

## The Situation in the Philippines

A Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) is any United Nations (UN) Member State which is not a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and designated as a MNNA under Section 2350a(f)(2) of Title 10, United States Code.<sup>1</sup> This designation is given by the U.S. government to close allies who have significant working relationships with American forces but are not members of NATO.<sup>2</sup> MNNA's have become eligible for various levels of military assistance, including participating in cooperative defense research and development projects.<sup>3</sup> MNNA status does not entail the same mutual defense and security measures afforded to NATO members; however, designation as an MNNA does reflect the United States and NATO's opinion of the Member State as one of importance.<sup>4</sup>

The Philippines was declared a MNNA by former U.S. President George W. Bush in 2003.<sup>5</sup> The Philippines expressed interest in helping the U.S. fight their "War on Terrorism."<sup>6</sup> President Bush believed that the two Member States could easily work together for mutual strategic maneuvers against militant terrorists in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

Since the ascension of Rodrigo Duterte into the office of president, tensions between the West and the Philippines have become strained.<sup>8</sup> Once a steadfast ally of NATO and the United States, Duterte has implemented a more independent foreign policy including opening relations with China and Russia.<sup>9</sup> While he does not intend to formally end relations with the U.S., he has stated that the Philippines' relationship with the U.S. is "at the point of no return" and is seeking to strengthen ties with other geopolitical powers, directly ending a decade long foreign policy method that primarily focused on relations with the West.<sup>10</sup> In a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Duterte stated that "America has lost now. I've realigned myself in your ideological flow."<sup>11</sup>

The growing tensions in the South China Sea extend to the Philippines as well.<sup>12</sup> In April of 2017, Duterte ordered the Philippine military to occupy all Philippine-claimed landholdings in the South China Sea.<sup>13</sup> While focused on improving relations with China, Duterte is committed to maintaining its dominance over its controlled territories, threatening to raise a Philippine flag on Thitu island, land that is claimed by the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei, and Malaysia.<sup>14</sup>

Duterte has instituted a brutal war on drugs within the Philippines that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of Philippine citizens.<sup>15</sup> He has even gone as far to offer cash and rewards to those who kill drug dealers and addicts.<sup>16</sup> Many international bodies have condemned Duterte's violent tendencies including the European Union (EU) and the

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<sup>1</sup> "Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA)," *GlobalSecurity.org*, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/mnna.htm> (Accessed 24 September 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Garamone, "Philippines to Become Major non-NATO Ally, Bush Says," *U.S. Department of Defense Archives*, <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=28968>. (Accessed 24 September 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Duterte Declared Philippine President-Elect by Parliament" *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36410949> (Accessed 24 September 2017).

<sup>9</sup> "Philippines' Duterte Wants 'Open Alliances' with Russia, China," *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-politics-duterte/philippines-duterte-wants-to-open-alliances-with-russia-china-idUSKCN11W17T> (Accessed 24 September 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "South China Sea: Duterte Orders Philippine Military to Occupy Islands," *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/06/asia/philippines-duterte-south-china-sea/index.html> (Accessed 18 October 2017).

<sup>12</sup> "South China Sea: Duterte Orders Philippine Military to Occupy Islands," *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/06/asia/philippines-duterte-south-china-sea/index.html> (Accessed 18 October 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "The Killing Time: Inside Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's War on Drugs," *CNN*, <http://time.com/4462352/rodrigo-duterte-drug-war-drugs-philippines-killing/> (Accessed 24 September 24 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

United Nations (UN) calling them violations of basic human rights.<sup>17</sup> Duterte has responded with, “I don’t care about human rights, believe me.”<sup>18</sup>

Duterte holds well-known anti-U.S. sentiments. In September 2016, he announced that the Philippines would no longer be cooperating with the U.S. in military drills as a way to show his seriousness in fostering a relationship with China and Russia.<sup>19</sup> Philippine Air-Force Chief Lieut. General Edgar Fallorina, remained committed to a “strong partnership” between the Philippines and the U.S.<sup>20</sup> Since Duterte’s announcement, he has since changed his stance and drills have continued between the two countries but in a different capacity.<sup>21</sup> Instead of using these drills for territorial and maritime defense measures, Duterte ordered much fewer drills that focused on simply disaster response and counterterrorism.<sup>22</sup> Duterte has also began to pull away from U.S. influence, relying mostly on China and Russia as their security allies.<sup>23</sup>

Duterte also handpicked a new commander for the Philippine Armed Forces in early October 2017. It has yet to be seen if this new general will agree with Duterte’s aversion to the U.S. or be more willing to keep U.S. and NATO involvement. Major General Rozzano D. Briguez, the Vice Commander of the Philippine Air Force, holds a more sanguine view of US-Philippines relations.<sup>24</sup> He believes an alliance with the U.S. would dispel any attacks or aggression in their regions, in turn keeping the peace.<sup>25</sup> Briguez agreed to continue working with the U.S. Airforce Brigadier General Craig D. Wills, the Pacific Air Forces’ Director of Strategic Planning.<sup>26</sup> The two men reaffirmed their alliance during the sixth annual U.S.-Philippines Airmen-to-Airmen talks in August 2017.<sup>27</sup>

The situation in the Philippines should be given serious attention. The alleged human rights atrocities committed at the hands of the Duterte and his lack of regard for international organizations like the United Nations should be concerning for NATO and its allies. Further, Duterte has threatened to institute Martial Law in dealing with the drug war ravaging the country.<sup>28</sup> Duterte’s willingness to open relations with China and Russia, directly opposes NATO’s commitment to democratic values and sends a strong signal to the climate of relations between the Philippines and the West.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Rodrigo Duterte to End Joint US and Philippine Military Drills,” The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/29/rodrigo-duterte-to-end-joint-us-and-philippine-military-drills> (Accessed 18 October 2017).

<sup>20</sup> “A Brief History of U.S.-Philippine Relations” Time, <http://time.com/4543996/history-of-us-philippine-relations/> (Accessed 18 October 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Captain James Moore, “U.S. Philippine Airmen talks pave way for continued cooperation,” *Pacific Air Forces*, 11 August 2017, <http://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1276338/us-philippine-airmen-talks-pave-way-for-continued-cooperation/> (Accessed 18 October 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “The Killing Time: Inside Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte’s War on Drugs,” *CNN*, <http://time.com/4462352/rodrigo-duterte-drug-war-drugs-philippines-killing/> (Accessed 24 September 24 2017).