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## US Exploits Humanitarian Suffering in Philippines to Win More Military Bases

By John Glaser

January 31, 2014

Catherine Traywick at *Foreign Policy* explains <sup>[1]</sup> how the U.S. government and the (U.S.-backed) Philippines government exploited the U.S. military's disaster response to the recent typhoon in order to justify more U.S. troops to be stationed at more U.S. bases in the Philippines.

Officials from both nations quickly framed the catastrophe as a justification for a broader U.S. military presence in the Philippines. Two weeks after Haiyan made landfall, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario said <sup>[2]</sup> the disaster “demonstrated” the need for U.S. troops in the Philippines. Shortly after that, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Philip Goldberg argued <sup>[2]</sup> that Haiyan underscored his top priority: to deepen the military relationship between countries. That argument riled <sup>[3]</sup> some Filipino legislators. One leftist political advocacy group decried <sup>[4]</sup> it “disaster opportunism at its finest.”

U.S. troops already have a small but significant footprint in the Philippines. U.S. special forces have spent the past 12 years in the southern part of the country to help Philippine troops carry out counterterrorism missions against Abu Sayyaf and elements of Jemaah Islamiyah, two Islamic terrorist groups with links to al Qaeda. U.S. troops also participate in frequent military exercises with the Philippine military. Since President Barack Obama announced his so-called “pivot to Asia,” however, the United States has been pushing for greater access to Philippine bases and the

right to build exclusive facilities on them — a politically contentious issue that caused negotiations to fall apart last October.

Traywick notes the issue of more U.S. troops is “a sensitive one”: “The Philippine legislature ousted U.S. forces from the country in 1991 over issues of national sovereignty and the public’s perception that American troops were above the law, after allegations of rape and the human rights abuses made national headlines.”

I wrote about this cynical effort to win more basing rights back in November, noting specifically why the history of U.S. interventionism in the Philippines makes many Filipinos justifiably wary of welcoming U.S. troops back:

The fact that Filipinos hesitate to welcome the U.S. back onto permanent bases, after kicking us out at the end of the Cold War, should not be belittled. The 1899-1902 U.S. war and occupation of the Philippines was a vicious colonial experiment waged for cynical geopolitical interests. Inclusive estimates that account for excess deaths related to the war say there were as many as 1 million casualties <sup>[5]</sup>. Hundreds of thousands of Filipinos were locked up in concentration camps, where poor conditions and disease killed thousands <sup>[6]</sup>.

The account of U.S. Corporal Sam Gillis <sup>[7]</sup> provides a vivid insight into what the occupation was like: “We make everyone get into his house by seven p.m., and we only tell a man once. If he refuses we shoot him. We killed over 300 natives the first night. They tried to set the town on fire. If they fire a shot from the house we burn the house down and every house near it, and shoot the natives, so they are pretty quiet in town now.”

Just as the U.S. is now trying to cloak their interventionism in the guise of humanitarian causes, the 1899 intervention was of course described in the loveliest of terms. The leader of the nationalist movement in the Philippines who declared independence from the Spanish, Emilio Aguinaldo, received a letter from U.S. General Thomas Anderson that read <sup>[8]</sup>, “General Anderson wishes you to inform your people that we are here for their good...”

President William McKinley insisted <sup>[8]</sup> the U.S. was just trying to liberate the Philippines: “No imperial designs lurk in the American mind,” he said, but it was “not a good time for the liberator to submit important questions concerning liberty and government to the liberated while they are engaged in shooting down their rescuers.”

The legacy of that imperial war persisted over the decades until the U.S. was finally kicked out of the Philippines in the early 1990’s. The only reason the U.S. is interested in increasing military presence in the Philippines is to threaten and thus contain China. Never mind the fact that China doesn’t actually pose a threat to Americans.

It should go without saying that it is unacceptable for the U.S. to cynically use the quick military relief operations response to “lubricate” a deal that benefits U.S. foreign policy interests.