

Genocide and the Philippines-American War. President Rodrigo Duterte and Neocolonialism

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Has Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte declared an end to the long-standing U.S.-Philippines alliance by seeking closer relations with China and Russia?

It seems that "America's Pacific Century" intended to maintain its influence throughout the Asia-Pacific region and isolate China has hit a major roadblock.

The relationship between the Philippines and the United States has been quite interesting with Duterte making headlines across the world in 2016 criticizing the foreign policy of the Obama administration.

According to a Reuter's report on October 20th 'Duterte aligns Philippines with China, says U.S. has lost' on Duterte's trip to China last October with a business delegation of over 200 people. Duterte spoke at a forum in the Great Hall of the People, and said "in this venue, your honors, in this venue, I announce my separation from the United States." Duterte continued "Both in military, not maybe social, but economics also. America has lost "according to the report. What Duterte said next made Washington nervous:

I've realigned myself in your ideological flow and maybe I will also go to Russia to talk to (President Vladimir) Putin and tell him that there are three of us against the world - China, Philippines and Russia. It's the only way

Here is Washington's response to Duterte's statement about the U.S.-Philippine relationship:

In Washington, the U.S. State Department said it was "baffled" by Duterte's comments and would seek an explanation when Daniel Russel, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, visits Manila this weekend.

We are going to be seeking an explanation of exactly what the president meant when he talked about separation from the U.S.," said State Department spokesman John Kirby. "It's not clear to us exactly what that means in all its ramifications



Duterte's visit to China was not the only latest development that made headlines; he also called Obama a "son of a bitch" making it clear that he was not interested in diplomatic relations with the United States. The U.S.-Philippine relationship is a "colonial relationship" at best and Duterte wants to change that arrangement. The Philippines has been

a “colony” of Washington since *The Spanish-American War*, not a sovereign nation that has its own political and economic interests at hand.

Duterte’s Controversial ‘War on Drugs’ Policy

Duterte’s domestic policy against drug dealers received criticism from the *United Nations*, *Human Rights Watch*, *Amnesty International* and the Obama administration. In a nationally televised speech, Duterte said that “*If (a criminal) fights, and he fights to the death, you can kill him.*” He went on to say, “*Please feel free to call us, the police, or do it yourself if you have the gun ... you have my support.*” *The Associated Press* reported on September 5th what Obama had said at a news conference in Hangzhou, China if he does meet with Duterte concerning the extrajudicial killings:

“I always want to make sure that if I’m having a meeting that it’s actually productive, and that we’re getting something done,” Obama said.

We recognize the significant burden that the drug trade plays not just in the Philippines but around the world, and fighting narco-trafficking is tough. But we will always assert the need to have due process and to engage in that fight against drugs in a way that’s consistent with basic international norms. And so, undoubtedly, if and when we have a meeting this is something that is going to be brought up,” said Obama, who has been attending a meeting of the Group of 20 nations

Duterte was not pleased on what Obama had said when he responded in a speech in a local convention in Manila the following month “*Instead of helping us, the first to criticize is this State Department, so you can go to hell, Mr Obama, you can go to hell.*” Although extra-judicial killings of suspected drug dealers are a policy that crosses the line when it comes to human rights violations, it’s a problem that the Filipinos themselves must solve. Saudi Arabia has committed numerous human rights violations against its citizens since its founding and Washington does not criticize the Saudi monarchy for it. Illegal drugs are a serious problem in the Philippines so many Filipino’s actually support Duterte’s decision to allow extra-judicial killings. *The Daily Mail* reported in 2016 that “*In a separate poll the following day, 84 percent of Filipinos said they supported the drug crackdown although most felt it important to arrest suspects alive.*” Whether you agree or disagree with Duterte’s drug war policies, it is a Filipino problem, a problem that needs no interference from Washington. Only the Filipino’s should decide how to deal with the drug epidemic that is a result from the “*War on Drugs.*”

Colonialism, Oppression, and Imperial Conquest



To Duterte, it is not just about Washington’s criticism of his war on drugs policy, it is about the history between the U.S. and the Philippines during and after the *Spanish-American War*. The Philippines became a colony of the U.S. after the *Spanish-American War* until 1946 and since its independence; it has remained a vassal state.

