

Decoding the Duterte Doctrine: Understanding Strategic Changes in Philippine Foreign Policy during Duterte Administration

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ABSTRACT

This article employs a sophisticated neoclassical realist framework to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the intricate landscape of Philippine foreign policy under the administration of former Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, elucidating the contours of the so-called “The Duterte Doctrine”. This encompasses a nuanced exploration of the nation's role as a middle power, focusing on the pillars of national security, economic diplomacy, and the safeguarding of overseas Filipinos. Employing an analytical lens that intricately weaves systemic pressures and domestic imperatives, the study meticulously unravels the historical trajectory of Philippines-USA relations and the evolving dynamics in the Philippines-China relationship. Methodologically, a discerning review of historical events, policy decisions, and diplomatic maneuvers is undertaken to unveil discernible patterns and strategic recalibrations within the nation's foreign policy landscape. The main findings underscore a diplomatic chess game in the Philippines-China relationship, marked by a strategic departure in defense posture with the cessation of joint military exercises with the U.S. Economic diplomacy, encapsulated in the Duterte Doctrine, manifests as a fervent pursuit of diversified economic partnerships, concurrently raising cogent concerns about potential economic dependence. The analysis accentuates the adaptive resilience of Philippine foreign policy in response to the evolving global landscape, thereby substantively contributing to regional stability. As a middle power, the Philippines astutely leverages its agency amid great power competition while assiduously upholding principles of international law and justice, necessitating nuanced and context-specific approaches to maintain a delicate balance between traditional alliances and emerging economic partnerships.

Keywords: China, Duterte Doctrine, Philippines, Rodrigo Roa Duterte

A. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine Foreign Policy and its Pillars

Foreign policy of the Philippines serves as a dynamic framework that guides the nation's interactions within the international community. Defined by principles, objectives, as well as strategies, Philippine foreign policy aims to secure the country's national interests as well to sustain peace, cooperation, and stability on a global stage. This diplomatic approach is characterized by three pillars that form the foundation of each nation's interaction towards the international community, namely (1) Preservation and enhancement of national security, (2) Promoting and attaining economic security, and (3) Protecting the rights and promoting the welfare and interest of Filipinos overseas (Republic Act No. 7157, 1991). In examining the constitutional underpinnings that shape the contours of Philippine foreign policy, paramount attention is directed toward pivotal provisions established from the 1987 Philippine Constitution. From Article II, Section 2, a definitive reestablishment of war as an instrument of national policy is articulated, concurrently embracing the universally acknowledged tenets of

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international law as integral components of the nation's legal fabric. This constitutional mandate further champions a commitment to the principles of peace, equality, and justice. Simultaneously, Article II, Section 7 propounds a directive emphasizing the resolution of independent foreign policy by the State. From engagements with other sovereign entities, preeminent considerations underscored are the preservation of national sovereignty, the safeguarding of territorial integrity, the advancement of national interest, as well as the unequivocal endorsement of the right to self-determination. These constitutional imperatives collectively shape the foundational framework within which Philippine foreign policy operates, as conceived by the architects of the nation's supreme legal charter.

The first pillar of Philippine foreign policy revolves around promoting national security and the protecting territorial integrity. As an archipelagic nation situated strategically in Southeast Asia, the Philippines faces a myriad of security challenges, including territorial disputes, transnational crime, and the threat of terrorism. Consequently, ensuring the safety and sovereignty of the nation is paramount. This pillar underscores the importance of building strong defense capabilities, forging strategic alliances with like-minded nations, and actively participating in regional security mechanisms. The pursuit of security not only safeguards the nation from external threats but also contributes to the overall stability of the region.

Economic diplomacy constitutes the second pillar of the Philippine foreign policy, emphasizing the country's commitment to fostering economic growth, trade, and development. Recognizing the interconnectedness of the global economy, the Philippines actively seeks to establish mutually beneficial economic relations with other nations. This involves negotiating trade agreements, promoting investments, and participating in international economic organizations. By engaging in economic diplomacy, the Philippines aims to harness the benefits of globalization, stimulate economic development, and improve the well-being of its citizens. This pillar reflects the understanding that a robust and diversified economy enhances the country's resilience and competitiveness in the global arena.

The third pillar of Philippine foreign policy centers on the protection and promotion of the rights and well-being of Filipinos overseas. With a substantial diaspora scattered across the globe, the Philippines places a significant emphasis on ensuring the welfare of its citizens living and working abroad. This pillar involves the establishment of consular services, the negotiation of bilateral agreements to protect migrant workers, and the advocacy for the rights of Filipinos in the international community. By actively engaging in the global discourse on migrant rights, the Philippines not only safeguards the interests of its citizens but also contributes to the development of international norms and standards concerning the treatment of migrant workers.

In essence, these three pillars collectively form the cornerstone of Philippine foreign policy, shaping the nation's stance on various global issues and influencing its diplomatic engagements. The delicate balance between national security, economic interests, and the well-being of overseas Filipinos reflects the multifaceted nature of the Philippines' role in the international arena. As the geopolitical landscape evolves, the adaptability of these pillars becomes crucial in navigating the complexities of global affairs while safeguarding the nation's core interests and values.

B. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Philippines-USA Relationship

The historical trajectory of the Philippines-USA relationship has been shaped by a complex interplay of geopolitical, historical, and cultural factors. The close connection between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines encompasses a strong bilateral security alliance, extensive collaboration in the military domain, intimate people-to-people connections, and numerous shared strategic and economic interests. The Philippines has played a significant role in shaping U.S. Asia policy, serving as a key ally in security and counterterrorism efforts (Congressional Research Service, 2022). Rooted in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, which saw the cession of the Philippines from Spanish colonial rule to the United States in 1898, the early foundations of this bilateral relationship were established. The United States, having acquired the Philippines along with other territories, embarked on a nation-building project in the archipelago. This marked the beginning of a multifaceted connection that has evolved over the decades. The colonial period, which lasted until the granting of Philippine independence in 1946, was a formative phase in the relationship. While the United States invested in infrastructure development, education, and governance reforms, it also faced resistance from Filipino nationalist movements seeking self-determination. The eventual grant of independence, in the aftermath of World War II, marked the commencement of a new phase in Philippine foreign policy. The Philippines emerged as a sovereign nation, and the bilateral ties with the United States transitioned into a framework of independent cooperation.

Throughout the Cold War era, the Philippines and the United States forged a strategic alliance rooted in mutual defense. The signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951 solidified this alliance, committing both nations to support each other in the event of an armed attack. This treaty was a cornerstone of Philippine foreign policy during the Cold War, aligning the country with the United States in the face of regional security challenges, particularly in the context of the burgeoning communist threat in Southeast Asia. The Philippines also played a crucial role in hosting American military bases, most notably the Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Base, which served as vital components of U.S. military presence in the region. However, the end of the Cold War and the subsequent geopolitical shifts brought about changes in the dynamics of the Philippines-USA relationship. The closure of the U.S. military bases in the early 1990s marked a significant turning point. The termination of the bases agreement in 1991 reflected the Philippines' pursuit of a more independent and non-aligned foreign policy. The post-Cold War period saw a recalibration of the relationship, with both nations seeking to redefine their ties in a rapidly changing global landscape. Economic cooperation became a central focus of the bilateral relationship during the post-Cold War era. The Philippines and the United States engaged in trade agreements and economic partnerships, fostering collaboration in areas such as investment, technology transfer, and development assistance. The U.S. remains one of the Philippines' major trading partners, and economic diplomacy has become a key component of their bilateral engagement.

The early 21st century brought about new challenges and opportunities for the Philippines-USA relationship. The fight against terrorism, particularly in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, led to increased collaboration on counterterrorism efforts. The Philippines, grappling with internal security issues related to insurgencies, found a supportive ally in the United States. Joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing became integral

components of this collaboration, reflecting the evolving nature of their strategic partnership. Following the events of September 11, former Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (2001-2010) became the initial Asian leader to commit unwavering support to the global counterterrorism coalition. The Philippines declared its intention to offer the United States intelligence collaboration, permission for overflight, and access to the former base facilities at Clark and Subic for transit and staging operations (del Rosario, 2002). Additionally, the Philippines expressed readiness to provide logistical assistance, including food supplies, medicines, and medical personnel. Furthermore, there was a commitment to contemplate deploying combat troops in response to an international call for such action.

Philippines-China Relationship

The historical interaction between the Philippines and China, its colossal neighbor, entails a nuanced narrative shaped by cultural affinities, geopolitical shifts, and dynamic exchanges. In contrast to the relatively straightforward dynamics characterizing the Philippines-USA relationship, the bilateral engagement between the Philippines and China has exhibited a nuanced choreography, marked by phases of collaboration, tension, and strategic recalibration. Rooted in history, the relationship between these nations possesses a deep foundation, extending over centuries and manifesting through cultural bonds and robust trade connections. Chinese historical records suggest early interactions between Filipinos and China, with evidence of Filipino presence dating back to 982. During this period, Ma-yi traders from Mindoro reportedly arrived on the Guangzhou coast. Additionally, in 1001, the first recorded Philippine tribute mission was documented, believed to have originated from Butuan. Towards the end of the twelfth century, Visayan pirates were reported to conduct raids on Fujian from their bases in the Pescadores. These instances illustrate early exchanges and engagements between the Philippines and China, marking a historical foundation for their cultural and trade connections (Scott, 1989). Antiquated maritime routes served as conduits for reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, and traditions, fostering a symbiotic relationship that transcended temporal boundaries. The persistent influence of Chinese culture on various aspects of Filipino culture, particularly language, cuisine, and daily life, serves as evidence of the enduring nature of this historical interconnectedness. Nevertheless, the contemporary diplomatic landscape has been significantly shaped by the ebb and flow of geopolitical currents. A pivotal moment occurred in the post-colonial era, specifically in 1975, when the Philippines formally recognized the People's Republic of China. This landmark decision marked a substantive departure from the Philippines' prior affiliation with the Republic of China (Taiwan) in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War, laying the groundwork for a new paradigm in diplomatic relations.

The Philippines officially recognizes the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government of China, in line with the "One China Policy." The historical context provided by the Shanghai Communiqué underscores the broader acceptance of the PRC as the representative of China in international relations, influencing diplomatic stances in the Asia-Pacific region, including the Philippines. The communiqué marked a thaw in relations between the two countries, which had been estranged since the Chinese Civil War. It acknowledged the existence of one China and recognized the People's Republic of China as the legitimate government (United States & People's Republic of China, 1972). Subsequent decades witnessed concerted efforts on both sides to cultivate a comprehensive relationship, spanning economic

collaboration, cultural exchange, and people-to-people connections. These endeavors, driven by a shared commitment to surmount historical intricacies and navigate the challenges of the contemporary geopolitical milieu, sought to establish a resilient partnership. The Philippines and China, cognizant of their intertwined histories and the imperatives of the present, sought to construct bridges that acknowledged both shared affinities and inherent disparities.

In the ongoing evolution of diplomatic dialogue between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China, the bilateral relationship unfolds as a nuanced interplay intricately interwoven with historical legacies, cultural convergence, and imperatives intrinsic to the contemporary global milieu. A neoclassical realist lens, employed for analytical elucidation, reveals a discerning strategic calibration undertaken by both sovereign entities, wherein they judiciously assess systemic influences vis-à-vis domestic imperatives. Neoclassical realism, grounded in the tenet that state comportment is shaped not merely by external exigencies but also by internal determinants such as leadership paradigms and inherent state capabilities, furnishes a framework for deciphering the intricacies of their diplomatic interplay. Within this analytical purview, the historical backdrop, typified by oscillations between collaborative phases and periods of tension, assumes paramount significance in shaping strategic calculations. Cultural affinities contribute an additional layer, impacting the tonality of diplomatic discourse. In navigating this multifaceted terrain, both sovereign entities aspire to articulate a diplomatic rhetoric that encapsulates not only the historical and cultural subtleties but also aligns with the intellectual perspicacity inherent in scholarly discourse, thereby transcending immediate geopolitical considerations.

C. DISCUSSION

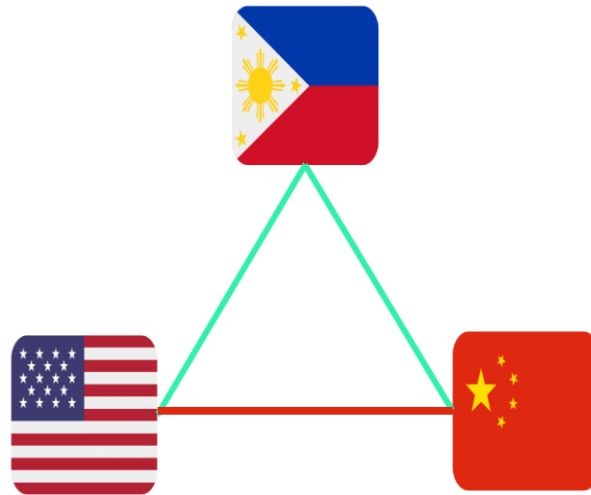
National Security

Duterte's election is often interpreted as an embodiment of a discernible change in the landscape of electoral politics. This shift transcends ideological and developmental differences globally, aligning with what Putzel (2020:418-419) identifies as the phenomenon of 'new right populist politics.' In this practice, political figures position themselves as 'outsiders,' challenging established norms, and pledging significant departures from the status quo. Concurrently, these leaders tend to propagate divisive narratives regarding marginalized groups such as the poor, minorities, and women, while also displaying a tolerance for transgressions on individual rights (Ramos, 2021). The foreign policy trajectory under the tenure of former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022) delineated a strategic departure in the nation's international relations, deviating notably from established alliances and embracing a pragmatic and autonomous posture. This departure stands in stark contrast to the approach adopted by his immediate predecessor, former Philippine President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III (2010-2016). By employing a neoclassical realist framework, which accentuates the impact of both systemic influences and domestic considerations on foreign policy determinations, one can scrutinize Duterte's approach within the intricate context of global power dynamics.

Majority of the discussion regarding powers in the 21st century emphasize on the premise that American power is declining while other hegemon are on the rise. According to a report entitled "Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World," a multipolar world, which is characterized by multiple centers of power, is gradually emerging (US National Intelligence

Council, 2008). Even though the USA retains a dominant military position in the world, the basis for US leadership in the world has eroded. The moral leadership or the "soft power" of the USA has been diminishing, especially in the Middle East countries (D'Anieri, 2014). In the case of China, its rise in terms of economic power and military power seems inevitable. However, Chinese hegemony is very different than US hegemony and also different from the values of several middle power countries that are emerging to become a great power sooner or later including but not limited to the Philippines. China's authoritarianism prompts some nations to worry about what kind of world it would promote. Hence, this situation will just force several middle power countries to rise – without compromising their national interests and their values. The liberal world order is now fraying, the result of a decline in America's relative power and its growing unwillingness to play its traditional role in the world and a rising and increasingly assertive China (Haass, 2022). In this geopolitical recalibration, President Duterte's diplomatic overtures toward China and the strategic distancing from the United States weave a complex narrative that demands careful examination. This nuanced approach, emerging in the wake of the PCA's landmark ruling, not only speaks to the multifaceted nature of diplomatic maneuvering but also underscores the intricate interplay between legal decisions, regional politics, and the pursuit of national interests. As the Philippines navigates this evolving geopolitical landscape, the implications of President Duterte's diplomatic initiatives will undoubtedly resonate across Southeast Asia, shaping the future contours of regional alliances and strategic alignments.

