

# Steadfast ally worthy of support

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On April 9, 2002, 19 guns boomed in salute as Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. Albert del Rosario laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington, Va. The simple ceremony paid homage to the U.S. and Filipino troops who laid down their lives in the World War II battle of Bataan and the horrific conflict that followed.

Now, as the U.S. moves to bolster the coalition of nations in the War Against Terror, it is imperative that we reward our most loyal allies so others may see that it is always better to be with us than against us. Our commitment to the Philippines, a time-tested friend, should be developed in three ways: Offer a symbolic act of friendship, meet our obligation to war veterans, and assist the Philippines' economic development.

The relationship between the United States and the Philippines spans more than 100 years. Filipino revolutionaries were fighting the remaining Spanish garrison in Manila at the time Adm. George Dewey, a welcome ally, sailed into Manila Bay.

However, in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, America and the Filipinos began fighting, whereon the U.S. colonized them after a bloody four-year campaign. During this horrific campaign, U.S. troops took three church bells from Balangiga, Samar, as war trophies. Now, the Philippines has requested the return of at least one of these bells. They have religious importance, and if returned would serve as a symbolic act of renewed friendship as well as a show of respect.

The hostility between the two nations mentioned above was short-lived. By World War I, Filipinos were even in our ranks in Europe and have fought beside us in almost every major conflict since. The Filipinos who served in World War II, and under American command, fought and died with their compatriots under the Stars and Stripes. Unfortunately, they are unable to collect their due benefits. We must rectify this before the clock ticks out on these last remaining brave souls.

Today, our nations remain aligned in the millennial conflict against terrorism. One hour after the first airliner hit the World Trade Center last September, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became the first Asian leader to offer President George W. Bush her condolences and support. At the request of the U.S., the Philippines immediately made its airspace, airfields and ports available to the U.S. for the campaign in Afghanistan.

The Philippines' ongoing fight against terrorism became highlighted in 1995, when Philippine police foiled various terrorist plans including one to assassinate Pope John Paul II and another to bomb U.S. airliners. In the process, the Filipinos arrested Hakim Murad and flushed Ramzi Youssef into American hands. Both had been implicated in the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. Murad was extradited to the U.S. and American agents subsequently arrested Youssef in Pakistan.

Currently, the Philippine Military is fighting an al Qaeda affiliate, the Abu Sayyaf, which for several years has terrorized thousands of Filipinos and others. The Abu Sayyaf funds itself through gifts from Radical Muslim supporters and kidnapping for ransom activities. They had even held two American missionaries hostage whom the Philippine Military strove to liberate but was only able to successfully rescue one. They have, with U.S. equipment and now direct training, gradually reduced Abu Sayyaf numbers from a high of 1,200 eight months ago, to less than 100 today. They suffered 250 military casualties in the process. Accordingly, President Macapagal-Arroyo is calling on other Asian leaders to work toward a cohesive alliance to root out Islamic extremist groups in the region which would help protect America's back.

Realizing that poverty-stricken areas are prime recruiting grounds for the hatred and dissension that breed conflict, President Bush unveiled the Millennium Challenge Account on March 14, 2002. The \$5 billion account was established to give monetary assistance to developing nations that subscribe to sound democratic principles, good governance, and investments in their respective human resources. Our government's criterion closely follows the vision that President Macapagal-Arroyo wrote about in May 2001 in the foreword of "Tigers' Roar: Asia's Recovery and Its Impact."

Thus the Philippines should be among the first to receive assistance, and in a generous way. On another vital economic point, America should warn the Communist Chinese not to continue encroaching, 800 miles from their shores, on the nearby Philippine-owned, oil-rich, Spratly Islands. This protection will allow unfettered development of that Philippine resource base.

President Bush recently called on America to lead by example. Returning of one of the Bells of Balangiga, adequately compensating Filipino War Veterans, and assisting in economic stability are three examples we should lead with. Doing this would speak volumes to the rest of the world, by showing how well America treats its established allies. We will only make new friends if we demonstrate how well we treat our old ones.

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