My purpose in this article is to present some thoughts on the more than half-century of Philippine-American relations since the recovery of Philippine independence in 1946. That is a long period. One cannot deal with those years in a meaningful way unless one looks back over an even longer span of time, beginning with the American colonial conquest of the Philippines in 1898. Only by recalling some events and characteristics of the Philippine-American colonial relationship is it possible to understand what has been distinctive about the connection between the two countries since 1946. I will begin with some propositions that may contribute to an understanding of that relationship, and the tensions that it has encountered, over the course of a century.

Viewed over time, the Philippine-American relationship reversed the more usual direction of the evolving relationships between colonial powers and their former colonies. An example of that more common pattern, typical especially but not exclusively of the earlier overseas "colonies" of European countries, was the relationship between Britain and the United States. It began with the settlement of the North American coast by immigrants from the British Isles who thought of themselves as loyal subjects of the British King. Over time, as these settlers and their descendants grew more self reliant, they became increasingly restive under British rule. This led finally to the American Revolution, the violent low point in the British-American connection.

Thereafter, the post-colonial relationship was strained, improving only slowly, as the painful break receded into memory, with only a gradual reconciliation. At first, ill will towards British loyalists led to the flight of many of them to Canada. Then came another clash, the War of 1912, and the burning of the American capital by British troops.
Later, during our Civil War, Britain favored the seceding South. Yet by the time of the First World War, the warm friendship between Britain and her former North American colonies had been restored. Through World War II until today, it remains America’s trans-Atlantic special relationship.

During the Falklands War, Latin Americans were shocked that their Northern neighbor would side almost instinctively with Britain, its former ruler, against Argentina, another former American colony of a European power. But these same erstwhile South American colonies, which made their revolutions against Spain a century and a half ago, have undergone similar warming relationships with Spain. Philippine relations with Spain followed a similar pattern. After the clashes of 1896 and 1898, they could only improve and that they did.

The Philippine-American relationship has followed an opposite course. It began badly at the turn of the century, when American forces suppressed the First Philippine Republic, and installed the United States as the new colonizing power. But attitudes towards their new colonial ruler became less hostile over the next four decades, as Filipino leaders took increasing control over their own government, in the expectation of early Independence, and as Filipinos came to value American contributions in education, health, and rural development.

What had become a Philippine-American friendship reached its high point with the end of the Japanese occupation, when Filipinos welcomed General MacArthur as their liberator. This era of good feeling, found in few other newly independent colonies of the early post World War II years, lasted through the 1950s to such a degree that U.S. Ambassador Charles Bohlen found it necessary to let it be known that his task was to represent the interests of the United States, as distinguished from the interests of the Philippines. Meanwhile, as Americans basked in the glow of Filipino expression of friendship, both governments vowed to maintain a special relationship between their countries in the future.

But, relying too much on Filipino gratitude for their liberation, and taking advantage of the Philippines’ need for reconstruction aid, the U.S. Congress extracted from its former colony a number of concessions that, in the long run, could not but grate on the national pride and sense of self-interest of an independent nation. I refer of course to the Parity provisions of the Bell Act which, as a precondition for badly needed reconstruction assistance, required the Philippines to amend its
Constitution so as to give to Americans equal rights in the exploitation of Philippine National resources, and the 99-year lease given the United States for a number of military bases.

The unequal nature of these provisions offended Filipino nationalists, who had expected something better from America. That the Parity provision was recommended to the U.S. Congress by Paul V. McNutt, who as High Commissioner should have defended Filipino interests, rather than the interests of American investors, added to that bitterness. But the majority of Filipinos, perhaps out of a combination of gratitude and national need, supported the Constitutional amendment that gave parity to American investors.

And then there was a final, thoughtless affront to Filipino pride: The U.S. Congress' decision to set the date of Philippine independence for July 4th, which was also America's Independence Day. That was to become a source of embarrassment to Philippine diplomats abroad, until President Macapagal moved Independence Day to 12 June, in commemoration of the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution.

From then on, as memories of the euphoria of Liberation faded, the "special relationship" came under growing strain. To redress the inequities of the 1946 arrangements, parity was made reciprocal by the Laurel Langley agreement, and various objectionable provisions of the bases agreement were revised in a series of later agreements. These included a shortening of the time period of the leases for the bases, the flying of the Philippine flag over what were redefined as Philippine instead of American installations, the extension of Philippine jurisdiction over American servicemen charged with certain offenses, and the payment of increasing amounts of what was variously defined as "aid" or "rent" for the use of the bases.

After 1972, the Filipino perception of American support for the President Marcos' post-1972 martial law government created a new source of resentment towards the United States among the president's opponents. In the meantime, the American presence in both its military and economic forms was to remain a lightning rod for Filipino nationalists. Only in recent years, as the major irritants in the relationships have been removed—notably Marcos and the military bases—has there been an improvement in the ties between the Philippines and the United States.

