

How Philippine Nationalist and Neo-Imperialist Political Identities Influence Foreign Policy: Examining the Case of Palestine

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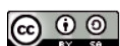
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Abstract

The discourse on the ongoing escalation of conflict in Gaza has signaled a shift in the stance of the international community on the question of Palestinian statehood. As discourses, and subsequently policies, shift, we investigate the sources and implications of specific policies. In this paper, we look at the Philippines, a democracy with a long anti-colonial history, and examine why its foreign policy has not called out Israel's crimes against Palestinians. In other words, why has the country maintained a foreign policy of following in suit of the United States (US), its former colonizer, in its support towards Israel? Moreover, what impact has this policy had on the Philippines' role in the international system? Using a constructivist lens, we critically review historical events to analyze the origins, components and implications of Philippine political identities, which then inform foreign policy decisions. In order to answer these questions, we first conceptualize the Philippines' political identities focusing on two streams: nationalist and neo-imperialist. We then argue that the neo-imperialist current, made possible by the collusion of domestic political elites with the US, has facilitated a foreign policy that results in entrenched dependency on the US where the Philippines follows the dominant discourse dictated by the US on issues such as the Palestine-Israel conflict. This dependency has resulted in a vicious cycle where the Philippines suffers from a diminished role in the international stage through the depletion of its moral capital; in turn, reinforcing dependency.

Keywords: Political discourse, Philippines, Palestine, moral capital



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Introduction

The Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, which claimed hundreds of Israeli lives, and the ensuing Israeli war on Gaza, which itself has claimed tens of thousands of lives so far, has provided a new-found impetus to the issue of Palestinian statehood. Philippine foreign policy has traditionally lent support to Israel, even in the face of mounting international law violations by the latter. As a country with a long history of anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian movements, it is puzzling why this has not translated to foreign policy that more strongly supports the issue of Palestinian statehood and self-determination in international fora, similar to the foreign policies of South Africa and Ireland. Previous explanations have attributed this behavior to the Philippines' position as a satellite state floating in the imperialist sphere of influence of the United States (US). We argue that these explanations are insufficient as they do not account for the nuances in Philippine domestic politics and the role of various interest groups and social movements in forming the country's political identity. We caution that deterministic arguments not only ignore countries' agency but also fail to account for the rise of norms that ultimately shape state behavior as well as international law. These norms contribute significantly to countries' political identities; that is, their perception of the range of appropriate behavior in the international system.¹

Thus, to contribute to discussions in this field, we aim to answer the question: why has the foreign policy of the Philippines, a democracy with a long anti-colonial history, not been more supportive of the struggles of other Global South countries for self-determination, such as that of Palestine? In other words, why has the country maintained a foreign policy that follows the US in its support towards Israel, even when Israel's actions violate international law? Moreover, what impact has this policy had on the Philippines' role in the international system? To answer these questions, we conceptualize the Philippines' political identities by

¹ Katzenstein 1996.

examining key historical events that have had a direct impact on the country's foreign policy direction. We propose that two streams are of relevance to this issue, nationalist and neo-imperialist political identities, with adjacent sources of emergence but diverging paths of evolution. We argue that the neo-imperialist identity reflects the dominant discourse that has been influential in foreign policy. We then argue that the neo-imperialist current, made possible by the collusion of domestic political elites with the US, has facilitated a foreign policy that results in entrenched dependency on the US, to the extent that the Philippines echoes US foreign policy on multiple issues. This policy dependency has resulted in a diminished role for the Philippines in the international stage through the depletion of its moral capital. It is important to note, however, that these political identities are not static and are constantly being constructed, contested, and reconstructed. Tracing the genealogies of these identities and the discourses behind them allow us to observe these changes.

Using the foreign policy of the Philippines on the issue of Palestine as a case study, we utilize frameworks from the constructivist school of thought in international relations. The conceptualization of political identities is conducted by building on the under-explored constitutive and prescriptive norms that make up Philippine political identity and trace how these norms influence foreign policy. Using these concepts, we build on Katzenstein's and Finnemore and Sikkink's conceptualization of norms and the interplay between domestic and international norms.² Furthermore, we add to this debate by acknowledging the heterogeneous nature of domestic norms and dissecting the different components that influence foreign policy. Additionally, we build on works on social movements such as Wendt's arguments on social theory of international politics³ and Laclau and Mouffe's ideas⁴ on the role of antagonisms in challenging hegemonic discourse.

² Katzenstein 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.

³ Wendt 1999.

⁴ Laclau and Mouffe 1985.

Supported by this literature, this paper argues that Philippine political identity is a multifaceted composition reflecting different and sometimes opposing discourses on values and norms. Of relevance to our case study are the nationalist and neo-imperialist discourses. The neo-imperialist discourse reflects the voice of the political elite and is structured around their interests. This political elite, through collusion due to mutual economic interests with former colonizers such as the US, has maintained a privileged position post-independence. The foreign policy associated with this facet is one that maintains Philippine dependence and reaffirms the US imperialist dominance in international fora such as the United Nations (UN). The Philippines' continued support of Israel, even when the latter violates international law, is a reflection of this neo-imperialist discourse which links Philippine political elite with their former colonizer, the US. The second strand, the nationalist discourse, emerges from secular and religious social movements that have fought against authoritarian rule, either external in the form of colonizers, or domestic in the form of non-democratic leaders such as Ferdinand Marcos Sr. (1965-1986) and Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022). The values and norms associated with the nationalist discourse have not consistently manifested on the international stage through foreign policy due to its grassroots origins and disconnect from decision-making circles. However, it has manifested more concretely through the work of activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through international solidarity movements.

To support our argument, we use a multiple qualitative method composed of critical historical analyses of formative political events, discourse analysis of the narratives framed by the key actors during those events, and process tracing to track how these discourses influence the emergence of norms which then shape foreign policy directions that impact moral capital. This paper contributes insights into several emerging areas of literature such as Philippine political identities, norms, and discourses and their impact on shaping international positions. We

also contribute to debates on international solidarity among social movements, the ever-growing role of non-state organizations on the international stage, and the policy implications of these changes. Finally, we build on emerging works on moral capital, an underdeveloped concept, using historical and empirical evidence.

The remainder of this introduction proceeds with a review of relevant historical background on the Philippines' relations with Palestine and Israel. The section after elaborates on the conceptual framework used to build the paper's argument. Subsequently, the methodology is discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion and conclusion.

Philippines' Stance on Palestine

The Philippines' connection to the Israeli-Palestinian issue dates back to its vote supporting UN Resolution 181, which passed in 1947 declaring that the land of Palestine, run administratively under the Ottoman mandate with the rest of the Levant prior to British and French colonization of the region, would be divided into two states. The first state would accommodate the establishment of an Israeli nation, creating a new homeland for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and other Jewish migrants. The second would establish the state of Palestine to house the land's indigenous Muslim and Christian populations. However, Palestinian statehood was never fulfilled due to illegal Israeli settlement into lands marked by the UN as Palestinian territory. In fact, Palestine continues to fight for full recognition⁵ as a state and a member of the international community.

