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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: FUTURE US MILITARY AREAS OF OPERATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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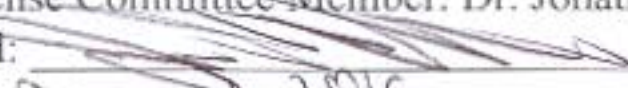
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Executive Summary

Title: Future US Military Areas of Operations in the Philippines

Author: Lieutenant Commander Christian Dumlao, United States Navy

Thesis: The US should utilize six rotating stations located throughout the Philippines in order to deter aggressive Chinese behavior, counter the violent extremists in the south, and respond quickly to a natural disaster or any other crisis that may occur in the region.

Discussion: The US has not had any military bases in the Philippines since 1991 when it closed down Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Field. The attacks on America on September 11, 2001, and the ensuing Global War on Terrorism re-introduced US troops in the Philippines to fight the extremists in Mindanao. The US troops were mostly Special Operations Forces advising, training, and assisting the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The Philippine Constitution of 1987 prohibits foreign military bases, troops, and any other facilities in the country except under a treaty approved by the government of the Philippines and the other contracting state. The recently signed and approved Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the US and the Philippines allows for the temporary and rotational deployment of US forces in the Philippines. However, there are no approved locations for where the US troops will be operating. This paper identifies some viable locations that will allow the US military and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to be appropriately positioned to combat internal and external threats and conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.

Conclusion: Temporary and rotational US forces in the six proposed locations throughout the Philippines will help deter aggressive Chinese behavior, counter the violent extremists in the south, and respond quickly to a natural disaster or any other crisis that may occur in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States (US) has not had any permanent military bases in the Philippines since 1991, after the Philippine Senate voted to shut down the US bases. The US military's departure was also expedited by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, which left Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Field buried in a deep layer of volcanic ash. It wasn't until after the attacks on America on September 11, 2001 (9/11), that a small number of American troops returned to the Philippines to help the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) root out the terrorists operating in the southern part of the country. Article 18, Section 25 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that, "foreign military bases, troops or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and, when the Congress so requires, ratified by a majority of the votes cast by the people in a national referendum held for that purpose, and recognized as a treaty by the other contracting State."¹ However, the Philippine government has allowed some small number of international forces to operate inside the country on a temporary and rotational basis after the 1991 base closures. With President Barack Obama's declaration of a rebalance of American focus to the Asia-Pacific region in 2010, there will undoubtedly be a heavier presence of American troops in the area soon. The question is: Where might they be operating from? The Philippines may play a huge role in helping America achieve its goals with the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, and at the same time gather valuable training and equipment for the modernization of the AFP. The US should utilize six rotating stations located throughout the Philippines in order to deter aggressive Chinese behavior, counter the violent extremists in the south, and respond quickly to a natural disaster or any other crisis that may occur in the region.

ROADMAP

This paper will begin with a brief history of the American bases in the Philippines, why the bases were closed, and what facilitated the return of US troops in the Philippines. Then it will discuss the US National Security Strategy and the Philippine National Security Policy and how they support the six rotating stations. This paper will also describe the Joint Special Operation Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the US and Philippines, and the US Marines in Darwin, Australia as a framework for how to actually establish the proposed six rotating stations. After a review of the JSOTF-P, EDCA, and the Darwin model, the paper will tackle the challenges associated with the EDCA and how US and Philippine priorities will affect its implementation. Then the paper will examine all six proposed rotating stations (Subic Bay Naval Base, Clark Air Field, Basco Airport, Oyster Bay Naval Base, Edwin Andrews Air Base, and Iloilo International Airport) and highlight their advantages and disadvantages. Finally, the paper will conclude with some recommendations for implementation.