In sum, while the slow post-revolutionary restoration of friendship between the United States and Britain, or between the Philippines and Spain, resembled a warming romance, that between the Philippines
and America after 1946 was analogous to a troubled marriage, in which both partners, for different reasons and with little understanding of each other, found themselves increasingly embittered by what they saw as their partner’s failure to live up to his or her wedding vows. Only a renegotiation of the terms of the marriage could save it. It is always easier, and more pleasant to experience a romance than an estrangement. That is why the post-Independence “special relationship” between the Philippines and the United States suffered under frequent if not persistent strains.

At various times, over the past century, there have been within both the Philippines and the United States serious internal disagreement over the management of the relationship between the two countries, and indeed over whether there should be a relationship at all. This has contributed to the difficulties of maintaining smooth ties between the two countries on both sides of the Pacific.

In the Philippines, there were at the beginning of the twentieth century deep divisions over whether or not to make the best of American colonial rule, or to continue the resistance in the hills. Prominent advocates of the former view were rewarded for their cooperation by appointments to the Philippine Commission and to lesser government posts. The cause of continued resistance won its support mainly among the less privileged classes, who carried on their struggle from the highlands for a number of years. Some then chose long years of self-exile abroad. Among these was the Ilocano revolutionary General Artemio Ricarte, who went into exile in Japan, and returned to his homeland only four decades later, during the Japanese occupation.

In America, there was from the beginning disagreement between the two political parties as to whether and how long the United States should retain the Philippines as a colonial possession. Anti-Imperialists, centered in New England, and most of them Democrats, opposed America’s becoming a colonizing power, and called for immediate Philippine independence. American exponents of Manifest Destiny, led by Theodore Roosevelt, favored an extended period of retention while Filipinos were prepared for self-government. As the Republicans controlled both the Presidency and the Congress during the early years of the American presence in the Philippines, the Republican policy prevailed.

But with the election of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson in 1913 American Philippine policy, implemented by Governor Francis Burton Harrison, shifted towards a rapid devolution of power to Fili-
pinos. Policy became more conservative under the next governor general, Republican appointee Leonard Wood. But in 1933, shortly before the end of the Herbert Hoover administration, and over that President's veto, a bipartisan coalition in the U.S. Congress passed the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Philippine Independence Act, and Filipinos proceeded to write a Constitution for what would first be an interim autonomous Commonwealth and later an independent Republic. Thus, for Filipino leaders, the partisan contests in the United States were a matter of vital national importance, which they learned to manipulate, or accommodate, with considerable skill.

The post-World War II, post-Independence years saw no significant differences in Washington between the Philippine policies of Republican and Democratic administrations. All found the former colony a useful ally at a time when some Third World governments had become clients of the Soviet Union, while others had formed an assertively anti-Western non-aligned block.

In the Philippines however, there were sharp disagreements about the policies that should be chosen to deal with the United States. The first three post-war Philippine presidents all saw a need for a close special relationship, if only to ensure the continued flow of American financial assistance. Manuel Roxas led the move to amend the Constitution so as to include the parity provision. Elpidio Quirino accepted the Bell Mission's economic reform conditions for increased American aid. Ramon Magsaysay relied on American advice in combating the Hukbalahap rebellion and in designing his land reform program. The next three presidents, Carlos Garcia, Diosdado Macapagal, and Ferdinand Marcos also found close ties with the United States to be in the national interest, while at the same time building bridges to other countries as well.

But not all Filipino leaders favored the maintenance of a special relationship with the United States. Opposition came from several groups which, though dissimilar in other respects, worked together to promote a more independent foreign policy. They included outspoken nationalists, prominent among whom were several figures who had been imprisoned by General MacArthur for their service in the wartime government under the Japanese.

It probably was no accident that wartime President and later Senator Jose P. Laurel was entrusted with the task of renegotiating Parity, and that wartime Foreign Secretary and later Senator Claro M. Recto became the most outspoken and eloquent critic of the Philippine-
American defense agreements. In later years, the most widely read critics of the special relationship have been historians Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino.

Opposition to the special relationship came also from the members of the Communist Party of the Philippines and their sympathizers, whose Hukbalahap guerrillas had been denied recognition and back pay by American authorities, and who viewed an American presence in their country as an obstacle to their hoped-for march to power.

Criticism of the special relationship came finally from new Filipino manufacturers, who saw economic protectionism as the precondition for Philippine economic self-reliance and growth. A new serious disagreement over the desirability of close ties between the two countries, or at least between their administrations, was to occur on both sides of the Pacific during and after the martial law years. I shall return to this controversy later.

Unequal Partners

Another obvious characteristic of the Philippine-American association since 1946 is that the two countries have been unequal partners. Their inequality affected what each partner sought from the other, their relative bargaining power, and the gains or costs of the relationship to their national psyches.

It is important to be clear as to what aspect of that inequality has been most damaging to the Philippine self image during the post-independence years. It has not been the obvious difference in the sizes of the two countries' populations or their military capabilities. Small countries often become junior military partners of larger ones. That need not affect the self-respect of the smaller state. Particularly painful for the Philippines, however, has been its economic inferiority. Again, I do not mean the relative sizes of the two economies but the different degrees of success of these economies in providing for their countries' needs. GDP per capita, not total GDP.

