

# The Philippine and U.S. Expanded Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA): An Analysis

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## **Abstract**

*This study seeks to explain and analyze the behavior of the Philippines and The United States in forging the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Treaty (EDCA). It employs International Relations theories namely Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism as frameworks of analysis and interpretation. In the perspective of realism, EDCA is a joint interest of the Philippines and US. EDCA is an act or move of the US as it balances China's rise to power in order to avoid war and anarchy and protect US interest in the Asia Pacific region. EDCA serves as deterrence to China or to any would-be aggressor to the Philippines in the midst of territorial and maritime disputes. In the point of view of liberalism, the EDCA is a reaffirmation and the strengthening of the alliance of two democratic states promoting military, economic, civic, and humanitarian cooperation and interdependence. In the spirit of constructivism, EDCA is also a product of democratic ideas and norms that the US and Philippines share as democratic states. The United States serves as a norm entrepreneur to the Philippines and other states in the Pacific Rim. Therefore, EDCA is necessary, practical, and beneficial to the Philippines and the United States.*

*Keywords: EDCA, Philippine Territorial Dispute, Philippine Foreign Relations, US-Philippine Relations, and International Relations*

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The Philippines and the United States signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) last April 28, 2014. The agreement does not only strengthen the Philippine-US relations but affirms their mutual support and defense for each other from any armed attack by a foreign state (Q and A on the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement).

However, there are ongoing debates about EDCA that focus on controversial issues. First, is on the possibility that US servicemen will abuse

Filipino women. Second is the danger of a nuclear accident should the US forces bring in nuclear weapons because there is no way the Philippine government and armed forces can check their vessels. Third is also the danger that the US forces will dump nuclear or toxic waste into Philippine water and land. Fourth is the constitutionality of the agreement because it does not undergo senate and congress scrutiny and approval. Many people think of the agreement as a violation of the country's sovereignty and others argue that the agreement is more beneficial to the US than

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the Philippines (Fonbuena, 2014). These issues have drawn reactions, suspicions, and protests, especially, from individuals and interest groups in the country that have anti-US sentiments. But, none of these debates explains nor focuses on the behavior (action/decision) of the Philippines and the United States why they enter into this agreement.

### **Objective of the Study**

For this reason, the paper would like to explain the behavior of the Philippine government and the US in forging the EDCA using different theories of international relations such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism as framework.

This paper is relevant because this provides a broader interpretation and more academic approach to this timely issue that will help facilitate understanding among students of political science and international relations as well as the general public. Likewise, considering that there are still very few literatures on the analysis of state behavior concerning EDCA, this paper serves as additional analysis that may lead to further analysis by other scholars. This study also supplements classroom discussions and literatures on Philippine foreign relations and other courses in International Relations that would discuss US and Philippine relations and politics.

### **2.0 Method**

The study employs interpretative textual analysis using the aforementioned theories of international relations. Specifically it utilizes state and inter-state levels of analysis on the issue.

### **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

In the analyzing why the US and the Philippines signed EDCA, the theories on realism, liberalism and constructivism are used in the study.

Realism is one of the oldest theories of

international relations. Some would call it conservatism. It is based on fundamental assumptions: First, human nature is evil. Thus, it is natural for man to be belligerent. In other words, war, conflict, and anarchy are natural. Peace, on the other hand, is artificial. Second, man is a social being who needs to belong to a group. Belonging to a group makes one distinct and separate from others who belong to another group; this creates a feeling of superiority over others and a sense of competition that is called collective egoism. Collective egoism is a perfect recipe of conflict which makes conflict inevitable (Shimko, 2013).

Realism can be traced back to the ancient time. Among its proponents is the Greek historian Thucydides who claims that might is right. Its contemporary proponents are the British historian Edward Carr, the political scientist Hans Morgenthau, and the diplomat George Kennan. According to Hans Morgenthau, what makes man evil is his propensity for power. George Kennan added that there is a seed of totalitarianism in each human being. Therefore, human nature is something that cannot be perfected (Shimko, 2013). Eduard Carr assumed that the only basis of international relations is power, that is, economic, military, and political. The power states and actors are the ones that define international relations (Duke, 2015).

Man's natural propensity for power leads to conflict or anarchy in the international system which causes a security dilemma. Security dilemma happens when each state strives to accumulate power in order to feel secure. As one state becomes more powerful, other states feel insecure. Thus, they too strive to accumulate more power to feel secure. This would lead to an eternal recurrence of a power struggle among states that perpetuate the vicious cycle of insecurity and even of conflict, war, and anarchy (Shimko, 2013).