One of the main chapters in the Philippine-American War Duterte had mentioned was the Moro Rebellion (1899-1913), a conflict between the U.S. forces and the Moro people (ethnic Muslims) that took place in the southern part of the Philippines in the islands of Mindanao, Jolo and the Sulu Archipelago. The Moros are a tribe, committed to establishing a ‘Moro

Nation. It was a “national liberation movement” of the Bangsamoro (an autonomous political entity within the Philippines for the ethnic Moro). The Moros have resisted foreign invaders for more than 400 years that included the Japanese, Spanish and the Americans.

In 1968, a conflict also erupted between the Moros and the Philippine government under the U.S-backed dictatorship of President Ferdinand Marcos. It was known as the Jabidah massacre that resulted in the killings of more than 60 Filipino Muslim commandos on a planned operation by the Marcos government to reclaim the north-eastern part of the Malaysian state of Sabah. Sabah was under the rule of the Sultanate of Sulu, a Muslim state which was part of the Malaysian Federation since 1963 under the Malaysia Agreement. However, the Philippine government claimed that the eastern part of Sabah was never part of any foreign entity and that Sabah was only leased and still remained part of the Philippines.

There were numerous battles between U.S. and the Filipino forces. One of the conflicts took place on May 2, 1902 called *‘The Battle of Bayan’* where U.S. troops clashed with the Moros near Bayan on the island of Mindanao which claimed the deaths of more than 350 Moros and a dozen U.S. soldiers.

The online news website www.sunstar.com.ph based in the Philippines published Duterte’s comments on America’s history in the Philippines during the early 20th Century. Duterte was asked by a reporter from *Reuters* about Obama’s response on the extra-judicial killings and he went on to mention the history of *The Battle of Bud Dajo* on March 6th, 1906 on the island of Jolo:

“Who is he? When as a matter of fact at the turn of the century, before the Americans left, the Philippines, in the pacification campaign of the Moro in this island, there were around 6 million ang population ng Moro, how many died? Six hundred. If you can answer this question and give an apology, I will answer him,” Duterte said

It was a massacre by the U.S. forces that attacked the Moros with advanced weapons such as mountain guns since an agreement between both sides that failed to establish a peaceful resolution. The Moros wanted Bud Dajo as a shelter, far away from the war. *The Sunstar* article published the details of what had happened at Bud Dajo:

On July 4, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt declared the war over after successfully subjugating the insurrectionist Filipino forces, and in his own proclamation said, “except in the country inhabited by the Moro tribes, to which this proclamation does not apply.”

The Moro Province was created in 1903, comprising the southern Mindanao and the Sulu islands. Unlike the other provinces, the Moro Province was to be staffed by US Army officers, simply because US believed the Moro Province was backward and need to be civilized and educated on democracy

It was the continuation of Manifest Destiny when the U.S. expanded its economic, political and social influences throughout North America particularly affecting indigenous tribal nations. That same program was obviously implemented on the Philippines:

On March 5, 1906, Woods ordered his officers to gather 800 of his men from the 6th and 19th Infantry, the 4th Cavalry, the 28th Artillery Battery, the Sulu

Constabulary, and sailors from the gunboat Pampanga, led by Colonel Duncan, to Jolo. They were armed with mountain guns, rifles, bayonets, fast-firing pistols and grenades. When negotiations for the Moro people who sought refuge in Bud Dajo failed, they attacked.

