

Philippines: Pawn In U.S. Encirclement of China

For Whom is the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)?

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Like Sen. Santiago, I can sense the urgency to resolve the VFA issue because we might be overtaken by events unfolding on the US-China relations when it comes to the South China Sea territorial disputes.

As one of the claimants on the disputed islands, together with some of our neighbors, we are being led (like a herd of cattle) towards a regional conflict where China is the main enemy.

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The week following the call of Senator Miriam Santiago to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was filled with uncertainties and vague answers as to the fate of the said treaty.

According to presidential spokesperson Edwin Lacierda, the Palace is open for the review of the VFA but its abrogation is not an option in the discussions made.

Statements and press releases from the different departments made the review of the VFA, and much more its abrogation, a minor issue and not the immediate concern of the administration. Such disposition changed overtime when the US Pacific Command Chief Adm. Robert Willard visited the country and attended the RP-US Mutual Defense Board meeting at Camp Aguinaldo last August 18.

According to the Department of National Defense Spokesman, Eduardo Batac, "This matter is being taken up by the Senate. It has been presented. We will wait for the debates or action on this," and "... we will just heed the recommendations of the legislators. When there is necessity for us, we will review it (VFA)."

In reference to the Joint Resolution No. 3 filed by Sen. Santiago, the Congress as a whole can terminate the VFA. Now the ball is with the legislators and the country will just wait on how long they will "dribble" the decision on the matter. Like Sen. Santiago, I can sense the urgency to resolve the VFA issue because we might be overtaken by events unfolding on the US-China relations when it comes to the South China Sea territorial disputes.

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An increased defense alliance with the U.S. leading to a quiet escalation of its military presence will make the Philippines a pawn in the Pentagon's plan of containment and encirclement of China. If Aquino III makes the mistake of succumbing to this pressure, he runs the risk of antagonizing Beijing's trade ties with Manila and its growing investments in mining, electronics, and other industries.

It could provoke retaliation from China in the disputed Spratly islands. (Source: Center for People Empowerment in Governance). Even the US government (and our government) kept on denying that there is no American military base in Mindanao and that their troops are here only for military trainings, but we just cannot deny the reality that the US is using the VFA to have their military base here.

As reported by the New York Times – “at least 600 American troops under the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, headquartered in the Philippine military camp in Camp Navarro in Zamboanga City, have remained in the country and have been using the VFA as a means to stay.”

Moreover, the controversial agreement has created an atmosphere of dependency on the part of our AFP and will continue to do so now that the US government has approved the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) \$434 million to fund three projects in the Philippines for five years.

On top of this was the reported \$18.4 million worth of precision – guided missiles and the suggested leasing of a squadron of F-16 along with T-38 supersonic trainers, aircraft for maritime patrol and two FFG-7 guided-missile frigates to provide a recognized capability to enforce the Philippines' offshore territorial claims.

Based on the abovementioned facts, Filipinos should be wary on the US visit of President Aquino III next month for this might be the beginning of what the previous presidents did – the continuing subservience to a perceived master. If this scenario will push through, let those who voted for PNoy ask, where is the CHANGE you promised?

And the rest of us will say – for whom is the VFA anyway?

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