

Colonization without a Colony: Nominal Philippine Independence and the American Empire

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As he presided over the Philippines under the American Empire, President Manuel L. Quezon famously quipped that he preferred “a government run like hell by Filipinos to a government run like heaven by Americans.”¹ On paper, Quezon got his wish on July 4, 1946, when United States President Harry S. Truman recognized the Republic of the Philippines as an independent and sovereign nation. On the same day, a treaty was signed between the two nations where the Americans ceded all claims to the Philippines. The Philippines was finally independent, marking what should have been the end of a 400-year saga of subjugation. Renato Constantino, a Filipino historian, remarked: “The Filipino people have had the misfortune of being ‘liberated’ four times during their entire history.”² Constantino tells the story quite vividly by noting that the Spanish liberated the Philippines from the devil in the 1500s.³ Then, a little more than 300 years later, the United States bought the archipelago from the Spanish.⁴ In 1942, amidst its imperial campaign across the Pacific, the Japanese freed the Philippines from the United States’ grip, but American troops managed to wrest back control from the Japanese imperial government in 1945.⁵ In each case, the Philippines saw foreign “benefactors” replacing each other over and over again in the name of freedom for Filipinos. This paper thus posits that post-1946 Philippine independence follows this pattern rather than breaks it, constituting a fifth liberation and occupation.

On congratulating the Philippines for its achievement of independence, Jawaharlal Nehru stated that:

*We hope that this really signifies independence, for this word has become rather hackneyed and outworn and has been made to mean many things. Some countries that are called independent are far from free and are under the economic or military domination of some great power.*⁶

Unfortunately, the United States–Philippines relationship retained the asymmetries Nehru outlined regarding economic and military power. The Philippines were independent in name only as the archipelago remained

¹ Jun Ynares, “President Quezon’s Timeless Words,” Manila Bulletin, August 20, 2024, <https://mb.com.ph/2024/8/20/president-quezon-s-timeless-words>.

² Renato Constantino, *A History of the Philippines* (Monthly Review Press, 2010), 10.

³ Constantino, *A History of the Philippines*, 10.

⁴ Constantino, *A History of the Philippines*, 10.

⁵ Constantino, *A History of the Philippines*, 10.

⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, “Message to the People of the Philippines (5 July 1946),” The Nehru Archive, July 5, 1946, <https://nehruarchive.in>.

beholden to the United States even after *de jure* American rule had dissolved. The United States' indirect dominance over the Philippines thus constitutes a neo-colonial relationship.⁷ For this relationship to have persisted this long, the governance structures of the Philippines must have reproduced this asymmetric relationship. Thus, this paper seeks to understand the mechanisms behind this reproduction. Specifically, this paper argues that political elites and the socio-political milieus in which they exercised influence actively reproduces the material conditions constituting a neo-colonial relationship.

This paper will demonstrate the role of political and social elites in the reproduction of the United States' dominance in four parts. First, this paper looks at how the United States maintained its foothold after granting independence to the Philippines. The paper then turns to analyzing American support for Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship. Then it will analyze the evolution of military cooperation through the mid to late stages of the Cold War and the transition to the War on Terror. The focus of this paper will then shift to explaining how the alliance between the Philippines and the United States weathered President Rodrigo Duterte's attempted decoupling and pivot to China which sets the stage for an analysis of the resurgence of the US–Philippine relationship under the leadership of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.

This analysis is thus rooted in the method of historical-discursive analysis. It focuses on how the ideas of sovereignty, independence, and alliance are articulated and understood in the aftermath of the United States' withdrawal from the Philippines. As such, this paper draws upon a wide range of sources, which include grey literature, treaty documents, Philippine law, and statements by Filipino and American politicians, as well as the body of literature on the US–Philippine relationship. This is done to situate each source within the political and historical context in which it was produced.⁸ Despite the wide range of sources, this paper remains constrained to the concepts of sovereignty and subjugation as understood by political elites, lawmakers, and academics. However, the exclusion of non-elite, proletarian perspectives from the scope of this paper is appropriate as it focuses on the reproduction of colonial structures by governance actors on both sides.

