

Philippine Foreign Relations: A Look Back in 2018

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The following is an excerpt from the author's article that was first published in "2018 Philippine Development Report" by Hainan Normal University.

The year 2018 was a period of enormous challenges and opportunities for the Philippines in the arena of diplomatic relations. The challenges the country faced in the previous year signalled a need for reexamination of its foreign relations in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly with China and the USA, while pursuing new interests and approaches for optimizing opportunities that would benefit the Filipino population. The Philippine foreign policy essentially contains three mutually constitutive pillars: 1) preservation and enhancement of national security, 2) promotion and attainment of economic security and 3) protection of the rights and promotion of the welfare and interest of Filipinos overseas. Using these three main components, this paper aims to identify, describe and assess the Philippine external affairs at a time when it was increasingly challenging to redefine its priorities, alliances and interests. The Philippines, to put it simply, made notable attempts to diversify and expand its relations in 2018.

Brief Assessment

Since taking the oath to office in 2016, Rodrigo Duterte has been keen on pursuing an independent foreign policy, one that puts a premium on national development as the Philippines engages with the global community. To realize its goals in the aspects of national and economic security, the Philippine state has worked towards broadening ties of cooperation with countries (i.e. Russia, Turkey, Nordic countries, and the Pacific region) and regions with which the Philippines has limited, or non-existent, relations, while sustaining long-established partnerships, such as those with the US, China, and Japan. The strong linkage between migration and socio-economic development prompted the Philippine government to finally launch Overseas Filipino Bank, the banking institution that supports and aids in the transfer of remittances from Filipino migrant workers to their families and hometowns. 2018 was inopportune for Filipino domestic workers affected by the temporary migration ban. It compelled the Philippines to clarify the terms of a bilateral agreement with Kuwait, one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) destinations of Filipino domestic workers following the death of a Filipino migrant in February. Whereas new opportunities for cooperation opened for the Philippines particularly in relation to Russia and China, enduring challenges such as the South China Sea dispute have in check the relations between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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