HISTORY OF AMERICAN BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES

The history of American bases in the Philippines started at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and was forged during World War II (WWII), when Filipinos fought alongside Americans against the Japanese. After that war, the Philippines gained its independence and formalized the military relationship with the US in the form of two early Cold War treaties: the Military Bases Treaty (1947) and the Mutual Defense Treaty (1951) – the latter of which remains in force today. The Military Bases Treaty would result in the creation of America's largest overseas military bases: Clark Air Field and Subic Bay Naval Base. Clark, Subic, and their smaller satellite bases across the Philippines represented what the Chief of Naval

Operations in 1958 referred to as “an essential part of a worldwide base system designed to deter communism.”² For much of the Cold War and particularly during the Vietnam Conflict, they provided logistics for the US 7th Fleet in the Western Pacific as well as military operations across Southeast Asia until the early 1990s. The Philippines offers locational advantages to the United States that other potential host nations in Southeast Asia either cannot or will not match.³ Although the US military had to close Clark and Subic following the Senate of the Philippines refusal to ratify a new agreement, the two nations are still linked by the Mutual Defense Treaty, and they have continued joint military activities related to counter terrorism and maritime security, with the Philippines dependent on US aid for its security.⁴

The American bases in the Philippines closed down in 1991 for a variety of reasons. Among them were a growing nationalist sentiment among many Filipinos, the amount of financial compensation the Philippines should receive for the bases, questions over which country should have legal jurisdiction over Americans off base or Filipinos on base, and the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. Many Filipinos always saw the US bases as a tangible reminder of American colonial influence over the archipelago.⁵ Even after the Philippines gained its independence in 1946, the US bases were an obvious sign to Filipinos of their dependent relationship under the Americans. Some Filipinos argue full sovereignty and independence can only be achieved with the closing of the US military bases.⁶ The US had bases all over the world after WWII to contain communism. American base treaties with other countries had more favorable terms for the host nations compared to the Philippines. The Philippines received about \$700 million a year in the 1980s from the US for Subic and Clark, a small amount of money compared to the billions of dollars that Germany, Japan, and Italy were receiving.⁷ These factors culminated in the Philippine Senate denying the extension of American bases in the Philippines

by a very close vote of 12 to 11.⁸ A little over a year later, the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo covered Subic and Clark under a thick layer of ash and rendered them unusable. US troops left, and they would not return until the end of the 20th century.

RETURN OF US TROOPS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Having US military presence in different locations all over the Philippines will help serve the National Security Strategy of each nation. In 1999, the Philippine Senate ratified the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the US, allowing American forces to re-enter the country to conduct joint exercises and limited operations with the AFP. Then the attacks on 9/11, solidified the restoration of US-Philippine military ties and accelerated the return of American troops to the Philippines. US troops were sent to the Philippines to assist in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations across its southern islands, where militant Islamic groups with links to Al-Qaeda have long pursued independence from Manila. Washington regards the Philippines as a front-line state in the war on terrorism and is one of the largest recipients of US foreign assistance in Southeast Asia, including both military and development aid. About 60% of US assistance to the country supported development programs in Muslim areas of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago, with the aim of reducing the economic and political conditions that make radical or extremist ideologies and activities attractive.⁹

China's aggressive behavior concerning the disputed islands in the South China Sea has also facilitated the return of American troops in the Philippines. The Philippine government knew it had no military capabilities to defend its territorial claims. Its only hope is a military alliance with and aid from the US. The US government agreed to triple its military assistance to the Philippines to \$30 million, to rebuild maritime and air capabilities that have atrophied, as a result of army dominance within the AFP.¹⁰ Bilateral exercises between the US and the

Philippines are invaluable because the AFP receives international military education and training together with supplies. In turn, the US receives access to military facilities and a dependable ally in the region. Then-US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta stated that, “while the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region. Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of the region.”¹¹ Finally, Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (FHA) operations occur very frequently in the Asia-Pacific region. The US military plays a huge role in FHA operations, and its presence in the Philippines would facilitate for quicker response times and immediate availability of pre-positioned supplies and equipment.

US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

The rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region supports the US National Security Strategy which states, “The US has been and will remain a Pacific power and that American leadership will remain essential to shaping the region’s long-term trajectory to enhance the stability and security, facilitate trade and commerce through an open and transparent system, and ensure respect for universal rights and freedoms.”¹² According to President Obama, “We seek the security of our nation, allies, and partners. We seek the prosperity that flows from an open and free international economic system. We will focus on a broader range of challenges and opportunities, including the security and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific.”¹³ US economic and security interests are intimately tied to the developments in the Asia Pacific, and the primary missions of the US Armed Forces were developed with these interests in mind. These primary missions include Counter Terrorism and Irregular Warfare, Deter and Defeat Aggression, Project Power despite Anti Access/Area Denial Challenges, Provide a Stabilizing Presence, Conduct Stability and Counterinsurgency Operations, and Conduct Humanitarian, Disaster Relief, and

other Operations.¹⁴ The preservation of peace, stability, freedom of navigation, and of US influence in this region will be determined by an underlying balance of military capability and presence along with the use of other instruments of national power. The US must continue to make the necessary investments to maintain this capability, presence, and access in the region while at the same time helping the Philippines meet its National Security Policy objectives.

