



Resilient Alliance

Moving the U.S.-Philippines Security Relations Forward

Edited by Jeffrey Ordaniel and Carl Baker



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Authors of this volume participated in the inaugural *U.S.-Philippines Next-Generation Leaders Initiative*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, through the U.S. Embassy in the Philippines. With backgrounds from academia, public policy, civil society and industry, the cohort brings rich insights on the past, present, and future of the U.S.-Philippines bilateral security relations.

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Editors' Note

Resilient alliance: moving the U.S.- Philippines security relations forward

Jeffrey Ordaniel & Carl Baker

Balikatan, or shoulder-to-shoulder, the name for the annual U.S.-Philippines military exercises, describes the enduring bond of Filipinos and Americans committed to the ideals of democracy and freedom. This bond has been over a century in the making. Since the United States first occupied the Philippines in 1898, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos have fought and died alongside the U.S. armed forces and helped defeat threats—from Imperial Japan and the Cold War to terrorist movements and violent extremism.

In 1951, then-U.S. President Harry S. Truman described the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty as a “strong step toward security and peace in the Pacific... and a formal expression of something that already exists — the firm relationship of brotherhood that binds our countries together.” Then-Philippine President Elpidio Quirino, in response, described the security pact as “a formal undertaking to assist each other and to stand together in the face of aggression, in the hope that hereafter we may be able to follow undistracted the fruitful pursuits of peace.”

Seven decades since, the bilateral security relationship has evolved considerably. It has faced a number of political changes spanning 12 Philippine presidents and 14 U.S. presidents and has withstood the test of time. Today, the alliance remains indispensable, not just for the peoples of both countries, but also for the broader Indo-Pacific in addressing emerging threats and regional challenges – from irredentist claims and blatant sidestepping of the rule of law in many of the region’s maritime spaces to natural disasters, cyber insecurity, climate change and the lingering threat of pandemics. The alliance has been consequential and will continue to survive and can help address these challenges. But it cannot be taken for granted.

While many American strategic thinkers and policy communities remain largely positive about security engagements with the Philippines, the Filipino public remains mostly ‘detached’ from their country’s foreign affairs. For instance, in Philippine elections, foreign policy and relations with major powers have never figured prominently. This is despite the importance of issues like the South China Sea to the country’s economic well-being. Moreover, there is a need to foster next-generation expertise on the Philippines in the United States. As more next-generation Filipinos and Americans assume positions of leadership in governments, public institutions, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector, their priorities will begin to dominate discourses on the alliance. It is vital that the next generation is involved in contemporary strategic discourses relevant to U.S.-Philippine security relations and is mutually invested in the growth of their countries’ partnership.

“Today, the alliance remains indispensable, not just for the peoples of both countries, but also for the broader Indo-Pacific in addressing emerging threats and regional challenges...”

This edited volume is an effort to provide exchange opportunities and a platform for next-generation U.S. and Philippine leaders and experts, so their voices can be heard, and creative thinking is encouraged about this vital alliance.

Gregory Winger premises his chapter with an assertion that, while the applicability of the U.S.-Philippine alliance to an armed attack has been discussed for decades, how the alliance addresses new forms of “aggression like cyberattacks remains undefined.” To fill the gap, Winger’s paper critically examines the place of cybersecurity in the alliance and traces the history of bilateral cybersecurity cooperation from the 1990s. He finds that integration of cybersecurity into alliance cooperation has lagged since 2016 and explains that elite-political discord and strategic divergence in how both governments perceive threats within the digital domain are to blame. Winger argues the different institutional preferences at the national level (i.e., U.S. prioritization of geostrategic competition pursued through military-cyber means versus the Philippines’ preoccupation with cybercrime and securing its cyberinfrastructure) limited the alliance’s role in addressing cybersecurity.

Angelica Mangahas’ chapter discusses the historically divergent attitudes on alliance issues between Malacañang Palace, where U.S. preferences are often embraced, and the Philippine Senate, where security cooperation with Washington is often re-dissected, and how President Rodrigo Duterte overturned this 65-year dynamic. On the former, Mangahas revisited the three common arguments used to explain the divergent attitudes: 1) Philippine senators’ views as a reflection of the national threat perceptions of the period that may not mirror U.S. priorities adopted by the sitting president; 2) the demand for the Philippine president to be pragmatic about security issues and the senators’ tendency to push for idealistic positions on independence; and 3) the impact of U.S. assistance flowing directly to the executive branch of government to the detriment of Congress, which otherwise holds the power the purse. On the latter, Mangahas offers a fourth explanation: electioneering. She argues that senators keen to pursue higher office often “adopt ‘maverick’-type

personas on hot-button issues that galvanize public attention.” Hence, these senators tend to adopt positions that are seen as opposing the Palace.

Graham Jenkins’ chapter takes a closer look at the posture of U.S. forces in the Philippines under the existing Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) and Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and argues that any direct assistance from U.S. military “with sufficient combat power in a short enough timeframe” in the event of a contingency in the South China Sea will be a challenge. Jenkins analyzes three different access regimes (low/medium/high, in terms of relative permissiveness) to determine their operational feasibility and effectiveness should there be a need for U.S. military action to defend the Philippines in the South China Sea. The paper offers insights into “the ideal U.S. force posture that effectively defends the Philippines” against a maritime invasion and “the investments that Manila should prioritize to better defend itself.”

Jay Tristan Tarriela’s chapter argues that coast guard cooperation between the Philippines and the United States can serve as an interim approach to sustain bilateral maritime security cooperation in times when domestic political attitudes are not favorable to close alliance engagements. Tarriela’s arguments stem from his analysis of coast guard functions and how the Philippines and other regional states regard white hulls vis-à-vis their national security priorities. The chapter also posits that if domestic political conditions become favorable again to military-to-military engagement, coast guard engagement can complement and amplify naval initiatives. “In essence, coast guard cooperation between the Philippines and the United States can complement (vice substitute) future military engagements between the two allies.”

Rachel Anne Miranda’s chapter focuses on the significant role the U.S.-Philippine alliance has played in disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) in the Philippines. Miranda surveys the U.S. military’s contributions to the Philippines’ acquisition of logistics capacity for both security and disaster response operations, which, in turn, addresses the challenges posed by the intense impacts of disasters on vulnerable communities. Miranda underscores that U.S. assistance encompasses DRRM beyond mere disaster response operations, providing important insights into the disaster, human security, and conflict nexus.

Edcel John Ibarra’s chapter challenges the notion that the Philippines-U.S. alliance is detrimental to resolving the South China Sea disputes because the United States is external to the conflict. Using the ‘issues approach to international relations,’ Ibarra examines the specific component issues of the South China Sea disputes and identifies the direct parties involved and types of conflict resolution implied in each issue. He argues that the United States is a “direct party on the issues of settling the extent to which coastal states may regulate the activities of user states and managing the risk of miscalculation associated with military operations in the South China Sea.” For Ibarra, this opens opportunities for cooperation between Manila and Washington on actual conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and conflict management.

“With backgrounds from academia, public policy, civil society, and industry, the cohort brings rich insights on the past, present, and future of the U.S.-Philippines bilateral security relationship.”

The chapter co-authored by Deryk Matthew Baladjay and Florence Principe Gamboa explores the U.S.-Philippines alliance in three critical respects. First, it explains why the alliance is important and why it will continue to benefit the two countries. Second, it presents an analytical framework originally conceptualized by Victor Cha to show the Philippines’ disposition toward its alliance with Washington, which explains why countries like the Philippines link and delink or hedge against major powers. Finally, it explores what the Philippines and the U.S. can do moving forward. Baladjay and Gamboa argue that, while hedging has been beneficial for the Philippines in dealing with geopolitical uncertainties, the time has come for Manila to decide “whether or not it wants to be a shaper in international relations.”

The final chapter by Santiago Castillo examines how the EDCA can further improve the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ (AFP) external defense capabilities and improve the defense ties of the two allies. Santiago argues that a particular area where the EDCA can advance U.S.-Philippine military partnership is improving the AFP’s ability to protect the country from external military threats and adapt or effectively respond to a dynamic geopolitical environment.

Authors of this volume participated in the inaugural U.S.-Philippine Alliance Next-Generation Leaders Initiative, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, through the U.S. Embassy Manila. With backgrounds from academia, public policy, civil society, and industry, the cohort brings rich insights on the past, present, and future of the U.S.-Philippines bilateral security relationship.

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1

Buffering: cybersecurity in the U.S.-Philippine alliance

Gregory Winger

Abstract

This study examines the integration of cybersecurity within the U.S.-Philippine alliance. Technological change poses distinct challenges to international alliances by presenting new security threats and vulnerabilities that alliances must adapt to address. Using a process-tracing approach, this article investigates the evolution of cybersecurity within the U.S.-Philippine alliance and whether existing defense arrangements have been effectively leveraged to meet the challenges of a cyber insecure world. It finds that despite initial momentum toward integrating cybersecurity within the alliance, cyber cooperation has largely stalled since 2016. Although the elections of Rodrigo Duterte and Donald Trump contributed to this malaise, the stagnation also reflects a larger strategic divergence in how Washington and Manila approach the digital domain. This contrasts sharply with other alliances like NATO and must be addressed to sustain alliance activities in cyberspace.

Introduction

On July 12, 2016, the Arbitral Tribunal constituted in The Hague under Annex VII of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea issued a landmark ruling on the South China Sea. The tribunal favored the Philippines in its long-standing maritime dispute with China. Within hours, Philippine government websites were flooded with artificial requests and forced offline amid a sustained Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack.¹ There was no lasting damage from the attack, but the episode acutely underscored the evolving nature of conflict in the 21st century. Whereas the applicability of the U.S.-Philippine alliance in response to an armed attack in the South China Sea has been discussed for decades, how the alliance addresses new forms of aggression like cyberattacks remains undefined.²

To remedy the oversight, this paper critically examines the role of cybersecurity within the U.S.-Philippine alliance and how this new area of operations has figured in the bilateral security relations. Using a process-tracing approach, this paper follows the course of cybersecurity cooperation from its origins in the 1990s until 2020. In addition to illustrating how the alliance has responded to specific cyber incidents, this paper seeks to find evidence of the security relationship adapting to cyber with several pre-existing alliance practices being expanded to include cybersecurity. However, this incorporation of cyber affairs within the alliance has lagged since 2016. This stagnation is not merely a byproduct of elite-political discord but also a strategic divergence in how both governments perceive threats within the digital domain. Specifically, whereas geostrategic competition pursued through military-cyber means has become the keystone to U.S. cyber strategy, the Philippines has instead prioritized cybercrime and securing its cyberinfrastructure. This divergence has led to different institutional preferences at the national level and limited the alliance's role in addressing cybersecurity. This paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings and offering policy recommendations on how the current state of malaise may be overcome.

Partnerships in changing times

States forge alliances for a wide range of reasons, but that process is inevitably shaped by the geopolitical conditions of its origins.³ In the case of the U.S.-Philippine alliance, the fashioning of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) was acutely informed by the tumult of the early Cold War. Specifically, Article IV of the MDT holds that "each party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional

processes (MDT)." In 1951, less than a decade after the Japanese invasion of the Philippines and with the Korean War still ongoing, the definition of 'armed attack' was self-evident and grounded firmly in the fears of conventional military assault that pervaded the early Cold War.⁴ Yet, over its ensuing 70 years, neither geopolitical conditions surrounding the alliance nor the nature of 'armed attacks' has remained constant. The success of an alliance is not measured solely in years but whether it fulfills its core mission of advancing the security of its member states. Therefore, amid periods of change, the central challenge for an alliance is not merely enduring but whether the pact itself can adapt to continue serving the interests of its member-states.

Alliance transformation is the process through which existing alliances develop new policies, practices, missions, and capabilities to respond to changing international conditions.⁵ This evolutionary process gained particular prominence during the 1990s as the Cold War-era alliance system reacted to the rapid dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. With the primary objective of deterring communist aggression no longer applicable, did Cold War alliances like NATO still have a place in world affairs?⁶ Yet, rather than fold, U.S.-centered alliances in both Europe and Asia underwent a transformation process whereby they embraced new missions like humanitarian interventions and counterterrorism to respond to new geopolitical circumstances and the changing security needs of member-states.⁷

The U.S.-Philippine alliance has been emblematic of this transformation process. Since its formation, the alliance has undergone significant changes to respond to shifting internal and geopolitical dynamics. Notably, the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and the regime's subsequent removal during the 1986 People Power Revolution placed considerable strain on bilateral relations. After the revolution, popular backlash against the United States led directly to the closure of U.S. bases in 1992 and threatened to unspool the alliance.⁸ However, rather than scuttling the alliance, the closure of the bases provided a stimulus for the alliance to transform from its conventionally oriented Cold War-era configuration to a more flexible arrangement that was better able to meet the political and security challenges of the 21st century. New mechanisms like the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement provided a legal framework for renewed alliance activities and a means to redress a host of emerging security challenges. This transformation was demonstrated during the Global War on Terrorism with the Philippines supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and cooperating very closely on joint counterterrorism operations in the Southern Philippines.⁹

¹ Piiparinen, Anni. "China's Secret Weapon in the South China Sea: Cyber Attacks." *The Diplomat*. (2016), July 22, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/chinas-secret-weapon-in-the-south-china-sea-cyber-attacks/>.