Even though all other Asian countries either voted against or abstained from voting on Resolution 181, the Philippines voted in favor. This can be explained in part by the fact that the Philippines had only

⁵ Key states such as the US, UK, France, Canada, etc. still do not recognize the State of Palestine but do recognize and have close diplomatic relations with Israel although all of the above did vote for UN Resolution 181 mandating the creation of a Palestinian and Israeli states

gained independence from the US a year earlier and was in effect still under direct US influence. Since then, the Philippines has consistently and unmistakably followed in the footsteps of the US foreign policy with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Israel began in 1957, with the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1958. By 1962, the two countries opened their respective embassies. This stands in contrast to the Philippines' recognition of Palestinian statehood, which would not occur until 1989 despite signing Resolution 181 in 1947. UN General Assembly Resolution 67/19, which the Philippines voted in favor of, recognizing Palestine as an observer member of the UN General Assembly, would not occur until 2012. A Palestinian embassy in Manila only opened in 2020 during the administration of then-President Rodrigo Duterte, who was notoriously antagonistic to the US. During the same year, the Philippines permitted the opening of a second Israeli diplomatic mission, with the establishment of the Honorary Consulate of Israel in Davao. Aside from this brief stint at balancing its foreign policy, the Philippines has failed to consistently condemn Israel for its crimes against the Palestinian people.

More controversially, on 27 October 2023, the Philippines did not vote in favor of a UN General Assembly resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. This resolution was presented following Israeli attacks that resulted in thousands of deaths among Palestinian civilians and wide scale destruction of infrastructure, mounting to suspected war crimes. The Philippines did not vote in favor of the resolution despite calls by the UN Secretary General Guterres for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire as Israel's "attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people"⁶. It was not until demonstrations in front of the Israeli embassy in Manila organized by different civil society organizations that the Philippines eventually changed its stance and voted in favor of a later UN

⁶United Nations 2023.

General Assembly resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza on 13 December 2023.

Israeli Violation of International Law in Palestine

The Philippines' reluctance comes despite the egregious crimes conducted by the Israeli government, as well as some of its civilians, especially settlers, whose transgressions are emboldened by the lack of legal repercussions to their crimes against Palestinians.⁷ According to Human Rights Watch, Israel has gravely violated five categories of international human rights and humanitarian law, including "unlawful killings; forced displacement; abusive detention; the closure of the Gaza Strip and other unjustified restrictions on movement; and the development of settlements, along with the accompanying discriminatory policies that disadvantage Palestinians"⁸. All of these violations are conducted on land that has been illegally occupied since 1967, although according to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 that passed the same year, Israel should have withdrawn its armed forces from occupied territories captured in the aftermath of the 1967 war and respected the sovereignty of all states in the region. Israel has also continued to expand illegal settlements in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank implementing a policy of "institutionalized discrimination"⁹ against Palestinians in those occupied territories while providing state protection against crimes by illegal settlers.

The level of abuse has escalated significantly since the Hamas-led attack on 7 October 2023 in Israel, which resulted in the death of 1,139 individuals, mostly Israeli civilians. In response, Israel has launched a war on Gaza that has lasted, as of writing this paper, over a year claiming the lives of tens of thousands of individuals, the majority of whom are besieged

⁷ Bergman and Mazzetti 2024.

⁸ Human Rights Watch 2017.

⁹ Ibid

women and children who are effectively imprisoned in the Gaza Strip following Israel's blockade in 2007. The cost of rebuilding the destruction to Gaza's economy following Israel's war is estimated at over USD 80 billion.¹⁰ This is excluding the killing, illegal detention, harassment and intimidation suffered by Palestinians in the West Bank at the hands of illegal settlers and Israeli security members. UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, has repeatedly called on Israel to cease fire as Gaza turns into a "killing field"¹¹. In a rare occurrence, Guterres also invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter, urging the Security Council to act in order to stop the violence. In a stark contrast in language and tone, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs only recently expressed on 21 March 2025 that it was "gravely concerned" over Israel's most recent offensive in Gaza which caused the loss of the lives of 400 Palestinians,¹² focusing only on an individual attack rather than the toll since 2023.

What Constitutes Philippine Political Identities and Why do they Matter?

In light of the previous discussion, how can we explain the Philippines' divergent foreign policy? Before attending to the argument and theoretical foundations of this work, it is worth noting the broad strokes of this section. Firstly, a summary of current work on Philippine foreign policy is presented, establishing a gap that motivates the need to home in on concepts of political identities and norms in the field of foreign policy. The succeeding sections flesh out the proposed conceptualization of relevant political identities in the Philippines which have influenced its foreign policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict, namely the neo-imperialist and nationalist identities. These concepts are constructed through a discussion of the logic of identities and norms in a constructivist

¹⁰ Hodali et al. 2024.

¹¹ United Nations 2025.

¹² Department of Foreign Affairs 2025.

framework. Next, we identify the link between norms and identities, and foreign policy. We argue that foreign policy is a medium where political identity is articulated, a lever through which interests of decision-making political elites can be internationalized. Foreign policy is a result of the agenda-setting power of norms, which in turn affect the strategic preferences of policymakers. The final section conceptualizes moral capital through the concept of legitimacy in international society. Moral capital can be thought of as a resource, a type of power alongside other types such as hard power. Foreign policy choices have a direct impact on the 'reserve' of moral capital a country has on the international stage.

As such, if all the groundwork follows through, then a framework of thinking about how political identities, articulated through foreign policy, affect moral capital is formed. This grounds the argument that a neo-imperialist political identity emerging from specific norms and discourse, has manifested in a Philippines' foreign policy dependent on the US. This has translated into close support for Israel despite their widely condemned conduct in Palestinian territories. In turn, this uncritical support depletes the moral capital of the Philippines. We further argue that the Philippines sorely needs moral capital as it tries to assert its sovereignty through international law against the territorial expansionism of the People's Republic of China.

Philippine Foreign Policy

Many scholars of Philippine international relations have routinely noted, (1) a continuous dependence on the US, which (2) is detrimental to the Philippines' interests. Despite agreement on these outcomes, less has been said on their causes. We critique these works as essentialist and deterministic works that marginalize the agency of the Philippines. Fleshing out norms and identities is the proposed remedy, by opening discussion on the continuous contentious disputes over norms as a part of

an ongoing negotiation of Philippine agency in foreign policy.¹³ By recapitulating some of the major arguments, we establish the need to resort to norms and identities to explain the Philippines' dependency on the US, including puzzling policies such as reluctance to call out Israel on crimes committed against the Palestinian people. The following sections recount some of these works.

