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## The U.S. Doesn't Need the Philippines

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America is a curious great power. It cowers before international lightweights, begging the least significant nations to let it defend them. Such as the Philippines.

President Rodrigo Duterte has gained notoriety for the official murder of thousands of drug users and dealers. He then publicly insulted President Obama for criticizing this murderous policy.

United States credibility suffers when a nation long subsidized and defended by America shows such ostentatious disrespect. The Philippine president shouldn't be treated like a co-equal and ally if he doesn't behave like one.

Moreover, the Philippines needs America far more than America needs the Philippines. Manila spends less than 1 percent of its gross domestic product on its military and its best ships are U.S. cast-offs. It doesn't help defend the United States from anyone.

Rather, Manila expects Washington's protection even though the archipelago matters little for the United States. America retains the Pacific as a barrier and faces no serious threats to its homeland.

Of course, Washington sees domination of East Asia as an American birthright. Base access obviously helps the U.S. attempt to enforce its will. However, convenience does not translate into interests substantial enough to risk war.

The region matters far more to nearby China, which understandably does not want to be contained. It also costs Beijing far less to deter U.S. intervention than it does for America to project power: missiles and subs are less costly than aircraft carrier groups. With no one threatening free navigation, Washington must decide what kind of risk it is willing to take on behalf of what remain primarily other nations' territorial interests.

Insisting on defending the Philippines irrespective of its actions is particularly dangerous. Manila relies on American support rather than its own military in confronting China and could drag the United States into a conflict easily.

Washington should drop the "mutual" defense treaty and joint patrols. Maintaining base access is good insurance but does not require a security guarantee, especially over contested territory, such as Scarborough Shoal. Moreover, such access is not worth paying any price: America lost no influence when Subic Bay and Clark Airfield closed decades ago.

President Duterte is not a reliable ally. The United States should not allow such an unpredictable regime to be a trigger for war.

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