

Military Bases and Prostitution: Olongapo City after the Bases

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Abstract : Military bases are an indelible mark of prolonged US defense relationships in the Pacific. Bases like the Subic Naval Base in Olongapo City have irreversible consequences for their host communities, not all of which are positive. One consequence the Subic Naval Base had for Olongapo City was the rise of vibrant sex industry. While the Philippine Senate voted to remove US bases like Subic in 1991, the question remains as to why did prostitution not end after the bases pull-out? To answer this question, the study used an institutionalist lens coupled with focus group discussions from the sex industry. It found that prostitution persisted due to two main reasons. The first was that like Olongapo City; the sex industry successfully shifted its reliance from the military to foreign tourism. The second was that agreements such as the 1996 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) ensured that the sex industry continued to receive US military clientele. With the contextual factors as the backdrop, this study used the Theory of Institutional Change to study institutions pivotal in altering Olongapo City and its sex industry after Subic Naval Base. These include local government, civil society actors such as NGOs, and the city's economic base. The study found that policy such as the VFA allowed the bases period status quo to revive (Symbionts). This led to renewed exploitation from the military presence coupled with foreign tourism (Opportunists). The local government, however, shifted focus away from base reliance which allowed a reinvigorated civil society to effect a gradual change (Subversives). Furthermore, uncertainties like rising HIV incidence, abandoned children born from US soldiers, and the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) remain to change the sex industry's future, for better or worse.

Keywords : Philippine-USA defence relations, overseas USA basing, 1991 Philippine-USA bases pull-out, Olongapo city, Subic naval base, institutional change

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