To the extent that the Philippines needed repeated infusions of American economic aid, that made it a supplicant for assistance, and gave it, as Claro Recto put it, a mendicant foreign policy. To the extent that the need for aid was seen to be the result of unwise decisions, mismanagement, or corruption, it necessitated embarrassing changes in policy and personnel. None of these were good for the self image of the Philippines, and all of them encouraged a wish to be self reliant and free of foreign aid and advice. The lesson of this disparity is
that if the Philippines wishes to be an equal partner of any economically successful state, it must get its economic house in order.

The two countries have differed also in the spatial or geographic scope of their policy concerns. The Philippine government, understandably, has been concerned primarily with its immediate national interests, and has sought to use the special relationship between the two countries to promote that interest. The United States has become a global power with global concerns. During the Cold War, it saw itself as having a responsibility to mobilize and defend the non-communist world, including the Southeast Asian region, against the communist powers.

This meant that while the United States took a friendly interest in the Philippines, and tried to assist that country insofar as it could, global or regional considerations were given a higher priority. That has led to the complaint that the United States has only used the special relationship to extend its own military power, and has not shown sufficient concern for the interests of the Philippines. This, I think, misses the point, which I wish to make.

That point is particularly relevant to the question of the military bases and American interest in Philippine democracy. During the later years of Philippine martial law, which coincided with the American withdrawal from Vietnam and what then appeared to be the growing threat of communist expansion in the Southeast Asian region, the need to maintain access to Clark Air Field and Subic Naval Base took a central place in American Philippine policy.

While American officials at the Embassy in Manila had no illusions about the depredations of the Marcos government, and well recognized that his continued rule undermined a long standing American interest in Philippine democracy, the concerns of American planners had to be given first place, especially at a time when nationalists in the Philippines had become increasingly hostile towards the United States.

Ferdinand Marcos played on this American preoccupation with considerable skill, and was successful for a time. But when it became clear that a continuation of Marcos' rule would hasten the triumph of the communist New Peoples Army, and lead to the loss of the bases as well, the American abandonment of Marcos became only a matter of time.

Crucial for this turnabout was the visit to the Philippines of Seventh Fleet Commander and soon to be Chief of Staff Admiral William Crowe. On returning from a trip to the Philippines where he sought the views of American officers and Embassy staff, he reportedly told
the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in so many words: "there is no hope for my
naval base with that guy as president of that country. Choose between
Marcos and that base." American ambassadors and their staffs had
long held that view. It took a bit more time to convince President
Ronald Reagan, who had formed a personal friendship with Marcos
while he was still the governor of California. But when EDSA erupted,
he too had to conclude that Marcos must go.

With Marcos in exile, the Cold War over, and Marxist economics
rejected even by ostensibly Communist states, American interests in
Philippine democracy and in regional security were no longer in con-
lict. That explains the pleasure and relief with which American lead-
ers, most notably then Secretary of State George Schultz, embraced the
Aquino Administration. President Aquino, however, found it harder to
accept these assurances of friendship, and her ambivalence paved the
way for the ending of the American military presence in the Philippines.

Each of the two countries' needs and expectations of each other
have varied in intensity over time. And so have their grievances. But
these have not followed similar time-curves Sometimes the Philippines
needed the United States more than the United States needed the Phil-
ippines. Sometimes it was the reverse. That also has affected their rela-
tive bargaining positions, and created more grievances. In the
immediate post-war years, as I have noted, the Philippines was greatly
in need of reconstruction assistance, while America, undamaged by the
war in contrast to other major powers, alone had the means to provide
foreign aid.

Hence the United States could and did extract concessions that later
would be deemed unacceptable by Filipino leaders. During the years
of the Indochina war, however, the United States needed the Philip-
pines bases, while the Philippines managed to stay uninvolved in that
war, except for the sending a small unit of engineers. That strength-
ened the bargaining position of the Marcos administration with the
United States.

Now that the threat of communist ideological subversion in the re-
region has subsided, and there are no longer military bases to give the
United States a special strategic interest in the Philippines, official
American interest in the Philippines has declined to some degree. The
Philippines for its part has become less dependent on the United States
than at earlier times as its involvement in ASEAN and APEC has in-
creased. That decline in mutual dependence is a healthy development,
and has made possible a less stressful relationship.

525
Stable Relationship

Despite the ups and downs of Philippine-American relations, caused by the two countries' changing needs and grievances, some elements of the relationship have remained quite stable since the early years of Philippine independence. These include various institutional relationships, such as the presence of the USAID mission, and its cooperation with a number of Philippine governmental departments, the Fulbright exchange program, and the American Embassy, with its daily queue of Filipinos seeking visas and immigration permits for the United States.

I have been especially familiar with the work of USAID, and have been impressed by the always friendly and cooperative ties that have existed between AID personnel and their Filipino partners. The same can be said about several private American foundations that make continuing contributions to the Philippines: the Rockefeller, Ford, and Asia Foundations, and many Church-supported groups.