Military Agreements in the Post–Independence Era

In 1946, the United States promised the Philippines independence and sovereignty. Despite its promise, the United States could not stay away for very long. In fact, it made little effort to actually leave the archipelago as the Government of the United States immediately began working to

⁷ D. Boone Schirmer, “The Philippines Conception and Gestation of a Neo-Colony,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 5, no. 1 (1975), 53.

⁸ Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2020).

maintain its strategic military presence in the Philippines. The Philippines approached the negotiations with the United States in good faith and with minimal demands, namely conditions of no extraterritoriality on the bases and not having a base in the Manila metropolitan area.⁹ These demands sought to protect the newly won sovereignty and addressed a weakened postwar condition. Ultimately, it was in the Philippines' interests to keep the bases open in light of the remnant security threats in the region after the Second World War and it was unable to defend itself adequately as a result of devastation from the war.¹⁰ The United States resultantly took on the burden to stimulate the local economies of the areas surrounding the bases, but this condition was a small price to pay for the strategic advantage the Philippines provided.¹¹

For the United States, a continued military presence in the Philippines offered enormous advantages. Notably, maintaining its presence in the archipelago allowed it to project power in the Western Pacific and into the Indian Ocean. As Cold War tensions intensified, this would prove to be a major boon to the American strategy against the Soviet Union in the region and provided a launching point for United States' forces to access the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹² Despite the enormous advantages that the Philippines provided for the Americans, the style of negotiation the Americans adopted made it clear that they did not value the Philippines' demands.¹³ Eventually, the United States and the Philippines concluded the 1947 Military Bases Agreement (MBA). The final terms of the agreement would allow the American military to keep sixteen bases in the Philippines for ninety-nine years.¹⁴ In addition to the MBA, the Philippines signed the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) in 1951 which signified the newly independent Philippines' acceptance into the United States' network of Pacific allies.¹⁵ The immediate negotiation of the MBA and the MDT reveals that the United States' gift of independence to the Philippines did not function as a full withdrawal. The immediacy, scope, and duration of these agreements demonstrate that the United States saw the Philippines as a key component of its security strategy in the Pacific.

⁹ Estrella D. Solidum, "The United States Military Presence as an Issue in Philippine Politics: A View from the Philippines," *The Pacific Review* 1, no. 4 (1988), 390

¹⁰ L. Eve Armentrout Ma, "Treaty or Travesty? Legal Issues Surrounding the US–Philippines Military Base Agreement of 1947–1992," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 10, no. 1/2 (2001), 93.

¹¹ James Gregor, "The Key Role of U.S. Bases in the Philippines," January 10, 1984, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/>; William E. Berry, "The Effects of the US Military Bases on the Philippine Economy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 11, no. 4 (1990), 306.

¹² Gregor, "The Key Role of US Bases in the Philippines," 307.

¹³ Solidum, "The United States Military Presence as an Issue in Philippine Politics," 389.

¹⁴ Ma, "Treaty or Travesty?" 112.

¹⁵ Renato Cruz De Castro, "Exploring the Factors behind the Persistence of the Philippine–US Alliance: A Focus on the Changing Gist of the 1951 Philippine–US Mutual Defence Treaty (MDT)," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 6 (2022), 696.

Be that as it may, these agreements were structured around the strategy and interests of the United States and led to the erosion of Philippine demands.

Enabling Authoritarianism: The Marcos Sr.–United States Dictatorship

The United States' vested interest in maintaining a forward presence in the Asia Pacific Region via the Philippines had superseded its ideals of democracy and human rights. In 1972, the Philippines entered one of its darkest periods as President Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s second term drew to a close and in a bid to remain in power, Marcos declared martial law over the Philippines. The following years saw the Marcos Sr. administration devolve into a corrupt and repressive kleptocracy.¹⁶ In an article published in *Foreign Policy*, Richard J. Kessler outlines the relationship between Marcos and the Americans, demonstrating that the leadership of the United States was wary of criticizing Marcos Sr.'s rampant human rights abuses and sung his praises often.¹⁷ American presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan did little to call out Marcos and these abuses because they did not want their stances on human rights to get in the way of a renewal of the American bases in the Philippines.¹⁸ Marcos seemed to understand there was no political will among the American leadership to jeopardize their relationship with him because their need for bases in the Philippines overrode all other concerns.¹⁹

