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## ***Is the Philippines a Beneficiary of U.S.-Chinese Confrontation? [1,280 words]***

When President Ferdinand Marcos was running an authoritarian regime in the Philippines (1965-1986), he was once asked about rumors of rigged elections in his country.

“I promised I will give you the right to vote,” he said, according to a joke circulating at that time, “But I did not say anything about counting those votes.”

The Marcos regime—and the rise and fall of Ferdinand Marcos and First Lady Imelda—is now being portrayed as a glittering musical titled “Here Lies Love” on Broadway: the showcase for some of the biggest hits in New York’s famed theatre district.

The New York Times ran a review under the headline “[Disco and a Dictatorship: Brewing a Combustible Mix.](#)”

The U.S., which was a close political and military ally of the Marcos dictatorship, took a backseat after his fall from power—and never exerted the same influence under successive post-Marcos governments.

But the U.S. has now resurrected its relationship and has made a strong comeback under Marcos’s son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took over as president in June 2022, and whose country is now going to be one of the biggest single beneficiaries of the growing political—and possibly military—confrontation between the U.S. and China.

The positive fallout is on the Philippines as the U.S. bolsters its military relations with Manila with millions of dollars in U.S. arms and security assistance.

The U.S. has also designated the Philippines a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA), strengthening security ties between the two nations.

The Philippines joins the privileged group of 19 MNNA, including Israel, Australia,

Egypt, South Korea, Jordan, and New Zealand, among others.

They are all “close American allies that have strategic working relationships with U.S. armed forces” but are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The strong new relationship has also contributed to the development of significant opportunities for U.S. defense and security equipment manufacturers and service providers to enhance the Philippines’ self-defense capabilities, according to the U.S. Commercial Service (USCS), the trade promotion arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce’s International Trade Administration.

The U.S. provides an average of about \$120 million per year in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to the Philippines. In 2023, it will be in excess of \$200 million.

The U.S. Government has expressed its intent to make available to the Philippines \$100 million in additional Foreign Military Financing to be used by the Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) to fund its armed forces modernization programs.

According to the USCS, the Philippines’ defense market is contingent with the 15-year modernization program (2013-2028) currently underway.

“With the current challenges faced by the Philippines, including maritime disputes with China in the West Philippine Sea,” the Department of National Defense reiterated that air power is a critical component in its joint forces, especially in territorial defense.

The Philippine DND is a key player in the Indo-Pacific region as it continues to bolster its defense capabilities and maintain regional stability.

Under Horizon 3, the desired capabilities are focused on enhancements to C4ISTAR, air defense systems, air and surface interdiction systems, anti-tank systems, and ground rocket systems, all pending approval by the Department of National Defense.

During a briefing in April 2022, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: “Our security alliance is an enduring source of strength for both of our nations. Today, we focused on ways to continue our close partnership under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement so that our forces can work even more closely together, including to provide humanitarian assistance and respond to disasters.”

“We also discussed deepening our robust economic ties, including through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. We’re working closely with other IPEF partners to build out this framework to help our economies grow faster and fairer so that all our people can reach their full potential, lead on issues shaping the 21st-century economy, and do it in a way that is sustainable for our planet.”

At the April briefing, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said the two countries

had just celebrated the start of their 38th annual Exercise Balikatan.

He said more than 17,000 troops are participating in 2023. “It is the largest and most complex iteration in the exercise’s history.”

“Now the commitments that we made today will further integrate our strong bilateral ties into multilateral networks, including with Japan and Australia, and we discussed plans to conduct combined maritime activities with like-minded partners in the South China Sea later this year as we work to enhance our collective deterrence.”

“Our alliance is ultimately guided by our deep and enduring commitment to freedom. So, we’re not just allies, we’re democratic allies, and the United States and the Philippines are bound by a common vision for the future—a vision that’s anchored in the rule of law and freedom of the seas and respect for the territorial integrity of sovereign states.”

Mao Ning, a spokeswoman for China’s foreign ministry, was quoted as saying: “Out of self-interest, the United States continues to strengthen its military deployment in the region with a zero-sum mentality, which is exacerbating tension in the region and endangering regional peace and stability.”

She said, “Countries in the region should remain vigilant against this and avoid being coerced and used by the United States.”

In February 2023, the Biden administration announced a new conventional arms transfer policy. One of the objectives is to “Prevent arms transfers that risk facilitating or otherwise contributing to violations of human rights or international humanitarian law...”

After a meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. at the White House in May 2023, the Biden administration issued a [statement](#) that said in part, “The United States and the Philippines’ shared democratic values strengthen our alliance immeasurably.”

Promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, and ensuring civil society leaders and members of marginalized communities are safe from violence, are key priorities for the U.S.-Philippines relationship.

Natalie J. Goldring, a Visiting Professor of the Practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, told IPS, “The Biden administration’s new conventional arms transfer policy is a welcome development. But the policy needs to be fully implemented to be effective.”

“The U.S. security relationship with the Philippines is an important test of whether the policy rhetoric will become reality. So far, the signs are not encouraging.”

[Reporting](#) by Human Rights Watch\* indicates that human rights violations continue to

occur regularly under the Marcos administration. They report that “Marcos has done little to address the pending human rights issues.”

Police and their agents continue their ‘drug war’ killings, though at a lower rate than during the Duterte administration. “The authorities remain responsible for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests of activists and outspoken critics.”

“It’s time to stop rewarding countries that systematically abuse the human rights of their citizens. At a minimum, U.S. arms and security assistance to the Philippines should be paused until the Marcos administration demonstrates significant improvement in its human rights record,” said Goldring, who also represents the Acronym Institute at the United Nations on conventional weapons and arms trade issues.

“Continuing to provide U.S. military assistance and arms transfers sends exactly the wrong message. Business as usual is likely to perpetuate the human rights abuses the Biden administration claims to oppose,” she declared.

**\*HRW**

**statement:**

“[Philippines: Marcos Failing on Rights](#): A Year On, Course Correction Needed.” Human Rights Watch, June 28, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/node/385256/printable/print>.

**[White House Statement on Marcos’s Visit](#)**:  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/01/fact-sheet-investing-in-the-special-friendship-and-alliance-between-the-united-states-and-the-philippines/#:~:text=The%20Philippines%20is%20the%20United,the%20broader%20Indo%2DPacific%20region>.