PHILIPPINE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

The Philippine National Security Policy focuses on four key elements: governance, delivery of basic services, economic reconstruction and sustainable development, and security sector reform.¹⁵ US military presence can assist the Philippine government to achieve these four goals, especially security sector reform. The internally focused Philippine National Security Policy highlights that it has not been able to develop military capabilities within the last twenty years to deal with existential threats due to the ongoing internal threats to its security.¹⁶ The AFP admits that it has been so focused on fighting the real and enduring Muslim insurgency in the south that it has not had the opportunity to modernize its external defense capabilities.¹⁷ This internal effort has consumed most of its military spending. To counter China's aggressive behavior in the region and the insurgency in the south, in 2011, Philippine President Benigno Aquino announced increases in the military budget and welcomed enhanced security cooperation with the US.¹⁸ Continued US military presence can help improve the capabilities of the Philippine military to deal with various threats and accelerate their development, while also ensuring there are ready personnel, supplies, and equipment standing by to assist in the event of a natural disaster. US military assistance to the Philippines aims to win the internal struggle, assist the AFP to transition from an inward focus to a more outward one, and to help the country establish a credible security presence and awareness in the maritime domain.¹⁹ According to

General Ricardo David Jr., AFP Chief of Staff, “The enhancement of AFP capabilities shall not only refer to materiel, but shall also focus along the areas of doctrine, organizational structure, training, personnel, leadership, and education and facilities. Other priority goals include increasing organizational efficiency, professionalism, accountability, and transparency.”²⁰

With China’s economic and military rise, coupled with aggressive behavior in the region especially with the issue of disputed island territories in the South China Sea, there is little the Philippines alone can do to deter China. The Philippines is hoping for a diplomatic venue and compromise with China, multilateral cooperation with other claimant nations, and/or assistance from the US. Furthermore, given its archipelagic geography, the Philippines’ porous borders make it more vulnerable to international criminal activity such as illegal drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms smuggling that affect its stability and security.²¹ Finally, the Philippines is a natural place for disasters because it is situated in the Ring of Fire where active volcanoes are located and it lies in the midst of intersecting geologic fault lines, exposing it to destructive earthquakes and possible tsunamis. It has more than seven thousand islands, which are exposed to at least twenty typhoons per year.²² The two governments need to agree on a plan which allows the US military to operate in the country without violating or encroaching upon the sovereignty of the Philippines.

JOINT SPECIAL OPERATION TASK FORCE – PHILIPPINES

The Joint Special Operation Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) was a solution that satisfied the security and sovereignty needs of both nations. JSOTF-P began operations in the Philippines in January 15, 2002, and was a part of the Global War on Terrorism after the events of 9/11. According to Thomas Lum, “JSOTF-P advises and assists the AFP in the execution of four major counter insurgency/counterterrorism objectives: deny insurgent/terrorist sanctuary;

deny insurgent/terrorist mobility; deny insurgent/terrorist access to resources; and separate the population from the insurgent/terrorist.”²³ JSOTF-P used Special Operations Forces (SOF) along with members of the interagency to build the AFP’s capacity to defeat terrorist organizations and networks that threaten the Philippines and regional stability. This indirect approach to fighting terrorist organizations maintained an exceptionally small US military presence and limited American combat involvement in direct support of the AFP. The JSOTF-P approach was perceived among many in the US SOF community to be extremely successful in disrupting terrorist organizations in the Philippines.²⁴ By 2009, about 600 US military personnel were advising and assisting the AFP in Mindanao. JSOTF-P disbanded in June 2014, ending a successful fourteen year mission.²⁵ A few months before JSOTF-P was decommissioned, the two countries signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The EDCA is designed to improve the US-Philippine military relationship by allowing the US to rotationally station troops and equipment in the Philippines.