Furthermore, the military aid that was provided to the Philippines enabled Marcos Sr.'s regime, as the donated military equipment was fit for use against military threats and internal threats, usually labelled as Marcos' detractors. Despite his targeting of political dissidents with American equipment, Marcos fell strictly into the anti-communist category and the United States was in need of an ally in the middle of the Cold War as a foil against the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and Vietnam.²⁰ President of the United States Ronald Reagan was recorded saying that he stood by Marcos because the only other alternative was his overthrow by the Communist movement in the Philippines.²¹ Taken together, the evidence suggests that the United States had chosen to enable and perpetuate Marcos Sr.'s dictatorship. The United States' provision of aid to the Marcos regime postured him as a client-ruler. Sovereignty may have allowed the Marcos regime to pull out of the alliance in theory, but history tells a different story. The Philippines under the Marcos regime was dependent on the United States' military and economic support but Marcos had no incentives to challenge that dependency.

¹⁶ Gary Hawes, "United States Support for the Marcos Administration and the Pressures That Made for Change," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (1986), 26.

¹⁷ Richard J. Kessler, "Marcos and the Americans," *Foreign Policy*, no. 63 (1986), 47.

¹⁸ Raymond Bonner, "Unexpected Lessons from Manila. Where We Went Wrong," *New Republic*, March 24, 1986, CIA FOIA, 2016.

¹⁹ Kessler, "Marcos and the Americans," 51.

²⁰ Hawes, "United States Support," 23.

²¹ Bonner, "Unexpected Lessons from Manila."

Resistance and Resurgence

Despite the United States holding a great amount of influence in the Philippines government post-1946, there were small pockets of resistance against them. The MBA would see many amendments over the years—with the most significant shortening the duration of American military access to the Philippines to 1991.²² Later that year, the Philippine Senate voted to not renew the agreement keeping United States military bases in the Philippines and the United States had until 1992 to complete its withdrawal.²³ The result of this vote was celebrated by nationalist legislators who viewed this decision as a victory. In the words of Senator Wigberto Tañada, voting against the renewal of the treaty was an “awesome task of severing the last remaining shackles of colonialism in our motherland.”²⁴ This rhetoric reflected the broader political narrative advanced by the anti-bases movement, which interpreted the closure of the bases as a restoration of sovereignty.²⁵ However, this was only a single ideological strand among the entire Filipino population and did not represent a complete rupture in the US–Philippines relationship.

The victory for those who opposed the alliance was thus fleeting and short lived. The MBA had been struck down as a result of senators voting against it in an effort to sever the shackles of colonialism but no such action was taken in opposition to the 1951 MDT between the United States and the Philippines.²⁶ The MDT was allowed to be further reaffirmed and strengthened by the US–Philippines visiting forces agreement (VFA), which was signed in 1998, a mere seven years after the vote which closed American bases in the Philippines.²⁷ The VFA was an agreement for the legal protections of United States armed service members and Department of Defense (DoD) personnel who, in the course of their duties, had to visit the Philippines.²⁸

The provisions in the VFA for U.S. servicepeople in the Philippines tipped the scales of justice in favour of American personnel. Such

²² Kessler, “Marcos and the Americans,” 55.

²³ Timothy McLaughlin, “The Choice the Philippines Didn’t Want to Make,” *Global, The Atlantic*, June 16, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/>; David E. Sanger, “Philippines Orders US to Leave Strategic Navy Base at Subic Bay,” *The New York Times*, December 28, 1991.

²⁴ McLaughlin, “The Choice the Philippines Didn’t Want to Make”; *Sen. Wigberto Tañada - A Time to Heal, Unite, Rebuild Our Divided Nation (Explanation of Vote on the Proposed Bases Treaty, Senate Session Hall, Sept. 16, 1991)*, directed by Wigberto Tañada, 1991.

²⁵ Roland G. Simbulan, “The Historic Senate Vote of 16 September 1991: Looking Back and Looking Forward Twenty-Five Years After,” *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* 66, no. 1 (2018), 5.

²⁶ Cruz De Castro, “Exploring the Factors behind the Persistence of the Philippine–US Alliance,” 696.