Indeed, realism views international relation

as a struggle for power. Power and security are the ultimate interests of states. Thomas Hobbes affirms that since there is no world power that will impose and enforce peace among various political units, anarchy and conflict are inevitable. Thus, the primary interest of the states is its national security (Viotti, 2013).

Moreover, the power struggle of states characterizes the international system as anarchical. Each state strives for order and the only way to achieve it is through the "balance of power." Balance of power has something to do with the proper distribution of power or the equilibrium in power distribution so that no aggressive state will emerge (Paul, 2012). Through a balance of power, peace can be achieved.

Balance of power is either "Bipolar" or "Multipolar." The former means two states have equal power while the latter would mean many states have equal power. These powerful states are the custodians of peace. The main principle behind balance of power is that states with equal power are less likely to wage war (Paul, 2012).

It is usually the more powerful state that will wage war with weaker states. That is why, it is dangerous to have only one powerful state because it will impose its power on others. However, if there is another equally powerful state to balance the power, war would less likely emerge (Paul, 2012).

An alternative view of looking at the international system and international relations is liberalism or idealism. Others would call it liberal internationalism. Among its proponents are the philosophers John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant (Shimko, 2013).

Just like realism, liberalism has its own assumptions. First, man is good in nature. Thus man naturally seeks for freedom and is capable of making rational choices. Second, social institutions are geared towards catering to the needs of individuals. Third, human nature can be perfected

through time by using one's rationality in making choices and decisions. Liberalism believes that conflict can be avoided. Its goal is to create a social, political, and economic order that benefits everyone, an order that promotes freedom and economic well-being, in other words, peace and security. (Shimko, 2013).

Liberalism believes in human progress. With his intellect and reason, man can find solutions to problems and human needs. So, human history is a scientific, social, and moral progress. It also believes and respects human rights because it advocates democracy. Democracy recognizes, promotes, and protects human rights and human dignity. Hence, democracies are more peaceful than non-democracies. Liberalism wants the world to be democratic so that the world will become more peaceful (Shimko, 2013).

According to liberalism, peace can also be achieved through trades and economic interdependence among states. The growth of international institutions has helped ameliorate insecurity because it has built trust and cooperation among states (Shimko, 2013).

Liberalism claims that peace is the natural state of affairs. War and conflict are artificial. Nature dictates harmony and cooperation among people and states. Therefore, conflict and war are irrational and unnatural (Burchill, 2009).

War is a consequence of militaristic and undemocratic governments pursuing their own individual vested interest. War is seen as an ailment that needs to be cured. Democracy and Free Trade are seen by liberals as medicines of this illness. Democracy will prevent totalitarianism and tyranny to hold power through checks and balances (Burchill, 2009).

Indeed, liberalism can be summarized in three main principles: democracy, economic interdependence, and institutions. Economic interdependence will cause mutual loss if

countries engaged in war. Regional institutions and international organizations are means to settle disputes and engagements as well as encourage cooperation among states and impose sanctions (Paul, 2012).

Aside from realism and liberalism, constructivism is another alternative view on international relations. Daniel Thomas explains states and actors in the international system behave in accordance with ideas and norms relevant to their identities. In other words, states and international actors behave according to what they believe is right and proper depending on their mental models or the ideas and norms that influenced them and shaped their identity. States and actors act and behave depending on what politicians and leaders think how they identify themselves and others and how they think they should behave (Shimko, 2013).

Constructivism postulates that peace and order in the international level can neither be achieved through material and structural conditions as postulated by liberalism nor by the balance of power advocated by realism. Peace and order are achieved by the norms, ideas, and practices about peace and conflict that regional entities hold. These norms and ideas are spread at the international level through norm entrepreneurs (Paul, 2012).

The core principle of constructivism or social constructivism as it is also called is that the international system does not determine the behavior of state and non-state actors, rather, the international system is what state and non-state actors make of it. In other words, the identity and interest of state and non-state actors are not given to them or predetermined but these identities and interest are constructed by state and non-state actors as they relate or interact with one another on the basis of their past and present experiences as well as their expectations in the future. Therefore, the behavior of state and non-state actors are

determined by how they conceive themselves and how they conceive others (Daddow, 2009).