Ronas notes that the Philippines has historically outsourced its post-independence security to the US¹⁴ (especially in the period from 1946 to the 1990s), until the Philippines reformed its armed forces. Ronas claims that this weakened the Philippines' autonomy in foreign policy due to a resulting security dependency, especially during the aegis of the Cold War. For example, during the Gloria Macapagal Arroyo administration (2001-2010), the US threatened to withdraw economic aid unless the Philippines joined the George W. Bush administration's infamous global 'war on terror'.¹⁵ However, less discussed is why this dependency exists. Other scholars argue that this dependency is due to the Philippines' geostrategic insecurities as a weak state.¹⁶ If we turn to the Philippines' Southeast Asian neighbors, many of who display similar material economic and military capabilities, we notice how much of an anomaly Philippine foreign policy is. Faced with geostrategic insecurities especially with the great power rivalry of the US and China, most Southeast Asian states have turned to hedging policies that reduce one-sided dependency on any singular great power by making use of both the US and China.¹⁷ Thus, what accounts for the Philippines' unique divergence?

Focusing on the Middle East, Sevilla argues that the Philippines' foreign policy approach towards the region is deficient in securing greater social and economic benefits due to a narrowing of foreign policy options

¹³ Katzenstein 1996.

¹⁴ Ronas 2006.

¹⁵ Morales 2006; Bello 2009.

¹⁶ Heydarian 2017.

¹⁷ Kuik 2016; Lai and Kuik 2021.

as a by-product of US dependency.¹⁸ He argues that this is due to an orientalist view of the Middle East composed of harmful stereotypes, which reflect American cultural worldviews. Moreover, US discourses permeate attitudes through the proliferation of English and the influence of American universities on key Philippine figures. Peleo applies this to domestic agrarian policies,¹⁹ arguing that American discourse frames agricultural reforms as anti-communist measures.

While this work bears some resemblance with our proposed argument, we build on it by addressing the lack of a systematic approach that links pro-US discourse to Philippines' foreign policy. This gap limits historical analyses insofar as it fails to provide an explanation through an elaborate causal mechanism. We attempt to build on this argument by introducing conceptual frameworks on norms and identities.²⁰ Norms provide a systematic basis through which discourses and ideational variables can influence foreign policy through formal institutions. We conceptualize this as neo-imperialist norms that manifest in a neo-imperialist identity. Neo-imperialist norms regulate and prescribe foreign policies of dependency on the US. This will be further discussed in the next sections. However, norms are not monolithic or static, but continuously negotiated throughout history.²¹ We trace these norms to two focal points. Firstly, we excavate post-colonial US legacies, noting their institutional and discursive effects.²² Secondly, in our process-tracing, we note the stranglehold of political elites in the Philippines, sponsored by US support.²³

Indeed, some scholars have explained Philippine foreign policy as partially attributable to the need for political survival between competing

¹⁸ Sevilla 2022.

¹⁹ Peleo 2022.

²⁰ Katzenstein 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.

²¹ Katzenstein 1996.

²² Webb 2022; Karnow 1989.

²³ Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020.

elites affiliated with the US or China.²⁴ Others argue that Philippine foreign policy is an expression of the president's personal views, reflecting a personalistic, weakly institutionalized bureaucracy.²⁵ We build on this by considering how norms modify the worldviews and strategic preferences of policymaking elites.²⁶ In summary, the literature has generally agreed that the Philippines has a detrimental dependency on the US. However, discussion on the causes for this face numerous weaknesses. We systematize the discussion on the causes and develop it further by turning to the concepts of norms and identities.

In order to explore this, the theoretical groundwork for identities must be laid out first. Constructivism questions whether the identities and interests of states are automatically given and assumed in international relations analysis. This school of thought argues that identities of states are not static but instead are shaped by their actions and the structure of the international system.²⁷ As such, states decide how they can respond to anarchy.²⁸ This line of thought reflects the broader trend in international relations scholarship that moves away from structural realism, which treats foreign policy as determined by the structure of the international system, and not by the unit-level characteristics of states.²⁹ Structural realism has received multiple critiques. For instance, referring only to the structure of the international system is indeterministic in deciding the foreign policy of states.³⁰

The logic of identity concerned in this work is one that is built on norms within a state and how that affects that state's foreign policy. For instance, Katzenstein argues that the formation of a collective identity in Europe has influenced regional integration through the architecture of the

²⁴ Camba 2022.

²⁵ Wu and Velasco 2022.

²⁶ Johnston 1995.

²⁷ Wendt 1999.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kertzer 2016.

³⁰ Katzenstein 1996.

European Union (EU).³¹ The analytical tools of constructivism demonstrate that the construction of such an identity over time post-war is what has decisively laid the social structure for the EU. Domestic identities such as the political identities of Democrats and Republicans in the US, too, influence US foreign policy and what is framed as US national interest.

Among Wendt's typology of identities,³² two are most relevant in this work. The first is collective identity, when an identity goes beyond personal boundaries to subsume a personality within the identity of a collective. An example of a collective identity is nationalism. The second type of identity is role identity. A role identity is when an entity takes upon roles that are played within relationships. For example, 'student' and 'teacher' are role identities. States operating in the international system similarly take on role identities that have implications on their policy choices.

Political identities, in turn, are influenced by different types of norms. Katzenstein distinguishes between regulative norms and constitutive norms.³³ Regulative norms dictate the range of appropriate behavior, while constitutive norms are norms that form identities and, subsequently, interests. Norms are neither fully static, nor purely dynamic. Norms are subject to contention and disagreement. However, norms can be cemented when they are institutionalized. In this case, norms guide behavior and interest, often containing worldviews. These norms are embedded in institutions, informing state-society relationships, state relationships, and inter-state relationships. There are also prescriptive norms, which set what 'ought' to be done.³⁴ Prescriptive norms aim to capture normative issues. These norms influence a country's identity and the range of actions it exhibits in the international community. Moreover, a state's identification with specific social groups in the international

³¹ Katzenstein 1997.

³² Wendt 1999.

³³ Katzenstein 1996.