² Winger, Gregory H. "Reassurance and Revival the US-Philippine Alliance in the Wake of the Vietnam War." *The International History Review* (2022): 1-25; Poling, Gregory, *On Dangerous Ground: America's Century in the South China Sea* from Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022

³ Walt, Stephen M. "Alliance formation and the balance of world power." *International security* 9(4) (1985): 3-43.

⁴ Ngoei, Wen-Qing. *Arc of Containment*. (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Cha, Victor D. *Powerplay: The origins of the American alliance system in Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018)

⁵ Dinerstein, Herbert S. "The transformation of alliance systems." *American Political Science Review* 59, no. 3 (1965): 589-601; Lee, Chung Min. "Reassessing the ROK-US alliance: transformation challenges and the consequences of South Korea's choices." *Australian Journal of International*

Affairs 57 (2) (2003): 281-307; Nam, Chang-hee. "The Alliance Transformation and US-Japan-Korea Security Network: A Case for Trilateral Cooperation." *Pacific Focus* 25(1) (2010): 34-58.

⁶ Mearsheimer, John J. "Why we will soon miss the Cold War." *The Atlantic Monthly* 266(2) (1990): 35-50; Mearsheimer, John J. "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War." *International Security* 15(1), 5-56.

⁷ Ikenberry, G. John. "Institutions, strategic restraint, and the persistence of American postwar order." *International security* 23(3) (1998): 43-78; Nevers, Renée de. "NATO's international security role in the terrorist era." *International Security* 31(4) (2007): 34-66; Ivanov, Ivan Dinev. *Transforming NATO: new allies, missions, and capabilities*. Lexington books, 2011.

⁸ Yeo, Andrew. *Activists, alliances, and anti-US base protests*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁹ Robinson, Linda, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gillian S. Oak. *US Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001-2014*. Santa Monica CA: Rand Corporation, 2016; De Castro, Renato Cruz. "The Revitalized Philippine-US

Cybersecurity as an alliance issue

The question of alliance transformation has focused principally on geopolitical questions and how pre-existing alliances have adapted to different eras in world affairs. However, technological change can prove equally disruptive to alliance systems. New technologies like the steam engine, airplanes, and nuclear weapons pose distinct challenges to alliance systems by upsetting existing strategic calculations and introducing new vulnerabilities that must be addressed.¹⁰

The digital revolution and the growth of cyberspace as a domain of geopolitical competition have emerged as another such technological revolution.¹¹ With the integration of computer technologies into nearly every facet of modern society, upholding the security and functionality of these systems has become a national security priority for governments.¹² More than just creating new vulnerabilities, actors like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea have seized upon the digital domain as a critical domain

of operations and embraced cyberattacks as a tool of international statecraft.¹³

“...cybersecurity has become a vital domain in both the maritime dispute and the overall growth of international conflict...”

As cybersecurity has gained importance as a national security issue, it has also climbed the agendas of international alliances. Specifically, with countries actively using cyber means to advance their international agenda through coercion and subversion, alliances have increasingly needed developing cyber portfolios to fulfill their mandates of protecting their member-states.

This process of an alliance developing cyber capabilities has been most evident within NATO. Cybersecurity moved to the forefront of NATO’s agenda in 2007 after Estonia was subjected to a sustained DDOS attack (believed to originate in Russia) that lasted weeks and crippled the country’s internal operations.¹⁴ Amid the crisis, Estonia looked to NATO for assistance and even raised the issue of invoking NATO’s collective defense clause (Article V) to address the situation. NATO eventually declined because it did not consider a

cyberattack to meet the threshold of an ‘armed attack’ under the North Atlantic Treaty. Despite this decision, the scale of the attack on Estonia, the clear geopolitical implications, and the inadequacy of NATO’s response prompted a larger re-examination of how the alliance should address cyber threats.¹⁵ Over the ensuing years, NATO conducted a systemic review of its approach to cybersecurity. This included recognizing cyber as an operational domain within the alliance’s strategic concept, creating dedicated cyber institutions like the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in Tallinn that helped develop the alliance’s cyber capabilities, and ultimately declaring during the Wales Summit in 2014 that a cyberattack could constitute an ‘armed attack’ and trigger the alliance’s collective defense requirements under Article V.¹⁶

NATO’s development of a robust cyber portfolio provides an important illustration of how an alliance can evolve in response to the digital revolution and a potential

model for the U.S.-Philippine alliance. Although the U.S.-Philippine alliance has proven resilient, survival is not a

guarantee of efficacy, and responding to ‘grey zone’ operations that occur below the level of armed attack has emerged as a central challenge for the alliance.¹⁷ The bulk of the discourse within the alliance on this issue has centered on the South China Sea, and China’s use of hybrid means to advance its claim to disputed waters.¹⁸ However, cybersecurity has become a vital domain in both the maritime dispute and the overall growth of international conflict below the threshold of war.¹⁹ In 2021, Trend Micro warned that the Philippines was amongst the most targeted countries in the world by malicious actors, and a recent survey of security elites in the Philippines found nearly a quarter (24.1%) listing cybersecurity as a top national security issue.²⁰ Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups from Vietnam and China have been identified as operating within Philippine networks.²¹ While cybersecurity may not yet be at the forefront of the U.S.-Philippine alliance, it is a major area of concern with significant implications for the alliance’s future.

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¹⁰ Krishna-Hensel, Sai Felicia. "Technology and international relations." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. 2010; Drezner, Daniel W. "Technological change and international relations." *International Relations* 33(2) (2019): 286-303.

¹¹ Kello, Lucas. "The meaning of the cyber revolution: Perils to theory and statecraft." *International Security* 38(2) (2013): 7-40; Hoffman, Wyatt. "Is Cyber Strategy Possible?." *The Washington Quarterly* 42(1) (2019): 131-152.

¹² Buchanan, Ben. *The Hacker and the State: Cyber Attacks and the New Normal of Geopolitics*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2020; Libicki, Martin C. *Conquest in cyberspace: national security and information warfare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007;

¹³ Harknett, Richard J., and Max Smeets. "Cyber campaigns and strategic outcomes." *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2020): 1-34; Valeriano, Brandon, and Ryan C. Maness. "The dynamics of cyber conflict between rival antagonists, 2001–11." *Journal of Peace Research* 51(3) (2014): 347-360.

¹⁴ Davis, J. (2007). Hackers take down the most wired country in Europe. *Wired Magazine*, 15(9), August 21, 2007 15-09. [https://www.wired.com/2007/08/ff-estonia/]

¹⁵ Herzog, Stephen. "Revisiting the Estonian cyber attacks: Digital threats and multinational responses." *Journal of Strategic Security* 4(2) (2011): 49-60;

¹⁶ Burton, Joe. "NATO’s cyber defence: strategic challenges and institutional adaptation." *Defence Studies* 15(4) (2015): 297-319; Shea, Jamie. "How is NATO meeting the challenge of cyberspace?." *Prism* 7(2) (2017): 18-29; Jacobsen, Jeppe T. "Cyber offense in NATO: challenges and opportunities." *International Affairs* 97(3) (2021): 703-720.

¹⁷ Sari, Aurel. "Legal resilience in an era of grey zone conflicts and hybrid threats." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33(6) (2020): 846-867; Poling, Gregory B., Simon Tran Hudes, and Adreyka Natalegawa. *Alliances in Need of Upkeep: Strengthening the US-Philippines and US-Thailand Partnerships*. Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021.

¹⁸ Burgers, Tobias, and S. Romaniuk. "Hybrid Warfare in the South China Sea: The United States’ Little Grey (Un) Men." *The Diplomat* December 31, 2016. https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/hybrid-warfare-in-the-south-china-sea-the-united-states-little-grey-unmen/; Patalano, Alessio. "When strategy is ‘hybrid’ and not ‘grey’: reviewing Chinese military and constabulary coercion at sea." *The Pacific Review* 31(6) (2018): 811-839.

¹⁹ Gomez, Miguel. A. "Awaken the cyber dragon: China’s cyber strategy and its impact on asean." *Journal of Communication and Computer* 10 (2013): 796-805; Manantan, Mark. "Cyber dimension of the South China Sea clashes." *The Diplomat*. August 5,

2019. [https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/the-cyber-dimension-of-the-south-china-sea-clashes/]; Manantan, Mark Bryan. "The People’s Republic of China’s Cyber Coercion: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea." *Issues & Studies* 56(3) (2020): 1-29.

²⁰ Dagooc, Ehda M. Dagooc, "Philippines among top five targets of global cyber criminals," *The Philippine Star*. June 8, 2021; Amador, Julio S. III, Arugay A.A., Misalucha-Willoughby, C., Baquial J.K. "National Security Agenda of the Philippines: Perceptions from the Filipino Strategic Community." Amador Research Services. December 21, 2020. [https://www.amadorresearchservices.com/publications/national-security-priorities-and-agenda-in-the-philippines].

²¹ FireEye, *Southeast Asia: An Evolving Cyber Threat Landscape*, March 2015; Gomez, Miguel Alberto. "Frustrated with the Philippines, Vietnam Resorts to Cyber Espionage." *Council on Foreign Relations*. June 8, 2017.

This research employs a process tracing approach to examine how the U.S.-Philippine alliance has adapted in response to the digital revolution. Similar to NATO, the role of information technology within the U.S.-Philippine alliance began in the 1990s. Unfortunately, the opaque and often clandestine nature of cyber affairs limits the scope of this investigation to publicly available sources. Despite this limitation, it is still possible to trace the development of cybersecurity within the bilateral relationship through declassified information, government documents and statements, and media coverage.

Digital dawn in the U.S.-Philippine alliance

The digital revolution during the 1990s coincided with a nadir in U.S.-Philippine relations. The 1992 closure of the U.S. military bases in the Philippines had strained bilateral ties and significantly hindered alliance operations.²² Despite this limitation, the bilateral relationship was key to the spread of information technology in Southeast Asia.

The first internet connection in the Philippines was established on March 20, 1994, with a 64kb/s link connecting Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT) with the U.S. phone company Sprint.²³ The connection officially welcomed the Philippines to the internet age and reflected the continued importance of the bilateral relationship despite the fallout from the base closures. During the 1990s, the internet was principally viewed as an informational and commercial domain (rather than security) whose primary benefits were educational and economic.²⁴ As such, the Philippines and the United States had a closely aligned approach to information communications technology (ICT) that prioritized rapidly expanding internet connectivity as an essential tool for free speech and development.²⁵

At the 1996 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders Meeting in Subic Bay, the United States, and the Philippines achieved a major victory through the removal of tariffs on telecommunication technologies like computers and software.²⁶ This initiative eliminated significant trade barriers and paved the way for expanded commercial cooperation in ICT. In 1997, President Fidel Ramos unveiled the Philippines National Information Technology Plan, a comprehensive strategy to spur increased development and competitiveness through information technology.²⁷ U.S. businesses and government intermediaries were central to this endeavor, with companies like Microsoft signing large contracts to help develop digital infrastructure in the Philippines.²⁸

However, with the growth of internet access also came the ills of the digital age and responding to the growth of cybercrime became one of the first areas where existing alliance practices first demonstrated their utility in cyberspace. Cooperation between law enforcement agencies, often tied to the U.S. military bases, had long been a hallmark of the bilateral relationship and a frequent point of controversy.²⁹ Even after the closure of the bases, many of these cooperative mechanisms, like the posting of agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to the U.S. Embassy in Manila, remained in place and provided points of cooperation for addressing cyber-enhanced issues like child pornography and internet fraud.

The effectiveness of these mechanisms was demonstrated in May 2000 during one of the first global cybersecurity events. The "ILOVEYOU" virus, also known as the "LoveBug", was a computer worm that spread rapidly by emailing itself to every contact in a victim's address book with the suggestive subject line of "I Love You" and encouraging the recipient to read an attached love note. The note was a piece of malware that copied itself to the victim's computer, overwriting some files in the process, and attempted to steal internet login credentials before finally emailing itself to every contact in the new victim's address book to perpetuate the process.³⁰ Within hours of first appearing in Asia, the "Love Bug" went global. It is estimated to have infected roughly 45-50 million computers, hamstringing governments, militaries, and businesses and causing over \$10 billion in damages.³¹

Immediately after the "ILOVEYOU" virus reached the United States, the FBI initiated an investigation into the malware's origins. It quickly traced the bug to the Philippines, where it launched a joint investigation with the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) in an attempt to locate the hacker. The investigation identified Onel de Guzman, a 23-year-old student living in Manila, as the virus's creator. De Guzman, who had created the virus in the hopes of using the stolen credentials to get free internet, was promptly arrested but soon released. Since the Philippines at the time did not have laws concerning computer crimes, de Guzman could not be charged with a crime, nor could he be extradited to the United States.³²

Despite its anti-climactic conclusion, the "Love Bug" episode demonstrated the continued importance of bilateral relations and how existing mechanisms could be effectively adapted to the internet age. Although the "ILOVEYOU" virus was not sophisticated, the existing links between the FBI and NBI proved instrumental in facilitating a quick investigation and the identification of the perpetrator. Moreover, that both law enforcement

²² De Castro, Renato. "US Grand Strategy in Post-Cold War Asia—Pacific." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (1994): 342-353.