ENHANCED DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENT (EDCA)

The controversial Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the US and the Philippines was finalized on April 28, 2014 in Manila. The agreement was signed by Philippine Defense Secretary, Voltaire Gazmin, and US Ambassador to the Philippines, Philip Goldberg, and was timed during an official state visit by President Obama. The ten year deal is the first significant military agreement between the US and the Philippines since American troops were asked to leave the country. According to Renato Cruz de Castro, “It provides the framework by which the Philippines and the US can develop their individual and collective defense capabilities through the deployment of American troops and equipment on a rotational basis, thus skirting the controversial issue of re-establishing US bases in the country.”²⁶ The

EDCA clearly delineates that the US is not allowed to have permanent troops stationed in the country, that it cannot establish a permanent US base, and that it cannot store or position any nuclear weapons in the Philippines. The agreement was designed with the goal of promoting peace and security in the Asia-Pacific, and it also allows the US to respond more quickly to the frequent natural disasters that occur in the region.²⁷ The EDCA remains a bare-bones framework whose specifics have yet to be fleshed out. Even though the agreement was signed over a year and a half ago, there are some challenges facing the implementation of the EDCA and there are still very important details that need to be worked out such as where US troops will be operating from within the Philippines.

CHALLENGES TO EDCA

Although the EDCA was designed as an agreement that would benefit both countries, not all Filipinos support it. Thomas Lum states, “Despite general agreement on the importance of US-Philippine relations, the potential for bilateral friction remains as interests and perceptions occasionally diverge regarding obligations under the alliance, the US role in maintaining Philippine internal and external security, and US response to China’s regional influence.”²⁸ There are still many politicians in the country who firmly believe that any agreement, treaty, or contract with the Americans or any other nation is not wholly for the benefit of Filipinos.²⁹ These same politicians feel that the EDCA caters to US interests more than Philippine interests, it surrenders national sovereignty to the US, and it does not help the Philippines in its dispute against China.³⁰ They also believe that the Philippines can and should rebuild from within, instead of depending on one sided deals with more powerful nations. The US’ neutral stance with regards to the sensitive and central issue of the island disputes also makes the Philippine government wonder if the Americans truly have the Philippines’ interests in mind. Euan Graham

states, “The Philippines’ status as a US treaty ally brings a different complexion to US interactions with other Southeast Asian claimants in the South China Sea. Washington has been careful not to interpret the Mutual Defense Treaty in a way which would embolden Manila to take risks, since the US has only limited legal commitment to the defense of Philippine territory as defined in the 1898 Paris Treaty.”³¹ These nationalists argue that if the Americans won’t support the Philippines now during the island disputes, the Americans will never be there for the benefit of the Filipino people.

Other challenges to the EDCA include possible increase in prostitution, environmental hazards, and the possibility that the Philippines will actually become more vulnerable instead of safer with US military presence in the country. According to religious and various women’s groups, the presence of American troops has incurred high social costs such as prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, human trafficking, drug addiction, and alcoholism.³² These activities degrade the Philippine culture and society over time, and it has led to many cases of abandonment and domestic violence by US service members.³³ Filipino environmentalists are also worried about the hazardous waste and chemicals that come with the buildup and normal operations of a military base that may lead to health and environmental problems. Some also argue that having US forces temporarily stationed throughout the Philippines makes the Philippines a prime target for terrorists and that the EDCA may actually increase tensions between China and the US.³⁴ Launching attacks against the enemy’s logistics system is a key element in China’s overall strategy for dealing with the US military. Attacks against logistic systems described in China’s writings include blockades, attacking supply depots, and striking at air or sea supply missions.³⁵ Even with the current challenges facing the EDCA, it was just approved by the Philippine Supreme Court and we will see US troops operating throughout the

Philippines sooner rather than later. The United States Marine Corps (USMC) rotational forces in Darwin Australia can serve as a good model for how both countries can go about implementing the EDCA.

THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS IN DARWIN, AUSTRALIA

In November 2011, President Barack Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the deployment of Marines to Darwin for around six months at a time. During this period, they conducted exercises and training on a rotational basis with the Australian Defence Force.³⁶ The first set of rotational Marines deployed to Darwin from April to September of 2012. This small complement of Marines engaged in joint training with Southeast Asian countries. Darwin is a good location because it provides the US better control over the main sea lines of communications around Indonesia and the Philippines, along with direct access to the Indian Ocean.³⁷ This form of rotational and temporary deployments enhances the US regional presence while also avoiding the creation of any new US bases on foreign soil. The Darwin model seems to be working out just fine for both the Americans and the Australians; and it can be used as a precedent for implementing the EDCA in the Philippines. However, there are certain variables within the Philippines and their relationship with the Americans that can pose as barriers to the successful execution of the EDCA. Careful consideration also needs to be given to the priorities and interests of both nations when choosing the location of these temporary and rotational bases.

US PRIORITIES AND INTERESTS

The US priorities and interests with regards to the Philippines include maintaining the US-Philippine alliance, enhancing security and stability in the South China Sea, assisting the

AFP in counterterrorism, maritime domain awareness (MDA), modernization, supporting the peace process in Muslim areas of Mindanao, promoting broad-based economic growth, and helping the Philippines to develop more stable and responsive democratic institutions.³⁸ When it comes to the issue of where American troops will actually be operating from within the Philippines, US priorities and interests are locations with strategic, tactical, economic, and logistical efficiencies that also support bilateral and multilateral exercises and training. Throughout all of the possible locations, the US wants to improve perimeter security, modernize the barracks and other support facilities such as administration and medical buildings, and build more warehouses and hangars to store ammunition and supplies. The US Air Force specifically wants more ramp space, re-pavement of runways, and installation of re-fueling depots. For the US Navy, dredging of approaches and improvement of piers are its top priorities. The US military is expected to fund all of their operations and activities, not interfere with the local radio spectrum, respect local laws and customs, prevent spillage of hazardous waste, and use Philippine suppliers of products and services as much as possible.³⁹

PHILIPPINE PRIORITIES AND INTERESTS

The Philippine priorities and interests concerning the EDCA are territorial defense, MDA, FHA, and COIN. In order to meet these priorities and interests, the Philippines needs to conduct comprehensive changes throughout its entire military. According to Voltaire Gazmin, its capability development and improvement goals include establishing a three tiered Philippine Navy Fleet with surface, sub-surface, and anti-air warfare capabilities, a strategic air strike force with surveillance and airlift capabilities, and a credible expeditionary force for its Army and Marines. In addition, Gazmin also states that it must develop a coastal watch system for MDA and natural disaster warning, cultivate an elite special operations force for rapid response and

unconventional warfare, and improve its command and control capabilities to help advance the joint warfare concept within the AFP.⁴⁰ The main responsibility of the AFP with regards to the EDCA and the bases is to provide adequate base security. Philippine priorities and interests when it comes to selecting the sites for rotational employment of US troops are locales that can support and enhance its current capability gaps, develop and improve the local economy, and not interfere with local businesses and operations.

POSSIBLE TEMPORARY AND ROTATING STATIONS

SUBIC BAY NAVAL BASE

There are many options within the Philippines where the US military can operate. Discussions are still ongoing between the two countries, but two obvious prospects include operating from former US bases such as Subic and Clark. Other possibilities consist of civilian airfields and other bases throughout the country where the AFP currently operates from. Subic, located fifty miles north of Manila, was once a major ship repair facility, huge supply depot, and favorite rest and recreation spot for the US military. The base's famous strategic location, sheltered anchorages, and deep water made it an ideal spot for development into a naval base. Subic Bay was the largest overseas US naval base and at one point it handled the largest volume of fuel oil of any navy facility in the world.⁴¹ Subic would allow the US and Philippine military to respond more quickly to territorial aggression by China in the region because the bay's mouth faces to the west and has an easy access to the South China Sea.