The Moro warriors were armed with kris, barongs, and spears. The attack ended on March 7, 1906, with not one Moro standing; women and children among them. The Americans lost two dozen men and some 70 wounded. It was a complete massacre. The "victory" that was earlier celebrated in the US was immediately tainted with shame after the US Congress realized there were women and children among the dead

Duterte reminded Washington that the Philippines are neither a colony nor a vassal state:

"The PH is not a vassal state, we have long ceased to be a colony of the US. Alam mo, marami diyang mga columnista they look upon Obama and the US as we are the lapdogs of this country. I do not respond to anybody but to the people of the Republic of the Philippines. Wala akong pakialam sa kanya. Who is he to confront me, as a matter of fact, America has one too many to answer for the misdeeds in this country," Duterte said

The Philippine-American War was about U.S. Imperialism and maintaining a foothold within the Asia-Pacific region.

On December 10th 1898, Spain ceded Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the U.S. under the *Treaty of Paris*. The Philippines was technically sold for \$20 million. It was a justification for the U.S. to permanently occupy the Philippines. The Spanish Empire's downfall led to the rise of the ever expanding American Empire. The U.S. government installed a military dictatorship on the Philippines on December 21, 1898 (as they did in other newly acquired territories including Puerto Rico). U.S. President William McKinley issued the Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation which said that the U.S. has "*come, not as invaders or conquerors, but as friends, to protect the natives in their homes, in their employment, and in their personal and religious rights.*"

The U.S. military experienced a resistance in the Philippines which led to The *Philippine-American War*. The leader of the resistance was Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy, a politician, a revolutionary and a military leader who led the defeat against Spanish forces and became the first President of the Philippines from 1899-1901. On January 5th, 1899 Aguinaldo declared the independence of the Philippines and established a "rebel" government in Malolos on January 23rd, 1899. Aguinaldo was named the President of the newly established government who led Philippine forces against Spain and then went on to fight the U.S. government with guerilla warfare tactics. Conflict began almost immediately between the Aguinaldo led rebel government forces and the U.S. in Manila on February 4th, 1899. U.S. forces went on to take control of a volcanic island called Jolo located in the province of Sulu on May 18th, 1899. Numerous conflicts soon followed as the rebel government suffered heavy losses due to a well-armed U.S. military. Aguinaldo was forced to continuously move his base of military operations during the war. The U.S. government wanted Aguinaldo dead or alive.

Since Aguinaldo declared independence for the Philippines, President McKinley had appointed the '*First Philippine Commission*' or '*The Schurman Commission*' on January 20, 1899. Dr. Jacob Gould Schurman was chosen as the chairman with other prominent

members to investigate the living conditions throughout the Philippines and make recommendations to solve problems in an attempt to gain influence over the Filipino population. However, conflicts continued between U.S. forces and the Filipino rebels the following month as Aguinaldo's 'Revolutionary Congress' which was known as the '*Malolos Congress*' voted to stop fighting and give the peaceful resolution set forth by the McKinley administration a chance.

The revolutionary congress was then led by Apolinario Mabini, but was replaced by a 'peace cabinet' but suffered from internal conflicts. Aguinaldo appointed a delegation to meet with the commission that was advised by moderate members of the commission. Several arrests were made against the original members' of the peace cabinet including Pedro Paterno and Felipe Buencamin by General Antonio Luna, a field commander for the rebels. Aguinaldo immediately withdrew his support of the peace cabinet and reinstated Mabini and his revolutionary cabinet.

Mr. Schurman advised McKinley to create a new plan as a way for the Filipino's to participate politically and economically within the Philippine government since his original plan had failed to gain popularity with the Revolutionary government. President McKinley ordered his Secretary of State John Hay to tell Schurman that the U.S. government would prefer peace but McKinley received advise from the commission members that the "prosecution of the war until the insurgents submit" would be more beneficial for U.S. interests.


On March 16th, 1900, the '*Second Philippine Commission*' under the future President of the United States William Howard Taft called the *Taft Commission* appointed by McKinley was given legislative and executive powers replacing the Spanish system of law. From the start of the Taft Commission, close to 500 laws were passed including a U.S. inspired judicial system, a supreme court, municipality and tax collections. Elections were also held for new municipal board members. All of the new U.S. imposed systems were under the supervision of the U.S. government.

