second phase of America’s war on terrorism, directed at denying Al-Qaeda a new home base and access to human and material resources. Unlike U.S. forward deployment during the Cold War, the current American military presence in the Philippines is not aimed at ensuring the security of major sea and air lanes in East Asia for the Western Alliance’s trade and commerce. Rather, the U.S. forces have been deployed to encourage and assist governments in neutralizing terrorist groups that threaten their own countries and global security, as well. The temporary stationing of American soldiers in the Philippines is undertaken to help a regional ally untangle the links between terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations that converge within the so-called “seam of lawlessness”—a geographic area that stretches from Afghanistan to Southeast Asia.

The Bush administration has described its military operation in the Philippines as part of a concerted effort to neutralize a geographic area where ter-

---

terrorist groups interact with drug kingpins, smugglers, pirates, money launderers, and other organized criminals. Washington has made it clear that it would not send American troops to fight this campaign against lawlessness, but it would actively prepare other states for the battles ahead. Washington's stated goal is to help a number of countries develop competent and professional armed forces that could provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and support United Nations peacekeeping operations, as well as conducting operations against terrorism and other international illegal activities. In conducting this type of military operation in the Philippines, the Bush administration was setting an important precedent for possible future U.S. military assistance programs in Southeast Asia and other developing regions in the world. In the view of Robert Rotberg, director of the World Peace Foundation Program on Intrastate Conflict, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, "Basically we [i.e., the U.S. government] want to add military deployment heft through training and cooperation to friendly governments who have Muslim insurgencies that might or might not be fertile ground for Al-Qaeda. The idea is a kind of cordon sanitaire—an expression of U.S. muscle by proxy." The American military objective in the Philippines employs a small number of U.S. troops that operate in-country. In contrast to the policy of stationing of sizable air and naval units at Philippine bases during the Cold War era, U.S. troop deployment for the Balikatan 02-1 exercise totaled only 660 personnel and 10 aircraft, three C-130s and seven medium and heavy helicopters. Only 160 U.S. personnel were directly involved in the actual military exercise, while 500 were crew and service personnel for aircraft, watercraft, and other major equipment. An additional team of 340 U.S. Navy Engineers and their Marine Corps security detail were later deployed in Basilan to build roads, construct helicopter pads, and dig wells as part of the civil action program of the military operation.

41. Ibid.
During the operation, U.S. troops performed limited roles such as providing intelligence support to the AFP’s Southern Command, conducting special patrol and night operation training with Philippine military units, and undertaking civil engineering projects. In effect, the U.S. was relegated to a purely supporting role, while the Philippine military retained the primary role of combating the Abu Sayyaf terrorists. The military exercise provided for the assignment of American Special Forces personnel to Filipino units conducting patrols inside the jungle combat zone of Basilan. Although they were armed and allowed to shoot in self-defense, the U.S. troops were forbidden to engage in combat and instructed only to observe and assess the performance of their Filipino counterparts. In the middle of the operation, however, Secretary Rumsfeld scaled down the American participation, holding back American troops from joining Philippine jungle patrols. Although he eventually decided to let American troops join their Filipino counterparts at the company level, Rumsfeld made the decision two weeks before the scheduled end of the Balikatan 02-1 exercise and rejected the idea of extending the activity beyond the July 31 deadline.46

**Issues in the Revitalized Alliance**

The exercise lasted for six months, and during this period, American military officials reiterated that Washington has no intention of setting up a permanent base in the country. Instead, they emphasized the U.S. need to expand its network of access arrangements with Southeast Asian countries and to extend the scope of military exercises involving U.S. and regional forces by including counterterrorist operations.47 Balikatan officially ended on July 31, 2002, when the bulk of the 1,200 U.S. troops (all the engineers and their Marine contingent) were shipped out of Basilan. They left behind a small number of Special Forces officers to drill additional light-reaction companies and conduct counterterrorism training both in the AFP’s Southern Command and in training areas in Luzon.