Today, the old US Navy base is called Subic Bay Freeport Zone. Since its transformation, Subic has been considered a model for base conversions and it is currently one of the major areas for economic development and growth in the Philippines. "The Philippine

government agreed back in 2012 that the base can host US troops on a semi-permanent basis and America's largest military shipbuilding company, Huntington Ingalls Industries signed an agreement with Hanjin Heavy Industries to provide maintenance, repair, and logistics for US Navy ships using Hanjin's dry docks in Subic Bay."⁴² This fact makes Subic an obvious choice for US troops to operate from and their supplies and equipment be pre-positioned. Philippine Defense Undersecretary Pio Lorenzo Batino states, "The military had signed an agreement with the Subic Bay Freeport Zone's operator in May to use parts of the installation for military purposes under a 15 year lease."⁴³ The other former US military base, Clark Air Field is also an obvious choice for US troops to operate from.

CLARK AIR FIELD

Clark Air Field was a former US Air Force Base in the Philippines located about forty miles northwest of Manila. The base served from 1903-1991 and was a stronghold of the combined Filipino and American forces during the end of WWII and a backbone of logistical support during the Vietnam War. During those times it was the largest American base overseas. A variety of aircraft ranging from transport, bombers, fighters, helicopters, and even trainer aircraft flew in and out of Clark. After the base closure in 1991, it eventually became the site of Clark International Airport, the Clark Freeport Zone, and the main base for the Philippine Air Force. Just like Subic, the Philippine government agreed to the return of American forces back to Clark to counter the aggressive Chinese behavior in the region. Since the Philippine Air Force is already using Clark, it only makes sense to let the US Air Force have a small footprint on the base as well. US Air Force assets could assist with South China Sea intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions and at the same time provide air combat capability – something the Philippines currently lacks.⁴⁴

Both of these former US military bases have been developed as a commercial seaport and airport respectively since the US troops left. However, even with all the economic and financial growth and overcrowding in the area, it is still possible and maybe even practical to station US troops, supplies, and equipment on a small part of these former bases. Both the US and Philippine governments like this option because it would be very minimal improvement that they would have to undertake in order to allow US and Philippine troops to start operating from these former bases and it would re-establish a US military presence in Luzon, the northern part of the Philippines.⁴⁵ Subic and Clark are very obvious and pragmatic choices because of the infrastructure already available and the fact that the US military has operated from these bases in the past. They are already housing US troops who participate in the annual Balikatan exercise with the AFP. Leaving aside Subic and Clark as bases of operations for US forces, other possibilities include operating from Basco Airport, Oyster Bay Naval Base, Edwin Andrews Air Base, and Iloilo International Airport. Figure 1 below shows where these locations are throughout the Philippines and Figure 2 shows an overview of the region depicting where the disputed islands and China are.



Figure 2. Overview of the region showing the disputed islands and China.⁴⁷

BASCO AIRPORT

Basco Airport is located in northern Luzon in the Batanes Islands about 400 miles north of Manila. It is a small civilian airport that mostly conducts domestic flights to Manila. Basco is strategically located about 90 miles southeast of Taiwan and roughly 350 miles southeast of mainland China. The airport can host US and AFP air force assets that can conduct MDA and ISR operations throughout the South China Sea. In addition, the base can also be outfitted with modern radars to help with MDA and ISR operations to monitor China and any shipping or air activity throughout the South China Sea. US and AFP assets stationed in Basco can easily respond to any hostilities from the Chinese and help out in a natural disaster that may occur in northern Luzon.

In addition to all the strategic military benefits that Basco Airport provides, it is also prime for modernization and development because there is plenty of undeveloped space in this island for new infrastructure and expansion. On the other hand, the major disadvantage in choosing Basco airport as a future area of operation for the US military in the Philippines is the cost and the volume of work needed to upgrade the airport so military forces can operate from it effectively. Another drawback in setting up a base of operations for US military and AFP use in Basco is its close proximity to mainland China. China might view this as a very aggressive move by the US and the Philippines to challenge Chinese dominance in the region and further pressurize an already volatile situation. To counter Chinese aggression in the South China Sea with naval assets, Oyster Bay Naval Base is a prime option for the US Navy.

