

US-Philippines: Duterte is cursing, Kerry is diplomatic

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Rodrigo Duterte breaks vow to stop cursing others

President breaks recent pledge not to use profanity with a torrent of invective towards the United States.

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said his war on drugs had cut back the supply to “very low” levels and thanked China for supporting his crackdown, but swore repeatedly at ally the United States for criticising it.

Duterte said on Friday his bloody campaign against drugs had successfully reduced the narcotics flow, but conceded there were signs that criminals had now turned to kidnapping, another problem he planned to tackle.

“There is a very low supply of drugs now. But there is a shift to kidnapping by these idiots,” he said during a televised speech. “This is a new game, so be careful. Give me time to talk to God.”

The crime-busting former mayor of the once lawless Davao City said last week he had spoken to God and promised him he would no longer use bad language.

But his vow has not held long. On Friday, he got angry again at former colonial power the United States for its concerns about alleged summary killings, and contrasted its stance with that of China, which has funded a huge drug rehabilitation centre.

“Now who helped? China,” he said. “America, what did they say? ‘Duterte, stop the extrajudicial killings. We hold you responsible’,” he said.

“I said: ‘You can go to hell. You’re all shit. You look at us Filipinos like dogs... You’re all really sons of bitches because you violated our dignity.’”

As a provincial outsider in May’s presidential election, Duterte used his brashness and profanity to enhance his public appeal. Dubbed “the punisher” and “Duterte Harry”, he was elected by a big margin.

That was aided by the promise of a drugs war, which has killed more than 2,300 people in four months.

Duterte's relentless assaults on Washington have baffled the country's biggest ally, but do not appear to have resonated among Filipinos and the local business community, which has expressed concern.

A recent opinion poll of 1,200 Filipinos showed they had far greater trust in the United States than they did in China, which Duterte has been praising and courting strongly.

Duterte invited his countrymen to protest if they disagreed with him.

"If you think America will be good for you, if you want to be a [US] territory ... if it is to your personal interest, go ahead and join the demonstration," he said.

"And maybe you can convince me to leave the presidency. But at least I leave without being treated like a pig by the Americans."

* 4 November 2016:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/11/rodrigo-duterte-breaks-vow-stop-cursing-161104203044695.html>

Kerry: US-Philippine ties 'ironclad'

WASHINGTON - The historic alliance between the United States and the Philippines remains "ironclad" despite recent differences, Secretary of State John Kerry said Thursday, alluding to the anti-American rhetoric of populist President Rodrigo Duterte.

"The United States continues to place high value on the close ties that exist between our countries," Kerry said during a swearing-in ceremony for the new US ambassador to Manila, the Korean-born diplomat Sung Kim.

"We continue to recognise our ironclad commitment to the sovereignty, independence and security of the Philippines."

In August, Duterte said in a speech that Kim's predecessor in Manila, Philip Goldberg, was a "son of a bitch" — a comment that prompted the State Department to demand an official explanation.

Duterte, who accused Goldberg of meddling in Philippine elections, then issued a stream of insults toward the former colonial power, going so far as to refer to President Barack Obama as a "son of a whore."

The fiery Filipino leader later said his comment was "nothing personal" and that he regretted that it had caused such controversy.

But Kerry, who met with Duterte in Manila in late July and said he hopes to return there before the Obama presidency ends in January, struck a diplomatic tone in his remarks Thursday.

"I am confident about the future of our bilateral relationship, notwithstanding the difference here or there about one thing or another," he said. "I am absolutely confident about the ties between our peoples."

Facing the extraordinary insults of the Philippine president, American diplomats have been wary of adding fuel to the fire.

“Democratic elections bring change and we must all have the wisdom to recognize and to adjust to that change,” Kerry said.

He added that “the logic of our alliance” — built around a military partnership forged after World War II and cemented by a mutual defense treaty in 1951 — remained “as compelling today” as it had ever been.

Until Duterte came to power in June, Manila was one of the closest US allies in Asia, and it was viewed as a vital link in the political “pivot” or “rebalancing” of US policy toward the Asia-Pacific region under Obama.

But late last month Duterte announced his country’s “separation” from the United States and called for an end within two years to the presence of “foreign military troops” — a clear reference to American forces.

Duterte later struck a more conciliatory tone, saying there would be no “severance of ties” with Washington; Manila, he added, would simply pursue a more independent line in foreign affairs while improving its ties to Beijing.

Until the early 1990s, when the Manila government ordered them out, the United States kept thousands of troops at major bases in the Philippines.

But months before Duterte took office, Washington and Manila had announced plans for stepped-up security cooperation, with a “periodic presence” of American troops rotating through the area near the contested South China Sea.

* Bangkok Post. 4 Nov 2016 at 02:14 891:

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asean/1126465/kerry-us-philippine-ties-ironclad>

Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte suggests asking Russia for weapons after US block rifle sale

‘[America] won’t sell weapons? We have lots of explosives here already’

Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte has suggested he may turn to Russia to provide his country with weapons, after the US government reportedly blocked the sale of assault rifles to police in the Philippines.

The US state department recently halted the sale of 26,000 rifles due to concerns over Mr Duterte’s violent war on drugs in which thousands have been killed without trial, according to Reuters.

“They are blackmailing me, saying that they won’t sell weapons? We have lots of explosives here already,” Mr Duterte told CNN Philippines.

"I remember what the Russian diplomat said: Come to Russia, we have anything you need here."

US state department spokesman John Kirby said he could not comment on the arms sale due to federal regulations, while Philippines police chief Ronald dela Rosa told a press conference he had not received official notice the sale had been blocked.

In October, Russia's ambassador to the Philippines said Moscow was ready to discuss a partnership with the Philippines, after Mr Duterte announced his country was "separating" from the United States.

"Formulate your wish list," Igor Khovaev told Mr Duterte according to GMA news agency. "Think of what kind of assistance you expect from Russia and we will be ready to sit down with you and discuss what can and should be done."

Speaking during a state visit to Beijing last month, Mr Duterte said: "I announce my separation from the United States. Both in military, not maybe social, but economics also. America has lost."

The organisation Human Rights Watch estimates as many as 5,000 people have been killed by police in the war on drugs since Mr Duterte was elected president on June 30 this year.

Mr Duterte's approach has been repeatedly criticised by the US as tensions continue to grow between the two countries, with the Filipino president responding by telling Barack Obama to "go to hell" and claiming he "doesn't give a s*** about human rights".

During his China visit, Mr Duterte announced he believed "America has lost" and said he would "go to Russia to talk to Putin and tell him that there are three of us against the world - China, Philippines and Russia".

In early October, Mr Duterte effectively severed 65 years of military ties between the US and the Philippines by ordering US troops out of the country.

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* The Independent. Thursday 3 November 2016:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/philippines-president-rodrigo-duterte-asking-russia-weapons-us-arms-block-a7395516.html>