Important too has been the presence in the United States of a large and growing Filipino-American community. Most are immigrants. Some came temporarily during the Marcos years for political sanctuary. Many return to the Philippines for frequent visits as Balikbayan. Some, especially Filipino-American doctors, visit the Philippines year after year to give their services, gratis, to their needy former countrymen. Many other Americans too have formed strong ties with and affection for the Philippines, and some have chosen to make that country their permanent home. These non-governmental and very personal relationships help to hold the two peoples together even as the special relationship between their governments has declined.

A Retrospective Assessment of the Relationship

Few Filipinos now believe that any contributions of American colonialism to their country's development outweighed its costs. As several friends have reminded me, Americans "stole" the achievements of the Philippine Revolution, and destroyed what was the first independent republic in the region. Whether that republic would have fallen prey to Japanese or German instead of American colonialism had Admiral Dewey sailed away, can be no more than speculation. Whether it would have been a democracy or an autocratic oligarchy of the type then common in Latin America, can also be no more than conjecture.
F. Sionil Jose believes that had the latter occurred, there would have been within a few decades a popular social revolution such as the Mexican one, led by the spiritual heirs of Andres Bonifacio. The American occupation foreclosed these possibilities.

In my view, the main positive American contributions to the Philippines were the following: The institution of a system of free public education in both urban and rural localities that provided opportunities for the upward social mobility of the ambitious and linguistically talented children of the poor, which had been foreclosed to them in Spanish times. As Frankie Sionil Jose remarked to the writer, "had it not been for my education in the public schools, I would be riding a carabao today."

Another important contribution, connected with the previous one, was the spread of the English language. I shall return to that subject later. A third useful American contribution was the expansion of the system of roads and highways, which was the particular interest of Governor General W. Cameron Forbes.

Also valuable, though little remembered today, were major efforts to improve the state of public health, both by the American colonial government and through private assistance, led by the Rockefeller Foundation's Dr. Victor Heiser. My first awareness of the Philippines came through my youthful reading of his An American Doctor's Odyssey in which Dr. Heiser described the war against smallpox, and the successful effort to persuade young women from good families to enter the nursing profession.

Philippine Democracy

More problematical has been the effectiveness of American efforts to guide the Philippines towards the development of a democratic political system. During the first decade of the century, when American anti-imperialists called for the immediate granting of Philippine independence, U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft, who played the leading part in shaping Republican Party policy towards the new colony, opposed early independence on the grounds that:

We wish to prepare the Filipinos for popular self government. This is plain from Mr. McKinley's letter of instructions and all his utterances. It was not at all within his purpose or that of Congress which made his letter a part of the law of the land, that we were merely to await the organization of a Philippine oligarchy or aristocracy competent to administer the government and then turn the islands over to it.
PHILIPPINE STUDIES

When the Filipino people as a whole show themselves reasonably fit to conduct a popular self government, maintaining law and order and offering equal protection of the laws and civil rights to rich and poor, and desire complete independence of the United states, they shall be given it. (Grunder and Livezey 1951, 85)

The United States "could not consider its trust in the Philippines discharged," Taft wrote to Theodore Roosevelt, "until we had seen to it that the masses had received education, sufficient to know and maintain their civil rights”. It was “not sufficient to have a governing class of 10% and a serving and obedient class of 90% (99).

Yet despite almost half a century of public education during and following the American years, the Philippine elite established and maintained their rule in the manner that Taft had feared, with not much attention to the interests of the poor. That was probably the inevitable outcome of the early establishment of an Assembly, elected under what at first was a narrowly limited suffrage.

In fact the goals of permitting an early Filipino participation in government, and of preventing the establishment elite dominance, were incompatible. It was the former, not the latter that was the result of American colonial policy. Later when the right to vote was extended to all adult men and eventually to women as well, the elite managed to continue to win most elective offices by a combination of vote-buying, patronage, the public works pork barrel, and the occasional use of force.

What might an American colonial government have done, aside from setting up public schools, to bring about the formation of a Filipino-controlled government that was more responsive to the interests of the ordinary Filipino? Half a century later, General Douglas MacArthur, as absolute ruler of Japan, imposed a virtually confiscatory program of land reform that created a prosperous land-owning peasantry which in turn has forced all post-war Japanese governments to protect the interests of the small farmers by maintaining high prices for their products at the cost of the Japanese consumers.

Before MacArthur’s land reform, Japanese peasants were as poor and powerless as are their Filipino counterparts. Land ownership, and the increased incomes which it made possible, made the difference. Similarly in post-war Taiwan and South Korea, comprehensive land reform, imposed by authoritarian governments, brought both peasant prosperity and rapid increases in national productivity. Democracy came later.
Could American colonial administrators have imposed similar drastic, redistributive land reform in the Philippines? Perhaps, but they did not try. Taft's purchase in Rome, on behalf of the Philippine government, of what were called the "friar lands" offered such an opportunity. Once acquired, the friar lands, and other public lands, might have been distributed among the rural poor. Instead, their disposition took a different form, with emphasis on their sale in large tracts to private individuals and corporations. The aim was to promote efficient, large-scale commercial agriculture, not social justice. Later, with the establishment of an elected Assembly and then a Senate, the opportunity for American imposed land reform had passed.