²³ Medilo, Luis Reginaldo "Celebrating 25 Years of Internet in the Philippines," *Tech Pilipinas*, March 29, 2019. [https://techpilipinas.com/celebrating-25-years-internet-philippines/].

²⁴ Florini, Ann. "The end of secrecy." *Foreign Policy*, 111(summer)1998, 50-63.

²⁵ La Porta, Alphonse. "Oral History interview with Ambassador Alphonse F. La Porta," Association For Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST), February 11, 2004; Eng, Peter. "The media and democratization in Southeast Asia." *Current History* 96(614) (1997): 43-442.

²⁶ Associated Press, "U.S. Wins Support On Tech Trade," *Washington Post*, October 21, 1996; Saga, Kenji. "APEC: steps to harmonising regional telecom policy." *Telecommunications Policy* 23, no. 3-4 (1999): 335-344.

²⁷ Ramos, Fidel. Speech of President Ramos at the First Congress on Information Technology and Telecommunications Education. February 20, 1997. *Official Gazette of the Philippine Government*. [https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1997/02/20/speech-of-president-ramos-at-the-first-congress-on-information-technology-and-telecommunications-education/].

²⁸ Ricciuti, Mike. "Philippines' Ramos to visit MS," *CNet.com*, November 21, 1997. [https://www.cnet.com/news/philippines-ramos-to-visit-ms/].

Cortes, Claro. Microsoft Boss Visits Philippines, *Associated Press*. March 20, 1998.

²⁹ McCoy, Alfred W. *Policing America's empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the rise of the surveillance state*. Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2009.

³⁰ "Love Bug Virus Running Amok," *Wired.com*. May 4, 2000; Markoff, John. "Law Officials Seek Origins of the Virus," *The New York Times*, May 6, 2000; Markoff, John. "Even a Worm Needs Love," *New York Times*. June 4, 2000.

³¹ Griffiths, James. "'I love you': How a badly-coded computer virus caused billions in damage and exposed vulnerabilities which remain 20 years on," *CNN.com*, May 3, 2020.

[https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/01/tech/iloveyou-virus-computer-security-intl-hnk/index.html]

³² Landler, Mark. "A Filipino Linked to 'Love Bug' Talks About His License to Hack." *New York Times* October 21, 2000; Associated Press, "'Love Bug' Virus Case Dropped in Philippines," *Washington Post*. August 22, 2000; White, Geoff. "The 20-Year Hunt for the Man Behind the Love Bug Virus." *Wired.com* September 12, 2020. [https://www.wired.com/story/the-20-year-hunt-for-the-man-behind-the-love-bug-virus/].

institutions defaulted to a joint investigation despite the global nature of the worm illustrates how the embedded norms of bilateral cooperation were translated into the digital age.

This process of adapting and expanding existing points of cooperation to include adjacent cyber areas became more significant with the onset of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, combatting the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) operating in the southern Philippines became a priority for the United States. Counterterrorism became the focus of alliance cooperation.³³ While joint operations like *Balikatan 02-1* were the most visible manifestation of this new priority, the shared desire to defeat terrorism had ramifications in the cyber realm. Notably, as groups like ASG increasingly embraced the internet and social media as a means of spreading propaganda and recruiting new fighters, joint counterterrorism operations expanded into these digital arenas as part of intelligence gathering and counter-messaging efforts.³⁴

“While cyberattacks stemming from the Scarborough Shoal standoff did not escalate beyond the level of harassment, the episode had a clear impact on cyber’s role within the alliance.”

Over the first 20 years of the digital age, cybersecurity’s growth within the U.S.-Philippine alliance followed an organic pattern whereby existing points of cooperation like economic engagement, law enforcement, and counterterrorism were adapted and extended into the realm of cyberspace. This process had substantial effects, especially in law enforcement, but also largely remained at a functional level. Cyber was merely a supplement to existing enterprises rather than a distinct realm of alliance operations. Yet, changing strategic conditions and cybersecurity’s continued development as a distinct domain of strategic competition increasingly posed new challenges for the alliance in cyberspace.

Numerous academic and policy papers have examined the 2012 standoff between the Philippines and China over Scarborough Shoal for its significance in the South China Sea and great power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific.³⁵ But the incident also had important implications for cybersecurity. During the standoff, on April 20, 2012, Chinese hackers attacked the website of the University of the Philippines and defaced it with slogans claiming the shoal as Chinese territory. The incident triggered an escalation cycle whereby patriotic hackers in both the Philippines and China conducted a series of retaliatory

attacks. These attacks appeared to be conducted by non-state groups acting independently and were confined to a low-level attack, including the defacement or DDoS-ing of government websites. Despite the attacks being more of a nuisance than a national security crisis, they did garner significant attention, with Malacañang ultimately issuing a statement calling on patriotic hackers within the Philippines to halt their attacks on China.³⁶

While cyberattacks stemming from the Scarborough Shoal standoff did not escalate beyond the level of harassment, the episode had a clear impact on cyber’s role within the alliance. When senior Philippine officials met with their U.S. counterparts in late April to discuss the standoff, cybersecurity was included in the agenda. The joint statement issued at the end of the meeting contained a vow to “Maintain our cooperation with respect to the protection of cyberspace. Enhance the resilience of critical infrastructure to counter cyber.”³⁷ The statement was reinforced a few days later when U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta pledged to aid the Philippines in developing

its capacity to counter cyberattacks.³⁸

The 2012 Joint Statement and Panetta’s subsequent affirmation represented an important milestone. They were the first recognition of cybersecurity as a distinct security issue in the alliance. This acknowledgment of cyber as an alliance issue set the stage for more joint cooperation in cybersecurity and for the issue’s inclusion within the bilateral strategic dialogue.³⁹ Yet, the 2012 developments were strictly a beginning, and as much as the 2012 statements provided an opportunity for further cooperation in cybersecurity, they also created an opening for intra-alliance friction.

Crises and divergence

In the aftermath of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal Cyber Exchange, there were additional developments in cybersecurity at both the national and alliance levels. In the Philippines, the 2012 Cybercrime Prevention Act paved the way for significant institutional developments in cyber law enforcement. The security establishment in Manila recognized cyberspace as a security domain where the military would need to operate.⁴⁰ Within the alliance, the dialogue begun in 2012 continued. Cooperation on

³³ Banlaoi, Rommel. *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror: National, regional, and global challenges in the post-9/11 world*. Auerbach Publications, 2009; Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: crucible of terror*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

³⁴ Abercrombie- Winstanley, Gina. “U.S. Department of State, Counterterrorism: Terrorist Use of the Internet,” Joint U.S. Embassy and Philippine Welcome, 2nd Tri-Border Conference, Manila, Philippines, June 28, 2010. Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC. [https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/rm/2010/143876.html]; Pamela, Amparo, H. Fabe, and Ella Zarcilla-Genecela. “The Philippines’ Cybersecurity Strategy: Strengthening partnerships to enhance cybersecurity capability.” In *Routledge Companion to Global Cyber-Security Strategy*, pp. 315-324. Routledge, 2021.

³⁵For example: De Castro, Renato Cruz. Facing up to China’s realpolitik approach in the South China Sea dispute: The case of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off and its aftermath. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 3(2)(2016), 157-182; Green, Michael, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas. “Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff.” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative* May 22, 2017. [https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/].

³⁶ Gomez, Miguel. A. “Awaken the cyber dragon: China’s cyber strategy and its impact on asean.” *Journal of Communication and Computer* 10 (2013): 796-805; Passeri, Paolo. Philippines and China, on the edge of a new cyber conflict. *Hackmageddon*, May 1, 2012.

[https://www.hackmageddon.com/2012/05/01/philippines-and-china-on-the-edge-of-a-new-cyber-conflict/]

³⁷ State Department, Joint Statement of the United-States-Philippines Ministerial Dialogue. Office of the Spokesperson. April 2012. [https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/04/188977.htm]

³⁸ Malig, Jojo. “Pentagon to help Philippines vs Hackers.” *ABS-CBN News*. May 4, 2012. [https://news.abs-cbn.com/-depth/05/03/12/pentagon-help-philippines-vs-hacker].

³⁹ U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, (2014). Media Note on the Fourth Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue. Office of the Spokesperson. March 7, 2015. [https://ph.usembassy.gov/media-note-fourth-philippines-united-states-bilateral-strategic-dialogue/]

⁴⁰ Gomez, Miguel. Alberto. Establishing a Philippine Cyber Command: points to consider. *EastAsiaForum*. December 14, 2012. [https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/12/14/establishing-a-philippine-cyber-command-points-to-consider/]

cybersecurity was discussed at the presidential level during President Barack Obama’s visit to Manila in 2015.⁴¹

Unfortunately, even amid this progress, significant challenges remained. The Philippines dealt with major cyber incidents throughout 2016. These included the use of the Philippines as a through point by North Korean agents as part of the Bangladesh Bank Heist, the revelation of Chinese based APT groups conducting extensive espionage campaigns in the Philippines, a massive data breach at the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) in the leadup to the 2016 presidential election, and a series of DDoS attacks against Philippine government websites following the 2016 arbitration award.⁴² Each episode was individually significant. The fact that these incidents occurred within a six-month period underscored the Philippines’ acute state of cyber insecurity.

U.S.-Philippine cyber cooperation played a role in responding to these incidents. The United States assisted in the investigation of the Bangladesh Bank Heist. The U.S. Department of Justice assisted in taking down a searchable website containing the stolen COMELEC data.⁴³ Furthermore, in August 2016, the Office of the Legal Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Manila and Philippine government counterparts launched the Joint Cyber Security Working Group (JCSWG). The JCSWG aims to help foster public-private partnerships in cybersecurity within the bilateral relationship “to promote intelligence sharing and policy development through training and technical assistance to law enforcement personnel, with the purpose of enhancing Philippine law enforcement operations related to cyber security.”⁴⁴ Perhaps most significantly, a cybersecurity incident was included in the 2017 *Balikatan* exercises. In May 2017, the AFP hosted a

four-day, subject-matter expert exchange event with the U.S. military to discuss risk management methods and ongoing issues in cyber affairs.⁴⁵ The creation of the JCSWG and the inclusion of a cyber event during *Balikatan 2017* marked an important step toward building bilateral capacity in cybersecurity.

While the immediate aftermath of the 2016 cyber incidents illustrated the potential for alliance cooperation in cybersecurity, it also opened the door for added discord. Just as the COMELEC breach had sparked a furor over cyber insecurity in the Philippines, foreign interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election galvanized public and political attention over America’s own lax cybersecurity. In the wake of the 2016 attacks, the Philippines and the United States significantly revised their individual cybersecurity strategies and undertook significant institutional developments to advance national cybersecurity. However, Washington and Manila envisioned the challenge of cybersecurity in fundamentally different ways and pursued divergent paths in their policy and institutional preferences.