³⁴ Finnemore and Sikkink 1998.

system influences their behavior as they seek to conform to behavior expected of this group.³⁵

Conceptual Framework

In the following section, the conceptual framework and central argument of the paper are presented, starting with a proposal on what constitutes Philippine political identities. This section is not meant to be an exhaustive exploration of *all* Philippine political identities, but only the salient and relevant ones to the country's specific policy of disproportionate support towards Israel. The section also does not propose that political identities are static. Instead, they are dynamic concepts that are influenced by prevalent discourses, dominant and non-dominant, the emergence of which can be traced to specific historical periods. After fleshing out Philippine political identities, we justify reverting to political identities as a starting point for understanding foreign policy. Here, we build on the concept of norms which acts as an agenda-setting variable. Last but not least, we highlight the significance of the arguments proposed by linking foreign policy choices to moral capital and autonomy in the international community. As international relations literature increasingly acknowledges the relevance of other types of power, alongside material hard power, we argue that moral capital is a type of power, similar to soft and smart power, which affords countries more leverage and influence in international settings. The cultivation of a homogenous stance towards relevant international issues, such as territorial integrity, is key to building a consistent identity and interests along the lines proposed by Katzenstein³⁶ and Wendt³⁷ and, subsequently, strengthening this moral capital.

³⁵ Fearon 1997.

³⁶ Katzenstein 1996.

³⁷ Wendt 1999.

Philippine Political Identities

Building on the extant literature, the central argument of this paper is that multiple political identities can be found in the Philippines. In this manuscript, we focus on the conceptualization of two: neo-imperialist and nationalist. These two identities are of major relevance to the Philippines' foreign interests. A neo-imperialist identity is formed through a constitutive norm where the Philippines is viewed as a small power that must rely on external powers, chiefly the US. This identity is accompanied by various norms which shape Philippine foreign policy. The prescriptive norm is a consistent, durable, and substantive strategic preference for security dependency on the US throughout Philippine history. When subject to scrutiny, the history of this neo-imperialist identity is found as a post-colonial legacy.³⁸

We name the other identity as the nationalist identity. This identity is one in which attempts are made to reclaim Philippine autonomy by challenging hegemony at home and abroad and clamoring for an independent foreign policy. This reclamation is embedded within anti-authoritarian social movements which oppose US imperialism. It is this call to self-determination, and assertion of sovereignty, that distinguishes the nationalist identity from its neo-imperialist counterpart. For example, in 1991, following massive protests the Philippines' Senate voted against the renewal of the US's lease over Subic Naval Base, historically the largest American naval base in Asia.³⁹ While the Philippines nevertheless continues its overarching reliance on the US, nationalist discourses have attempted to erode neo-imperialist norms. What is central to the logic of identity is that it is constructed through discourse.⁴⁰ The nationalist and neo-imperialist identities are continuously contested throughout Philippine history. So far, this work claims that the neo-imperialist identity

³⁸ Webb 2022.

³⁹ Francisco 2016.

⁴⁰ Laclau and Mouffe 1985.

has enjoyed institutionalization but has faced substantive opposition from nationalist discourse.

Foreign Policy as Articulation of Political Identities

This paper emphasizes the centrality of identities as a concept. But why are political identities so central to foreign policy? Why do norms matter to foreign policy makers? Why can certain outcome variables be expected? The sub-argument underpinning the causal mechanism linking political identity to foreign policy is that the latter is a medium for articulating the former. However, the causal relationship between norms and foreign policy is not deterministic. Rather, norms influence foreign policy through agenda-setting power.⁴¹ Agenda-setting refers to the power to decide which issues are discussed, and which are not given attention.⁴² This was originally formulated by Bachrach and Baratz,⁴³ who argued that those with agenda-setting power lock away attention from issues that disadvantage them. Moreover, taking norms as a culture has probabilistic rather than deterministic effects on foreign policy. Johnston's framework formulated strategic culture as causing ranked preferences in grand strategy.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, norms as a strategic or foreign policy culture affect the preferences of policymakers. In the case of neo-imperialist norms, these norms are agenda-set by preventing the discussion of issues which are contrary to dependency on the US. It also means that in a given environment, policymakers will almost consistently prefer policies of alignment with the US. However, how is it the case that the agenda-setting power of neo-imperialist norms have led to other states' uncritical support of Israel? The answer to this lies in the institutionalization and durability of neo-imperialist norms.

⁴¹ Katzenstein 1996.

⁴² Heywood 2013.

⁴³ Bachrach and Baratz 1963.

⁴⁴ Johnson 1995.

What is noteworthy is how entrenched the neo-imperialist identity appears to be. For instance, President Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022) attempted to distance the Philippines from the US in the name of an independent foreign policy. This attempt was largely in rhetoric, but was not substantively present in policy.⁴⁵ Wu and Velasco note that ideologically, Duterte's personal views were centered around suspicion towards the West,⁴⁶ but the power of neo-imperialist norms constrained Duterte from fully expressing these views. Indeed, these norms involve the mobilization of institutions and attitudes to constrain debate and decision-making.⁴⁷

In the case of the Philippines, this means that any shift away from the US occurs outside the boundaries of dominant discourse and decision-making. Historical attempts to distance the Philippines from the US have been frustrated for this reason. For instance, Duterte attempted to suspend the Visiting Forces Agreement with the US that allows the stationing of the US troops on Philippine soil. However, following the pressure of the Philippines' Senate, alongside the US's cancellation of visas to Duterte's political allies, the suspension did not eventuate.⁴⁸ This is even more puzzling, given that decision-making power over foreign policy is, to a large extent, malleable, able to reflect the views and tastes of presidents.⁴⁹ In this case, the durability of neo-imperialist norms served as external factors which constrained Duterte's ability to move away from the US. This is demonstrative of the agenda-setting power of norms. We will further review the entrenchment of neo-imperialist norms and its concrete effects on Philippine foreign policy in the discussion section.

Here, it is important to add that positioning in the international system is not restricted to the purview of governmental institutions.

⁴⁵ Camba and Magat 2019.

⁴⁶ Wu and Velasco 2022.

⁴⁷ Bachrach and Baratz 1963.

⁴⁸ Wong 2020.

⁴⁹ Wu and Velasco 2022.

Leaders of social movements can also use their platforms to bring awareness to causes and strengthen their identity, bypassing any restrictions that might be imposed on them by the state.⁵⁰ The connections between domestic social movements with international solidarity movements can be understood as an expansion of the concept of foreign policy beyond state institutions and away from political elites. The role of social movements in flawed democracies, or democracies with dictatorial elements, is particularly important, as it reflects the interests and identities of those groups without direct access to agenda-setting power. In the context of our case study, we argue that the unfettered support of Israel, even as it continuously violates international law, is the manifestation of the exclusion of nationalist identity from agenda-setting platforms and the monopoly of the foreign policy arena by the US-aligned neo-imperialist political elite. Instead, solidarity is manifested through grassroots social movements such as civil society-led protests, donation drives, educational campaigns, and so on.

