

US Shapes Philippines into Southeast Asia's "Ukraine"

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With the rise of China, so too rises Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia has slowly transformed in terms of economics, infrastructure, tourism, industry, and politically over the last two decades as Chinese influence increases and inevitably displaces US influence over the region.

At its height, US influence resulted in a major war spanning two decades, engulfing Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The US maintained military bases across the region, including in Thailand and the Philippines. However, when the US finally lost its war against Vietnam, it withdrew much of its military. And in the following decades, the region slowly shifted from depending heavily on trade with the US and its allies, including Japan, over to China.

Today, China stands as the largest trading partner, investor, source of tourism, and infrastructure partner for most of Southeast Asia. This includes the Philippines.

According to Harvard University's [Atlas of Economic Complexity](#), China stood as the Philippines' largest export market. Between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, over 30% of exports from the Philippines go to China. The US and Japan combined account for only around 25%.

China also stands as the largest source of imports into the Philippines at around 33% while the US accounts for around 6% and Japan around 8%. China is indisputably the Philippines' largest trade partner.

China is also the Philippines' best chance at developing badly needed modern infrastructure.

However, while other nations across Southeast Asia are expanding their relationship with

China and building the region together, the Philippines finds itself irrationally cutting itself off from China, laying out a foreign policy demonstrably contradicting its own best interests.

The Philippines Sacrifices Progress to Become US Provocateur

As Chinese-built high-speed rail networks begin operating in Laos and Indonesia and another continues construction in Thailand, the Philippines has recently canceled several joint-Chinese rail projects.

US government-funded Benar News reported in its recent [article](#), “Philippines drops funding deal with China for 3 railway projects,” that not only will the Philippines no longer seek funding from China, it will also seek out alternative contractors to build the rail projects. Since no other nation is capable of building such projects in the region, the Philippines has for all intents and purposes put infrastructure investment on hold.

Earlier this year, the Philippines also signed a military basing agreement with the United States. The Washington Post in its [article](#), “U.S. reaches military base access agreement in the Philippines,” would report that:

U.S. military forces will be given access to four new military bases in the islands, solidifying a months-long U.S. effort to expand its strategic footprint across the Pacific region to counter threats from China.

Since then, the Philippines has also begun talks with the US for the development of a port dangerously close to China’s island province of Taiwan.

Reuters in its article, “Exclusive: U.S. military in talks to develop port in Philippines facing Taiwan,” would report:

U.S. military involvement in the proposed port in the Batanes islands, less than 200 km (125 miles) from Taiwan, could stoke tensions at a time of growing friction with China and a drive by Washington to intensify its longstanding defence treaty engagement with the Philippines.

While the United States justifies its growing military presence in the Philippines by citing maritime disputes in the South China Sea, it should be noted that maritime disputes are common both around the world and particularly in Southeast Asia. Not only do many Southeast Asian states have disputes with China, they also have overlapping claims and resulting disputes with one another.

These disputes can result in sometimes dramatic public displays. Malaysia, for example, in 2017 sank nearly 300 foreign fishing boats seized amid these disputes, including fishing boats from the Philippines, Nikkei Asia [reported](#). While these disputes become somewhat heated, they are always resolved bilaterally all while nations in the region, including China, maintain otherwise constructive and even close economic and diplomatic ties.

Thus, the US is using common maritime disputes as a pretext to insert itself militarily into the region, attempting to escalate ordinary disputes into a regional or even global crisis. In reality, the US is building up its military presence, not to defend its supposed allies, but to encircle and contain China while transforming host nations into battering rams against China.

This US strategy has had varying success across Southeast Asia, with the Philippines being by far its greatest success. This is owed to the unique and unfortunate history of the Philippines as a US colony from 1898-1946 and its defacto subordination to the US ever since.

The Philippines as an American Foothold

The US State Department's Office of the Historian in a [publication](#) titled, "The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," would admit that the US seized the Philippines as a US colony from Spain and then waged a brutal war of subjugation against the Philippine people.

The US State Department admits:

The ensuing Philippine-American War lasted three years and resulted in the death of over 4,200 American and over 20,000 Filipino combatants. As many as 200,000 Filipino civilians died from violence, famine, and disease.

It also admitted that:

U.S. forces at times burned villages, implemented civilian reconcentration policies, and employed torture on suspected guerrillas, while Filipino fighters also tortured captured soldiers and terrorized civilians who cooperated with American forces. Many civilians died during the conflict as a result of the fighting, cholera and malaria epidemics, and food shortages caused by several agricultural catastrophes.

While the US granted the Philippines "independence" in 1946, the US has maintained varying degrees of political and military control over the nation ever since. Under the presidential administration of **Rodrigo Duterte**, the Philippines attempted unsuccessfully to expel the US military presence. President Duterte's successor, **Ferdinand Marcos Jr.** has since rolled back the incremental gains in sovereignty and dignity achieved during Duterte's term in office.

To explain the deep, institutional subordination of the Philippines to US interests, demonstrably at the cost of the Philippines' own best interests including economic development, trade, and infrastructure, Philippine **Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo** would explain at a Washington-based [April 2023 talk](#) hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that the core of his nation's political leadership has been shaped by decades of US indoctrination.

Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo would explain:

Our partnership has thrived on other vibrant connections. And people are the throbbing core of our ties. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Fulbright program in the Philippines, which has 8,000 alumni and is the longest continuing Fulbright program in the world. The seeds of the future of our alliance are born in the many platforms in our relations where our peoples, whether they are scientists, entrepreneurs, civil society partners, youths, and artists, incubate new ideas and contemplate on visions together.

The [Fulbright program](#), created by the US State Department, claims on its website that it "expands perspectives through academic and professional advancement and cross-cultural dialogue." By "expanding perspectives" it means indoctrinating potential leaders in politics,

media, business, education, and culture to adopt a pro-US worldview and create a US-influenced cadre of administrators in nations around the world.

Together with other US government programs, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) which funds political parties, education programs, media platforms, and many of the “civil society partners” Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo referred to in his speech, the Fulbright program is part of the toolset the US uses to politically capture a targeted nation.

An example of this is **Maria Ressa**. She is a [1986 Fulbright alumni](#) who founded the media platform “Rappler” [funded](#) by the US government through the NED. Both Ressa and her Rappler media platform are loud advocates for greater US influence over the Philippines and the rolling back of relations with China. Rappler’s media content is indistinguishable from US government talking points because Rappler *is an extension of* US government influence.

In terms of political capture, the Philippines represents one of Washington’s success stories. Enduring US influence, first as the Philippines’ colonial master and then through decades of indoctrination and political interference via the NED and programs like Fulbright, Washington has convinced Manila to forego the benefits of trade and economic development together with China and the rest of Asia in exchange for positioning itself as Southeast Asia’s “Ukraine.”

Just as Kiev attempted to convince the Ukrainian people that the West would provide a superior substitute for the nation’s long-standing ties with Russia only to instead find itself abandoned at the end of a self-destructive proxy war, Manila is likewise attempting to convince the people of the Philippines that the US, Australia, and Japan will provide better alternatives to Chinese-driven trade, economic progress, and infrastructure development. In reality, all the US is building in the Philippines are military bases meant to drag both it and the region into greater instability, economic stagnation, and possibly even war.

Only time will tell if China’s patient rise and ability to build up the rest of the region will outlast America’s desire and ability to divide and destroy Asia. The Philippines, for its part, serves as an indicator of which direction the region may move in. Sadly, for now, it seems the US capacity for dividing and endangering the region is still very much intact.

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