#### **4.0 Results and Discussions**

##### **EDCA Defined**

EDCA is a ten-year military pact between the US and the Philippines that provides the US more open access to Philippine military, air force, and naval bases in the country. The US military presence in these bases is only temporary and rotational considering that the last Philippine Constitution does not allow a permanent occupation of foreign military forces in the country (Reuters, 2014).

The agreement was signed by the US ambassador to the Philippines, Philip Goldberg and Philippines' Secretary of Defense Voltaire Gazmin. The purpose of the agreement is to promote peace and security in the region and to enhance humanitarian aid operations during natural disasters and calamities (Panda, 2014).

EDCA is intended to bring Interoperability. It provides capacity building to modernize the Philippine military. It strengthens the Philippine Armed Forces for external defense, maritime security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance, and disaster response (Romulo, 2014).

EDCA is the fourth security agreement between the Philippines and the United States. Before EDCA, there were MUTUAL Defense Treaty (MDT), the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) which governs the status of US Troops in the Philippines, by the MSLA that is about the Logistics Cooperation of US and Philippine armed forces, and the MAA which formalized the US Development Assistance to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Dizon, 2014).

##### **EDCA in the Realist Point of View**

EDCA is a product of the determination of the administration of Benigno Aquino III to counter China's expansion in Southeast Asia. It is necessary for a small power like the Philippines to forge alliances through its foreign policy options

to confront an emerging Power like China that is encroaching Philippine territory (De Castro, 2014).

EDCA is indeed motivated by the security concerns of the Philippines on China's aggression on disputed maritime territories, the Scarborough shoal and the Thomas shoal. Thus, this deal is perceived as a containment of China (Panda, 2014).

It serves as deterrence to would-be aggressor to the Philippines. Without the EDCA, there would be no deterrence at all, and it would make the Philippines an easy prey to bullying and aggression by a state like China. Indeed, General Emmanuel Bautista, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff, affirmed that EDCA is the Philippine's creative way of enhancing deterrence in the midst of territorial and maritime security issue. It is practical for the Philippines to turn to its ally the United States for help to create a credible deterrence to would-be assailants to Philippine territorial and maritime security (Dizon, 2014).

It provides the Philippines an opportunity to strengthen its defense through the modernization of the armed forces with the help of the United States achieving "The minimum credible defense capability" amidst territorial disputes (Baviera, 2014).

It has to be known that EDCA is not only the interest of the Philippines. It is also the interest of the United States. It is clear that one of the main characteristics of US foreign policy in the Obama administration is the "Pivot to Asia." It means that the US will enhance its role in the Asia Pacific region (Manyin et al., 2012). This policy aims to rebalance US defense policy to Asia (Ungaro, 2012). China's growing belligerence on maritime issues in East and Southeast Asia needs a balancing of power (Romualdez, 2014). Indeed, China's military buildup threatens the freedom of navigation and US access to global governance, the air, sea, land, space, and cyberspace. This threat posed by China to the US requires the US to balance China's power

in the Asia Pacific region (Ungaro, 2012).

When Barrack Obama visited Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines, he reassured them of the US commitment and support defensively in case China will become belligerent in the region (Reuters, 2014). Hence, EDCA is not an isolated case because other Asian countries like Japan and South Korea have mutual defense treaty with the US. It is an evidence of US interest of containing China. In other words, these mutual defense treaties are intended to contain an emerging power to become belligerent and cause instability in the region.

The US Pivot to Asia is seen as a defense strategic guidance. It is intended to lure China to be under US hegemony. But, the ulterior motive is to contain China so that it will not become a rival power (Smith, 2014).

Other reasons of the pivot are the growing economic and financial influence of Asia for the future of the United States like the free flow of commerce, stability, the promotion of democracy, and human rights (Ungaro, 2012).

Even before the Obama administration, the US regional strategy is to prevent Asia from becoming unstable. The US must find a way to establish peace in the region according to its intent. The US cannot solve this issue by itself. It always needs the help of its allies in the region and the world. The US must create a way to establish regional cooperation. It must enhance communication and reduce misunderstanding and boost economic interdependence that will reduce the likelihood of conflict. Enhanced security alliance will further help in the deterrence of war and conflict (Khalilzad, 2001).

The EDCA is an affirmation that the US rebalancing in Asia is concrete and that the US recognizes the Philippines and its Southeast Asian allies are vital and critical in that process. It also reinforced the idea that the "Pivot to Asia" is

basically a security policy (Dalpino, 2014).

