

Philippine President Aquino in Washington boosts military ties

Joseph Santolan
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Philippine President Benigno Aquino travelled to Washington from June 7 to 10, where he met with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office, as well as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and members of the US Senate. The meetings were part of Washington's "pivot" to the Asia Pacific, a calculated policy for the strategic military containment of China. Increased military ties, intelligence sharing, and the dramatic expansion of the rotational deployment of US troops in the Philippines were all agreed upon during these meetings.

On June 5, two days before Aquino's arrival, the US Senate unanimously passed Resolution 481, which called for US support for "increased Philippine defense modernization" and the "rotational presence of US armed forces in the Philippines." The call for the rotational presence of US armed forces is part of the push for renewed basing arrangements in the Philippines, along the lines of the agreement reached by Washington and Canberra in November last year. It would allow the stationing of US troops in the Philippines and grant access to Philippine naval and military facilities.

Aquino's visit further cemented the plans announced in January to reach such an arrangement. Prior to Aquino's visit, Martin Dempsey, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited Manila and obtained a public commitment from the Aquino administration to grant US forces the use of Subic Naval facilities and Clark Airfield, the former US bases in the country. Aquino stated during his visit to Washington that US military forces and equipment would be deployed to the Philippines in greater numbers and more frequently.

On June 8, Aquino met with Secretary of State Clinton, who stated in her public remarks at the conclusion of the meeting that "the United States does

not take a position on the competing territorial claims in the South China Sea." This is the standard White House boilerplate on the South China Sea dispute. In practice, Washington has been actively undermining Chinese claims. Clinton made this obvious when she announced: "We are also working closely together to increase information and intelligence exchanges and coordination on maritime domain issues. And in this context, I'm pleased to announce today that the United States will support the construction, outfitting, and training of a new National Coast Watch Center in the Philippines."

The National Coast Watch Center was created by Aquino in September 2011, under Executive Order (EO) 57. It coordinates the activities of the Philippine Navy, Coast Guard, and numerous other sections of the Philippine government for the expressed aim of "guarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity." EO 57 explicitly states that Philippine national territory is defined by Philippine Baselines Law. This law establishes the Philippine claim to portions of the South China Sea, including all waters and islands currently disputed by China. The National Coast Watch Center is commissioned to "apprehend violators" of Philippine territory.

Washington's move to fund the construction of the National Coast Watch Center, and share surveillance and intelligence data with the Philippines, signals that the Obama administration is not only taking a position on competing territorial claims, it is encouraging one of the disputants—the Philippines—to aggressively assert its claim. This is sharply increasing the risk of armed conflict.

An interview with Aquino in the *Washington Post* quoted the Philippine president as saying that "the US deployment of surveillance aircraft, such as Navy P-3C

Orion planes and Global Hawk drones, would be ‘a welcome development’.” Aquino went on to say that “the Philippines was particularly interested in acquiring a land-based radar that could enable it to monitor the wide expanses of the South China Sea.” These deployments are what lie behind the statements of Hillary Clinton that the US will be expanding joint surveillance and the gathering and sharing of intelligence in the country.

On June 9, Aquino met with President Obama and further cemented these agreements. Obama stated that on “security and military issues, we had discussions about how we can continue to consult closely together, to engage in training together, work on a range of regional issues together—all of which is consistent with the announced pivot by the United States back to Asia, and reminding everybody that, in fact, the United States considers itself, and is, a Pacific power.” Obama’s statement makes explicit what lurks behind the rhetoric of “freedom of navigation” and assistance to the Philippines: the naked assertion of US military power in the Asia Pacific.

Obama, Clinton and the US Senate resolution invoked the long “storied” history of US-Philippine relations. The actual history of the relationship between the two countries is a bloody testament to the role of US imperialism in the Asia Pacific. The Philippines was the United States’ first, and only, official colony. It was acquired from Spain at the end of the Spanish American war in the Treaty of Paris for \$US20 million. And it was conquered by US troops over the space of a decade, from 1899 to 1909, in a vicious colonial war that resulted in the death of approximately 20,000 US troops and anywhere from 200,000 to 1.5 million Philippine civilians. The suppression of the Philippine population was carried out by the use of concentration camps, military censorship, the routine use of torture, the execution of unarmed prisoners and the massacres of whole villages of men, women and children. Disease took the toll even higher.

President Aquino had the unmitigated gall to invoke the writings of Mark Twain, some of the most trenchant and acid denunciations of US imperialism ever penned, as examples of the friendship between the governments of the United States and the Philippines.

The deals and speeches made during Aquino’s visit to Washington further ratchet up tensions in the South

China Sea, and are another step toward war.



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