OYSTER BAY NAVAL BASE

Oyster Bay Naval Base is located on the island of Palawan in the mid-west part of the Philippines called Visayas. It has a perfect natural harbor, a bay within a bay on the west coast of Palawan. Oyster Bay also already plays host to a small Philippine Navy base, an hour north of the provincial capital Puerto Princesa. At the present time, however, the quiet station is poorly equipped to play a major role in the Philippines' territorial struggles with China, despite its proximity to the disputed Spratly Islands. Manila just budgeted about \$7 million to refit the base and enable it to berth up to four naval frigates. There were no dates set to start this project, but the recent defense pact with the US is likely to hasten the base development process. According to the terms of the EDCA, the US will have to pay a proportionate cost for the use of and the development and modernization of this naval base.⁴⁸ Consequently, US Navy engineers just built an elementary school in the village where the base is situated.⁴⁹

The location of this naval base is strategically sound because its opening is on the western side of the island with direct access to and only about 300 miles east from the disputed Spratly Islands. If this base is developed to allow US Navy cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and other logistic ships to operate from it, Oyster Bay could serve as a major deterrent to China's aggressive behavior with regards to the territorial disputes in the region. According to Commodore Joseph Pena, commander of the Philippines' western navy, "Oyster Bay will be a mini-Subic that can base at least four large naval vessels together with various radar outposts to allow the military to better monitor events in the South China Sea."⁵⁰ Right now only small Philippine patrol boats are operating at this naval base, but if the US military and the AFP proceed with upgrading the capabilities of this base, China might see that as another aggressive action by both nations to suppress Chinese regional hegemony. Oyster Bay also meets one of the requests from the AFP that these future bases support local development and modernization. Palawan is a first class tourist destination because of its pristine beaches, but the immediate area surrounding Oyster Bay is underdeveloped and could definitely use the economic help that a military base provides. To counter the extremist insurgency in the southern Philippines, Edwin Andrews Air Base is the prime basing candidate for US forces.

EDWIN ANDREWS AIR BASE

Edwin Andrews Air Base is located in the southern area of the Philippines called Mindanao. Currently, the base serves as Zamboanga International Airport and it has a small contingent of Philippine Air Force (PAF) assets on the eastern side of the base. It also served as the base of operations for the recently disbanded JSOTF-P, where US SOF helped train and advise the AFP in their war against violent extremists in the area. This air base has the potential to be a key center of operations for US and Philippine troops. It also already has a long enough

runway that can service most US tactical, transport, and reconnaissance aircraft, which can help in MDA, ISR, and logistical operations. With some US money and aid, it is possible to further develop the base and install radars, control tower, airport lighting, fire station, arresting wires, FHA warehouses, and other infrastructure such as hangars. If the improvement of Edwin Andrews Air Base is approved, it can serve as the headquarters for operations against the extremists and a base for staging supplies and equipment in case of a natural disaster. The final proposed location for US troops to operate from is not meant to counter any specific threat, but it's centrally located to help out with any crisis or contingency operations that may arise in the region.

ILOILO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Iloilo International Airport is advantageously located in the middle of the Philippines and can serve as an ideal base to pre-position troops, equipment, and supplies needed to respond to any crisis, especially a natural disaster. This strategic site in the Visayas region on the island of Panay make it a very important base of operation for both the US military and the AFP because it has the capability to support many different missions and operations. FHA missions occur very frequently in the Asia-Pacific, but it's tough to predict when and where they are going to happen. Having a base positioned in a central location with a surplus of troops, supplies, and equipment standing by to respond to a natural disaster or any crisis can prove to be the difference between life and death for people that may be affected. Iloilo International Airport is a fairly new facility built in March 2007. The US military and AFP need a small part of the airport with a hangar or two to stage their aircraft, equipment, supplies, and headquarters for contingency operations. There's not much upgrading that needs to be undertaken because the airport is fairly current with updated equipment and facilities needed to support military operations. However, if Iloilo

