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## U.S. drone strikes in the Philippines would be a massive mistake

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Here we go again. The United States is on the verge of carrying out military operations in yet another country as part of the war on terrorism. The Philippines — specifically the southern island of Mindanao — may soon become the latest target of the world’s busiest and most powerful military. The goal will apparently be to strike Islamic State elements that “could be a threat to allies in the region.” So far, U.S. officials have made no mention of a threat to the United States.

Conducting drone strikes in the Philippines, however, would be a serious mistake.

The strikes would further erode America’s moral credibility by putting American firepower in service to a thuggish regime. Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines’ president, has boasted about personally carrying out extrajudicial killings during his time as a mayor. The killings have grown with his political power. Amnesty International reports that Duterte has approved thousands of extrajudicial killings since he assumed the presidency.

There is also good reason to suspect that Duterte is an unreliable partner who will seek to use American support for his own ends. History provides example after example of the United States trying to work through corrupt, incompetent or simply evil regimes. The results, from the Vietnam War to the present, have almost always been problematic. Given Duterte’s track record, there is legitimate concern that he will direct U.S. Hellfire missiles and precision-guided bombs against his political opponents or other targets of opportunity rather than terrorists. The United States would share responsibility for any deaths from those crimes.

Nor does the threat from Filipino jihadists justify these sorts of risks. A few months after 9/11, the United States sent military forces into the southern Philippines. At that time, the terrorist groups included the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah — organizations generally composed of Muslim separatists demanding autonomy for the Moro population. While the names have changed, terrorism remains a constant.

Yet armed rebellion has been a part of life in Mindanao for more than 100 years. The United States first experienced it in 1899 after acquiring the Philippines as a result of the Spanish-American War. The grievances have endured for more than a century and are largely between the Moro citizens of the Philippines and their government. The presence of the Islamic State in Mindanao has much more to do with that problem than it does with any global jihadist objectives. If, however, the United States begins drone strikes there, new resentments and

civilian casualties are inevitable and will provide recruiting fodder and justification for future attacks.

Finally, drone strikes in the Philippines would be a mistake because they represent a failed strategy. The United States' war on terrorism has relied on an extensive and aggressive military strategy focused on killing terrorists and attempting to defeat specific terrorist groups. Sixteen years into the war, however, Americans are not safer, and the global terrorist threat has only increased. Not only has the United States failed to eradicate al-Qaeda, its actions have inadvertently spawned jihadist groups including the Islamic State and helped those groups recruit tens of thousands of fighters — the number of Islamist-inspired fighters more than tripled between 2000 and 2015. And in no place where the United States conducted military operations after 9/11 is the situation better than it was before 9/11.

In fact, the evidence shows that the American military strategy in the war on terrorism is having the opposite effect from the intended one. The United States has, to date, conducted military operations in seven states. But instead of reducing the incidence of terrorism, American military force is helping spur more attacks. In those seven countries, terrorist attacks have risen 1,900 percent since 9/11.

Tragically, U.S. strategy ignores not only recent experience but also the best available research, which shows that military defeat rarely spells the end of terrorist organizations. Instead, the path toward their demise — especially for long-lived movements such as the one in the Philippines — typically requires political compromise of some sort.

Beyond linking the United States to Duterte's brutal regime, then, the most likely outcomes of American drone strikes in the Philippines would include more casualties, increased instability, the strengthening of the terrorists' grievances and resolve, and zero reduction in the terrorist threat to the United States.

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