Foreign Policy and Moral Capital

This study does not stop at the conceptualization of political identities. It also attempts to investigate the impact of the dominant political identity on the Philippine's international position. We argue that the foreign policies adopted thus far by the Philippines have had an adverse effect on the state's moral capital. Prior to elaborating on this impact, it is necessary to conceptualize moral capital, as it has been underdeveloped so far in the literature. Moral capital refers broadly to how legitimate the membership and domestic and international conduct of a state is perceived by the international community.⁵¹ Conduct refers to the foreign policies of a state, whereas membership refers to the type of regime a state has, as well as its domestic policies. The key difference

⁵⁰ Hintz 2016.

⁵¹ Clarke 2005.

between moral capital and legitimacy is that moral capital takes legitimacy and turns it into a power. It thus becomes a latent power, almost akin to a currency that can be leveraged to support state interests, similar to soft power and smart power.⁵² This concept is most implicit in international law. As international law is a landscape for political maneuvers,⁵³ the ability for such maneuvers is determined by the currency of moral capital. To this literature, we add that having a consistent stance on key issues of relevance to the international system, such as territorial integrity and human rights, are central to having a high reserve of moral capital.

Nations are more willing to back the conduct of a state that has high moral capital. Conversely, a state with low moral capital is more likely to be on the receiving end of sanctions, critiques, and belligerent responses from the international community. North Korea is a poignant example, having been excluded by the international community due to their illegitimate possession of nuclear weaponry. The argument made in this essay is that the cumulative and persistent articulation of the political identity of neo-imperialism in Philippine foreign policy since its independence, has resulted in the depletion of the Philippines' moral capital. This is because the Philippines has restricted itself to a status of a small power, regardless of its material capabilities which are at least comparable to other countries in the region, by continuing to orbit in the US sphere of influence. Sevilla notes that one of the traps smaller states fall into, is the narrowing of strategic options by depending on a stronger power for protection.⁵⁴ This is one of the reasons why other Southeast Asian states such as Malaysia attempt to hedge by not seeking a lopsided alignment with any one power.⁵⁵ Realizing its full potential is imperative for the Philippines for cases beyond those of Palestine but also with regards to other domestic concerns. For example, a lower 'reserve' of

⁵² Nye 2009.

⁵³ Hoffman 1970.

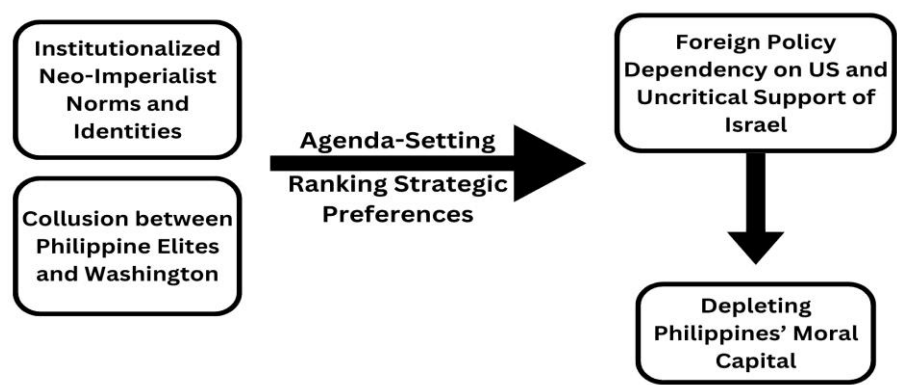
⁵⁴ Sevilla 2022.

⁵⁵ Kuik 2016.

moral capital limits the Philippines' ability to back claims on contested territories such as those in South China/West Philippine Sea. It also limits the roles the Philippines is able to play such as its bid to become a member of the United Nations Security Council and to become the chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

The connection between the concepts discussed above on political identities, foreign policy, and moral capital is illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 1 demonstrates that Philippine political identity is a multifaceted complex weave of various norms and values. Of relevance to our argument are the neo-imperialist identity and the nationalist identity. This work argues that the dominance of the neo-imperialist identity has caused the Philippines to trail the cues of US foreign policy makers. Alongside a general indifference to oppression in the international system, this results in a foreign policy which has uncritically supported the Israeli state despite its violations of international law against Palestinians.

Figure 1. *The relationship between political identities, foreign policy and moral capital.* Note: Authors’ own illustration.



Methodology

In order to support the core argument of this paper, we use a multiple qualitative method that helps us uncover the link between historical events and their effects on the development of key norms and discourses which shape political identities and set foreign policy into motion. Starting from a critical theory standpoint, the multiple method relies on an analysis of historical events recorded in seminal books on history and contents of key laws, as well as process tracing. The critical analysis of historical events starts in 1946, when the Philippines gained independence, and ends in 2022 with the last months of the Duterte administration. This ending point is chosen for feasibility purposes due to the availability of more material for analysis. Within this period, we examine the key actors in deciding foreign policy as well as key laws, decisions, and interests that had direct implications on foreign policy. We then use process tracing to establish the link between these historical events and actors and the emergence of relevant norms and political identities. Going beyond the description of historical events, we also

employ discourse analysis to analyze the ideational content of norms and identities with a focus on what we propose are nationalist and neo-imperialist identities. Applying Foucauldian discourse analysis,⁵⁶ we trace the genealogy of the two types of proposed political identity, neo-imperialist and nationalist.

Discussion

The following section answers the paper's research questions by first identifying the key actors, ideological leanings, and implications of the neo-imperialist and nationalist political identities. Next, we trace key historical events that are associated with the emergence of neo-imperialist and nationalist political identities. This is followed by a discussion of the relation between both identities and how political events are perceived through them. Finally, this section ends with a discussion on the implications of a neo-imperialist political identity on the moral capital of the Philippines in the national arena.

Political Identities: Actors, Ideology, Implications

Considering the discussion of historical events and the genealogy of political discourses, it is apt to address some main points. Firstly, what actors are most central to analyzing norms and identities in the case of the Philippines? These would be those with agenda-setting and decision-making power over foreign policy: the political elite (also referred to as the civic sphere⁵⁷). This means the president, as well as interest groups whose approval is needed for the president to survive politically. However, the primacy of elites as the focus of analysis should not discount the citizens. Public opinion is still a requisite for legitimizing foreign policy. Thus, the public is a secondary actor of analysis.

⁵⁶ Nola 1998.

⁵⁷ Kusaka 2017.

Secondly, where do these identities come from? The neo-imperialist identity originated from the US colonial regime, as will be elaborated on in the section on the genealogy of neo-imperialist identity. Particularly, it is an internalization of US colonial discourses that justified American imperialism as a form of democratic education.⁵⁸ As a post-colonial legacy, it forms constitutive, regulative, and prescriptive norms, leading to the Philippines' strategic dependency on the US. However, we can trace the emergence of the nationalist identity to a much earlier period, in the form of independence movements against the Spanish colonial regime (1565-1898), whose rule preceded US colonization (1898-1946). Despite this, following the Philippines' independence, nationalist discourses in favor of independent foreign policy did not enjoy the same level of attention or institutionalization as neo-imperialist discourses.