Militarily, the operation was a mixed success. It was marked by a botched rescue effort that resulted in the death of two hostages and the wounding of another. The operation also failed to eliminate the Abu Sayyaf. Nevertheless, it was successful in upgrading the AFP tactical maneuver force’s combat capability and the Southern Command’s Integrated Territorial Defense System.48 This was evident when the Southern Command neutralized the Abu Sayyaf’s freedom of movement and minimized the group’s capability to con-

---

duct terrorist activities in Basilan. However, the Abu Sayyaf responded to the military's tactical advantage by strategically transferring its operations to other parts of Mindanao.

The military's exercise's biggest gain, however, might have been political rather than military. Balikatan strengthened domestic political support for the revitalized alliance as it complemented the Philippine government's programs of social reform and poverty alleviation to the poorest parts of Mindanao. The local people were said to have appreciated the road-building, well-digging, and economic and humanitarian assistance that accompanied the counterterrorism training program. The exercise also boosted the local economy through regular trade fairs and American employment of local companies for laundry and food catering. More significantly, American participation in the counterterrorism exercise is widely credited with energizing the strained alliance. On the one hand, the Bush administration was able to extend its war on terrorism in the Philippines without involving U.S. troops in actual combat, as their participation was limited to advisory and humanitarian missions. On the other hand, President Arroyo has been able to use the Philippine rapprochement with the United States to get Washington's commitment for $4.6 billion in economic and military assistance, which could help widen her domestic political base. Both Manila and Washington viewed Balikatan 02-1 as a political success and discussed ways of transforming it into a sustained program of security cooperation and counterterrorism training and assistance. After assessing the exercise, the two countries agreed on a Five-Year Work Plan to enhance the half-century-old Mutual Defense Treaty.

The political controversies surrounding the conduct of the military exercise, however, brought forth some stumbling blocks to the reinvigorated Philippine-U.S. security relationship. The foremost problem is the fact that Manila is still uneasy over the American military presence in the Philippines. Politicians and non-governmental groups that campaigned in 1991 to terminate U.S. basing rights are still determined to keep American forces from returning and staying in the country on a permanent or long-term basis. Indeed, by allowing American forces to join the AFP in a counterterrorist operation against the Abu Sayyaf, Arroyo took a calculated risk that resurrected the latent and militant anti-American sentiment in Philippine politics. During the exercise, Washington and Manila played up the cooperative nature of the venture by minimizing the extent to which American troops could be exposed to actual combat engagements with the Abu Sayyaf. Thus, the Balikatan Ex-

49. Ibid., p. 13.
50. Ibid.
exercise was not regarded as a joint operation but rather a Filipino military maneuver with American advisers. Nevertheless, the politics of putting American boots on Philippine soil is proving to be a delicate and divisive issue. The fact that U.S. military deployment in the country has no clear exit strategy or timetable—since American troops are expected to return in 2004—can further accentuate the volatility of this issue.

Another problem that the two allies must address is their differences over long-term objectives of the alliance. For Washington, U.S. military assistance is extended to help an ally develop a more capable military establishment that can pursue American strategic interests in the war on terrorism. This involves encouraging an ally and training and equipping its armed forces so that it can counteract terrorist organizations threatening the local society and the global community. For Manila, the reinvigorated alliance should enable the country to deal with the so-called geopolitical reality of the region—the power and presence of China. Manila sees a strong security relationship with the U.S. as a deterrent to the hegemonic ambition of China. However, Washington’s current priority is not to counterbalance Beijing. Bilateral relations have improved since Bush met Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Shanghai during the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders’ meeting in October 2001. In the aftermath of the summit, Beijing granted approval for a U.S. aircraft carrier and its escorts to make a port call in Hong Kong, as a sign of Chinese support for the war on terrorism. China has also shared intelligence on terrorists and their activities with the United States. The Bush administration, for its part, has dropped the view of China as a strategic competitor and has emphasized Washington’s desire to foster a constructive relationship with Beijing. The post-9/11 Sino-U.S. rapprochement has made it easier for both countries to deal with the many thorny issues that have plagued the relationship since the end of the Cold War, such as Taiwan, China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea, etc. Moreover, Washington is preoccupied with enhancing its homeland defense capability, maintaining the cohesion of the global coalition against terrorism, and assisting a number of countries to develop their police and military establishments for counterterrorist operations.