²⁷ “Philippines Defense Status of Forces (1989),” <https://www.state.gov/wp-content>.

²⁸ Philippines Defense Status of Forces.

imbalances were made clear in 2005 when a Filipina woman known by the pseudonym Nicole, was raped by Lance Corporal Daniel Smith while three other American soldiers cheered on. Nicole's lawyer, Evalyn Ursua, noted that no other case had reached Philippine court because soldiers were recalled out of the country and back to the United States before the cases made it that far.²⁹ Despite this seeming break in tradition, Smith was not held in a Philippine prison, but was instead held in a detention facility inside the American Embassy in Manila.³⁰ Further, the counterpart VFA that allows members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to train and work in the United States does not allow the Government of the Philippines to "save" its personnel in the same way.³¹ The imbalance between the VFAs is another imbalance in the relationship, with the Philippines again drawing the disadvantage. If these provisions in the VFAs were built upon principles of equality, both parties would be able to recall their soldiers if they committed crimes in their host country or neither party would be able to. However, the reality is that only one side holds the privilege of trying their personnel.

Even as new agreements were being signed, the United States and the Philippines were beginning to reconsider the utility of their alliance since the Cold War had ended, and communism was no longer seen as a priority threat.³² These efforts to reaffirm the alliance in the face of the end of the Cold War were seen as stopgap measures taken with no clear end goal.³³ Gregory B. Poling of the Center for Strategic and International Studies describes the alliance as "nice to have but not vital."³⁴ However, the United States had a new threat to conquer after the 9/11 Attacks in New York City.

After the 9/11 attacks, the Global War on Terror was born. The War on Terror, as it has come to be known, was a war in which the securitization of Muslims was normalized toward the ultimate goal of securing American economic and military supremacy.³⁵ The United States consequently built up its presence in the Philippines to help take on Muslim liberation groups in its southern region of Mindanao, where there was a pre-eminent Muslim liberation movement. The region had seen the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) rise and splinter into the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

²⁹ Gabbie Castro, "VFA and How Perpetrators of Murder, Gender-Based Abuses Got Away with It," *Bulatlat*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.bulatlat.com>.

³⁰ Castro, "VFA and How Perpetrators of Murder."

³¹ Llanesca Panti, "Pimentel Seeks VFA Review over Unequal Treatment of PHL, US Troops," GMA News Online, February 7, 2020, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news>

³² Cruz De Castro, "Exploring the Factors," 695.

³³ Cruz De Castro, "Exploring the Factors," 700.

³⁴ Gregory B. Poling, "The Transformation of the US–Philippines Alliance," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2, 2023, www.csis.org/.

³⁵ George Leaman, "Iraq, American Empire, and the War on Terrorism," *Metaphilosophy* 35, no. 3 (2004), 234; Tahir Abbas, "Reflection: The 'War on Terror', Islamophobia and Radicalisation Twenty Years On," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 14, no. 4 (2021), 402–4..

(MILF), providing justification for expanded American involvement in the region.³⁶ The Philippines also identified a threat with increased military activity by China in the West Philippine Sea, which was also in line with the Obama administration's re-orientation of foreign policy toward Asia in 2012.³⁷ With the emergence of these two new challenges to Philippine security and American interests, the palliative care of introducing new exercises and protections for visiting troops had turned into a breath of life for the dying alliance.

To build on this momentum, the United States and the Philippines signed the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The EDCA would allow American forces to maintain a small presence in the Philippines to be rotated through agreed upon locations like forward operating sites and cooperative security locations.³⁸ Much like there was resistance to the MBA, there was some resistance to this new pillar of defense cooperation between the two nations. The Philippine Senate attempted to have the EDCA struck down in the Supreme Court of the Philippines on the grounds that it was unconstitutional.³⁹ According to article 18, section 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, "foreign military bases, troops, or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate."⁴⁰ Thus, the basis of the Senate's argument hinged on their lack of input on the ratification of the EDCA. President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III reportedly acted unilaterally to push the EDCA through mere hours before American president Barack Obama was slated to visit Manila. The Supreme Court ultimately found the EDCA to be constitutional because it was an executive amendment to the VFA and the MDT and was not a new treaty on its own.⁴¹ The VFA and MDT had already allowed for U.S. forces to rotate in and out of the Philippines and the EDCA only bolstered their ability to do so.⁴² This case demonstrates the limits of the Filipino constitution and government to exercise oversight on foreign troop movements and check the power of the executive branch. Elected senators