How can we distinguish between neo-imperialist and nationalist identities? Here, we may provide some indicators. Firstly, neo-imperialist prescriptive and regulative norms prescribe policies which cause dependency on the US. These norms therefore shape public opinion, providing a consistent positive attitude towards the US. These norms will also take hold among political elites, who rank strategic preferences that are friendly towards the US higher than policies which are otherwise. It would be tautological to infer the presence of a neo-imperialist identity purely by the presence of policies of dependency towards the US. Rather, what we highlight is the salience of norms and worldviews which prescribe this dependency.

This is important because the factors we highlight here need to have a non-trivial causal relationship with foreign policy. How does the argument proposed relate to plausible alternative explanations for Philippine foreign policy? For example, a realist argument might suggest that Philippine dependency on the US, and its subsequent support for

⁵⁸ Webb 2022.

Israel, is due to a need to offset its power asymmetry. Norms and identities as ideational variables do not epistemologically compete with other variables such as security. Rather, they modify the weight of these other variables and their salience through agenda setting and ranking strategic preferences.⁵⁹ As such, they over-determine material variables in favor of US dependency and under-determine material variables in opposition to US dependency.

Counterfactual analysis is also necessary to test the importance of this variable. Meaning, in the absence of neo-imperialist norms and identities, would the same foreign policies be observed? While it is impossible to definitively answer this question, a comparative analysis by looking at foreign policies of other countries in the region might hint at the direction of an answer. In this regard, the Philippines is an anomaly in its entrenched dependence on the US as Southeast Asian countries have chosen more balanced foreign policies. This is not to disregard the relevance of the issue of Palestinian statehood to the Filipino masses. But instead of a foreign policy that clearly supports this issue, initiatives such as protests and donation drives have manifested through grassroots social movements that have expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine. It is through such initiatives that we trace the nationalist identity. However, since nationalist identities and norms have enjoyed far less institutionalization, our analysis is more concerned with it as a discourse that at once reflects and shapes identities.

Genealogy of Neo-Imperialist Political Identity

Over the course of a few decades, the Philippines went from being a Spanish colony sold to the US, to Japanese war spoils, then back to a US colony, before finally gaining independence in 1946. Independence, however, was mostly nominal, as the US maintained influence over the Philippines both directly and indirectly. Through foreign aid, security

⁵⁹ Johnston 1995; Katzenstein 1996.

pacts, and promises of investment and trade, the US was able to co-opt the political and landed elites into maintaining an indirect policy of “benevolent assimilation”.⁶⁰

Philippine nation-building followed the trend among its Southeast Asian counterparts, constructed by socioeconomic and intellectual elites with ideas of nationalism enabled by world trade and increasing Westernization.⁶¹ In particular, a Philippine political identity built on a shared historical memory of colonial struggle began to emerge. However, Ileto argues that this understanding of history imported an elitist discourse into Philippine history where mass movements were viewed as “irrational”, “primitive”, and “blind”,⁶² requiring the translation by intellectual elites into liberal nationalistic sentiments. For the US to legitimize its colonial empire over the Philippines, an ensuing paradox of democratic imperialism served to shape the dominant discourse on Philippine political identity. These discourses were based on ‘democratic tutelage’, where the Philippines would be ‘schooled’ in the practice of democracy by a ‘benevolent’ power due to the state’s alleged impotence in democratic practice.⁶³ What this illustrates is the ideational post-colonial legacy that provides ground for neo-imperialist norms based on domestic elites whose incentives align with that of US policymakers.

Impact of US Colonization on Philippine Foreign Policy

The US worked with Philippine landed elite by handing them the reins of power following independence and granting them access to US markets for the export of agricultural products grown in their lands in

⁶⁰ Referring to the proclamation by US President William McKinley in 1899 following the Spanish-American War indicating that the US would take over the governance of the Philippines.

⁶¹ Croissant and Lorenz 2017.

⁶² Ileto 1979.

⁶³ Webb 2022.

return for privileges only afforded to the US.⁶⁴ For example, the US tied reconstruction payments to the Philippines with ratification of the Bell Trade Act of 1946. The terms of the Act disproportionately benefited the US, giving them not only access to cheap imports of raw agricultural products and an export market for manufactured goods, but also ownership of land in the Philippines on parity with rights of Philippine citizens.⁶⁵ Additionally, the US actively encouraged the export of Philippine labor as seamen, soldiers, and healthcare workers when the former was not capable of domestically filling these positions⁶⁶.

The socio-political attitudes of the Philippines' middle class in the early honeymoon years of post-independence were marked with a post-colonial stamp, where the dominant native discourse blamed the country's lack of democracy on its own populace whilst simultaneously glorifying the US, portraying the Philippines as a 'child' of the US 'parent',⁶⁷ mirroring Rudyard Kipling's call on the US to fulfill the 'White Man's Burden' towards a populace that is "half devil and half child".⁶⁸ Dominant scholarly frameworks that attempt to explain Philippine politics are similarly affected discursively. They are populated by narratives that depict the US's democratic project as frustrated by features of Philippine culture. One example is a running theme which bemoans Philippine culture as rife with factionalism, clientelism, and bossism.⁶⁹ This reflects an orientalist or essentializing mode of viewing Philippine culture, whilst simultaneously presupposing a default Western cultural view.

In terms of foreign policy, the end of World War II sent an early signal as to the position of the Philippines in the ensuing Cold War rivalry. Arguably, relinquishing claims for war reparation and acknowledgement

⁶⁴ Anderson 1988.

⁶⁵ Webb 2022.

⁶⁶ Eugenio 2024.

⁶⁷ Webb 2022 .

⁶⁸ Kipling 1899

⁶⁹ Iletto 2001.

of war crimes committed by the Japanese,⁷⁰ when the latter surrendered, was an indication as to which camp the Philippines would join later during the Cold War. The US further solidified its neo-colonial territory during this period by building military bases in the Philippines. Now that the Cold War is over, these military bases serve a similar purpose during the US' ongoing rivalry albeit not against the Soviet but against China at this point. As such, these bases serve to signal the Philippine position within a cyclical system of great power rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union, then later China. Military agreements and exercises also further lock this relation even as the political economy of Asia Pacific changes and the distribution of power shifts in favor of emerging economies such as China (Seah et al., 2024) and other members of BRICS.

