

# Philippines: Duterte Snubs China, Orders Army to Occupy Disputed Islands - “All blow and no show”?

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**Duterte’s plan is unlikely to sit well with Beijing, especially as it comes amid a fast-warming relationship in recent months.**

The erratic Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte abruptly ordered his troops on Thursday to occupy uninhabited islands and shoals in the disputed South China Sea that the country claims, in an apparent change of tack that is likely to anger China.

The firebrand leader’s move comes after he had previously made a high-profile visit to Beijing, where he signed multiple trade deals and signaled that a China-Philippines strategic relationship was on the cards.

During his election campaign, Duterte had joked that he would jet ski to a Chinese man-made island in the South China Sea to reinforce Manila’s claim by raising the national flag.

“The unoccupied, which are ours, let’s live on it,” Duterte told reporters during a visit to an army base in Palawan, near the disputed waters.

“It looks like everyone is making a grab for the islands there. So we better live on those that are still unoccupied. What’s ours now, we claim it and make a strong point from there.”

Duterte announced his “separation” from the United States in October, declaring he had realigned with China as the two agreed to resolve their South China Sea dispute through talks.

His efforts to engage China in themselves marked a reversal in foreign policy.

Duterte’s plan is unlikely to sit well with Beijing, especially as it comes amid a fast-warming relationship in recent months.

“We try to be friends with everybody, but we have to maintain our jurisdiction,” he continued.

Duterte’s comments came just ahead of a first summit meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Florida on Thursday and Friday.

Asia expert Bonnie Glaser at Washington’s Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, said Duterte’s remarks looked like “bluster” comparable to his jet-ski remarks. “Vintage Duterte. All bark, no bite,” she wrote on Twitter.

“Duterte seems to be under greater domestic pressure and criticism on maritime issues,” she added

to Reuters. "I'm inclined to believe that his latest comment is driven ... by domestic politics."

Experts in China similarly view the comments as a characteristic "all blow and no show" comment from the Filipino statesman.

"Actually the islands he mentioned are already under the control of the Philippines. It's natural if the Philippines deploys troops on these islands," Zhuang Guotu, head of the Center of Southeast Asian Studies at Xiamen University, told Chinese state daily Global Times, adding that Duterte didn't talk about the Huang Yan island, which China views as far more important to its interest.

Last month, Defense Minister Delfin Lorenzana said the Philippines would strengthen its facilities in the Spratlys by building a new port and paving an existing rough airstrip.

Duterte said last month it was pointless trying to challenge China's fortification of its man-made islands and ridiculed the media for taking his jet-ski comments seriously.

"We cannot stop them because they are building it with their mind fixed that they own the place. China will go to war," he said.

**Telesur**

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<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Duterte-Snubs-China-Orders-Army-to-Occupy-Disputed-Islands-20170406-0030.html>