A similar opportunity was missed by Corazon Aquino during her year of unchecked rule. Urged by some of her advisors to impose drastic land reform by decree, she chose to leave it to the 1987 landowner-controlled Congress. As for the Marcos land reform, the subject of his first martial law decree, his program came to be limited to large tracts of land when, a cabinet member informed me, the President found that the civil servants and military officers, on whom he depended for support, many of them petty landowners like much of the middle class, were strongly opposed to the redistribution of their holdings. Even an autocrat could not impose major equalizing changes in the landholding pattern of the Philippines.

Glenn Anthony May (1984, 180) summarized what happened instead:

By placing political power in the hands of the principales and by allowing easy access for their crops to the U.S. market, American policy makers effectively reinforced the dominance of that elite over Philippine communities. The net effect of U.S. policies was not to implant popular government but to nurture a quasi-oligarchy.

Evidently, mass education alone is not enough to create a popular democracy. To be effective citizens, ordinary people also must have the security that comes with the ownership of property or the receipt of decent wages. John Locke and Thomas Jefferson would have agreed.

Many decades later, American land reform experts of the Agency for International Development were to play a useful role in advising President Ramon Magsaysay and several of his successors in connection with their land reform programs. But during the time of martial law, a USAID report, sharply critical of the Marcos administration's agrarian reform program, led him to demand the withdrawal of the American land reform specialists. Since then, there have been none of these at the USAID mission in Manila.
Has Philippine democracy become less elitist since the end of the colonial period? As long as there remains a wide gap between the rich and a large body of the very poor in the cities and the countryside, changes in the character of politics and public policy are bound to be slow. The Philippine political system can still be described as an elite democracy.

And it has other serious flaws: the corruptibility of many elected and appointed office holders, including members of the judiciary; spectacular cases of violence and crime, which too often involve those who should be enforcing the law; the endless squabbling and self-promotion of the politicians; recurrent charges of election tampering; provincial warlordism; and the settling of political feuds by violence instead of at the ballot box. In all of this, little has changed since I first began to study Philippine politics almost half a century ago.

But there have always been more positive features of Philippine democracy that deserve recognition: the effective working of both checks and balances as well as cooperation between the three branches of the national government; political leaders and parties that compete furiously at election time, but manage to reach agreement when major matters of public interest are at stake; a capable and aggressive journalistic profession, and the acceptance by most public officials of the right and obligation of the media to hold them to account.

There are in addition a number of recent developments that have altered the character of politics, making it less narrowly elitist, and suggesting that a more popular, participatory form of democracy is in the process of evolving. Much of this sea change took place during and after the final years of the Marcos era: The combination of military rebels and un-armed citizens that brought down the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, and fifteen years later in January 2001 ended the inept and corruption-ridden presidency of Joseph Estrada; the rapid growth of an array of non-governmental organizations, through which ordinary citizens, many as unpaid volunteers, can work directly to address their country's social problems.

Also important has been a revitalized, well-funded system of local self-government that has produced some very dedicated and innovative local executives. All of this represents the flowering of a civil society that in its vigor is un-equaled in the region. In some of this, one can detect the influence of American models. But it was Filipinos, not foreigners, who brought the changes about, and they occurred long after the end of American colonial rule.
Yet these changes too must be placed in perspective. The burgeon-
ing of civil society including the 1986 and 2001 "Peoples' Power revo-
lutions," has been mainly an urban middle class phenomenon. The
poor and unemployed ordinarily participate in politics only at election
time, and then as passive followers of whoever promises them short-
term rewards. A recent study found that many tenants still vote "as
the landlord tells us." The immense appeal of Joseph Estrada to the
poor, which gave him his massive victory in the presidential election
of 1998, and then his overthrow in 2001 by the more comfortable strata
of society, which in turn was followed by the massive pro-Estrada
demonstrations of "People Power III," suggest that the political aspi-
rations of the poor majority remain both real and unfulfilled.

A change in the political role of the most numerous stratum is not
likely to take place as long as massive poverty and inequality persist.
That is not likely to occur unless the Philippines can achieve both
rapid economic growth and a serious redistribution of property, which
will enable more of the poor to join the middle class. That has hap-
pened in a number of neighboring countries, which once were as un-
derdeveloped economically as the Philippines remains today. As a
friend of mine put it, "when my driver can eat as well as I do, then we
will have democracy." And then, of course, he will not be able to
employ a driver.

The Future of Philippine-American Relations

With the resolution of the issues that in the past produced recurrent
friction between two countries, there are few reasons for serious dis-
agreement between the Philippines and the United States. Current is-
sues between the two governments are minor ones involving trade: the
Philippines would like the U.S. to lift its ban on the importation of
Philippine mangoes, and for American producers to stop dumping
chickens in the Philippines. The U.S. seeks better protection for Ameri-
can copyrights.