Post-independence, the Philippines has continued to have a strategic dependency on the US, signing signed major agreements with the US. These include the US–Philippines Military Assistance Pact (1947), the Military Bases Agreement (1947), and the Mutual Defense Treaty (1951).⁷¹ More recently, Philippine elites have continued to outsource external security to the US through the Visiting Forces Agreement (1999) and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2014; in 2023, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. negotiated an expansion of the latter Agreement, adding four additional military bases.⁷²

Although the US continues to maintain a strong influence over Philippine foreign policy, these choices do not always reflect all facets of its political identity, as discussed in the next section. Nevertheless, this dominant influence, secured both materially and ideationally, effectively constrains the Philippines' agency in the international arena, diminishes its moral capital, and limits it to a position of a satellite state. This is evident in the country's policy towards Israel and Palestine.

⁷⁰ Such as sexual slavery and vivisections

⁷¹ Ronas 2006.

⁷² Seralbo 2024.

Genealogy of Nationalist Political Identity

Throughout its history, the Philippines has manifested a visible, albeit non-dominant, discourse that is critical of hegemony. One of the key reference points for this discourse within modern history is the People Power Revolution of 1986, which toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. As a result of an increasingly troubled presidency and in an attempt to curb opposition, Marcos Sr. implemented martial law in 1972. During this period, thousands of arbitrary arrests and other types of human rights violations were recorded. Eventually, a diverse national coalition led by Corazon Aquino forced Marcos Sr. out of office in 1986. To escape prosecution, Marcos Sr. fled to the US, where he lived in exile until his death in 1989. Under the leadership of Corazon Aquino, the humbly-dressed widow of the assassinated popular politician Benigno Aquino Jr., the People Power Revolution strengthened elements of the nationalist discourse as the maternal image of Corazon Aquino was juxtaposed with the lavish lifestyle of the 'elitist' Marcoses, notwithstanding the fact that this discourse blatantly obfuscates Aquino's own privileged background as a member of the landed political elite.⁷³

The revolution ushered in a wave of ensuing nationalist discourse. In 1991, the Senate, by a 12-11 vote, rejected the renewal of US colonial bases and the Philippines-US Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace.⁷⁴ Despite Corazon's own passionate defense of the treaty, the US bases were rejected on the grounds of undermining Philippine sovereignty. This was despite the US offering USD 203 million per year. The most prominent of these bases was the Subic Naval Base, for which the US fought fiercely to preserve.⁷⁵

A common theme in observing the assertion of nationalist norms is that they are often very brief and result in unsubstantial policies. This

⁷³ Andreson 1988.

⁷⁴ Francisco 2016.

⁷⁵ Seralbo 2024.

demonstrates that the entrenchment of neo-imperialist norms and identities has prevented the concretization of a truly independent foreign policy. The strategic implications of such a policy are now reverberating to the Philippines' uncritical support of Israel.

The People Power Revolution of 1986 did not become a dead artifact in Philippine politics. Its spirit lingered in the fervor of the People Power Revolution 2 of 16 January 2001 and the People Power Revolution 3 of 25 April 2021.⁷⁶ More recently, the administration of Duterte (2016-2022) and its association with the infamous drug war has reignited debates that critique the dominant discourse which has justified an elitist form of governance associated with a neo-imperialist identity. In response to Duterte's drug war, which caused the extrajudicial killing of an estimated 30,000 civilians,⁷⁷ activists in the form of journalists, students, NGO organizers and other members of civil society, sought to challenge Duterte's actions. Despite direct risks to their safety and that of their loved ones, these activists spoke out against and meticulously compiled evidence of Duterte's drug war.⁷⁸

Duterte remains a curious example. Outwardly, Duterte appeared to vocally distance the Philippines from the US, but his administration failed to repeal any major security agreement between the Philippines and the US. Illustrating the dominance of neo-imperialist norms are the views of Duterte's Secretary of Defense, Delfin Lorenzana. Educated in the Philippine Military Academy, which espouses pro-American education, Delfin preferred alignment with the US, working to minimize the effect of Duterte's anti-US rhetoric on the existing security ties.⁷⁹ Indeed, the norms between the state and its military apparatus, served to restrict Duterte's attempts at a pivot away from the US.

⁷⁶ Kusaka 2017.

⁷⁷ Ratcliffe 2024.

⁷⁸ See Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2021, for her work safeguarding freedom of expression.

⁷⁹ Seralbo 2024.

One of Duterte's precursors was nationalist President Carlos P. Garcia (1957-1961), famed for his 'Filipino First Policy'. US historical documents under the Office of the Historian demonstrate American views of Garcia.⁸⁰ What was noted was an increasing domestic demand for an independent foreign policy, which was growing proximate to anti-American sentiment. However, Garcia came in a time where reigning institutions and prevailing ideology were that of a resilient neo-colonial regime.⁸¹ Philippine-US ties continued uninterrupted under the visage of the Cold War.

Despite the momentum the nationalist identity regained as a result of the drug war, it is important to note that this political discourse is but a secondary strand that has not been sufficient to challenge the dominant neo-imperialist discourse. At times, the nationalist identity is even subsumed by the dominant neo-imperialist discourse. It is even the case that nationalist discourse is co-opted by neo-imperialist discourse, tying aspirations of sovereignty to dependency on a great power. Indeed, while the Philippines aims to defend its sovereignty against Chinese aggression, it has continued its neo-imperialist strategic culture by choosing a one-sided alignment with the US.

Philippine political history has been and continues to be an unrelenting contention between its authoritarian tendencies and neo-imperialist legacies, and its nationalist counterpart. If the initial face of our argument is that the Philippines ought to adopt a more balanced stance on Palestine in response to Israel's unlawful actions, then this counterfactual argues that on the other side of coin, should the Philippines continue to neglect its moral obligation to resist oppression, then it would reinforce this discourse of excuse and tolerance of tyrants.⁸² The Philippines would not only be on the wrong side of global history, but even

⁸⁰ US Office of the Historian 1958.

⁸¹ Teehankee 2016.

⁸² This idea originates from Dr. Anthony Borja in his article: <https://www.newmandala.org/excusing-the-inexcusable/>

on the wrong side in terms of its own history. Given the presidency of Duterte as from 2016 to 2022, and the subsequent electoral victory of Ferdinand ‘Bongbong’ Romualdez Marcos Jr., son of Marcos Sr., it is all the more urgent that the Philippines reverses the trend of tolerating oppression.

Philippine Position on Palestine and its Moral Capital

While the Philippines is not a major player in the international community and cannot single-handedly alter events on the ground, its decisions do impact international norms, conventions, and perceptions of global issues. The responsibility to protect principle, adopted by UN General Assembly in 2005, mandates that each state, regardless of size or power, bears the responsibility to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, all of which mounting evidence indicates are being committed by Israel in Gaza. The fragile security upon which the international system rests upon is only possible if all and every member abides by the laws agreed upon. The political efficacy of international law relies on the opt-in of the countries within its purview and thus entails that the Philippines’ foreign policy cannot be trivialized. The alternative would be a self-help system where Hobbesian state of nature prevails.

