

to the Philippines. Mischief Reef, it was further argued, was well within the Philippine exclusive economic zone.

Mischief Reef represented a wake-up call to the Philippine defence establishment which heretofore had been preoccupied with internal security problems rather than threats from abroad. Subsequently, there were more frequent apprehensions of Chinese and other nationals who were engaged in poaching, piracy, smuggling, and other illegal activities in the Spratlys and other areas immediately surrounding the Philippine archipelago, as compared to previous years. In many such cases, the offenders would be arrested and tried in Philippine courts and their vessels impounded. Each of these incidents were occasions for the filing of diplomatic protests and representations, especially between Manila and Beijing.

This situation underscored the inability of the Philippine Navy and Coast Guard to patrol the long Philippine coastline and the country's extensive EEZ. It helped provide justification for the Philippine Congress's approval of a modernization program for the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Alarmed, certain politicians even called for strengthening the Philippines' Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States as a counter to any further expansion by China.

In terms of public opinion in the Philippines, the dispute has helped create a negative image of China and may have reduced support for pursuing long-term friendly ties with Beijing. Events and statements relating to the dispute have been widely reported and commented on in Philippine media in a manner which tends to portray China in the worst possible light. Public statements by high-ranking Filipino officials and politicians, often intended for domestic consumption and at times no more than bluster, have moreover tended to add fuel to the fire by their bellicosity. In addition, it may have been relatively easy for the Mischief Reef problem to stir nationalist emotions, considering that Filipinos were celebrating the Centennial of the anti-colonial revolution and of independence, and because the anti-American cause no longer served as an effective rallying point for nationalists in the post-bases era.

While diplomatic ties were bad after 1995, it must be remembered that the most intensive period in relations between the two countries, in terms of high-level exchange of visits and dialogues, in fact came on the heels of the Mischief Reef dispute. This illustrates their mutual recognition of the importance of expanding understanding and keeping the door to dialogue open at this critical juncture in relations. Many of the initiatives involving high-level exchanges – particularly between military establishments – originated from the Chinese side and were meant to dispel suspicion of hostile intent and to establish communication links with Filipino military counterparts.

It is also worth noting that despite the persistence of tensions relating to the territorial and maritime resource disputes, other aspects of relations were not visibly affected by the tensions. Economic, cultural, scientific and technical cooperation continued. In particular, trade even registered a steep rise beginning in 1995, mainly due to an increase in Philippine imports from