

Does Duterte’s “Military Independence” from the U.S. Create New Opportunities for China?

The Philippines officially announced the ending of the National Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States.

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

Global Research, February 12, 2020

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)
Theme: [Intelligence](#)

The Philippines officially announced the ending of the National Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States. The denial of the U.S. military’s presence will give China a chance to expand militarization of the South China Sea and severely weaken the U.S. positioning in Southeast Asia. The VFA, signed in 1998, established the legal status for U.S. warships, aircraft and soldiers to be stationed in the Philippines.

Philippine **Secretary of State Teddy Locsin Jr.** signed and sent to the US Government the same day an affirmation of Manila’s official cancellation of the agreement, saying on [Twitter](#):

“The Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of the United States has received the notice of termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement. As a legal courtesy there will be no further factual announcements following this self-explanatory development.”

According to presidential spokesperson **Salvador Panelo**, the agreement termination will take effect 180 days from today, adding that

“It’s time we take care of ourselves. We will strengthen our defenses ourselves and not rely on any other country.”

Since Duterte came to power in 2016, he has repeatedly referred to severing ties with the U.S. while pursuing closer ties with non-traditional allies like Russia and China. The leader openly expressed his frustration with Washington when several U.S. officials made comments about his war on drugs. The discord was heightened when the U.S. Senate passed a resolution intended to punish Filipino officials involved in the drug war. Washington also was critical of the arrest of **Senator Leila De Lima**, a human rights activist and critic of the Duterte administration, who herself was arrested for drug-related allegations.

Senator Ronald Dela Rosa, who led the police force from 2016 to 2018, said the U.S. Embassy did not explain why his visa was cancelled but thought it was related to those murdered under his supervision. Duterte ordered an end to the military treaty after the U.S. cancelled the visas of Dela Rosa, who also took part in leading the war on drugs in the Philippines.

The cancellation of the VFA will benefit China mostly. The VFA has helped prevent China

from strengthening construction and militarization of the West Coast Shoal since 2016. China urgently prepared to renovate and militarize this area before the decision of the International Court of Arbitration on the South China Sea sovereignty dispute was issued in July 2016. It was the VFA that prevented the conversion of Scarborough Shoal into a Chinese artificial island. The presence of the U.S. military's A-10 Warthogs and F/A-18 fighters caused China to abandon the Scarborough idea.

Despite this, China completed construction structures on seven reefs and the Spratly Islands. The acquisition of Scarborough Shoal will give them greater control over the disputed waters in the South China Sea. The Chinese side took control of Scarborough from the Philippines in a tension between the two ships in 2012. Since then, China has maintained a military presence in the shoal with numerous maritime forces and coast guard vessels. It was China's occupation of Scarborough that prompted the Philippine government to bring the matter to international court.

China asserts that Beijing has sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea, including the continental shelves of countries that share the same sovereignty claims on strategic maritime routes in the South China Sea, despite the Court's ruling. The 2016 Permanent Arbitration denied and nullified all of China's claims. After China conducted reclamation in the Spratlys and conducted illegal militarization, the U.S. became clear about the real danger posed by Beijing in the region against other regional states.

The three major Chinese artificial islands are just reef and outposts, almost impossible to attack.

The Philippines' loss of the VFA will give China a chance to carry out its long-term goal. When the VFA is cancelled, China can completely eliminate other countries from the South China Sea militarily if it can deploy troops, build outposts and conduct militarization at all the locations of all these military bases.

Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin Jr. earlier also emphasized that the regular presence of U.S. military forces prevented China from taking drastic actions in waters to the west of the Philippines. Does this now mean that Duterte will continue his path moving closer to China? There are still the major issues of dividing the South China Sea equitably that prevents a full alliance between Beijing and Manila despite Duterte's hostility to Washington. However, Duterte's move has ensured that the Philippines has certainly opened the way for the South China Sea to be redrawn.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

Paul Antonopoulos is a Research Fellow at the Center for Syncretic Studies.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Paul Antonopoulos](#), Global Research, 2020

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Paul Antonopoulos](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca