

DOD's Rotation to the Philippines

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The United States has long maintained a significant military presence in the Pacific, with permanent garrisons and regular deployments by ground, naval, and air forces and routine exercises with their local counterparts. In 2011-2012, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced its intention to "rebalance" by focusing more of its attention and activity on Asia. One goal is to influence the development of regional norms and rules, particularly as China exerts greater influence.

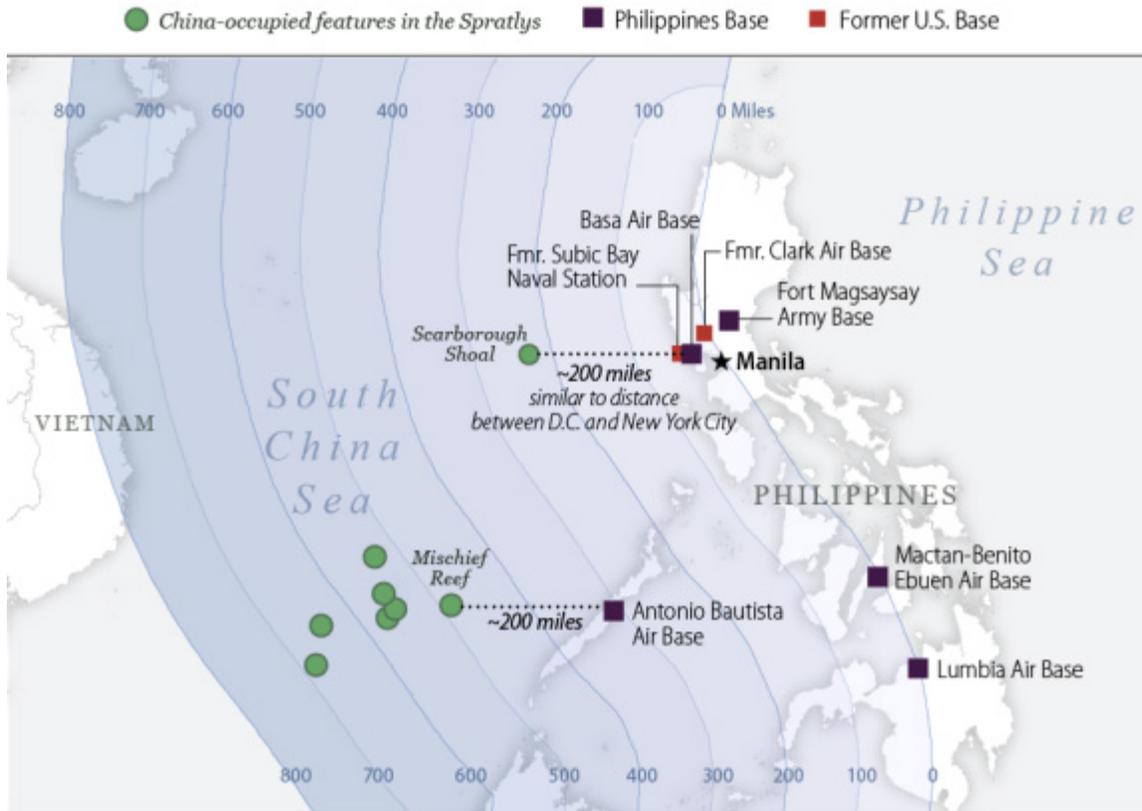
On March 18, 2016, the United States and the Republic of the Philippines announced the selection of five military sites that will host a rotation of U.S. military units. This marks the first time that U.S. units will be welcomed by the Republic on regularly scheduled visits since the last permanent garrisons were withdrawn in 1992 (see CRS In Focus IF10250, [The Philippines](#)).

The announcement identified five Philippine installations that would be configured to host U.S. units. [Figure 1](#) locates these sites relative to the nation's capital, Manila, and the former U.S. installations of Clark Air Base and Naval Station Subic Bay. The Government of the Philippines plans to modernize these and other installations, and U.S. infrastructure investment plans for those selected are now being developed.

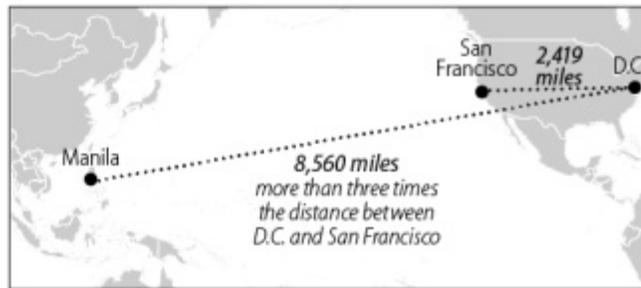
[Figure 1](#) also locates the Philippines relative to the United States and to several nearby South China Sea reefs and shoals on which the Peoples Republic of China has created landmass and built facilities (see CRS Report R44072, [Chinese Land Reclamation in the South China Sea: Implications and Policy Options](#)). The Philippines lie in the far-western reaches of the Pacific Ocean, nearly 9,000 miles from Washington, DC. A flight from the nation's capital to Manila requires 17½ hours, or the equivalent of flying between Washington and San Francisco, CA, three times before landing in Lincoln, NE. By contrast, Philippine military installations lie only 200 miles, or approximately the distance between Washington, DC, and New York City, from the nearest Chinese-developed reefs and shoals (see CRS Report R42930, [Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: Issues for Congress](#)).

Figure 1. Sites Selected for the Rotation of U.S. Forces

Showing former Major U.S. Garrisons, Announced Rotational Bases, and Chinese-occupied Reefs and Shoals



Comparable Distances



Source: Graphic developed by the CRS Publishing and Editorial Section.

Notes: Distances are in statute miles.

Table 1 provides details on each of the designated facilities listed by their location, north to south, within the country.

Table 1. Designated Rotational Philippine Military Facilities

Name	Location relative to the Capital, Manila	Notes
Fort Ramon Magsaysay	58 miles north	Largest Philippine military installation, covering 86,000 acres, a principal training facility

Basa Air Base	40 miles northwest	Houses air defense wing and fighter group, single 10,000' concrete runway
Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base	359 miles southeast	Hosts tactical helicopter, search and rescue, and airlift wings, single 10,000' concrete runway
Antonio Bautista Air Base	368 miles south southwest	Also Puerto Princesa International Airport, single 8,500' concrete runway
Lumbia Air Base	493 miles south southeast	Location of strike wing, also known as Lumbia Airport, single 8,000' concrete runway

Sources: [Philippine Air Force](#), [United States Naval Institute](#).

The United States and the Republic of the Philippines maintain close ties rooted in the United States' administration of the country (1898-1946), extensive military cooperation, the bilateral security alliance, and common strategic and economic interests. In the fall of 2011, the Obama Administration outlined a policy of "rebalancing" aimed at raising the priority placed on the Asia-Pacific region in U.S. foreign policy. The Philippines has figured prominently in this effort, particularly as maritime territorial disputes between China, the Philippines, and other claimants in the South China Sea have intensified. Twenty-five years after the Philippine Senate narrowly voted to effectively close U.S. military bases in the Philippines, and one year after the United States deactivated a counterterrorism special operations task force deployed in Mindanao, U.S.-Philippines security cooperation has entered a new phase. Since 2014, the U.S. government has substantially increased military assistance such as Foreign Military Financing to the Philippine armed forces (AFP), while joint military exercises have reoriented their focus from domestic to international maritime security. The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), finalized between Washington and Manila in 2014 and approved by the Philippine Supreme Court in January 2016, governs the increased rotational presence of U.S. military forces, ships, aircraft, and equipment in the Philippines and U.S. access to five Philippine military bases.

During U.S. administration, the archipelago served as the major U.S. outpost in the western Pacific. Between 1941 and 1945, Imperial Japanese military forces invaded and occupied the Philippines. Allied forces reconquered the islands in a lengthy and bloody campaign during 1944-1945. Throughout the Cold War, the Philippines hosted a sizeable U.S. military presence, serving as a major staging area for U.S. land, sea, and air forces engaged in the Vietnam War. By the 1980s, U.S. garrisons were concentrated at two large installations on the island of Luzon, the location of the nation's capital, Manila. Clark Air Base was located near the city of Angeles and Naval Station Subic Bay/Naval Air Station Cubi Point adjoined the city of Olongapo. At any given time, between 13,000 and 15,000 military personnel and approximately 12,000 DOD civilians, plus the crews of visiting ships and air squadrons, were serving in these facilities. Following the enactment of a Philippine law that barred the stationing of foreign troops on the territory of the republic, U.S. forces were withdrawn and all installations were returned to the administration of the host government.

For 13 years, in conjunction with Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, U.S. special operation forces (SOF) advised Philippine special forces in their fight against militants in the southern islands – notably the *Abu Sayyaf Group* (see CRS Report R44051, [Comparing DHS Appropriations by Component, FY2016: Fact Sheet](#)). At its height, the [Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines \(JSOTF-P\) reported 600 U.S. military personnel in country](#), consisting of Navy SEAL, Marines, and Army Special Forces. The mission, starting in January 2002, included both military (advisory) and humanitarian missions and is generally perceived as successful. Seventeen U.S. troops died during the mission, including 10 killed in a [2002 helicopter crash](#).