Emilio Aguinaldo was captured on March 23, 1901 by U.S. forces led by General Frederick Funston along with Filipino troops loyal to the U.S. government. Aguinaldo was replaced by General Miguel Malvar as the new rebel leader and continued the resistance against occupying U.S. forces. Aguinaldo was persuaded to take an "*oath of allegiance*" to the U.S. government on April 19, 1901. A few weeks later, Aguinaldo made a public statement which called on the rebels to lay down their weapons and surrender. H.W. Brands author of '*Bound to Empire: The United States and the Philippines*' published what Aguinaldo had told the rebels:

"Let the stream of blood cease to flow; let there be an end to tears and desolation," Aguinaldo said. "The lesson which the war holds out and the significance of which I realized only recently, leads me to the firm conviction that the complete termination of hostilities and a lasting peace are not only desirable but also absolutely essential for the well-being of the Philippines"

Aguinaldo's full cooperation with the U.S. government was a major setback for the Filipino's cause for independence. Washington replaced Aguinaldo with first, a U.S. Military Dictatorship under Lieutenant General Adna Chaffee, a veteran of the American Civil War and the "Indian Wars" then with a civilian government known as the 'Insular Government' of


the Philippine's led by William Howard Taft who served as its first civilian Governor-General taking the place of the military Governor, Lieutenant General Arthur MacArthur Jr.

However, General Miguel Malvar's new leadership did give the Filipino's hope by continuing what Aguinaldo had started, a revolution against the U.S. occupation. General Malvar launched an offensive against U.S. forces that were occupying the Batangas region while other Filipino generals continued the war in other areas throughout the Philippines. U.S. forces retaliated by targeting Filipino citizens, they forced  interrogations upon the Filipino population and tortured suspected rebels. General Malvar along with his wife, children and close to 3,000 rebels had surrendered on April 16th, 1902 as the *Scorched Earth Policy* began to take a toll on the population. That same month, the U.S. Military went on to establish concentration camps known as "reconcentrados." Close to 300,000 Filipinos were forced into concentration camps in the province of Batangas resulting in the deaths of more than 8,000 Filipinos. Torture methods such as 'water boarding' or what was known then as "the water cure" were also used against prisoners to gain intelligence on the rebels. *The New Yorker magazine* published a story in 2008 titled 'The Water Cure' by Paul Kramer who published a letter written by an American infantry man who was involved in the war explained how the water cure was used against the Filipinos:

A letter by A. F. Miller, of the 32nd Volunteer Infantry Regiment, published in the Omaha World-Herald in May, 1900, told of how Miller's unit uncovered hidden weapons by subjecting a prisoner to what he and others called the "water cure." "Now, this is the way we give them the water cure," he explained. "Lay them on their backs, a man standing on each hand and each foot, then put a round stick in the mouth and pour a pail of water in the mouth and nose, and if they don't give up pour in another pail. They swell up like toads. I'll tell you it is a terrible torture"

The U.S. war in the Philippines resulted in numerous deaths in what could be considered, genocide. Various estimates suggest that at least 400,000 rebels or "insurrectos" and 4,000 U.S. soldiers died in combat. More than 1 million Filipino civilians had died through hardships caused by the "Scorched Earth Policies." Deaths were caused by mass starvation and by U.S. forces targeting towns and villages killing men, women and even children.

The Philippine-American War Ends, but War against the Moros and the Pulahanes Continues

The Philippine-American war ended on July 2, 1902 with the United States as the victor despite the fact that other ethnic groups including the Moros and the Pulahanes continued the war. The Moros Rebellion was defeated almost 11 years later on June 15, 1913 during *The Battle of Bud Bagsak* (as mentioned earlier) where the Moro resistance battled U.S. forces on top of Mount Bagsak on the island of Jolo, Sulu.