Duterte perceives the world through a lens that influences the mindset of individuals (Maboloc 2018). Hence, Duterte's foreign policy departure can be understood in contrast to the Bush Doctrine, which characterized the early 21st-century U.S. foreign policy. The Bush Doctrine, developed in response to the 9/11 attacks, emphasized preemptive strikes against perceived threats, unilateral action, and a focus on spreading democracy globally (Owens, 2009). In contrast, Duterte's approach, dubbed the Duterte Doctrine, focused on non-confrontational and pragmatic engagement. While the Bush Doctrine sought to project U.S. power globally, Duterte's doctrine aimed at diversifying alliances and reducing dependence on any single power. The Duterte Doctrine is exemplified by a notable pivot from traditional ally, the United States, towards closer ties with China and Russia. This strategic shift, driven by Duterte's pursuit of economic opportunities and a desire for a more independent foreign policy, reflects the neoclassical realist emphasis on the influence of systemic pressures. The Philippines, as a middle power, leverages triangular diplomacy, skillfully navigating the tensions between major powers like the U.S., China, and Russia to maximize its national interests. McCoy (2017) contends that, beyond these actions, Duterte has demonstrated skill in leveraging the rivalry between the United States and China to enhance his international standing. This is evident in his announcement of reconciliation with Beijing and a separation from Washington during his state visit to China in October 2016. However, following the election of Trump in November 2016, Duterte shifted his stance back toward the United States. Duterte's balancing act allowed the Philippines to benefit from the strategic competition between these powers while avoiding excessive alignment. The Duterte administration, which came to power in 2016, brought a notable shift in the Philippines-China relationship. President Rodrigo Duterte pursued a pragmatic approach, emphasizing economic cooperation and de-escalation of maritime tensions.

Figure 1. Philippines-USA-China Triangular Diplomacy

The South China Sea, an expanse marked by intricate and overlapping territorial claims, assumed a pivotal role in shaping the intricate tapestry of relations between the Philippines and China. Against the backdrop of a geopolitical landscape characterized by competing territorial aspirations, the Philippines sought to assert its sovereignty over contested territories within the South China Sea. Concurrently, China, driven by historical narratives and geopolitical ambitions, pursued an expansive and assertive territorial agenda, leading to a confluence of interests and tensions in the region. The Scarborough Shoal standoff in 2012 stands out as a significant juncture, emblematic of heightened maritime tensions between the Philippines and China. This maritime dispute further underscored the divergent perspectives on territorial sovereignty and maritime entitlements. In response to the impasse, the Philippines opted for a diplomatic avenue, initiating international arbitration to address the contested claims. This culminated in the landmark 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration, favoring the Philippines and categorically invalidating China's historical claims. The arbitration ruling not only redrew the contours of territorial assertions in the South China Sea but also reshaped the diplomatic dynamics between the Philippines and China. The Philippines, through international legal avenues, sought to uphold principles of international law and maritime governance. This consequential decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration not only affirmed the Philippines' stance but also served as a catalyst for discussions on the rule of law in resolving complex territorial disputes in the broader context of international relations. The post-ruling landscape presented both challenges and opportunities for the Philippines and China to navigate their bilateral relations within the complex geopolitical canvas of the South China Sea.

In response to perceived Chinese aggression, the Aquino administration took measures to strengthen the Philippines' military ties with the United States as a deterrent. One significant initiative was the negotiation of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which provided the U.S. military with expanded rotational access to Philippine bases. This agreement facilitated increased American military, logistical, and intelligence support. Additionally, the Aquino administration pursued a lawfare strategy, bringing a case against China to a UN-

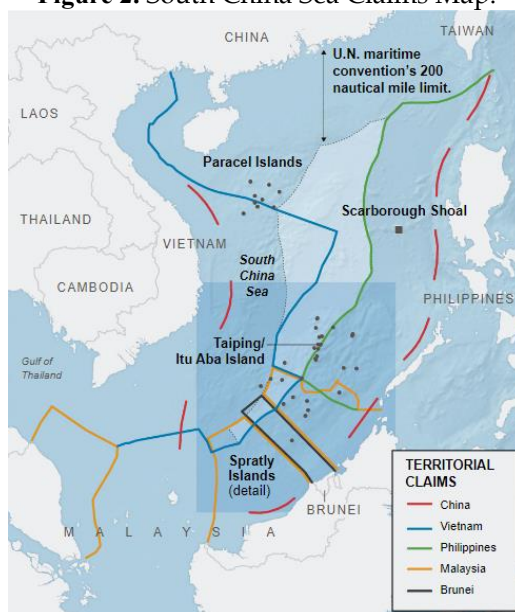
appointed international tribunal in The Hague for violating the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Despite the limited enforcement capabilities of such tribunals, the crucial support from the Obama administration played a significant role and further heightened the Philippines' reliance on the United States (Heydarian, 2017). On July 16, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) issued its long-awaited ruling concerning the petition filed by the Aquino administration regarding the West Philippine Sea. The PCA sided with the Philippines against Beijing's unilateral assertions in the West Philippine Sea. The arbitral decision specifically addressed three key matters:

1. The historical rights claimed by China in the West Philippine Sea, including the validity of the nine-dash line doctrine.
2. The classification of maritime features in the West Philippine Sea; and
3. The legality of Chinese activities conducted in the West Philippine Sea (Williams, 2016).

The South China Sea dispute has emerged as a contemporary challenge influencing the dynamics of the Philippines-USA relationship. As territorial tensions escalated in the region, the Philippines sought international support to uphold its claims in the face of China's assertiveness. The United States, expressing concern over freedom of navigation and regional stability, has been a vocal supporter of the Philippines in the South China Sea issue. This geopolitical concern has added a layer of complexity to their relationship, as both nations navigate the delicate balance between safeguarding regional security and managing diplomatic ties with China. However, the Philippines unequivocally anticipates and desires support from the United States in the ongoing dispute over Scarborough Shoal. However, despite more than a year having elapsed since tensions escalated, the U.S. government has not prominently addressed the issue nor demonstrated explicit support for the Philippines in the dispute. This absence of a vocal stance or overt support from the United States has left the Philippines, entangled in the dispute, in a position of strategic uncertainty and underscores the complexities of diplomatic relations amid regional territorial tensions. The perceived lack of a robust U.S. response has implications for the Philippines' geopolitical standing and raises questions about the depth and nature of the alliance between the two nations in navigating such sensitive maritime disputes (Chu, 2014). Therefore, the Duterte administration downplayed the significance of the PCA decision (de Castro, 2016). Specifically, ex-President Duterte directed his staff to exercise caution regarding the Philippines' legal award. When the South China Sea forum was held on November 23, 2018, quoting from the former Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana who said, "But when the arbitral ruling was about to be announced, we were all in Malacañang, all the Cabinet members were there. When it finally came out, we had this meeting with the President and it was decided that, he called it, let's do it as a soft landing. He said we should not be overly celebrating because we might offend China" (Esmaguél, 2018). Hence, Duterte's pragmatic approach shifted the Philippines away from exclusive reliance on the U.S. for security. Changes in security and defense policies under Duterte also reflect neoclassical realist considerations. The termination of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) and a more open stance towards alliance of defense with other states, which includes Russia and China, illustrate Duterte's pursuit of a more self-reliant defense posture. Neoclassical realism recognizes that domestic factors, including the need for a credible defense

posture, shape a nation's foreign policy, and Duterte's administration want to enhance Philippines' strategic autonomy.

Figure 2. South China Sea Claims Map.



(CSIS, 2016)

Source: CSIS (2016)

In the nascent stages of his presidency, President Duterte, spurred by the landmark award from the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Philippines' favor in the South China Sea dispute, initiated a diplomatic overture aimed at fostering amicable relations with China (de Castro, 2016). This strategic maneuver unfolded within the first three months of his tenure, notably during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Laos. In a calculated effort to garner diplomatic and economic concessions from China, President Duterte adopted a conciliatory approach by downplaying the contentious South China Sea dispute on the regional stage. The PCA's decision, a watershed moment in the Philippines-China relations, provided President Duterte with an opportune moment to recalibrate his country's diplomatic trajectory.

As China and Philippine continue to see themselves as territorial states with sovereignty can be interpreted from the power to exclude non-citizens from the clearly demarcated political spaces. It includes the sea where they will see each other as rivals who see their relationship as a zero-sum game. From that game, China and Philippine will both want to limit each other from their areas of interests in the South China Sea (Rogando Sasot, 2017). President Duterte's approach towards the SCS disputes reflects a calculated chess game strategy in the realm of international politics. Acknowledging the zero-sum nature of territorial claims between China and the Philippines, Duterte strategically positioned his country as a player in a larger geopolitical chessboard. Duterte conveyed a decisive message by stating, "You are scheduled to hold war games, which China does not want. I will serve notice to you now that this will be the last military exercise." In this pronouncement, he asserted a shift in the Philippines' military engagements, signaling a departure from the longstanding tradition of participating in joint