### **EDCA in the Liberalist Perspective**

The EDCA is a confirmation of Philippine alliance with the United States. Attacking the agreement or protesting against it is a denial or ignorance of history. It has to be remembered that the United States has been an ally of the Philippines even before the Second World War. It is normal for allies to develop or strengthen their alliance through improved agreements like EDCA. Attacking the agreements, protesting against them or desiring not to strengthen ties with the US are simply breaking our alliance with the US, and it is tantamount to “unfriending” the US. It would put the Philippines in isolation that is all the more illogical and unthinkable in the 21st century in an age of integration and globalization that essentially requires the cooperation of states.

The EDCA is, therefore, to be perceived as cooperation between the Philippines and the United States. The US being a democratic country is essentially a friend, an ally of the Philippines that is also a democratic country. Democracies do not fight or rarely fight and they cooperate because they share the same ideology that respects human rights, freedom, and dignity. Therefore, the Philippines should not be antagonistic with the US. Criticizing, attacking, and denying the EDCA is treating the US as an enemy because there is a feeling of fear, doubt, and suspicion. One cannot treat an ally with feelings of fear, doubt, and suspicion. In genuine friendship and alliance, there must be mutual trust and confidence.

The EDCA is a concrete evidence of the military, civic, and humanitarian interdependence between the Philippines and the United States. Through EDCA, both countries share military resources and they work hand in hand in providing humanitarian aid during calamities. In other words, it is an evidence of the deepening of the US –Philippine

bilateral defense agreements, relationship and cooperation (Cruz, 2015).

The Obama Administration is well aware that its “Pivot to Asia” is not sustainable unless it supports its partners, namely, Australia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Thus, EDCA is a tangible expression of US continued support to the Philippines (Ott and Allen, 2015). Therefore; it is confirmation of US-Philippine Alliance (Misalucha, 2015).

The US national Security Advisor Tom Donilon clarifies the goal of US Pivot to Asia. He said that the US wants stable security environment, and regional order founded in economic accessibility and openness, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for universal rights and freedom (Moss, 2014).

Unlike the realist perspective that views the pivot as an act of containing China militarily, in the liberalist perspectives the US wants to engage China peacefully. In fact, the US says that it does not want to contain China. It does not want to take a side in the disputes between China and its neighbors and suggests that the conflicts be settled peacefully (Lynch, 2014).

### **EDCA in the Light of Constructivism**

In the constructivist perspective, democratic norms, ideas, and practices lead the Philippines to the signing of EDCA. The Philippines has been longing for freedom and democracy ever since it has been a colony of Spain for more than three hundred years. Hence, the United States introduced democracy, freedom, and independence to the Philippines when it defeated Spain in the Spanish-American war. In other words, the United States acted as a norm entrepreneur to the Philippines. Since the Philippines was influenced by these democratic ideas, norms, and practices of the Americans, the Philippines will act according to the principles of democracy. Consequently, cooperating and making alliances with fellow

democratic countries is the norm and practice the Philippines has followed as evidenced by its previous treaties with the US.

China's territorial claim in the West Philippine Sea is a situation that threatens Philippine democracy, freedom, rights, and sovereignty that the Philippines as a democratic country must uphold and protect. Thus, it has to ask help from its ally, the US, to protect and preserve peace, democracy, and freedom.

The US also being a norm entrepreneur of democracy must see to it that democracy is preserved in the region so that war and conflict will not arise. In doing so, it must strengthen alliances with old allies to make sure they remain democratic. It must nurture new relationships especially with China through peaceful means so that communism will not spread, dominate, and cause instability in the region.

This study is limited only in explaining and interpreting the behavior of the US and the Philippines in signing the EDCA. It does not focus or emphasize on the pros and cons of the agreement. Likewise, this study employs only three major theories in the analysis and interpretation.

### 5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the EDCA is a natural, practical, and beneficial move of both the Philippines and the United States to protect their interests of securing peace and stability in the West Philippine Sea and the Asia Pacific region. It is intended to advance the democratic interest of preserving human rights and freedom. It is also an affirmation and confirmation of Philippine and US alliance, cooperation and interdependence.

The US engages China in three different angles. In the realist perspective, the US makes use of Mutual defense treaties with its allies in the Pacific region to contain and balance China's power. In

the liberalist way, the US engages China through economic interdependence and cooperation. In the constructivist way, the US maintains relations with its allies as well as with China to maintain peace, security, and stability in the region in order to preserve and spread the norm of democracy.

### 6.0 Recommendation

This study recommends that the EDCA be analyzed using other theories of international relations to further the understanding of the issue.

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