At the same time, there is no strong reason for either government
to wish to revive a special relationship with the other. Since the time
of the Ramos administration, the Philippine business community, with
rare exceptions, has embraced the value of free trade and foreign in-
vestments. Such investment will come from many countries, not only
from the United States. American investors, in turn, have found attrac-
tive opportunities in the neighboring "tiger economies" of the region.
Still, the United States remains the Philippines' largest trading partner, the only major one with which it has a surplus, based mainly on the export of semiconductors and garments. Thus in 1999 Philippine exports to the U.S., amounting to 30 percent of its total exports, were $10,444 billion. U.S. Exports to the Philippines totaled $6,365 billion. The United States also remains among the largest sources of foreign investment in the Philippines, together with Japan and the United Kingdom.

In recent years Philippine foreign policy has ceased to be closely aligned with that of the United States. The U.S. State Department, at the instruction of Congress, prepares an annual report on Voting Practices in the United Nations, which measures the degree of convergence between the voting record of every other U.N. member with the votes of the United States. Looking only at "Important votes," among Pacific Rim states, the 1995 convergence scores, in descending order, were:

- Japan, 76.9;
- South Korea, 63.6;
- Singapore, 54.5;
- Cambodia, 62.5;
- the Philippines, 45.5;
- Thailand, 40.0;
- Malaysia, 36.4;
- Indonesia, 30.8;
- Brunei, 30.0;
- Myanmar, 25.0;
- Laos, 14.3;
- Vietnam, 10.0;
- China, 9.1;
- North Korea, 0.

The Philippine voting record with the United States thus was no closer than those of most of its non-communist Southeast Asian neighbors.

This alteration in the focus of Philippine foreign policy occurred, I understand, on the advice of Foreign Secretary Carlos P. Romulo in the early 1970s when the Philippines was unable to obtain from the United States the weapons it needed to combat the growing Muslim rebellion. It then purchased them from Taiwan instead. As former Ambassador to the United States Raul Rabe noted, "well before the end of the cold war, Washington had ceased to be the lodestone of Philippine foreign policy." But that may be changing once again, at least insofar as the issue of national security is concerned.

After a somewhat difficult relationship between the Aquino administration and Washington, strained by the painful and ultimately unsuccessful effort to negotiate a new military bases agreement, her successor President Fidel Ramos, made it clear that he valued a continued close relations with the United States. In a 6 May 1997 address to an Asia Society and World Affairs Council Conference in Los Angeles, he stated that it was his policy to maintain the bilateral alliance with the United States, and to support the continued presence of the U.S. in the region, as a force for stabilizing the security environment in the Asia-Pacific.
Ramos' successor, Joseph Estrada, adopted a similar position. In 1991, as a member of the Senate, he had voted against a renewal of the military bases agreement, as had his then fellow senator, and later Secretary of Defense Orlando Mercado. But in his First State of the Nation Address, he endorsed the Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States which had been negotiated by the Ramos administration, but still was awaiting confirmation in the Senate. “Then (in opposing the bases) I was fighting for national sovereignty, now I’m fighting for national security,” he told the Financial Times. Estrada’s successor, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has given no indication that she will depart from this aspect of the foreign policies of her two predecessors.

For Philippine military planners, concerned about the loss of the security umbrella provided by the American bases before their removal in 1992, the restoration of defense cooperation with the United States has become an urgent matter in view of the country’s obsolescent weapons, and the claims of the Peoples Republic of China to the whole of the South China Sea. Most alarming to them has been the 1995 Chinese occupation and subsequent fortification of the Philippine-claimed Mischief Reef, 150 miles off the coast of Palawan Province but 800 miles away from the Chinese mainland.

Arguing for closer cooperation, and for a restoration of the now much-reduced U.S. military assistance funding—$2 million appropriated by the Congress for 2001 as compared with $100 million annually before the closing of the bases—Philippine officials point to their country’s status as a traditional US ally, the historic building of the Philippine armed forces on American models, and to the past training of many Filipino officers at American service academies. The Visiting Forces Agreement, which provides for unit training, serves as a basis for such renewed cooperation, in the form of major biennial joint military and naval exercises. Several of these have now been held near Palawan and Cebu provinces. Still, the Visiting Forces Agreement remains a contentious issue in Manila, even after its approval in 1998 by a 18 to 5 vote in the Philippine Senate.

American officials see the new Visiting Forces Agreement as an important policy tool for increased cooperation with the Philippines. They note that it strengthens both Philippine and American influence in the region, and has been welcomed by neighboring Southeast Asian governments.
Commonalities: Foundations for Friendly Ties

Little of the former special relationship between the two countries remains. Still, there are good reasons why Philippine-American relations, freed of their earlier irritants, can remain friendly and mutually beneficial. My main reason for this optimism is that, more than in the case of two other peoples on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean, Filipinos and Americans share a number of important traits and values.