Another overriding Philippine interest in the reinvigorated alliance is the modernization of the AFP; Manila looks to Washington for possible assistance for its military modernization program. The United States’ support to

---

its long-time ally, however, is and will be limited to the development of the AFP’s counterterrorist capability, not its overall capacity to deal with conventional military threats from China. This suggests that at this stage of the new alliance, there are already unwarranted expectations and misperceptions between Manila and Washington. These are the same irritants that bedeviled the alliance during the Cold War.

Conclusion

The major developments in Philippine-U.S. relations from 1990 to 2002 validate the realist theory of alliance, which states that the formation and operation of alliances are purposive or intentional actions of rational entities responding to strategic problems. This theory gives primacy to strategic and geopolitical factors, and explains alliance formation as a function of an externally “rationalized alliance of necessity.” However, the end of the Cold War accentuated the weakening of an ideological common threat that bound the two countries in an alliance early on. This also prompted Manila and Washington to assess the viability of a continued U.S. military presence in the Philippines. Despite changing domestic and international circumstances, the two allies tried to maintain the status quo in the alliance, keeping the Philippines as a launching pad for American forward-deployed forces in exchange for base-related economic and military assistance. The absence of a clear and present danger, a growing nationalist sentiment in the Philippines, and the Bush Sr. administration’s financial difficulties rendered the status quo untenable for both allies. The Philippine Senate’s eventual rejection of the product of a long bargaining process led to the withdrawal of American forces in November 1992 and a breakdown in one of America’s major bilateral alliances in East Asia.

International developments in the late 1990s up to mid-2001 drove the two countries to revitalize an alliance that had stagnated after 1992. Manila and Washington found it necessary to reassess their post-1991 security ties in the face of the uncertainties and exigencies in a changing and turbulent world. China’s emergence as a regional power in East Asia and the appearance of terrorism as a malevolent force in international relations have shown the two allies that the post-Cold War international system is far from a benign and peaceful environment. The consequent American response to form a global coalition against international terrorism, and the Philippines’ immediate and active support to this coalition, has produced a new dynamism in the alliance.

The revitalized alliance is far different from the two countries’ Cold War security relations. Its limited objective is to prevent Southeast Asia from

becoming a haven for international terrorist organizations. This objective is being pursued by the deployment of a small number of American troops tasked to provide counterterrorism training to the AFP, and to conduct civil-action programs for the benefit of the local population. The deployment of American troops in the Philippines is stated to be temporary, and performs an essentially symbolic function—as a model of the Bush administration’s emerging counterterrorism strategy of supplying military hardware and providing training to countries threatened by terrorists and insurgents. Despite the stated restricted objectives of the revitalized alliance, the U.S. military deployment has triggered protests from anti-American and left-wing politicians and organizations. The allies also view the long-term goals of their revitalized security relationship differently. Manila sees the alliance as long-term insurance against an emerging regional power, while Washington considers it as a short-term expediency in its war on terrorism. Both countries will face unknown and more serious challenges as they veer the reinvigorated alliance through the maze of the 21st century international system. But the more pressing challenge these two democratic allies confront is how they can transform this fragile alliance of necessity into a more durable alliance based on choice.57

57. An alliance of choice refers to an alliance that continues to exist not because of its military function, but more importantly, owing to its members’ common culture and ideology. This type of an alliance fosters the development of cultural similarities that allow member states to understand one another more fully. This raises the possibility that such an alliance will be able to resolve intra-alliance disputes in a way that will keep the alliance stable and resilient. See Fred Chernoff, After Bipolarity: The Vanishing Threat, Theories of the Atlantic Alliance (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 231.