military exercises, particularly those involving the United States. The announcement underscored Duterte's commitment to aligning the Philippines' defense activities with his administration's evolving foreign policy, marked by a recalibration of alliances and a pivot towards a more independent stance in global affairs. The cessation of these military exercises, as articulated by Duterte, reflected a strategic realignment and heralded a noteworthy transformation in the Philippines' defense posture under his leadership (Aurelio, 2016). This showcases Duterte's adept balancing act between systemic pressures and domestic imperatives. By leveraging diplomatic engagements and avoiding confrontations, Duterte aims to maximize the Philippines' agency and resilience amid the complexities of great power competition. The chess game strategy underscores his pragmatic pursuit of national interests, allowing the Philippines to navigate the intricate dynamics of the region and derive benefits from the delicate balance between major powers. President Duterte has opted for the revival of the equibalancing strategy as a departure from the previous administrations' policy of balancing relations with China. The strategic shift aims to foster a more constructive political environment in the bilateral ties between the Philippines and China. This shift is motivated by the goal of enabling substantial collaboration on significant infrastructure ventures, investment projects, and other cooperative initiatives. The overarching objective is to rebuild mutual trust and confidence between the two nations, as articulated in the context of President Duterte's diplomatic approach. This strategic recalibration reflects Duterte's vision of a more positive and cooperative engagement with China, replacing the previous administration's policy stance, and underscores the emphasis on rebuilding a foundation of trust to facilitate mutually beneficial endeavors and strengthen bilateral relations (Baviera 2016: 205). The strategic pivot was underscored by a deliberate effort to diminish the prominence of the South China Sea dispute during the ASEAN summit. By doing so, President Duterte sought to lay the groundwork for an atmosphere conducive to fruitful negotiations and cooperation with China, signaling a pragmatic approach to dispute resolution and regional diplomacy.

Simultaneously, President Duterte expressed a desire to distance the Philippines from the United States, a pronounced shift that carries profound implications for the region's strategic equilibrium. As a consequence of the nation's colonial history, the Philippines has become enmeshed in the global neoliberal economic framework since the post-war era. This integration involved the inheritance of political-economic and social relations and structures, which were further intensified during the debt crisis and through the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) starting in the 1970s (Viajar, 2022). In 2016, President Duterte embarked on diplomatic visits to both Russia and China, strategically positioning the Philippines to pursue an independent foreign policy and cultivate "open (new) alliances" with these regional powers. This diplomatic maneuver carried significant geopolitical implications, given the historic rivalries between Russia and China with the Philippines' longstanding and sole strategic ally, the United States. In the course of major speeches and policy initiatives throughout October 2016, President Duterte explicitly signaled his intention to establish a diplomatic and strategic distance between the Philippines and the United States. Simultaneously, he articulated a deliberate pivot toward the geo-strategic rivals of the United States, namely China and Russia, signaling a profound shift in the Philippines' global alignment and foreign policy orientation (Agence France Press 2016: 1). Duterte's widely termed "pivot to China" marks a significant departure from the robust anti-China stance and

fervently pro-American foreign policy adopted by his predecessors. This shift represents a nationalist resurgence prompted by the perceived humiliation associated with the presence of two substantial US military bases and the perceived unequal economic agreements imposed on the Philippines following its independence in 1946 (Teehankee, 2016). In articulating this strategic shift, the Philippines, as a middle power, finds itself in a geopolitical landscape where maneuvering becomes imperative for its survival and agency on the global stage. This strategic realignment represents a departure from the Philippines' longstanding policy of maintaining close security ties with the United States, its sole strategic ally. The ramifications extend beyond mere diplomatic posturing, heralding a transformation in the geopolitical dynamics of Southeast Asia. President Duterte's assertive stance toward the United States not only reflects an inclination toward greater autonomy in foreign affairs but also introduces a notable recalibration of the Philippines' security posture within the broader context of regional alliances.

Economic Security

Economically, Duterte's administration pursued trade agreements and economic partnerships that played an important role that shapes Philippine foreign policy. Philippines, through the Duterte Doctrine, sought to tap into the economic potential of China and Russia. Trade agreements and infrastructure projects, including those from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), signaled a diversification of economic partners. This economic dimension aligns with neoclassical realist perspectives, emphasizing how economic interests can influence foreign policy decisions. By expanding economic engagements beyond traditional allies, Duterte aimed to bolster the country's economic resilience and reduce vulnerability. The economic interdependence within China and Philippine was notably evident in the flagship program from the Duterte presidency known as "Build, Build, Build," an ambitious initiative aimed at addressing the country's infrastructure gaps. This initiative envisaged a substantial contribution from China in financing various infrastructure projects spearheaded by the Duterte administration. These projects encompassed the development of Mindanao railways, construction of bridges, and the establishment of drug rehabilitation programs and facilities (Marcelo, 2018). Concerns about the implications of growing economic dependence on China had been raised.

The Duterte administration's aspiration for enhanced relations with China aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) infrastructure plans. The "Build, Build, Build Program" or the Golden Age of Infrastructure involves substantial spending, allocates \$170 billion or 7.4% of GDP for infrastructure development by 2022. Chinese support played a crucial role in the implementation of President Duterte's infrastructure plan (Rabena, 2018, p. 7). The BRI's relevance is underscored by Philippines' longstanding struggle with a lot infrastructure challenges, hindering industrial and national development. Based on the data from World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index, Philippine ranked seventh out of nine ASEAN countries in regards of the concerning infrastructure, highlighting the urgent need for improvements (Rabena, 2018, p. 7). President Duterte's first visit to Beijing in October 2016 resulted in substantial financial assistance, that includes \$9 billion in loans and \$15 billion in investments (Baviera & Arugay, 2021, p. 278). The Department of Trade and Industry estimates that the \$24 billion in agreements with China is expected for generating two million jobs at the

Philippines (Rabena, 2018, p. 8). The Philippines, under the BRI framework, joined the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), serving as a financial conduit for China's extensive projects (Paderon & Ang III, 2020, p. 39). China sees the Philippines as a crucial partner in the Silk Road Economic Belt, emphasizing the strategic importance of building trust and respect in the region (Wong, 2014, p. 2). Xi Jinping, in a bilateral meeting in Beijing in April 2019, emphasized the Philippines' significance as an important partner for the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to establish a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia, Europe, and Africa (Virgil Lopez, 2019). The Belt and Road Initiative aligns with China's goal of developing its less affluent core regions, with substantial budgets allocated to firms in these central regions to compete for Belt and Road projects (Yu Jie, 2021). The Maritime Silk Road, connecting Manila to China's Ningbo, Qingdao, and Shanghai, is designed to enhance connectivity in the region (Garriga, 2020, p. 2). China United Lines (CULines) launched the China-Philippines service (CPX) at Qingdao Port in July 2021, with aims to expand the Asian network to provide channels of foreign trade corporation in northeast China that export to Manila. The CPX service facilitates the export of furniture, wood products, plywood, and other commodities from Shandong port and surrounding areas to Southeast Asia efficiently (www.culines.com, 2021; www.seetao.com, 2021).

Figure 3. China - Philippines Service (CPX)



(Culines, 2021)

Source: <https://www.culines.com/en/site/details/300> (2021)

Within the framework of neoclassical realist theory, the economic entwinement between China and the Philippines emerges as a strategic response that navigates both systemic transitions and intrinsic domestic imperatives. At the systemic echelon, the ascendant economic prowess of China, underscored by its global prominence, incites a calibrated strategic engagement by the Philippines, as orchestrated under the Duterte administration. This comportment aligns seamlessly with neoclassical realism's theoretical underpinnings, which underscore the discernible impact of power transitions on the comportment of states. Concurrently, at the domestic level, leaders, particularly exemplified by President Duterte, discern economic development and infrastructural augmentation as cardinal facets of national interests. The calculated pursuit of economic resilience and a concomitant diminution of vulnerability impel the Philippines to diversify its economic liaisons, transcending the purview of traditional allies. Noteworthy in this calculus is the strategic participation in initiatives of

considerable magnitude such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a manifestation of strategic hedging that insulates the Philippines from potential exigencies. This sophisticated foreign policy maneuver underscores the Philippines' strategic recalibration within the transforming global economic landscape, epitomizing a nuanced manifestation of statecraft. The strategic conduct is not merely transactional but is imbued with the vision to enhance regional standing, thereby projecting an overarching influence on the global stage.

Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Well-being of Filipinos Overseas

The diasporic presence of Overseas Filipinos in China, predominantly comprising Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), stands as a noteworthy and consequential facet of the global Filipino expatriate community. Indisputably, China, with its burgeoning economic landscape and dynamic developmental trajectory, has emerged as an increasingly alluring destination for Filipino workers in pursuit of diverse employment opportunities. This migration trend reflects a confluence of factors, including the expanding Chinese economy, demand for specific skill sets, and bilateral agreements facilitating labor mobility.

Table 1. Countries with the Highest Number of Overseas Filipinos

1	United States of America	3,353,891
2	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	938,490
3	Canada	676,775
4	Malaysia	620,043
5	United Arab Emirates	541,593
6	Japan	313,588
7	Australia	304,093
8	Italy	299,787
9	China	229,638
10	Singapore	200,000

Note. Based on Top 25 countries with the highest number of overseas Filipinos, Adapted from Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs' Distribution of Filipinos Overseas Report (DFA, 2014)

While many OFWs in China navigate their professional trajectories successfully, encountering new horizons and contributing meaningfully to their host nation, they also grapple with challenges intrinsic to the expatriate experience. Language barriers, cultural assimilation, and, in some instances, issues related to working conditions represent facets of the nuanced landscape that demand careful consideration. The Philippine government, cognizant of these challenges, worked diligently to address them through diplomatic channels and consular support, thereby fortifying the resilience and adaptability of the overseas Filipino community in China. The evolving economic dynamics of China, characterized by robust growth and infrastructural development, have amplified its appeal as a destination for Filipino professionals and skilled laborers, as well as students. Notably, a discernible surge in Filipinos seeking employment in various occupational sectors has been observed, spanning fields such

as education, healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing. The complexity of China's economic landscape also attracts skilled Filipino workers, who contribute their expertise to pivotal sectors such as engineering, construction, and technology. The involvement of Filipino professionals in China's transformative infrastructure projects underscores the multifaceted nature of the contributions made by OFWs to the host country's socio-economic fabric. Their roles extend beyond mere employment, encompassing active participation in China's advancements in technology and innovation.