Americans and educated Filipinos have in common the ability to speak and write the English language. English came to North America with its British settlers, and was quickly learned by most immigrants from non-English speaking countries. English reached the Philippines in a later wave of diffusion, during the American colonial years. It still remains a major language of spoken and written communication, although its importance and indeed desirability have been questioned in the Philippines, where educators now give priority to the spread of Filipino as the domestic lingua franca.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in linguistic theory states that language cannot be separated from the culture within which it is spoken. In short, many words carry culturally specific meanings. To the degree that Filipinos and Americans communicate in English, Filipinos as recent adopters of that language must largely accept the Anglo-American meanings carried by English words. Speaking a common language thus reinforces other relationships between the two countries. That is what linguistic imperialism means. I shall not here discuss the special place of English as the medium of global, including scientific, communication.

While the Philippines is undoubtedly in Asia, it is also a participant in Western civilization, and more specifically in what used to be called Christendom. That soon becomes evident to any observant American or European who visits the Philippines. Nowhere will he find Filipino villagers performing the Ramayana. Their festivals, like those of Latin America, are Catholic ones. Historian Reynaldo Ileto in his fine book, Pasyon and Revolution, has described the deep roots of their Christian tradition, and its place as an ideological foundation for messianic movements of protest among the Filipino common people (Ileto 1979).

The reason why Christianity sank such deep roots in all parts of the Philippines except the Muslim South is suggested by the histories of mass religious conversions in other parts of the world. When a tribal people with only a simple animistic religion, such as that of the early
Northern Filipinos, first encounters a major world religion, be it Buddhism, Islam or Christianity, that great religion can be embraced quite quickly, as can the institutions and broader civilization molded by that religion and within which it is embedded.

That occurred in Shinto Japan when Japanese first encountered Buddhism. That is what happened in Northern Europe when pagans stopped building stone circles to worship their ancient gods and began to build cathedrals instead. That is what happened in Central and South America, and also in the Philippines. Later attempts to convert such a people to another great religion and civilization will meet stiff resistance.

I do not mean to suggest that Filipinos do not also have strong ties with their more stereotypically Asian neighbors. Filipinos who visit other Malayan speaking countries quickly recognize that the peoples as their kinsmen, feel at home in their landscapes, and share many of their customs and much of their behavior. Filipinos of Chinese descent have similar experiences when they visit China. But the identification with these neighboring or ancestral societies and cultures is not complete.

A contributor to a symposium on Philippine-American Relations: expressed a not uncommon ambivalence: "The moment you go to Europe or the United States, you feel at home. But in spite of my Chinese ancestry from Limahong, I go to Hong Kong or Taiwan, and I feel strange" (Solidarity 1993, 80). Even Maoist revolutionary Jose Maria Sison, whose name combines traces of East and West, appears to feel more at home—or more sure of his Western democratic freedoms—in Utrecht than in Beijing.

Samuel Huntington has suggested that, with the end of the Cold War's battle of ideologies, the next great international division will be a clash of civilizations: the Muslim and Confucian East against the Christian West. If that is indeed our future, and I remain skeptical, I do not think that the Philippines will fall easily into the Eastern Camp. One may hope, instead, that it will serve as a bridge between East and West.

Another trait that Filipinos and Americans share is their belief in the importance and the universality of what now are called human rights. I have seen no more eloquent expression of this belief than that of Judge Jose R. Sebastian in an issue of Philippine Graphic:

When a man loses freedom, he is no longer whole. When he cannot think on his own anymore, when he cannot write what he feels, when he is not free to express his belief in God and faith in himself, when he
cannot articulate his thoughts and act on them freely in obedience to his will, he is a human being, broken in mind and spirit. Life, or his brief sojourn on earth, becomes a farce. (1996, 39)

The conviction that freedom of thought and expression are essential for the full exercise of their humanity by all peoples is one that Filipinos and Americans share. In this they disagree with those Asian rulers who regard human rights, as we define them, as Western cultural artifacts, that do not fit the needs or traditions of non-Western societies.

President Ramos entered this debate on the part of his country when he stated categorically that Filipinos regard human rights as being universal. A fine expression of that belief was his decision not to forcibly repatriate Vietnamese refugees remaining in Palawan, but to enable them to become integrated into Philippine society. This was in sharp contrast to the less humane refugee policies of many other countries in the region.

His successor, President Estrada, won praise for his regional policy in Southeast Asia, which gave a new emphasis to democracy and human rights. Although the Philippines would talk with the Burmese junta, newly admitted into ASEAN, it would do so with the democratic process firmly in mind. "Constructive engagement" would be replaced by "flexible engagement," a term coined by Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan. Non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN neighbors had failed. This new direction in regional policy, said an Opinion Today editorial, reflected Estrada's apparent preference to stand with the United States in our shared democratic ideals.