Airport is chosen as a location for US troops, perimeter security provided by the AFP would need to be improved. Additionally, a separate refueling facility strictly for military aircraft may have to be installed to allow continuous support during a contingency without disrupting the flow of civilian traffic in the airport. If Iloilo International Airport is approved for stationing US troops, equipment, and supplies, it could serve as the headquarters for FHA operations in the region due to Iloilo's central location within the Philippines. That would significantly decrease response times of troops and supplies to a devastated area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper primarily focused on the possible future locations within the Philippines where the US military can operate from. Based on cost, effectiveness, and location, this paper recommends prioritizing the approval and development of the six proposed locations in this order: Subic, Edwin Andrews Air Base, Iloilo International Airport, Clark, Oyster Bay Naval Base, and Basco Airport. Subic should be prioritized because of the infrastructure already available, its ability to support both the Navy and the Air Force, and its strategic location. Subic can also serve as the main initial concentration of US troops and supplies before they are detailed out to various locations in the region. Similar to Subic, Edwin Andrews Air Base should be second on the order due to the existing infrastructure from when it served as the headquarters for the JSOTF-P, its significance to the ongoing struggle against the insurgency in the southern Philippines, and its potential to serve as the main base of operations for the US and AFP in an area other than Luzon. The likelihood of getting the necessary funding, bureaucratic approval, and all the major muscle movements to start the development and modernization of all of these six proposed locations to support military operations is low. Prioritizing Subic and Edwin Andrews Air Base in the initial stages will pay huge dividends as the evolution of rotational US

forces in the Philippines matures. This paper will be a contribution to knowledge and once these bases have been officially identified, full exploration of feasibility and efficiency of the bases which support both the US and Philippine priorities and interests must be judiciously explored. Whichever locations are chosen for the US military to operate from, these bases must allow the AFP and the US military to be appropriately positioned to address current and future threats, contribute to regional peace and security, and facilitate readiness and availability for FHA operations.

On March 18, 2016, the US and the Philippines formally agreed on the use of five AFP bases as rotational and temporary stations of operations for the US military. The five bases are Basa Air Base, Fort Magsaysay, Antonio Bautista Air Base, Lumbia Air Base, and Benito Ebuena Air Base. These five locations do not match the six sites proposed in this paper primarily because of the different priorities used in determining where US forces should operate. Examining this list from the surface, one can conclude that the US and the Philippines are prioritizing the enhancement of their MDA, ISR, and rapid response capabilities, while at the same time trying not to antagonize China. The selection of these bases also confirms to the Filipinos that the Americans are here to support them without the perception of a large number of US troops and equipment deploying to the Philippines. Four of the five are Air Force bases which can support a variety of aircraft and missions with minimal footprint. The relatively small size of Air Force assets as compared to Army or Navy, helps in the slow re-introduction of more US forces and it does not send a threatening message to China. However, this paper still holds the six proposed locations as better options because it can achieve all of the same goals that the five bases can; while also allowing the US Navy to have a bigger role in the initial implementation of

the EDCA and facilitating for modernization and development of some rural areas in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION

The six locations proposed by the author in this paper are not officially included in the EDCA. The sites above were chosen on the basis of available infrastructure and ability to respond to deter aggressive Chinese behavior, counter the violent extremists in the south, and respond quickly to a natural disaster or any crisis that may occur in the region. The proposed sites in this paper are also appropriately dispersed throughout the country for security reasons and they will allow for progress and modernization in these mostly underdeveloped rural areas. Two of the six locales were obvious choices because of their former status as US military bases and the other four are also ideal primarily due to their location and potential to help the US and Philippines achieve their national security objectives. Having a small number of American troops and their equipment and supplies pre-positioned on locations all over the Philippines will allow US troops to more regularly participate in joint US-Philippine military exercises, focusing on maritime security, MDA, and FHA operations. This American presence throughout the Philippines would save time and fuel needed to fly in troops and equipment and keep it close hand in case of a crisis.⁵¹ Baviera states, “A larger, more flexible US presence in dispersed location working in close coordination with the Philippine defense establishment may also function as a deterrent to more serious external threats, while facilitating joint action in facing common challenges. By calling US defense commitments ironclad, China is forewarned not to underestimate US reaction to its growing assertiveness.”⁵² With its small and obsolete naval force and an almost non-existent air force, the Philippines relies heavily on the US military for training and equipment. More significantly, the Philippines banks on the deterrent effect that is

generated by the temporary deployment of US forces in its territory against threats to its maritime security interests and against natural disasters. Presence is indeed one of the best deterrents, and most nations in the Asia Pacific are hoping that US military presence in the Philippines can help stabilize the region.

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