As a country with a persistent undercurrent of nationalist, anti-imperialist, political identity that critiques colonization, oppression, injustice, and human rights abuses, it is incongruent that the Philippines continues to follow the foreign policy of its former colonizer, the US. While an alliance of political interests between US and Philippine policymakers explains this position, the international status of the Philippines cannot sustain the country’s current position. A position that supports Palestinian self-determination and denounces Israeli crimes is aligned with Philippine political identity of anti-imperial discourse. This aspect of a country’s identity is also what allows it to play a more autonomous role on the

international stage and build its moral capital. At a time when competing powers vie for more power and influence, it is crucial that the Philippines' stance is aligned with international law, justice, and more inclusive values.

However, by orbiting the US sphere of influence, as an attestation of extant imperialist policy, the Philippines is restricted from fully exercising its rights as an independent sovereign state. Instead, the nation continues to be dependent on the US for its security and for cues on foreign policy, even when this contradicts the country's interests. Maintaining this policy in effect condemns the Philippines to the status of a satellite state locked in the orbit of the US, rather than realizing its potential as an active regional player with a diverse identity that could be channeled towards building its moral capital. Building on sources of moral capital is particularly important at a time when the world order is being reshaped by the emerging economies of the Global South to the disadvantage of the hegemons of the last century such as the US. Thus, when it comes to the foreign policy of the Philippines, we call for a revisiting of stances on key international issues, maintaining independence and ensuring internal consistency with core national values.

Alternative Explanations

In this section, we articulate some alternative arguments and compare them to our argument. Firstly, rather than a strategic culture of dependency on the US, is it not possible that the Philippine alignment with the US is an act of agency? This alignment may be the product of external factors such as addressing security needs in relation to the dispute in the West Philippine Sea. To clarify, our argument is precisely positioned in order to avoid the essentialist trap of previous literature which marginalizes the Philippines' agency. Rather, we make the case that this act of agency to align with the US is overdetermined or given too much weight. To recall, our conceptual framework of norms, identities, and

strategic culture shape the preferences of policymakers. Moreover, these norms and identities regulate and prescribe certain behaviors, alongside constituting interests. The prevalence of neo-imperialist norms and identities overdetermines reliance on the US. Counterfactually, if such norms and identities do not exist, we should not expect reliance on the US to the degree currently observed. The argument we provide has greater explanatory power because it also explains why the Philippines has a different foreign policy strategy of one-sided alignment with the US compared to its Southeast Asian neighbors, who choose varying postures of hedging in response to Chinese aggression. These states face similar security needs in relation to China but pursue relations with both China and the US simultaneously. Given these options, rather than choosing hedging strategies, the Philippines has opted to align itself completely with the US. The argument shows how a neo-imperialist identity constitutes a strategic culture of dependency on the US, thus weighing heavier the Philippines' act of agency to prefer depending on the US.

Secondly, our argument relies on an identity of dependency on the US as the cause of an unwillingness to scrutinize Israel's crimes in Palestine. However, is it not the case that the Philippines has been undertaking modernization efforts in its military to embark on a more independent foreign policy? Most funding for the Philippines' military goes towards internal security rather than external security.⁸³ Meaning, most of the funds are funneled into the Armed Forces of the Philippines as a response to potential and/or ongoing rebellions, rather than the Philippine Navy and Philippine Air Force. Furthermore, the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Program only allocated PHP 38.8 billion as funding to the Navy and Air Force from 2013-2017. Furthermore, the Philippines spends the least on its military of all states in the Asia-Pacific region, constituting 0.8% of its GDP.⁸⁴ In addition, for external security needs, the Philippines continues to rely on the US, receiving the most US-

⁸³ Seralbo 2024.

⁸⁴ Kih 2023.

funded military of all countries in the Indo-Pacific, amounting to USD 1.14 billion from 2015 to 2022.⁸⁵

Thirdly, the nationalist identity may no longer be anti-US, as it has evolved into being anti-China given the disputes in the West Philippine Sea. However, anti-China rhetoric still demonstrates neo-imperialist norms and identities because while asserting Philippine sovereignty, it still prescribes a strategy of dependency on the US. It is likelier that the nationalist identity is co-opted by the neo-imperialist one, where the defense of Philippine sovereignty can only be done on reliance on the US.

Fourthly, perhaps it is the case that Duterte only appeared to pivot away from the US as a response to unwavering Chinese aggression. Would this not be an act of bandwagoning? To this, it is worth reiterating that Duterte's pivot away from the US was primarily rhetorical, failing to repeal any major security agreement.

Conclusion

The central question of the paper is concerned with the sources of political identities and the relationship between foreign policy and the international position of the Philippines. In order to account for Philippine political identities, we first turned to norms. We first distinguished between regulative, prescriptive, and constitutive norms.⁸⁶ We then identified two identities that are accompanied by norms: a neo-imperialist identity and a nationalist identity. Historical data demonstrates that the neo-imperialist identity has enjoyed institutionalization, serving the interest of Philippine political elites sponsored by US support.⁸⁷ However, its erstwhile opposition from nationalist discourse has remained relatively

⁸⁵ US Embassy 2022.

⁸⁶ Katzenstein 1996; Sikkinik and Finnemore 1998.

⁸⁷ Teehankee and Calimbahin 2020.

durable. Neo-imperialist identities and norms have caused Philippine foreign policy to be chained to the cues of US foreign policymakers.

This is especially the case given Philippine-Middle East relations.⁸⁸ This has caused the Philippines to uncritically support Israel, following the US's own support. Consequently, the Philippines has failed to support Palestine's march to self-determination, which has become all the more crucial, given the mounting atrocities against Palestinians in the Gaza strip. We tie this foreign policy to the concept of moral capital to illustrate how endorsing the unlawful policies of Israel weaken the Philippines' moral capital. This demonstrates that the question of supporting Palestine is not a purely normative question, but is relevant to self-interested states aiming to maximize benefits. The neo-imperialist norms which dominate Philippine foreign policy are squarely oppositional to the Philippines' own nationalist identities and norms, that assert self-determination and oppose injustice. In uncritically supporting Israel, the Philippines' is not only on the wrong side of global history, but also its own national history. The Philippines desperately needs moral capital, as it continually utilizes international law to assert its sovereignty, especially amidst disputes with China.⁸⁹ Historically, scholarship on the Philippines has continually emphasized hard state power, with a focus on military and economic capabilities.⁹⁰ This work represents the possibility of examining state interest from the lens of international legitimacy and morality.⁹¹ This may serve as groundwork for novel questions of legitimacy and identity for the Philippines in future works.

⁸⁸ Sevilla 2022.

⁸⁹ Heydarian 2017.

⁹⁰ Wu and Velasco, 2022; Ronas, 2006

⁹¹ Clarke 2005; Sikkinik and Finnemore 1998.

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