In November 1998, otherwise critical journalists praised Estrada when, while attending an APEC regional summit in Kuala Lumpur, he visited the wife of imprisoned former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, this against pointed Malaysian warnings against meddling in internal affairs. So did Canadian Prime Minister Chretien, and US Vice President Al Gore. In April 1999, when Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's husband died in Britain and was buried in her absence, the Philippines, alone among ASEAN governments, sent a representative to attend his funeral, as did the United States. Most recently, a Philippine military contingent joined the UN intervention force in East Timor. A Filipino officer replaced an Australian as the force commander. Such humanitarian acts have more than a symbolic importance.

Filipinos presumably derive their strong attachment to human rights in part from their predominantly Christian faith. But I think that
is not its only source. Bosnian Christians of the Eastern and Western churches ignored each other’s human rights in spectacular displays of brutality. Indeed, their clergymen blessed their own combatants as they went off to slaughter their opponents’ civilians. I think that the atypical Filipino respect for the humanity of their fellows, has cultural roots that go beyond religion, and are expressed in distinctively Filipino ways.

Many years ago, Anthropologist Margaret Mead made a short visit to the Philippines. At the end of her stay, she lectured at the Philippine Columbian Hall, where she was asked about her impressions of the Philippines. She replied that as she traveled through the provinces, she noted that every home had a different appearance, and each tried to stand out by its different brilliant growth of flowers. In other Asian towns that she had visited, every house appeared the same. That tells me, she said, that Filipinos are a very individualistic people. Having lived in a Manila subdivision, where every home too is unique, I know what she meant.

There are other features of Philippine culture that exemplify the Filipinos’ respect for the humanity of their fellows. They include the claim to personal dignity of even the poorest individual, and his right to defend that dignity if he is insulted. I see this in the considerate way most middle class Filipinos treat their household help, which contrasts with what I have observed in a neighboring country.

The humane traits of Filipinos are seen in their sense of awa (pity or compassion), for those who endure misfortune. To this observer from a more austere and moralistic culture, Filipino compassion may be expressed too freely for those who have done little to deserve it, and may co-exist with courts where justice or injustice are for sale, as well as with a society that does little to reduce extremes of economic inequality. But I think that my main point will be accepted. Filipinos on the whole are a humane and compassionate people. These national traits, including their religious convictions, explain why Filipinos believe that human rights are universal.

I shall not here recount the origins of the American belief in the importance and universality of individual rights, or what the French called the Rights of Man. They blossomed during the European enlightenment, and were expressed in the founding documents of the United States: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Valuing their own freedoms, Americans and their leaders generally have sympathized with peoples whose civil and political rights were
denied to them, and favored governments that respect these rights. That sympathy was strengthened by American experiences during the Second World War and the Cold War, which followed it. Human rights became officially a part of American foreign policy during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, and have been a part of the policy of every subsequent administration. Since Carter’s time, the Department of State has had an Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. His or her office prepares for the Congress a yearly human rights report on all countries, a source of some annoyance to governments that receive low ratings. During the Marcos years the first occupant of that post, Patricia Derian, several times visited Marcos to belabor him on his administration’s human rights record.

I do not suggest, by any means, that human rights have always been given priority in American foreign policy. Under what might be called the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, which holds that autocracy, though less desirable than democracy, is less destructive of individual rights and less lasting than totalitarianism, the United States at times sided with autocrats who seemed to stand in the way of communist takeovers. Chile was one example, the Philippines another.

But this application of the principle of the lesser evil, has not been resorted to since the end of the communist threat, and when invoked in earlier years, was questioned by many in our foreign policy establishment and by ordinary Americans. More widely supported as being more consistent with American values, have been several recent American-led humanitarian interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo. I have left out the Gulf War as that, arguably, could be seen at least in part as a defense of America’s oil supplies.

The deployment, in the early Clinton years, of the Seventh Fleet near Taiwan reflected American sympathy for a now democratic “Second China,” as well as opposition to threats to assert territorial claims by force. His successor, President George W. Bush, has reiterated this position by his statement that he would do “whatever it took” to help to defend Taiwan. In short, while American foreign policy makers sometimes have supported autocrats of the Right against totalitarians of the Left, they have preferred democrats to both of these. In this they had the support of the American public.

As for the supposed inapplicability of Western human rights to Asia, my personal observations abroad persuade me that other Asians also value their human rights even if their rulers claim that they do not. But as these peoples may not have seen their rights respected in
the past, and may have memories of brutal repression, other Asians may be less self-assured in claiming their rights than were Filipinos in 1986 and 2001. Yet even where human rights have been little respected, brave people have taken to the streets to claim them. We should not denigrate the strengths of their beliefs by giving credence to the contrary claims of their rulers.

Finally, Filipinos share with Americans the belief that, for all its faults, democracy, in the words of Winston Churchill, is "the worst form of government except all others."

There are other, more practical things that Filipinos and Americans share. But I have confined myself here to our shared values, and will leave it at that. These provide a sound basis, if no longer for a special inter-governmental relationship, then still for common efforts to promote our common values in the world, and for many close and lasting friendships between individual Filipinos and Americans.

References