The COMELEC breach had been perpetrated by non-state actors operating within the Philippines, and countering the threat of cybercrime emerged as the primary mission of Philippine cybersecurity efforts. In May 2016, immediately following the COMELEC breach, President Benigno Aquino signed Republic Act No. 10844, which reorganized responsibilities for cyber affairs in the Philippine government and created the Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT) as a distinct, civilian agency to oversee the country’s digital development.⁴⁶ DICT’s essential function was to serve as the executive hub for national cyber efforts, including ICT

development, coordination, and security. The creation of DICT did not replace existing (and growing) cyber capabilities in other institutions like the AFP, NBI, or PNP but did create a new administrative structure whereby DICT was the principal coordinating agency for national cybersecurity efforts. This framework was enshrined in 2017 when the Philippine government released the National Cybersecurity Plan 2022 (NCSP). This new envisioning of national cybersecurity prioritized non-state actors and cybercriminals as the primary threats to the Philippines. It endorsed an

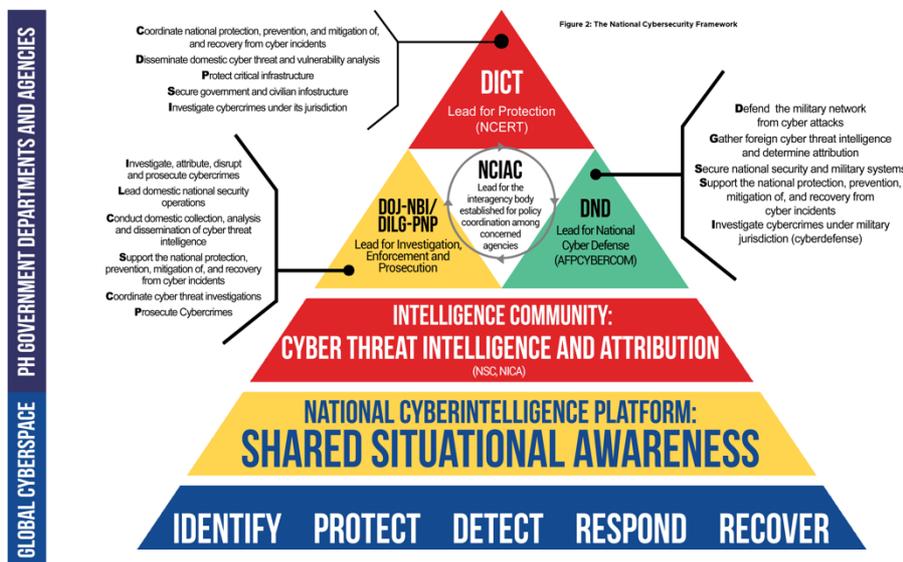


Figure 1: Philippine National Cyber Security Framework (Source: National Cybersecurity Plan 2022)

⁴¹ White House, (2015). Remarks by President Obama and President Aquino of the Republic of the Philippines after Bilateral Meeting. November 17, 2015. [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/17/remarks-president-obama-and-president-aquino-republic-philippines-after]

⁴² Gotinga, JC. & Tan Lara. “Suspected Chinese malware used to spy on PH gov’t – security firm,” *CNN-Philippines*. August 5, 2016. [https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/08/05/South-China-Sea-RAT-cyber-attack-Philippines.html]; Mateo, Janvic. “68 Government Websites Attacked.” *The Philippine Star*. July 16, 2016; Mateo, Janvic, “Year of hackers: Bangladesh bank heist, Comeleak,” *Philippine Star*. January 6, 2017.

⁴³ The NBI sought help from the United States’ Department of Justice because the site’s domain was bought from a U.S.-based web hosting company. However, the site itself was hosted in Russia. *CNN Philippines*, (2016). “Searchable website with hacked data taken down – Comelec.” *CNN Philippines*. April 22, 2016.

[https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/04/22/Comelec-hack-voters-data-wehaveyourdata.html].

⁴⁴ U.S.-Philippine Society. “U.S.-Philippines Joint Cyber Security Working Group Briefing,” March 1, 2018.

[https://www.usphsociety.org/2018/03/01/u-s-philippines-joint-cyber-security-working-group-briefing/]

⁴⁵ Pettis, Corey. Armed Forces of the Philippines, U.S. Military Host Cyber Exchange, *U.S. Indo-Pacific Command*. May 18, 2017.

[https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1186625/armed-forces-of-the-philippines-us-military-host-cyber-exchange/]

⁴⁶ Tordecilla, Karmela. “Aquino Signs Law Creating information, communications technology department.” *CNN Philippines*. May 23, 2016.

[https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2016/05/23/Benigno-Aquino-III-DICT-Department-of-Information-and-Communications-Technology.html]

interagency approach to cybersecurity with DICT as the primary institutional pivot.⁴⁷

Washington followed a different path in its cyber development. Perhaps because the attack on the 2016 presidential election was perpetrated by a foreign adversary, countering the use of cyber means by adversaries like Russia, China, and Iran emerged as the primary focus of U.S. cyber strategy. This manifested in the adoption of a more active cyber posture in the form of Persistent Engagement and the prioritization of cyber-military institutions like U.S. Cyber Command.⁴⁸ While not an anathema to alliance cooperation in cybersecurity, the divergent threat perceptions and institutional preferences did create an intra-alliance divide that would need to be deftly navigated to advance bilateral cyber initiatives.

The election of both Rodrigo Duterte and Donald Trump not only strained bilateral ties but uniquely jeopardized cooperation on cyber initiatives. A central facet in President Duterte's 'independent' Philippine foreign policy was expanding cooperation with other foreign partners. This manifested clearly in the digital arena. Whereas cooperation in ICT development had been a focal point of U.S.-Philippine relations during the 1990s, under Duterte, the Philippines undertook cyber initiatives with an ever-expanding roster of international partners, including Russia, China, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand.⁴⁹ ICT cooperation with Beijing, as part of the Belt & Road Initiative, was particularly prominent and became a major point of contention with the United States.⁵⁰ As the Trump administration rallied international efforts against Huawei, Washington put significant pressure on the Philippines to end its dealings with the Chinese company.⁵¹ These efforts fell flat with Manila, where officials refused to be dragged into the dispute.⁵²

Fallout over Huawei and the overall turbulence within the alliance did not scuttle bilateral efforts in cybersecurity. Cyber has continued to be included in bilateral strategic dialogues, and initiatives like the Joint Cyber Security Working Group and cyber programs run through the U.S. Embassy that continued throughout the Duterte administration.⁵³ Beyond bilateral efforts, both Washington and Manila have increasingly prioritized ASEAN as a forum to advance regional cybersecurity. The Philippines has been a leading driver in ASEAN's development of a cybersecurity portfolio, while in 2019, the United States launched a dedicated U.S.-ASEAN cyber dialog as a key mechanism for sustaining engagement in Southeast Asia.⁵⁴ While such initiatives do not preclude further cybersecurity developments within the U.S.-

Philippine alliance, they underscore a realignment in national cyber activities from a bilateral to a regional framework.

Conclusion: beyond buffering

Like an online video that never fully loads, cybersecurity's growth within the U.S.-Philippine alliance demonstrated a promising start only to stall at a critical juncture. During the early stages of the digital revolution, existing alliance mechanisms proved to be effective tools for adapting to the internet age and countering new challenges like cybercrime. Indeed, specific episodes like the 2012 Joint Statement and inclusion of cyber events within bilateral military exercises heralded a larger role for the alliance in addressing cybersecurity threats that could potentially follow NATO's trajectory. However, since 2016, that progress has foundered.

Elite political discord following the election of Rodrigo Duterte and Donald Trump has unquestionably played a role in stymieing the growth of cybersecurity within the alliance. In recent years, alliance supporters on both sides of have been preoccupied with merely preserving existing alliance undertakings like the Visiting Forces Agreement to expand alliance initiatives into new areas like cybersecurity.⁵⁵ Moreover, ICT development and the dispute over Huawei epitomized divergent attitudes towards Beijing. Such friction did not undermine existing practices and points of cyber cooperation but unquestionably raised practical and political barriers to increased cyber cooperation within the alliance.

Yet, focusing on elite disharmony alone neglects the larger disconnect over cybersecurity that has taken root within the alliance. Both the United States and the Philippines prioritized national cybersecurity after 2016, but they conceived of the issue in different ways and embraced divergent policy prescriptions and institutional preferences. While neither approach is inherently better, the divide has hamstrung the U.S.-Philippine alliance by fracturing the internal strategic alignment that underscored bilateral efforts during the 1990s and GWOT era. Notably, the choice to prioritize new institutions like DICT and U.S. Cyber Command may have been particularly detrimental to further alliance development. Not only do these institutions not have a historic role within the alliance with existing links to draw upon, but their respective elevations may have unintentionally sidelined or minimized existing avenues of cyber cooperation that could have provided a sound basis for further cyber development. Consequently,

⁴⁷ Duterte, Rodrigo. National Cybersecurity Plan 2022. [https://dict.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NCSP2022-rev01Jul2019.pdf]

⁴⁸ Nakasone, Paul. M. "A cyber force for persistent operations". *Joint Force Quarterly*, 92(1), 10-4; Healey, Jason. "The implications of persistent (and permanent) engagement in cyberspace." *Journal of Cybersecurity* 5(1) (2019).

⁴⁹ For example: Parameswaran, Prashanth. "What's in the Philippines' New Cyber Platform?" *The Diplomat*. January 23, 2019. [https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/whats-in-the-philippines-new-cyber-platform/]; Magdirila, Phoebe. "Philippines prioritizing cybersecurity in defense policy, officials say," *S&P Global Market Intelligence*. August 29, 2019. [https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/trending/by7iqqevsk488mgzw7nkua2].

⁵⁰ Fernando, Jonina A. "China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Philippines." *Asia Pacific Bulletin* #542. East-West Center. December 16, 2020.

⁵¹ Reardon, Marguerite. "US Warns Philippines Against Using Huawei 5G Gear." *CNET.com*. March 1, 2019. [https://www.cnet.com/tech/mobile/pompeo-warns-philippines-against-using-huawei-5g-gear/].

⁵² Mandhana, Niharika. "In Global Tech Battle, a Balky US Ally Chooses China." *Wall Street Journal*. July 15, 2019.

⁵³ For example: U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, "U.S. Embassy Partners with the Philippines to Train Prosecutors & Investigators on

Counterterrorism." August 31, 2018. [https://ph.usembassy.gov/us-embassy-partners-with-the-philippines-to-train-prosecutors-and-investigators-on-counterterrorism/]; U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, "U.S., Philippines Partner to Train Judges from Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula on New Cybercrime Rules." November 21, 2018.

[https://ph.usembassy.gov/us-philippines-partner-to-train-judges-from-visayas-and-zamboanga-peninsula-on-new-cybercrime-rules/].

⁵⁴ Tran Dai, Candice, and Miguel Alberto Gomez. "Challenges and opportunities for cyber norms in ASEAN." *Journal of Cyber Policy* 3(2)(2018): 217-235; Department of National Defense, "ADMM-Plus Conducts Table-Top Exercise on Cybersecurity." August 3, 2019.

[https://www.dnd.gov.ph/Postings/Post/ADMM-Plus%20conducts%20Table-Top%20Exercise%20on%20Cyber%20Security/]; Prashanth Parameswaran. "What's Behind the New US-ASEAN Cyber Dialogue?" *The Diplomat*. October 4, 2019. [https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/whats-behind-the-new-us-asean-cyber-dialogue/]

⁵⁵ Heydarian, Richard J. "The Visiting Forces Agreement and the Future of U.S.-Philippine Relations," *AMTI Update*, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 22, 2021; Winger, Gregory. "Alliance Embeddedness: Rodrigo Duterte and the Resilience of the US-Philippine Alliance." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17(3)(2021).

even at the twilight of the Trump and Duterte eras, a meaningful role for the alliance in cybersecurity will not simply bud in their absence without addressing this underlying strategic divergence. Fortunately, such reconciliation is possible, but it will require a concerted effort on behalf of alliance supporters to make this prospect a reality.

Just as NATO's development of a robust cyber portfolio shows that it is possible for international alliances to adapt to the age of cyber conflict, the U.S.-Philippine alliance proves that this process is not automatic. Rather, alliances require an internal engine of growth that will not only push for cyber's inclusion within the alliance but also help sustain alliance growth to address this issue. In the case of NATO, this role was largely played by one of its members, Estonia, which drove significant policy and institutional development within the alliance following the 2007 cyberattack.⁵⁶ The U.S.-Philippine alliance has no such impetus to drive alliance growth and reconciliation. Instead, if the alliance is to have a meaningful role in cybersecurity, it is incumbent on an internal actor or agency - be it a president, cabinet secretary, DICT, the AFP, DND, or Indo-Pacific command - to embrace cybersecurity as a critical mission for the alliance and translate such into meaningful actions.

If such an institutional driver embraces this mantle, there are policy steps that could be implemented to substantively advance the alliance's abilities to address cyber threats. The inclusion of cybersecurity within the alliance framework must be robust and unequivocal, entailing a policy pronouncement akin to NATO's during the 2014 Wales summit that a cyberattack can constitute an 'armed attack' under the Mutual Defense Treaty and trigger the alliance's mutual defense responsibilities. While it is not necessary to outline the specific conditions that could trigger such an invocation (ambiguity may even be beneficial), the explicit recognition that cyberattacks can constitute a form of armed coercion would substantively bring the U.S.-Philippine alliance in line with the practical realities of international conflict in the 21st century. Furthermore, such a clarification need not be made by the U.S.-Philippine alliance alone but could be linked to parallel proclamations made by other regional alliances, including the U.S.-Japan alliance, the U.S.-ROK alliance, and the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) pact. While undoubtedly difficult, a coordinated declaration of this kind would help establish a clear regional norm that existing alliance obligations do extend to foreign aggression emanating from the digital domain.