³⁶ Ben Reid, "Bush and the Philippines after September 11: Hegemony, Mutual Opportunism and Democratic Retreat," in *Bush and Asia America's Evolving Relations with East Asia*, ed. Mark Beeson (2006); Chris Woolf, "Here's the Backstory on Why the US Has Such Close Ties to the Philippines," The World from PRX, November 12, 2013, theworld.org/stories/.

³⁷ Woolf, "Here's the Backstory on Why the US Has Such Close Ties to the Philippines."

³⁸ Renato Cruz De Castro, "Philippine Supreme Court Approves EDCA: Unlocking the Door for the Return of US Strategic Footprint in Southeast Asia," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, February 1, 2016, amti.csis.org/.

³⁹ Cruz De Castro, "Philippine Supreme Court Approves EDCA."

⁴⁰ "1987 Philippine Constitution (1987)," *The Lawphil Project*, <https://lawphil.net/consti/cons1987.html>.

⁴¹ Cruz De Castro, "Philippine Supreme Court Approves EDCA."

⁴² Ina Reformina, "SC Rules EDCA Is Constitutional," *ABS-CBN*, January 12, 2016, www.abs-cbn.com; Michael Bueza, "Supreme Court's Decision on EDCA," *RAPPLER*, January 15, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/119210-full-text-supreme-court-decision-edca/>.

could only get a say in the EDCA by appealing to the Supreme Court and ultimately failed to strike it down.

Embedded Empire: Today's Legacies of Decolonization Through Duterte and Marcos Jr.

When Rodrigo Duterte was elected president in 2016, the foreign policy of the Philippines gained a new anti-American slant. When the Obama administration voiced concerns about Duterte's extrajudicial killing policy attached to his war on drugs, Duterte retorted by saying the Philippines were no longer a colony of the United States.⁴³ According to Gregory Winger, this was the turning point at which Duterte actively pursued foreign policy independent of the United States.⁴⁴ Duterte's anti-American actions included the suspension of joint patrols in the West Philippine Sea and putting out an order to terminate the VFA.⁴⁵ However, this limited list of anti-American actions were halted by institutional factors. The military opposed his suspension of patrols in the West Philippine Sea and United States Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin managed to talk Duterte out of terminating the VFA.⁴⁶ This coincides with ideas in the wider body of literature that even though Duterte aggressively sought to undermine the Philippines' relationship with the United States, the alliance is embedded into institutions like the military and the people that make up those institutions, making it resilient.⁴⁷ The alliance had survived the Duterte administration.

New paths for cooperation opened up once Duterte left office, demonstrating that the American empire was resilient. The Duterte administration's strategy for navigating the United States–China rivalry was to appease China and distance the Philippines from the United States. However, Duterte's successor has taken on the opposite approach. Much like his father, President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. has shown a great affinity for the United States. Marcos Jr.'s most significant policy shift in this regard was accelerating the EDCA, allowing the United States

⁴³ Carol Lee, “Obama Reconsiders Meeting with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte - ...,” Wall Street Journal, September 5, 2016, <https://archive.ph/9YMc3>.

⁴⁴ Gregory Winger, “Alliance Embeddedness: Rodrigo Duterte and the Resilience of the US–Philippine Alliance,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17, no. 3 (2021), 1.

⁴⁵ Jim Gomez, “Philippine Leader Rejects Joint Patrols, Eyes China Weapons | AP News,” *Associated Press* (Manila), September 13, 2016, apnews.com/; Rita Joviland, “Duterte Ordered Retraction of VFA Termination —Lorenzana,” GMA News Online, July 30, 2021, www.gmanetwork.com/.

⁴⁶ ABS-CBN News, “No Duterte Order to Stop Patrols in South China Sea - Aide | ABS-CBN News,” ABS-CBN, June 10, 2018, www.abs-cbn.com; Joviland, “Duterte Ordered Retraction of VFA Termination —Lorenzana.”