The U.S. invasion of the Philippines was an imperial war against the Filipino people. The Filipino's knew that the American invaders were there to exploit their country and establish a permanent base of military operations to subjugate the population and expand their imperial ambitions to neighboring countries within the Asia-Pacific region. The Filipino's initial reaction was to join the revolution against the U.S. occupation, first led by Emilio Aguinaldo and then followed by others including General Miguel Malvar. The revolution was lost. More than 120,000 well armed American soldiers came to fight the Filipinos who formed a resistance against a foreign invader. In the course of the conflict, the Roman Catholic Church was dissolved as a legitimate institution (under Spain the Catholic Church

was legitimized) and the U.S. government gained control of the lands the Church originally owned. The introduction of the English language was legitimized as the official language of the Philippines. The new Philippine government was given “limited self-government” under the *“Philippine Organic Act”* of 1902 which was quickly approved by the U.S. Congress. The U.S. government made a promise to the Filipinos that it would be granted independence 14 years later. However, the U.S. government passed the *1916 Philippine Autonomy Act* (or “Jones Act”) with U.S. Congressional approval under President Woodrow Wilson. The 1916 Philippine Autonomy Act was established as a mechanism for U.S. control as it supposedly protected the *“sovereign rights and interests”* of the Philippines. Independence was granted only if it was “stable” or in other words, a Philippine government that was subservient to Washington.

By 1934, the Philippine Independence Act led to the Commonwealth of the Philippines the following year indirectly ending the case for independence of the Philippines. Elections were held in 1935 with Manuel L. Quezon as the winner effectively becoming the second President of the Philippines ending the insular government which led to the Commonwealth of the Philippines. The Commonwealth government was the final step into the transition into an independent Philippine government. Then World War II began where the Philippines experienced another occupation by a foreign entity, this time by the Imperial Japanese forces (1942-1945). After the end of World War II, the U.S. government granted the Philippines full independence on July 4th, 1946 through the Treaty of Manila.

The Process of Americanization of the Philippines

The Americanization process effected Filipino culture on various levels. An American form of education was imposed on the Filipino population. American culture, the English language and religion was taught through the education process. During the McKinley administration, English and some Philippine languages replaced the Spanish language. Eventually, U.S. administrators in charge of the education process phased out most Filipino ethnic languages and settled for a “monolingual” system in English.

✘ The Americanization process began during the war in 1901 when more than five hundred teachers arrived from the U.S. on a Navy ship called the USS Thomas. The teachers were called the Thomasites. The teachers built numerous educational institutions (the Philippine Normal School and the Philippine School of Arts and Trades or PSAT) that taught Filipinos certain professions and trades under American supervision. The reason why the U.S. government decided to bring teachers and build educational institutions was to make the Philippines a permanent colony. Dr. John Henrik Clark, historian, professor and founder of the Africana studies in various education institutions in the U.S. spoke about the true nature of colonialism:

To control a people you must first control what they think about themselves and how they regard their history and culture. And when your conqueror makes you ashamed of your culture and your history, he needs no prison walls and no chains to hold you

Can Duterte End America’s Domination of the Philippines?

Duterte’s pivot to the east is about the Philippines becoming a sovereign nation with an independent foreign policy. Duterte said that he prefers China over the U.S. *“because it has*

the character of an Oriental. It does not go around insulting people”.

Washington is not comfortable with Duterte’s pivot to China and Russia. In fact, when any nation who seeks to be a ‘sovereign nation’ Washington becomes a threat. Duterte is clearly not following the rules of Washington’s globalized World Order. The Asia-Pacific region is an important part of Washington’s geopolitical interests. According to a recent *Press TV* interview with a former US Senate foreign policy analyst James Jatras mentioned that Washington may plan to destabilize the Philippine government. Jatras said *“that Washington does not “do very well in accepting foreign leaders that we believe are becoming too independent.”* The U.S. is losing its sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific when it comes to China’s growing political and economic power. Washington’s continued aggressive stance (including the Trump administration) toward China has increased over the past several years with the South China Sea dispute, its support of the Syrian government and its close relationship with nations who are non-compliant to Washington including Russia. The Philippines relationship with China concerns Washington. Jatras continued:

“I’m sure that there will be some people here in Washington that will be thinking in terms of how we destabilize Mr. Duterte and maybe replace him, I am not sure how strong that force will be, but no doubt there some people thinking around those lines,” he said.