If the U.S.-Philippines alliance embraces cybersecurity, it also must cultivate alliance mechanisms and capabilities needed to operate effectively in this new security arena. This can be achieved through the further adaption of existing mechanisms and the development of new practices dedicated exclusively to furthering joint endeavors in cyberspace. The inclusion of a cyber event in *Balikatan 2017* and similar subject-matter-expert events are

useful starting points and should be expanded.⁵⁷ Such collaborative undertakings build partner capacity in cybersecurity and help nurture bilateral constituencies and expert communities that could help advance cybersecurity cooperation. Existing relationships were essential to early bilateral efforts to address cybercrime and have proven useful in facilitating essential cybersecurity tasks like information sharing and incident response.⁵⁸ Existing defense diplomacy mechanisms like the State Partnership Program have already been successfully used to advance international cooperation in cybersecurity, and leveraging similar tools within the U.S.-Philippine alliance would provide an essential foundation to regularize joint-cyber training initiatives.⁵⁹ Indeed, just as the alliance already conducts exercises to respond to natural disasters like typhoons, it is only logical to practice how bilateral cooperation can best respond to a man-made disaster like a ransomware attack on critical infrastructure.

Such exercises will help develop functionality but may not themselves bridge the current state of strategic divergence within the U.S.-Philippine alliance. To help reconcile diverging approaches, it is essential to adapt existing points of defense cooperation and develop new partnerships between counterpart institutions that help address each government's cyber priorities. Notably, although domestically oriented, the Department of Homeland Security's recently created Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) could prove a natural partner for DICT in helping to secure critical infrastructure from cyber assault. Likewise, U.S. Cyber Command has conducted 'hunt forward' operations in 14 countries where U.S. cyber teams deploy to allied states "to help proactively identify adversary operations and cyber vulnerabilities on their network," which is then shared with the partners (Williams 2021).⁶⁰ The Philippines would be an ideal partner for such an endeavor. It would significantly benefit both countries and substantively advance bilateral cybersecurity. Whereas existing relationships helped facilitate earlier cyber collaboration, the newness of these practices and institutions requires a dedicated effort to stand up and turn potential alliance cooperation into reality.

⁵⁶ Crandall, Matthew, and Collin Allan. "Small states and big ideas: Estonia's battle for cybersecurity norms." *Contemporary Security Policy* 36(2) (2015): 346-368.

⁵⁷ Filca, Nicholas. "U.S. and Philippine Marines tackle the cyber domain," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, April 19, 2021. [https://www.dvidshub.net/news/394412/us-and-philippine-marines-tackle-cyber-domain]

⁵⁸ Carr, Madeline. "Public-private partnerships in national cyber-security strategies." *International Affairs* 92(1) (2016): 43-62.

⁵⁹ Pierce, Bill. "Ohio National Guard works with Serbian partners during Cyber Tesla 2017 exercise." *Nationalguard.mil*, October 13, 2017.

[https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/State-Partnership-Program/Article/1341589/ohio-national-guard-works-with-serbian-partners-during-cyber-tesla-2017-exercise/]

⁶⁰ The specific identity of which partner countries have participated in these "hunt forward" operation has not been disclosed and it is possible that the Philippine may already be a participant in the program. Williams, Brad. "CYBERCOM has conducted 'hunt-forward' ops in 14 countries, deputy says," *Breakingdefense.com*, November 10, 2021. [https://breakingdefense.com/2021/11/cybercoms-no-2-discusses-hunt-forward-space-cybersecurity-china/]

2

Explaining the divide: legislative positions on the U.S.-Philippine alliance

Angelica Mangahas

Abstract

When the Philippine president goes one direction, the Senate goes another. What explains the inconsistent cross-branch support for the U.S.-Philippine alliance? This paper outlines four possible arguments. First, senators' positions better reflect domestic perceptions of external threat. Second, senators are less constrained by performance legitimacy and have greater latitude to take idealistic positions. In the Philippines, this idealism entails nationalist rhetoric for self-reliance. Third, senators are protective of their constitutional mandate to approve international agreements, and distrust political strategies to circumvent receiving their approval. Fourth, senators are engaged in electioneering. The Philippine Senate is a popular starting line for higher office. To elevate their national profiles, senators may adopt maverick-type personas on hot-button issues that galvanize public attention. In the process, they tend to adopt positions that are seen as opposing the Palace. Advocates of a stronger and better institutionalized U.S.-Philippine alliance must address the gap between executive and legislative preferences. While it has not yet been possible to evaluate the relative importance of each of these hypotheses, policy approaches that reflect these realities are not costly. Part of the gap in threat perceptions may be filled with better briefing and information-sharing with legislators. Senators should have some stake in the success of the alliance, and alliance successes should emphasize mutual gain and not discount the potency of symbols. Filipino and American executive officials should resist the temptation to avoid seeking Senate approval as a matter of expediency. Finally, the oppositional impetus is greatest immediately before presidential elections—so timing will matter for new initiatives.

Introduction

In the decades since the Philippines gained independence in 1946, many observers expected the president in Malacañang to support the United States-Philippine alliance. Actual sentiment from the Palace ranged from accommodation to enthusiasm, but it was never indifferent, let alone hostile. Generally, more military cooperation with the United States was considered better than less of the same.

While Malacañang's position dominated, support was not universal. The alliance was fraught, facing legislative inquiries, judicial challenges, and even public anger on a range of constitutional, criminal, and environmental issues. One common belief was that deeper cooperation would face its biggest challenge in the Senate, where past agreements are periodically re-dissected, and new treaties are ratified. But the Palace could be relied upon.

For 65 years, the dynamics persisted. Several explanations have been put forward. Perhaps the alliance had been shaped primarily by U.S. preferences, while Filipino senators' views more accurately reflected the national threat perceptions of the period. Perhaps the president must be pragmatic about the defense of the Philippines, while senators have the latitude to take idealistic positions on independence. Or, perhaps U.S. assistance flowing directly to the executive increases the influence of that branch of government to the detriment of Congress, which otherwise holds the power the purse. For whatever reasons, the Senate became a primary platform for 'go our own way' nationalism in the traditions of Claro Recto, Jovito Salonga, or Miriam Defensor Santiago.

President Rodrigo Duterte overturned the dynamic. Duterte's personal anti-American position has been attributed to many causes, but it coincided with Western distaste for his human rights record. Since taking office in 2016, the administration has moved to threaten, suspend, or terminate U.S.-Philippine agreements: the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). Meanwhile, the administration cozied up to Beijing, Washington's 'near-peer competitor.'¹

As Malacañang changed its spots, so too did the upper house. Rather than a platform for senators to demonstrate their nationalist bona fides, the Senate has become the site of some resistance—even within the president's party. For example, during the Benigno Aquino administration, Senator Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III argued against EDCA.² As chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Pimentel argued against the Duterte administration's move to terminate the VFA.³

This paper revisits the three aforementioned arguments used to explain the 'sense of the Senate' to assess their continued relevance in the present environment. This paper suggests a fourth perspective: electioneering. The

Philippine Senate, as a body elected nationally and at large, is a popular starting line for higher office. To elevate their national profiles, senators may adopt 'maverick'-type personas on hot-button issues that galvanize public attention. In the process, they tend to adopt positions that are seen as opposing the Palace.

If true, it suggests that the stability of the U.S.-Philippine alliance is influenced by a Philippine institutional relationship. Thus, while Duterte's position presents a reversal of Philippine foreign policy, the Senate may be behaving as expected. Should an administration with pro-U.S. views return to Malacañang, we should expect the alliance to remain fraught in the future.

“One common belief was that deeper cooperation would face its biggest challenge in the Senate, where past agreements are periodically re-dissected, and new treaties are ratified.”

Consider the Senate

While most agree that international relations and domestic politics are intertwined, there is less consensus over the mechanisms and effects on foreign policy. Putnam's two-level game is a useful analytical starting point. At the national level, domestic actors pressure the government to adopt policies favorable to their interests, and politicians assemble supportive coalitions from among these groups. At the international level, governments aim to maximize their means to satisfy domestic demands and minimize negative consequences.⁴

Putnam's key insight is that the central government cannot ignore either game outright if it wants to retain influence. For this reason, governments may make moves that appear irrational or suboptimal when viewed exclusively from one level but reasonable when the other perspective is considered. This framework suggests that changing domestic coalitions influence foreign policy decisions made by the executive branch of government.

In the Philippine case, Putnam's metaphor is not often applied. This is commonly the case in Southeast Asia, where "the lack of attention is mainly due to the seemingly unchanging reality of executive dominance in the foreign policy process."⁵ Further, the variability within executive dominance (i.e., the roles of the president, the diplomatic corps, the national security sector, the economic sector) are incompletely narrated. Nevertheless, as Dosch observes, between Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, "it is the Philippines that the two-level game in the foreign policy process comes closest to Putnam's model."⁶ This is because of the legislative's direct role in approving foreign agreements.

Patterned after the United States, the Philippines has three co-equal branches of government: the executive,

¹ Office of the Director of National Intelligence. *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, unclassified report (Washington, DC, 9 April 2021), <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

² "13 Senators question EDCA's validity." *ABS-CBN News*, Manila, 12 June 2015, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/06/11/15/13-senators-question-edcas-validity>

³ Ramos, Marlon. "Koko Pimentel warns vs. VFA termination." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Manila, 27 January 2020.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/184545/koko-pimentel-warns-vs-vfa-termination>

⁴ Putnam, Robert. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization*, 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427-460. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785>

⁵ Dosch, Jorn. "The Impact of Democratization on the Making of Foreign Policy in Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines." *Südostasien aktuell: Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 25, no. 5 (2006): 45. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-336978>

⁶ *Ibid.*

the legislative, and the judiciary. The president is the 'chief architect' of foreign policy, with authority to recognize and deal with foreign states and governments. In the context of treaties, the president has the sole authority to negotiate with other states.⁷ The Philippine Senate has a specific interest in foreign policy, however. As part of the effort following the Marcos dictatorship to strengthen checks and balances, the "Philippine Congress is one of the most powerful legislatures in the Asia Pacific, as far as its role in foreign policymaking is concerned."⁸ Article 7, Section 21 of the 1987 Constitution ("No treaty or international agreement shall be valid and effective unless concurred in by at least two-thirds of all the Members of the Senate") guarantees the Senate's role.⁹

This formal role in treaty ratification has been 'critical' in major foreign policy decisions related to the U.S.-Philippine alliance. These include the Senate vote against retaining U.S. bases in 1991 and in favor of the Philippines-U.S. VFA in 1999. Moreover, as Baviera points out, Congress is also responsible for key legislation with bearing on the country's foreign relations: the 2009 Baselines Law redefining Philippine territory being the best-known recent example.¹⁰ Still, in consideration of the Senate's formal role, some analysts have argued that the Palace or executive branch has refrained from elevating agreements to 'treaties' as a matter of strategy, recognizing that achieving Senate ratification would be difficult and that agreements may not be finalized. Such was the fate of the mid-1990s Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement.¹¹

Finally, the Senate also has an informal role relating to foreign policy. First, individual senators or coalitions can shape public opinion on foreign policy concerns. Senate hearings can be highly publicized and are deeply enmeshed with the court of public opinion. Corruption investigations by a blue-ribbon committee can highlight questionable actions by the executive branch, such as the experience with the ZTE-NBN scandal, which soured relations between the Philippines and China. The U.S.-Philippine alliance has also seen its share of public challenges magnified by senators' scrutiny, such as the 2005 Subic rape case of 'Nicole' and the 2014 murder of Jennifer Laude. In a second way, statesmen may rise from Congress to "play significant roles in shaping Philippine foreign policy, such as Claro M. Recto and Raul Manglapus."¹²

Threat perceptions

The threat perceptions argument suggests that Senate support ebbs and flows with the magnitude of perceived threats to the Philippine state. In periods of heightened threat, the Senate should be expected to value U.S. military cooperation more highly. If so, more senators

would speak in favor of maintaining or advancing bilateral cooperation to shrink the problem. This argument is lightly distinguished from the international relations proposition that the intensity of alliance efforts coincides with allies' threat perceptions. Whereas 'alliance perceptions' would reflect a mix of views from the United States and the Philippine governments, the Senate's threat perceptions are expected to be less uniform but exclusively Philippines-centric.

U.S. Cold War priorities dominated the early decades of the alliance. After World War II, the United States had not envisioned an intensive presence in Asia, but intensifying strategic competition with the Soviet Union altered strategic calculations. Subic Bay Naval Station and Clark Air Base became important outposts, serving as repair and logistics hubs during the U.S. war in Vietnam. At one point, Clark was the largest overseas U.S. military installation¹³; and Subic, the size of Singapore, had been the "service station and supermarket of the fleet."¹⁴

As the United States focused on the campaign against Communist powers, its support to the Philippines rested on its continuing control of the bases and its desire to showcase American-style democracy in the region. Still, Filipinos in the period did not seriously perceive an external threat to state survival. Without proximity or cultural connections to the Asian mainland, the archipelago was insulated from the material destruction, armed movements, and human displacement occurring in Indochina.

Instead, Philippine threat perceptions were directed internally. Indeed, the Philippine-American experience with military-to-military cooperation has primarily involved counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, famously against the Hukbalahap, the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army, and, later, violent extremist groups. From 1947 to 1991, the United States provided advisors, cash aid, and arms sales to assist with domestic stability operations.