⁴⁷ Winger, “Alliance Embeddedness”; Andrea Chloe Wong and Alexander C. Tan, “The Philippines' Institutionalised Alliance with the US: Surviving Duterte's China Appeasement Policy,” *National Security Journal* 3, no. 2 (2021), 2.

access to four more bases, bringing the total to nine.⁴⁸ This was a move designed to increase interoperability between the two nations and increase the ability of the United States military to respond to threats from China in the South China Sea and Taiwan.⁴⁹ Increased presence in the Philippines also allows the United States military to respond quicker to the natural disasters in the Philippines.⁵⁰ However, military cooperation has become incredibly theatrical in service of the United States' increasing tensions with China. The *Balikatan* (Tagalog for shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises conducted under Marcos Jr. have been quite large, with the 2024 iteration being expanded from its traditional bilateral format between the United States and the Philippines, into a multilateral exercise including four countries: The Philippines, the United States, France, and Australia.⁵¹ Furthermore, a sinking exercise (SinkEx) of a retired Chinese-built boat took place in the West Philippine Sea which was intended to act as a deterrent message to China in both the West Philippine Sea and Taiwan.⁵² Despite Marcos Jr.'s extravagance in demonstrating that he is in favour of aligning the Philippines with the United States, bigger is not always better as he has defined the current agreement as a hard limit on American expansion and access within the Philippines.⁵³ Though this hard limit is in place, it does not defeat the United States' intentions in maintaining its presence in the Philippines. The archipelago is now seen as a launching point against China, and it serves as a central piece in the American plan of competition against China.

Conclusion

The United States and the Philippines have a special relationship. This relationship is one that is incredibly embedded in the organizational consciousnesses of their respective institutions and is not likely to go away any time soon. Such a relationship has been cultivated over forty-eight years of formal colonialism and almost eighty years of American meddling in the Philippines. The institutionalization of this special relationship is due in part to how high-level political actors understand sovereignty and act upon these understandings.

The United States' support for Ferdinand Marcos Sr.'s regime signalled that the Philippines were an important strategic piece, and they could not afford to lose them, no matter the moral cost. On the other side

⁴⁸ Aaron Favila, "The Philippine President Says He Won't Give US Access to More Local Military Bases," *World News*, *AP News*, April 15, 2024, apnews.com/article.

⁴⁹ Sanya Mansoor and Simmone Shah, "Why the Philippines Is Letting the US Expand Its Military Footprint in the Country Again," *TIME*, February 3, 2023, time.com/.

⁵⁰ Mansoor and Shah, "Why the Philippines Is Letting the US Expand Its Military Footprint in the Country Again."

⁵¹ "Balikatan 2024," US Naval Institute, May 29, 2024, www.usni.org/.

⁵² US Naval Institute, "Balikatan 2024."

⁵³ Favila, "The Philippine President Says He Won't Give US Access to More Local Military Bases."

of the alliance, the Philippines reaped military and economic benefits of American military presence within its borders. While moments of resistance emerged — especially in the post-Cold War period before 9/11 where the United States had no viable threats and no reason to maintain its alliance with the Philippines — the persistence of alliance institutions and buy-in from political elites limited the extent to which American military access could be meaningfully curtailed. Since the 9/11 attacks and the surge of great power competition against China, the alliance has been reinvigorated thanks to similar interests on both sides of the alliance. However, U.S. interests take precedent over those of the Philippines, especially during the six years of attempted decoupling by President Rodrigo Duterte. Alliance embeddedness saved the United States–Philippines relationship and stalled its collapse long enough for Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s enthusiastic turn toward the global superpower. To this day, the Philippines serves as an important piece of U.S. military strategy in the Asia Pacific region.

The United States never really left the Philippines. Its promise of independence for the archipelagic nation in 1946 was a method of shedding the full responsibility for welfare and governance of the Philippines while maintaining all the strategic military benefits. The Philippines was never an equal partner in this, thus making post–1946 Philippine independence a delusion of liberation. To hearken back to the logic of Constantino, the United States liberated the Philippines from itself. The story of the Philippines serves as a stark reminder that decolonization without a full and final withdrawal is merely colonization by another name.

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