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Mixed Implications for Filipino Amerasians in wake of Approval of new R.P.-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA)

Angeles City, Pampanga, Philippines/Albany, NY USA - The announcement of the R.P.- U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) presents a constellation of "sweet and sour emotions" as well as myriad unanswered questions. "It is a mixed outcome perhaps with as many questions as answers," declared Dr. P.C. "Pete" Kutschera, PhD, chief academic officer/founder of the Amerasian Research Network, Ltd. in Albany, New York and Director of the Philippine Amerasian Research Center (PARC), Systems Plus College Foundation . "One can't help but come away with an array of sweet and sour emotions. Surely it is a sweeping and welcome endorsement of the U.S. commitment to the defense of the Republic of the Philippines amidst an increasingly tense and turbulent Western Pacific Basin security environment. On the other hand, however, there are serious concerns over the EDCA document's failure to minimally address, hint at a remedy or caution against U.S. military personnel control issues that led to mass formation of the Amerasian condition in the first place. Particularly, I am very dismayed over the high access and exposure that will be afforded the plethora of corporate defense contractors who now accompany or follow U.S. forces performing the combat service military support role strongly implied in the new EDCA."

The 10-year agreement, signed April 28, 2014 in Manila, was hailed as a centerpiece of President Barack H. Obama's week long diplomatic sojourn through East/Southeast Asia including state visits to Japan, South Korea and Malaysia. It authorizes temporary stationing of U.S. warships, aircraft, weapons, equipment and materiel stockpiling and troops including corporate defense and civilian military employees virtually throughout the territory. The *Los Angeles Times* described the new pact as "opening the way for the first large-scale return of American military forces...since their eviction at the end of the Cold War." *The New York Times* reported the accord "returns the U.S. to *a visible presence* (Italics added) for the first time since the American military gave up its sprawling naval and air bases...in 1992." Philippine and U.S. governments and language contained in the EDCA specify the new military defense license in no way implies a permanent rebasing of U.S. forces in its former colonial and commonwealth territory; nevertheless, the agreement stipulates that it shall remain in force automatically

beyond the decade-long timeframe unless terminated by either party. That would occur by giving one year's written notice through diplomatic channels.

In addition to bolstering R.P.-U.S. security interests "which I conjecture will be met with the approval of Amerasians residing in Philippines," Dr. Kutschera maintained the new agreement "presents a tremendous opportunity to generate and focus interest on the part of the research community, academia, foundations and humanitarian organizations on the diaspora. The temporary stationing and increased rotations of U.S. military personnel may prompt a catalyst to ignite public debate and academic discussion on the current status and fate of Amerasians. That's a positive thing! We are hopeful it reignites, or works to exceed the level of public discussion and exposure that circulated around the Amerasian condition in the aftermath of the base closures."

On an ancillary issue, Dr. Kutschera praised "environmental, human health and safety" provisions, i.e. EDCA Article IX, which acknowledged the inherent and potential dangers to the Philippine ecological firmament and an apparently explicit commitment on the part of the U.S. government that it would act quickly and responsibly in the face of environmental hazards, spills, accidents and mishaps. "This is an issue of significant contemporary concern. It is particularly so in the vicinity surrounding the former Subic Bay naval complex (Olongapo City, Zambales), Clark air base (Angeles, Pampanga), and the Crow Valley Gunnery and Bombing Range (Tarlac) where it is widely acknowledged the U.S. Defense Department left a great many toxic wastes, POL materials (Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants) and explosive materiel debris in and adjacent to areas densely populated by 1st and 2nd generation Amerasians."

But Dr. Kutschera expressed alarm over Article VIII, the Contracting Procedures portion of the agreement which authorizes heavy and extensive use of corporate defense contractors for procurement or implementation of "any material, supplies, equipment and services. Such contracts shall be solicited, awarded and administered in accordance with the laws and regulations of the United States." Essentially, he related, "EDCA places the assignment and control of private contractors under U.S. government purview. However, previous experiences with contractors in recent U.S. Middle Eastern wars has shown much confusion arose over who actually regulates and controls U.S. private military company contractors in forward locations. In some instances this came under DOD purview, in other instances it was a responsibility of the State Department, or other U.S. federal agencies involved overseas. EDCA in this respect is a freewheeling document that - to quote the agreement verbatim - permits private contractors to participate in a wide range of activity: 'military training, transit, various support roles, refueling of aircraft, bunkering of vessels, temporary maintenance of vehicles, vessels and aircraft, temporary accommodation of personnel; communications; preposition of equipment, supplies, and materiel; deploying forces and materiel, and other such activities.'"

In further analyzing the EDCA, Dr. Kutschera said that unlike the environmental provision (Article IX), the pact makes no mention of the at risk Amerasian diasporic condition. "Essentially, it is devoid of any reference to policy or intended practices relating to adequate or preventative controls either over the uniformed military, corporate contractors or civilian government employees - those who contributed, in the past mind you - to the formation of the huge Amerasian diaspora during the nearly century long imposition of U.S. colonial and military involvement in the territory. I don't believe we are so far out as to say that the Philippines represents a very special case, a very needy case, indeed, when it comes to vulnerability to bringing unplanned, unwanted, or unfortunate children into the world, many over time who become the abandoned, forsaken offspring of soldiers and contractors. There is strong evidence the number of military Filipino Amerasians today number as many as 250,000 when all ages and 1st and 2nd generation are considered. It's a quite special, atypical case that cries out for special attention."