Prior to 1991, the Senate had a diminished role in influencing U.S.-Philippine defense relations. With the 1947 Military Bases Agreement (MBA) still in place and troops stationed in the country, senators did not have much influence in monitoring military interactions. The amendments to the MBA negotiated in 1966 and 1979 were made through exchanges of notes that did not require the Senate's approval.¹⁵ With the withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975, U.S. interest in the Philippine bases also declined, which facilitated a renegotiation of the bases agreement. The 1979 amendment explicitly reaffirmed Philippine sovereignty over the bases, allowed for the appointment of a Filipino base commander, and permitted the Philippine flag to fly above the U.S. flag.

⁷ Pimentel, Jr. v. Office of the Executive Secretary, 501 Phil 303 (2005), https://lawphil.net/judjuris/juri2005/jul2005/gr_158088_2005.html#fnt13

⁸ Dosch, "The Impact of Democratization," 51.

⁹ Philippine Constitution, art. 7, sec. 21.

¹⁰ Baviera, Aileen. "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy: The Case of Philippines-China Relations since 2004." RSIS Working Paper, No. 241 (2006). <https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/10356/95218/1/WP241.pdf>.

¹¹ Park, Jae-Jeok. "A Comparative Case Study of the US-Philippines Alliance in the 1990s and the US-South Korea Alliance between 1998 and 2008." *Asian Survey*, 51, no. 2 (March/April 2011): 268-289. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2011.51.2.268>

¹² Baviera, Aileen. "The Influence of Domestic Politics on Philippine Foreign Policy," 11.

¹³ Oberdorfer, Don. "Accord Reaches on 1 US Bases, Aid to Philippines," *Washington Post*, Washington, DC, 1 January 1979.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/01/01/accord-reached-on-2-us-bases-aid-to-philippines/3ca96ef1-c6b4-444b-9b35-0d42a5d77994/>

¹⁴ Anderson, Gerald, quoted in Whaley, Floyd. "Shadows of an Old Military Base," *New York Times*, New York, NY, 26 April 2013.

https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/world/asia/27iht-subic27.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

¹⁵ For 1966, see the Ramos-Rusk agreement: "Exchange of Notes Constituting an Agreement Amending Article XXIX of the Agreement Between the Republic of the Philippines and United States of America Concerning Military Bases of 14 March 1947," 16 September 1966, <https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/35/10859>. For 1979, see the Romulo-Murphy Agreement (30.1 UST 863 (1978-1979); TIAS 9224).

At the end of the Cold War, any lingering fears of the Communist threat had subsided. The 1987 Constitution had restored democracy, the Senate, and its role in ratifying international agreements. While the Philippines had not eradicated insurgency, military factionalism and repeated coup attempts had become a more urgent source of instability. The expiring bases agreement presented the first opportunity to reassess a foundational piece of the U.S.-Philippine relationship with the Senate rejecting the 10-year extension of the basing agreement in a 12-11 vote in 1991. The Senate also refused the next proposed bilateral deal, the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which would have allowed the U.S. military to refuel vessels and purchase and store supplies in the country.¹⁶

China's occupation of Mischief Reef in 1995 led to a change in mood. With the Armed Forces of the Philippines having maintained its traditional orientation toward internal security, the Chinese threat was magnified by the lack of Philippine preparedness. From that point, Philippine-American cooperation continued on an upward path. The Ramos administration negotiated a status of forces agreement ratified in 1998 by the newly elected Senate and signed by President Estrada. The agreement facilitated the return of joint exercises in the form of *Balikatan*.

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's administration embraced a role in the U.S. Global War on Terror. Under her watch, the United States extended a branch of Operation Enduring Freedom to Mindanao in 2001 to counter the Abu Sayyaf Group.¹⁷ In 2002, the United States and the Philippines signed a 'low level' Mutual Logistics Support Agreement—not dissimilar from the ACSA.¹⁸

The perceived Chinese threat initially receded under the Arroyo administration, which worked to improve relations with Beijing, including new cooperation initiatives, such as the Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking (JMSU). The public turned sour on Arroyo's relationship with Beijing as bribery scandals, and other anomalies surfaced relating to big-ticket investment projects linked to Chinese firms.¹⁹ The negative disposition toward China deepened in the Aquino administration, particularly after the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012.²⁰

Nationalism

The second argument regarding the role of the Senate in shaping the alliance relationship holds that the president and the executive branch are more aware and more pragmatic about the challenges in providing for the country's defense, while senators, being more removed from the pressure of maintaining performance legitimacy, have greater latitude to stake out idealistic positions. The reality of the Philippine military's long-term domestic

orientation and the high cost of naval investments—the country's greatest defense weakness—suggests that Malacañang is responding to the Philippines' durable need for an external defense partner. Senators, on the other hand, are rarely known for their voting records. This dynamic may also explain why, for example, in 1991 'Magnificent 12' Senator Joseph Estrada voted against extending the U.S. bases²¹; yet in 1999, as president, he supported and ratified the Ramos-negotiated Visiting Forces Agreement.²²

While the Mutual Defense Treaty dates back to 1951, the dynamic of the U.S.-Philippine defense

The 1987 Constitution had restored democracy, the Senate, and its role in ratifying international agreements.

relationship was initiated in the colonial period—a reality that continues to cast a shadow over the subsequent friendship. To some quarters, the Philippine military's entwinement with that of the United States is an unwelcome vestige of U.S. imperialism. Much has been made of the asymmetry in the relationship, which was particularly acute at the end of World War II and in the early post-independence period—when the Military Bases Agreement and Mutual Defense Treaty were both concluded.

Negotiations between the two countries began in 1945 between the Truman and Osmeña administrations. Following the destruction of Manila during the war, the new republic had been in dire economic straits: "So anxious was Osmeña to keep the Americans in the Philippines that he placed no curbs on the size of their force or its deployments."²³ Even then, Osmeña, aware of domestic nationalist pressures, denied the U.S. request for jurisdiction over all employees—military or civilian, on or off duty, and on or off the bases. Manuel Roxas, negotiating for the Philippines, argued that the jurisdictional question would "tarnish" the nation's sovereignty.²⁴

In the earliest generations, many critics of the bases had themselves grown up as colonial subjects. Their sentiments toward U.S.-Philippine cooperation could not be separated from the long-cultivated desire for self-determination. However, this desire could be separated from one's generally positive or negative views of American society. Particularly noteworthy were senators such as Claro Recto, who committed to the nationalist ideal even when it was domestically unpopular, and smear campaigns had been launched against them. A recent retrospective of Recto illustrates: "His total devotion to the nationalist's cause, unpopular during his days, was a recipe for political failure. But he was undeterred. To be a nationalist was equated with being a communist.... He opposed the Parity Rights, he condemned the Bases Agreement, and supported the Filipino First Policy

¹⁶ Branigin, William. "Philippines will tighten draft military agreement with US," *Washington Post*, Washington, DC, 23 November 1994: A15.

¹⁷ Swain, Richard. "Case Study: Operation Enduring Freedom Philippines," US Army Counterinsurgency Center working paper (October 2010). <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA532988>.

¹⁸ Danao, Efrén and Paolo Romero, "RP, US sign 5-year MLSA," *Philippine Star*, Manila, 22 November 2002, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2002/11/22/184942/rp-us-sign-5-year-mlsa>

¹⁹ Robles, Raissa. "Arroyo fears probe could ruffle China's feathers," *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong, 6 March 2008: 12, <https://www.scmp.com/article/628726/arroyo-fears-probe-could-ruffle-chinas-feathers>

²⁰ Max Boot, "China starts to claim the seas; the US sends a signal of weakness over the Scarborough Shoal," *Wall Street Journal*, New York, NY,

25 June 2012,

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304782404577486302897095274>

²¹ henon, Philip. 'Philippine Senate Votes to Reject US Base Renewal,' *New York Times*, New York, NY, 16 September 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/16/world/philippine-senate-votes-to-reject-us-base-renewal.html>

²² Legaspi, Amita. "Senate OKs resolution to review VFA on second reading," *GMA Network Online*, Manila, 23 September 2009.

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/172976/senate-oks-resolution-to-review-vfa-on-second-reading/story/>

²³ Karnow, Stanley. *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York: Random House, 1989), 331.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

launched by then-President Carlos P. Garcia over the objections of the Americans[.]”²⁵

The emotive power of post-independence nationalism has persisted, and it could be argued that recurrent controversies in the alliance relationship have not permitted that wound to heal. In any case, nationalist rhetoric continued to permeate the language of senatorial opposition. Over a decade after Recto, Jovito Salonga took up the cause for Philippine independence. In 1966, Salonga and a group of senators spoke against a Marcos plan to send an engineering battalion to Vietnam, saying, “the request did not come from the South Vietnamese government but from the U.S. government, which Marcos wants to please, for reasons he does not want to reveal.”²⁶ As Senate president in 1991, Salonga voted against the proposed extension of the bases agreement. He later wrote a book, “The Senate that Said No,” on the historic occasion. Nationalist sentiment is not only powerful. It can penetrate the highest positions. In 2002, for example, Vice President Teofisto Guingona resigned as foreign secretary for refusing to align with President Arroyo on the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement.²⁷ Guingona was replaced by Senator Blas Ople, known as a friendly figure to the United States.²⁸

Executive power consolidation

The third argument about the Senate’s role centers on the effects of external military support on the executive branch. The idea generally holds that this support improves the power of Malacañang to the detriment of other powerholders. This support could create resistance either directly or indirectly. In the direct sense, external support to the executive weakens the ability of other branches to serve a check-and-balance function. Congress is particularly affected because it holds the power of the purse, and senators are expected to defend their influence. In the indirect sense, the strengthening of Philippine security forces generates opprobrium rather than support, especially for internal concerns. If domestic military operations are unpopular, public sentiments may surface through the more regularly elected Congress.

While the VFA was signed in 1998, it continued to see domestic legal challenges, often filed by former lawmakers themselves, for over a decade after its ratification. The Philippine Supreme Court finally ruled in favor of the executive branch in 2009 and denied the motion for reconsideration in 2010. The cases against the VFA alleged that the agreement circumvented the 1991 Senate decision against the bases, particularly after ‘exercises’ had been used to justify the long-term presence of U.S. troops in the country and in an active war zone.²⁹

Equally concerning has been other ‘implementing agreements’ between the United States and the Philippines, which have come to be interpreted as a way for the executive branch to bypass Senate involvement. The first test of the ‘implementing agreement’ approach came from the quietly signed Mutual Logistics Support Agreement in

2002. Filipino and American executive officials emphasized the ‘mechanical,’ ‘boring,’ or otherwise inconsequential nature of the agreement. Presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye claimed: “This is fairly straightforward, there is nothing earthshaking about this document.”³⁰

Disagreeing, opposition Senator Ed Angara claimed, “As usual, Malacañang mishandled the whole matter. An agreement that is supposed to be an essential element of foreign policy was not shown to the chamber that is the mandated partner on foreign policy matters.”³¹ Senate Majority Leader Aquilino (Nene) Pimentel Jr said that the Philippines and U.S. governments design to keep the agreement secret from lawmakers suggested a “ploy to avoid submission of the accord to the Senate for review and classification.”³²

Similar accusations dogged the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement reached during the Aquino administration in 2014. Then-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Relations Miriam Defensor Santiago said that her committee had resolved that they “would not allow the power of the Senate to be eroded.”³³ Among those signing the resolution were Ed Angara, Joseph Ejercito, Jinggoy Estrada, and Koko Pimentel.

Electioneering

The fourth explanation of Senate behavior takes an institutional perspective. The Philippine Senate has an interesting structure: the 24 senators are elected at-large and on a national basis. Much as it has been accepted as a platform for nationalist rhetoric, it is also where emerging politicians elevate their profiles to win re-election and make a bid for higher office. As they do so, they benefit from establishing themselves as ‘maverick’-types willing to take on the failures of the incumbent administration. This argument explains why substantial numbers in the current Senate have been quick to complain about the Duterte administration’s planned termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement.

Many recent Philippine presidents moved directly to Malacañang from their Senate seats. The present list includes Benigno Aquino, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and Joseph Estrada—or half of the lot. Other senators have also placed second in the final contests: Miriam Defensor-Santiago (1992), Joseph Estrada again (2010), and Manuel Roxas (2016). Joe de Venecia, speaker of the House, was the runner-up to Estrada in 1998. While success has not been guaranteed, the Senate has become a venue for entrants from local politics or outside the political profession to test and expand their national profile.

Being a ‘yes man’ in the Senate has previously been a losing proposition, particularly after the midterm. The president’s single-term limit reduces their incumbency advantage, and candidates have typically succeeded by applying criticism to the Palace. The weak role of Philippine parties as ideological instruments or vehicles for campaign financing further reduces the desirability of

²⁵ Dooc, Manny, “The full measure of Don Claro M. Recto,” *BusinessMirror*, Manila, 5 February 2022, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/02/05/the-full-measure-of-don-claro-m-recto/>

²⁶ Bueza, Michael. “The life and struggles of Jovito Salonga,” *Rappler*, 10 March 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/79963-timeline-life-jovito-salonga/>

²⁷ Robles, Raissa. “Vice President agrees to resign as foreign minister,” *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong, 1 July 2002: 9.

