

Marcos Meets Trump in Bid to Secure Better Trade Terms and Strengthen Alliance

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Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is meeting U.S. President Donald Trump this week in Washington, aiming to negotiate a more favorable trade deal before new tariffs take effect, while also deepening defense cooperation amid rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

President Marcos arrived in Washington on July 20 and is scheduled to meet with President Trump on Tuesday, July 22. He will also hold talks with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and U.S. business leaders on tariffs, economic cooperation, and regional security.

Marcos is seeking relief from the recently imposed 20 percent “reciprocal” tariffs on Philippine exports, up from the 17 percent rate initially threatened. The president argues these tariffs place unnecessary strain on the Philippine economy, especially given the country’s close ties to the United States. In 2024, the U.S. goods trade deficit with the Philippines reached roughly \$5 billion, with total bilateral goods trade at approximately \$23.5 billion.

CSIS analysts suggest Marcos may secure better terms than Vietnam and Indonesia, which have agreed to baseline reciprocal tariffs of 20 percent and 19 percent, respectively. Given the strength of U.S.–Philippine relations and longstanding military cooperation, observers believe Washington could offer Manila more favorable trade terms.

In addition to trade, the leaders are expected to reaffirm their commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty. This longstanding agreement, in effect for over seventy years, has led to increased U.S. military access to Philippine bases and expanded joint military exercises. The deployment of advanced missile systems, including U.S. Typhon and NMESIS systems during recent Balikatan exercises, further underscores the growing security cooperation, particularly in response to Beijing’s increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Assistant Foreign Secretary Raquel Solano said negotiators are working toward a “mutually acceptable and mutually beneficial” trade resolution, reflecting Manila’s effort to balance its economic interests with its strategic alliance obligations.

Having already reached tariff agreements with Vietnam and Indonesia, President Trump may extend a similar or improved offer to the Philippines. With the August 1 tariff deadline approaching, the outcome of these discussions could shape not only future trade flows but also the broader U.S.–Philippines strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific region.