However, he said, “From the information I’ve seen, most people of the Philippines seem to support the approach he is taking, now that includes also applauding an independent foreign policy, one that is not going to simply serve as a tool of American policy in the western Pacific, that is specifically on confronting China, which is not in the Philippines’ interest”

The mainstream-media already started demonizing Duterte as they do with every other leader who decides not to follow orders from Washington. It is important to note that Duterte is very popular among Filipino’s (his popularity rate is at over 80%) for his stance against the U.S. and his drug war policies. It is also true that 92% of Filipinos view the U.S. in favorable terms according to a 2014 *Pew Research* survey but it is also interesting to note that a 2015 *Pew Research* survey showed that 54% of Filipinos also view China in favorable terms. Trade and investments between China and the Philippines will grow stronger as Duterte seeks closer relations with Beijing. It can be a beneficial arrangement for both countries in economic and geopolitical terms. Anti-Americanism has always existed among the Filipinos as many do know the history of the U.S. invasion and the genocide that followed during the Philippine-American War. U.S. colonial rule prevailed until 1946 then becoming a de-facto vassal state until Duterte was elected.

Yesterday, it was the Congo’s Patrice Lumumba, Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, and Guatemala’s Jacobo Arbenz Guzman among many others who were not favorable to Washington’s geopolitical interests.

They were either overthrown or assassinated. Today it is Russia’s Vladimir Putin, China’s Communist Party, Rouhani of Iran, Bashar al-Assad of Syria and now Rodrigo Duterte. With Washington’s history of supporting dictatorships, the former Philippines President and dictator Ferdinand Marcos, a convicted murderer who killed Julio Nalundasan, his father’s political opponent and winner of the first national elections would be ideal. Marcos was elected President of the Philippines in 1965. The U.S. backed the Marcos government throughout his presidency (1965-1986).

The Marcos dictatorship impoverished the Philippines with more than \$30 billion in debt; U.S. corporations profited while exploiting cheap labor and the environment. Martial law was imposed in 1972 due to horrible economic and social conditions caused by the Marcos government. The Philippines became a police state. By the 1977, more than 60,000 Filipino's were arrested as political prisoners. Many were tortured and sometimes even murdered. Marcos was eventually overthrown in 1986 by supporters of the first female President of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino, a prominent member of the People Power Revolution and the wife of Benigno Aquino Jr. a political opponent of Marcos who was also assassinated in 1983. Washington would prefer a Ferdinand Marcos-style government. Historically, Washington has always supported dictatorships friendly to U.S. corporate interests.

U.S. interventions throughout the world before and after World War II were disastrous for many nations. Duterte wants to end that cycle of the U.S. domination, especially in the Philippines once and for all, but can he succeed? The Duterte government must continue to strengthen its alliances with its neighbors in the Asia-Pacific rim as a united front against the American Juggernaut. What will Washington's next move be? Duterte congratulated Trump after the U.S. elections and said *"I would like to congratulate Mr. Donald Trump. Long live."* Duterte said he can work with the Trump administration as he builds stronger ties with Russia and China. What can Duterte expect from a Trump administration that's aggressive towards China? Tensions are sure to rise.

What is ahead for the U.S.-Philippines relationship? During Trump's campaign for U.S. president, he said "our current strategy of nation-building and regime change is a proven failure" so according to Trump, regime change is not in the interests of his administration. However, before Rex Tillerson was confirmed as Secretary of State he told Latin America Goes Global that he would seek a transition to democracy in Venezuela:

If confirmed, I would urge close cooperation with our friends in the hemisphere, particularly Venezuela's neighbors Brazil and Colombia, as well as multilateral bodies such as the OAS, to seek a negotiated transition to democratic rule in Venezuela

Tillerson's comments seem to imply that the Trump administration will attempt to impose regime change in Venezuela. Will they attempt regime change in the Philippines? One important fact to consider is that the U.S. wants to maintain its influence throughout the Asia-Pacific region and isolate China. So what does it mean for the Duterte government? It all remains to be seen.

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