²⁸ Conde, Carlos H. “A long-serving political survivor,” *International Herald Tribune*, Paris, 15 December 2003: 3.

²⁹ “Philippine Supreme Court rules US Visiting Forces Agreement Legal,” BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, London, 3 March 2010.

³⁰ Villanueva, Marichu A. and Paolo Romero, “‘Nothing secret in MLSA,’” *Philippine Star*, 23 November 2002. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2002/11/23/185051/145nothing-secret-mlsa146>

³¹ “Philippine defense secretary says ‘nothing secret’ in logistics pact with the US,” BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, London 23 November 2002: 1.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Legaspi, Amita, “13 Senators say EDCA invalid without Senate concurrence.”

aligning with Malacañang and inevitably defending the sins of the Palace.

Moreover, there is something unique about foreign policy as an issue area. There are few domestic groups with a deep interest in continuing specific U.S.-Philippine military cooperation, particularly since the closure of the bases, which had been a major employer in Central Luzon. Although the United States is a major source of investment for the country and a large trading partner, the economic relationship is perceived as insulated from military cooperation. At the same time, alliance issues press emotive buttons in the Philippines, particularly in the context of scandals (e.g., the 2006 'Nicole' case, the 2014 Jennifer Laude case). For this reason, reworking the U.S.-Philippine alliance is low-hanging fruit in an electoral strategy.

Recommendations

It is difficult to evaluate the relative importance of each of the arguments that have been presented, as the current evidence base supports multiple possibilities. In any case, these factors may take turns in prominence in response to other domestic political conditions. For this reason, advocates for a stronger U.S.-Philippine alliance should pursue efforts that address each of these factors.

Although the difference in Senate and executive positions on the alliance discussed here focuses on the reality of American dominance, particularly during the Bases Period, some of that gap may be attributed to inadequate information sharing between the branches. Many Senate resolutions filed around alliance politics constitute requests for information. There is demand from legislators to better understand the contours of the alliance and, in particular, the commitments of the United States to the Philippines.

While senators need not fear too much blame for alliance 'failure,' neither do they have a stake in the gains of its successes. As they occur, senators' contributions to alliance institutionalization should be welcomed. More broadly, it is difficult to overstate the emotive power of nationalism. Alliance activities should not only offer net security advantages to the Philippines but emphasize mutual gains and offer Philippine participants an opportunity to take part with pride. The 2018 return of the Balangiga Bells to the Philippines was long overdue.

In the post-bases era, Filipino and American officials appear to have adopted a strategy of Senate avoidance. This approach responds to the difficulties of passing agreements through the upper house but reaffirms the alliance as a threat to independent domestic institutions rather than an asset to government effectiveness.

Finally, the oppositional impetus is greatest immediately before presidential elections. Timing will matter for new initiatives, whether or not they require Senate approval, because of periods of heightened scrutiny.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the longevity of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, the strength of the U.S.-Philippine alliance should be considered a variable rather than a constant feature of the last 65 years. Both the Philippines and the

United States have experienced substantial domestic changes, and their foreign policies have changed as well. Changing perceptions about the external environment, the nature of the U.S.-Philippine relationship, the executive-legislative balance, and electoral opportunities have shaped and reshaped the alliance from its origins, through the bases era, and into the present.

The effort to understand the domestic drivers and mechanisms of Philippine foreign policy should not exclude an examination of the legislative branch. The 1987 Philippine Constitution provided a new basis for the legislature to revisit, modify, or affirm decisions by the executive branch to seek further cooperation with the United States (and other countries), and the Senate has been protective of its prerogative. While the president is the 'chief architect' of foreign policy, the Senate has both formal and informal roles in shaping the Philippines' relations with other nations.

Over several decades, senators have taken what appears to be an 'oppositional' view to the Palace. This paper has identified four arguments that may explain the Senate's role: senators may have clearer views of the prevailing threat of the period; they may be more idealistic or less bound than the executive by performance legitimacy; they may be more protective of the power of the purse; or they may opportunistically seek to elevate their own national profiles. Further study will be necessary to evaluate the relative importance of each of these factors in a given time period.

Finally, the electioneering argument suggests that the stability of the U.S.-Philippine alliance is influenced by a Philippine institutional form and helps explain why the Senate has reacted the way it has to President Duterte's reversal of Philippine foreign policy. It also supports the idea that a new president in Malacañang will not reduce the contested reality of alliance politics in the Philippines. Should pro-American views return to Malacañang, we should expect the alliance to remain fraught in the future.

"The 1987 Philippine Constitution provided a new basis for the legislature to revisit, modify, or affirm decisions by the executive branch to seek further cooperation with the United States (and other countries), and the Senate has been protective of its prerogative."

3

Friendship from a distance: the U.S.-Philippine alliance and allied access in wartime

Graham Jenkins

Abstract

The United States and the Philippines share a long history and alliance relationship. Yet, since the closure of U.S. military bases in Subic Bay and Clark, the Philippines has been the only U.S. treaty ally in Asia not hosting permanent U.S. forces. The threat posed by China to Philippine interests in the South China Sea has grown in recent years, but should China and the Philippines become involved in a military conflict, it is unclear how effective the U.S. contribution to the alliance would be given its current posture in the region. To maximize the alliance's deterrent capacity and operational effect, Manila and Washington should revisit this potential shortcoming and extend the work begun under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Act (EDCA) to provide a more robust U.S. presence and greater Philippine self-defense capabilities.

To strengthen the alliance, the United States and Philippines should shape U.S. force posture by:

- Developing a permanent U.S. Marine Corps presence on Palawan by rotating units through the island equipped with anti-ship weaponry and the ability to operate dispersed in austere terrain
- Rotating advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and battle management aircraft through the Philippines on a regular basis
- Homeporting a small surface action group with advanced anti-ship and anti-air capabilities at Subic Bay
- Ensuring U.S. and Philippine military units use a common datalink for sharing sensor data, information, and operational communications
- Improving access to Thitu Island by dredging the harbor and extending the runway, and upgrading its organic self-defense capabilities by installing new air defense and ISR systems

Introduction

One of the few constants in the long relationship between the United States and the Philippines has been, ironically, change. From a U.S. colony to a self-governed protectorate to an assertive nation-state today, the Philippines and its one-time colonial master, the United States, have charted a path alongside each other as allies. However, since the end of the Cold War—and particularly in the past few years—Manila has increasingly distanced itself from Washington. Some of this shift is attributable to recent administrations in both states, but has deeper historical roots. The 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) that binds the two nations together has been supplemented with numerous mechanisms, notably the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in 1999 and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2014. Longstanding sovereignty concerns have emphasized Philippine autonomy and downplayed the need for any kind of U.S. basing arrangement following the end of the Cold War.

The rise of an assertive China and its newfound willingness to flex power pose the most salient threat to the Philippines and is the most likely basis for either Manila or Washington to invoke the MDT. A military conflict with China, even if relatively 'limited,' presents a dire challenge to Philippine sovereignty and the lives of its people, and carries the potential to expand to a much wider theater of war. However, the present condition of U.S.-Philippine relations and the posture of U.S. forces under EDCA and VFA also pose obstacles to any direct assistance from U.S. military forces. The primary concern is access, which determines the corresponding ability of the U.S. military to respond to an attack on the Philippines with sufficient combat power in a short enough timeframe.

This paper considers the operational feasibility and effectiveness of potential U.S. military actions to defend the Philippines in wartime under three different access regimes (low/medium/high, in terms of relative permissiveness), using a Chinese attack on Philippine-controlled features in the South China Sea as a case study. The hypothetical offensive would see simultaneous Chinese amphibious assaults on key features, including Thitu, Second Thomas Shoal, and Scarborough Shoal. These attacks would likely come from Chinese-militarized features in the Spratlys: Fiery Cross, Mischief, and Subi Reefs. The proximity of Chinese bases to their intended targets challenges the ability of the Philippines to respond quickly and for the United States to assist. Strategic implications regarding the deterrent capability of U.S. forces stationed in the Philippines and their corresponding effect on escalation in the event that deterrence fails are examined. Doing so offers insights into the ideal U.S. force posture that effectively defends the Philippines against a

Chinese maritime invasion, and the investments that Manila should prioritize to better defend itself.

The relationship today

The Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America (MDT), signed in Manila six years after the end of Japanese occupation, commits both parties to recognize an "armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties" as "dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes." It defines such an attack as "an armed attack on the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific."¹ Pre-dating the MDT was the Military Bases Agreement of 1947.

"... U.S. War Department strategists advocated an open-ended presence in the Philippines..."

Even as World War II drew to a close, U.S. War Department strategists advocated an open-ended presence in the Philippines, as bases there could be used "not merely as outposts, but as springboards from which the United States armed forces may be projected" into Asia.² The eventual basing arrangement gave the United States "rights, power, and authority" over designated bases for 99 years.³ The Philippine bases proved vital to the United States in the postwar era. Clark Air Base grew to be the single largest U.S. military installation outside the continental United States, with an estimated 60,000 Americans living in the area by the 1970s. Naval Base Subic Bay played an equivalently outsized role as the forward headquarters for Seventh Fleet following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964. During the Vietnam War, Clark was a major logistics hub for transiting U.S. forces and those in-theater—however, it was not used for combat missions due to a requirement for Philippine approval of such operations.⁴ If anyone doubted the importance of Philippine bases to U.S. interests, it was made apparent by Washington's support for Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship even after his 1972 declaration of martial law.⁵

By 1991, Thirteenth Air Force at Clark was responsible for Air Force units in both the Philippines and Guam and the general region of Southeast Asia as far south as Singapore. The 3rd Tactical Wing at Clark with a squadron each of F-4E Phantom IIs and F-4G Wild Weasels, along with the 353rd Special Operations Wing and its MC-130E Combat Talons, constituted the permanently based air units in the Philippines.⁶ C-130s of the 374th Tactical

1. "Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines; August 30, 1951." *American Foreign Policy 1950-1955 Basic Documents Volumes I and II*. Department of State Publication 6446. General Foreign Policy Series 117. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957.

https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/phil001.asp.

2. "Negotiations for the Retention of American Bases in the Philippines after Independence." Annex A to Appendix A: "Special Instructions Regarding Selection of U.S. Military Bases in the Philippines." JCS 1027/5. 20 September 1945. Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Record Group 218. Washington, DC: National Archives. File: CCS 686.9 Philippine Islands, (11-7-43) sec. 1. As quoted in Shalom, Stephen R. "Bases by Another Name: U.S. Military Access in the Philippines." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29.4 (1997).

<https://www.wpunj.edu/dotAsset/209684.pdf>. p. 78.

3. *Agreement Concerning Military Bases*. Signed at Manila, March 14 1947 by Ambassador McNutt and President Roxas. Department of State Treaties

and Other International Acts Series.No. 1775, or 61 Stat. (pt. 4) 4019.

<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2158&context=ils>. pp. 162, 179.

4. "Clark Base Once Vital to Military." *New York Times*. 16 July 1991. P. A6. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/16/world/clark-base-once-vital-to-military.html>. Oberdorfer, Don. "Accord Reached On 2 U.S. Bases, Aid to Philippines." *Washington Post*. 1 January 1979. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1979/01/01/accord-reached-on-2-us-bases-aid-to-philippines/3ca96ef1-c6b4-444b-9b35-0d42a5d77994/>.

5. Shalom. "Bases by Another Name." p. 78.

6. Anderegg, C. R. *The Ash Warriors*. Hickam AFB, HI: Office of Pacific Air Forces History, 2000. pp. 5-6, <https://media.defense.gov/2010/May/25/2001330270/-1/-1/0/AFD-100525-075.pdf>.