In addition to skilled labor, a significant cohort of OFWs in China is engaged in the domestic sector, where they render invaluable services as caregivers and household assistants. These roles, often involving childcare and elderly care, exemplify the diverse spectrum of employment opportunities that China offers to Filipino workers. Jose Santiago, the ambassador of Philippine to China during Duterte's reign, disclosed plans to engage "English-speaking" Filipino domestic workers to meet the growing demand in China. Sta. Romana highlighted the influence of Hong Kong, where a substantial number of domestic workers from Filipino assisting busy families in nurturing the childrens they have. Elaborating on this trend, Sta. Romana explained, "The Chinese upper middle class are learning from Hong Kong. They want to hire nannies who can teach their kids English, so English-speaking domestics" (Elemia, 2017). However, he acknowledged that the scale might not match that of Hong Kong due to the competitive labor market in China. The evolving lifestyle and family structures in mainland China are prompting a shift in demand for household services. Professor of Xiamen University, Li Meiting noted that, at present, household service workers predominantly serve expatriates in five major Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xiamen, and Shenzhen. Within this matrix of employment domains, English language proficiency, a hallmark of Filipino communication skills, has engendered a demand for Filipino English teachers in China's language schools, private institutions, and tutoring platforms. As observed by Uy (2008), the escalating demand for English proficiency in China has resulted in the continual creation of job opportunities over the past decade. The surge in demand for English language instruction has significantly elevated the recruitment of foreign educators. The recent accord inked between Duterte and Xi pertaining to Filipino employment suggests prospective avenues for Filipino teachers seeking opportunities abroad. Recognizing the potential language barrier, Secretary Leonor Briones of the Philippine Department of Education articulated a proposal of education exchange initiative between the China and Philippines, encompassing the training of Filipino educators to improve Mandarin proficiency (Tomacruz, 2019). Those educators are envisioned to be deployed across various educational levels, from elementary schools to colleges, throughout the mainland. Contract durations are stipulated for two years, with the prospect of renewal upon the culmination of each contractual term (Bata, 2021).

The legal framework governing the employment of foreign workers in China underscores the adherence to Chinese labor laws and regulations. OFWs, as part of contractual agreements with their employers, operate within this legal framework, outlining terms and conditions that encompass work hours, compensation, and benefits. Simultaneously, the Philippine government, through its diplomatic mission and consulates in China, strengthened consular services and support to safeguard the rights and well-being of OFWs, ensuring compliance with labor standards and offering assistance during exigent circumstances. Beyond economic and territorial considerations, cultural and people-to-people exchanges have played

a role in shaping the Philippines-China relationship and have become an avenue for fostering mutual understanding and goodwill. These soft diplomacy efforts were aimed to bridge historical gaps and build connections at the grassroots level, contributing to a more nuanced and multifaceted relationship.

D. CONCLUSION

Examining the intricate terrain of Philippine foreign policy, the Duterte cabinet's tenure unveils a nuanced strategic recalibration epitomized by the Duterte Doctrine, scrutinized through the lens of a neoclassical realist model. This diplomatic paradigm reflects a meticulous negotiation of systemic pressures and domestic imperatives. The three pillars foundational to Philippine foreign policy which is national security, economic diplomacy, and protecting Filipinos overseas—illustrate a delicate equilibrium defining the nation's role as a middle power. The historical trajectory of relations between the Philippines and the USA, transitioning from a colonial legacy to a strategic alliance and subsequently undergoing a post-Cold War recalibration, manifests as a complex interplay of geopolitical shifts. Concurrently, the Philippines-China relationship, marked by historical connections and contemporaneous tensions, manifests as a diplomatic chess game where President Duterte strategically positions the nation amid territorial disputes. The cessation of joint military exercises with the U.S. signifies a seismic departure in defense posture, a resolute commitment to autonomy. Economically, the Duterte administration, encapsulated in the Duterte Doctrine, ardently pursues diversified economic partnerships, fostering opportunities with China and Russia while raising pertinent concerns about burgeoning economic dependence. In essence, this intricate geopolitical strategy underscores the adaptive resilience of Philippine foreign policy—a cogent response to the evolving global landscape, safeguarding core interests, and substantively contributing to regional stability. As the geopolitical stage continues to evolve, the adaptability and pragmatism exhibited by the Philippines in its foreign policy become paramount. The delicate balance between traditional alliances, economic partnerships, and the safeguarding of national interests necessitates a nuanced and context-specific approach. The Philippines, as a middle power, leverages its agency in navigating great power competition while actively participating in the discourse on regional security, economic development, and protecting its citizens abroad. The geopolitical landscape demands not only strategic agility but also a commitment to the principles of international law, peace, and justice, as enshrined at the constitutional underpinnings from Philippine's foreign policy. In this complex geopolitical milieu, the Philippines stands poised to continue shaping its destiny, contributing to regional stability, and participating in the global discourse on the basis of its foundational principles and strategic considerations.

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