Aircraft Wing provided airlift capabilities across the Western Pacific. Subic Bay was homeport to only a single cruiser and submarine but had an incomparable logistics and support role as the largest supply depot outside of the United States.⁷ Its “ship repair facility handled 60% of the Seventh Fleet’s repairs; the naval magazine held 40,000 tons of ordnance...and the training facility could accommodate live-fire naval gunfire, close air support, and jungle training available nowhere else in the Western Pacific. Without Subic, naval vessels operating in distant waters would have to steam almost 2,000 miles [1,730 nm] or more to reach the ship repair, supply, ammunition, and training facilities at Yokosuka and Sasebo in Japan or Guam in the Marianas.”⁸

But in 1991, negotiations between the Corazon Aquino government and U.S. diplomats over a continued lease on Clark stalled over questions of remuneration. The F-4s were completely withdrawn by early June, and then, as if to seal the deal, Mount Pinatubo began to show signs of imminent eruption. Remaining Air Force personnel—already planning to abandon Clark—hastened their evacuation, handing over what was left to the Philippine government.⁹ The Navy quickly repaired the damage to Subic and Cubi Point and intended to continue its presence there. But after the last extension of the Military Bases Agreement expired in 1991, the Philippine Senate voted against renewing it, and U.S. forces were withdrawn.¹⁰ The Navy spent much of 1992 moving its supply depots and other resources to various bases in the region before the last aviators and sailors departed Cubi and Subic on November 24, 1992.¹¹

As a concession to the alliance, the Philippines signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States in 1999, exempting visiting U.S. military personnel from the Philippine judicial system. With the VFA in hand, the United States and the Philippines resumed the annual exercise series called *Balikatan* in 2002, which was the actual operation undertaken by a small U.S. contingent deployed to the Philippines under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P). This deployment involved about 600 special forces personnel from Pacific Special Operations Command training Filipino counterparts and supporting counterterrorism operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group and other nonstate actors primarily in the southern islands of the Philippine archipelago.¹² Notably, U.S. forces assigned to OEF-P did not engage in combat operations but otherwise began establishing new post-Cold War ties with the Philippine defense establishment—ties that have helped anchor the relationship even when those at the executive level have been strained. The deployment officially ended in 2014.

Balikatan and other exercises are generally focused on less intensive operations, officially described as “humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, counterterrorism, and other combined military operations,” and have been the primary conduit for direct security cooperation in the 21st century.¹³ Some iterations have included combat training, as in 2019, which featured a combined live-fire exercise and the “orchestration of combined and joint ground and air elements to seize an objective,” including participation from a U.S. Stryker Brigade Combat Team.¹⁴ The most recent iteration, held in April 2021, focused on close air support, combined staff coordination, and humanitarian and civic assistance.¹⁵

Beyond that limited rotational deployment of special forces, U.S. presence in the Philippines has been limited to port calls and annual exercises and training missions. Thus, U.S. forces in the immediate vicinity in case of a contingency or crisis would be limited to whatever might be present for an exercise or training program—and only once has the latter consisted of USAF or USN fighter aircraft. Under EDCA, the United States has permission to preposition materiel and equipment at five locations across the Philippines (Bautista, Basa, Lumbia, and Ebuena Air Bases, as well as Fort Magsaysay), but cannot establish any permanent bases.¹⁶ As relations between China and its rival South China Sea claimants continue to sour, it is worth considering how inadequate that presence might be.

Threats to U.S. and Philippine interests

While President Rodrigo Duterte has been wary of his country’s association with the United States, his early skepticism has been tempered by increasing Chinese provocation and encroachment on Philippine sovereignty. Clashes between rival fishing fleets (often involving the People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia) have periodically threatened to spiral out of control. 2012 saw one of the tensest standoffs to date, after an attempt by Philippine armed forces to arrest illegal Chinese fishermen near Scarborough Shoal was blocked by Chinese surveillance vessels. Subsequently, Philippine forces (and fishing vessels) withdrew, only to see China further solidify its presence and bar Filipino ships from the area.¹⁷ Similarly, in 2014, Chinese ships attempted to prevent the resupply of the Philippine forces stationed at Second Thomas Shoal. After a supply airdrop, lighter-draft Philippine vessels were able to run the Chinese blockade and provide supplies from sea; for a time, supplies were airdropped on a monthly basis. In recent months (as of January 2022), China made further provocations, once again blocking the resupply of the Second Thomas Shoal from sea.¹⁸

7. Corning, Gregory P. “The Philippine Bases and U.S. Pacific Strategy.” *Pacific Affairs* 63.1 (Spring 1990). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2759811>. p. 11.

8. Marolda, Edward J. *Ready Seapower: A History of the U.S. Seventh Fleet*. Washington: Naval Heritage & History Command, 2012. <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/publications-by-subject/ready-seapower.html>. p. 111.

9. Anderegg, *The Ash Warriors*. pp. 7-8, 24-27.

10. Shenon, Philip. “Philippine Senate Votes to Reject U.S. Base Renewal.” *New York Times*. 16 September 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/16/world/philippine-senate-votes-to-reject-us-base-renewal.html>.

11. Marolda. *Ready Seapower*. p. 112.

12. Robinson, Linda. “The SOF Experience in the Philippines and the Implications for Future Defense Strategy.” *PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations* 6.3. National Defense University Press: 7 December 2016. <https://cco.ndu.edu/News/Article/1020239/the-sof-experience-in-the-philippines-and-the-implications-for-future-defense-s/>.

13. U.S. Marine Forces Pacific (MARFORPAC). “Balikatan 2017.” 5 May 2017. <https://www.marforpac.marines.mil/exercises/balikatan.aspx>.

14. Sharpe, Tori. “PH-U.S. Exercise Balikatan Increases Warfighting Capabilities, Complex Live Fire Training.” U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. 10 April 2019. <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1811310/ph-us-exercise-balikatan-increases-warfighting-capabilities-complex-live-fire-t/>.

15. U.S. Embassy Manila. “U.S. and Philippine Forces Conclude 36th Balikatan Exercise.” *U.S. Embassy in the Philippines News & Events*. 23 April 2021. <https://ph.usembassy.gov/us-and-philippine-forces-conclude-36th-balikatan-exercise/>.

16. Hammond, Joseph. “Philippine, U.S. Forces improve defense cooperation.” *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum*. 9 November 2021. <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2021/11/philippine-u-s-forces-improve-defense-cooperation/>.

17. Aglibot, Joanna Rose. “‘Worse than invasion’: China ships poach 240,000 kg of fish daily in PH seas, says group.” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. 15 April 2021. <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/195237/worse-than-invasion-china-ships-poach-240000-kg-of-fish-daily-in-ph-seas-says-group>.

18. Gomez, Jim. “China coast guard uses water cannon against Philippine boats.” *Associated Press*. 18 November 2021.

The likeliest flashpoint for a China-Philippines conflict involve major Philippine holdings in the South China Sea—particularly Scarborough Shoal, Thitu, or Second Thomas Shoal, where the Philippines maintains a small military presence on the BRP *Sierra Madre*, a World War II-vintage transport ship intentionally run aground in 1999 as a means of countering the Chinese reclamation of Mischief Reef.¹⁹ Unlike China's fortified Spratly outposts, the Philippines has only a limited presence—of the most off-discussed features, Scarborough Shoal is wholly uninhabited, Thitu has fewer than 200 Filipinos living there (including civilians), and Second Thomas Shoal hosts only *Sierra Madre* and a dozen Philippine Marines. A further seven features have at least a rotational Philippine presence, but little in the way of permanent facilities or defensive capabilities.

“... the United States would only be legally obliged to respond under the MDT if an attack involved Philippine personnel, vessels, or aircraft...”

Military conflict between China and the Philippines is far from impossible. Any such attack would almost certainly precipitate U.S. intervention on Manila's behalf (if indeed not be predicated on it). However, the United States would only be legally obliged to respond under the MDT if an attack involved Philippine personnel, vessels, or aircraft—the mere seizure of an uninhabited reef or island feature would not invoke treaty obligations.²⁰ The scenario presented in this study is drawn primarily from J. Michael Dahm's recent research for the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, a 2015 RAND Corporation report for the U.S. Air Force on the U.S.-China military balance in a 2017 Spratly Islands scenario, and a 2017 RAND study sponsored by the U.S. Army's Quadrennial Defense Review office.²¹ The RAND study for the Army examines a similar 'road to war' in both 2015 and 2025; this paper will primarily utilize the latter.

Philippine capabilities

The Philippine Air Force (PAF) is presently organized for littoral maritime patrol and primarily for low-intensity operations and cannot mount an effective air defense against a modern adversary. This will remain the

case even with planned reforms and acquisitions in the *Flight Plan 2028* strategic guidance released under the Benigno Aquino administration in 2013. This analysis also presumes that platform acquisitions across the major combatants generally remain unchanged from today's long-term plans—there are no 'magic bullets' to be found here.

Most Philippine combat aircraft are dedicated to counterinsurgency (COIN) operations and close air support. A squadron of 12 South Korean-made FA-50PH light fighters form the primary jet capability of the PAF, though they have primarily been employed alongside A-29B Super Tucano and aging OV-10 Bronco turboprop aircraft in a ground attack role. While these aircraft are also intended for maritime patrol use, they are mostly limited to smaller, slower-moving targets in Philippine littoral waters. The potential future acquisition of F-16Cs, however, would give Manila its first credible fighter aircraft since retiring its F-5s in 2005. In June 2021, a deal was approved by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) that would send a dozen F-16 fighters to the PAF in the coming years, with an estimated cost of \$2.43 billion.²² The next day, though, the Philippine defense secretary described the deal as "too expensive" and said that the PAF would begin looking into other options, such as the Saab Gripen.²³ Nevertheless, this paper will assume that the deal has been successfully concluded and that during this scenario, the Philippines is in possession of 10 F-16C and two F-16D Block 70/72 fighters. Preliminary Philippine air responses are limited to air units operating from Basa Air Base near Manila (12 F-16s) and Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan (12 FA-50s).

Dedicated Philippine air defense platforms are rudimentary but slowly improving. Acquisition of three Israeli-built ELM-2288 air surveillance radars provides Manila fairly good coverage of the South China and Sulu Seas. Japan's Mitsubishi has been contracted to provide a further three fixed radar installations (with a detection range of more than 250 nm) in the next few years.²⁴ In late 2021, the first of three Israeli Rafael SPYDER surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries entered service, according to open-source reporting.²⁵ The SPYDER-ER variant has a missile range of only 21 nm, though its multimode radar unit can detect targets out to 255 nm.²⁶ Manila has yet to acquire long-range patrol or airborne early warning aircraft,²⁷ and most other *Flight Plan 2028* acquisition programs have yet to bear fruit and have been routinely pushed to subsequent five-year "Horizon plans."²⁸

<https://apnews.com/article/china-united-states-philippines-manila-south-china-sea-9fe8af0a7ae2386e058e99a7c5c33243>.

19. Himmelman, Jeff. "A Game of Shark and Minnow." *New York Times Magazine*. 27 October 2013.

<https://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/10/27/south-china-sea/index.html>.

20. Rosen, Mark E. *Philippine Claims in the South China Sea: A Legal Analysis*. Occasional Paper, CNA: August 2014.

https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf. p. i.

21. Dahm, J. Michael. "Offensive and Defensive Strike." *South China Sea Military Capabilities Series: A Survey of Technologies and Capabilities on China's Military Outposts in the South China Sea*. Laurel, MD: Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, March 2021.

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1128637.pdf>. pp. 38-5. Heginbotham, Eric, et al. *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html. p. 64-65. Long, Duncan, Terrence K. Kelly, and David C. Gompert, eds. *Smarter Power, Stronger Partners, Vol. II: Trends in Force Projection Against Potential Adversaries*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017.

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1359z1.html. pp. 106-131.

22. Defense Security Cooperation Agency. "The Philippines – F-16 Block 70/72 Aircraft." Transmittal No. 21-14. 24 June 2021.

<https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/philippines-f-16-block-7072-aircraft>.

23. Donald, David. "Green Light for 'Too Expensive' Philippines' F-16 Purchase." *AInOnline*. 28 June 2021. <https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/defense/2021-06-28/green-light-too-expensive-philippines-f-16-purchase>.

24. Roblin, Sebastien. "Japan Strikes First Arms Export Deal – Can Tokyo Find More Buyers for Its Pricy Weapons?" *Forbes*. 11 September 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sebastienroblin/2020/09/11/japan-strikes-first-arms-export-deal-can-tokyo-find-more-buyers-for-its-pricy-weapons/>.

25. Montero, Max. "Ground-Based Air Defense System (GBADS) Acquisition Project of the Philippine Air Force." *PH Defense Resource*. Update from 16 October 2021.

<https://www.phdefresource.com/2020/03/ground-based-air-defense-system-gbads.html>.

26. "Spyder Family of SAM Systems." *Jane's Land Warfare Platforms: Artillery & Air Defense*. 23 October 2021.

<https://customer.janes.com/Janes/Display/JLAD0700-JAAD>.

27. "Philippines – Navy." *Jane's World Navies*. 1 November 2021.

<https://customer.janes.com/Janes/Display/JWNA0122-JWNA>.

28. Max Montero, "MaxDefense PH's Year-ender for 2020 – A Summary of Project Updates on the Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Program," *MaxDefense Philippines*, 31 December 2020,

Philippine antiship capabilities will soon be greatly upgraded with the acquisition of three batteries of shore-based BrahMos coastal defense cruise missiles (CDCMs) for the Philippine Marine Corps after signing a contract in December 2021. The BrahMos's range of more than 150 nautical miles allows the Philippine Marine Corps to cover much of the Spratlys from Palawan, holding potential surface threats at risk.²⁹ The navy's two new Jose Rizal-class frigates only have short-range SAM systems with a range of less than four nm.³⁰ By March of 2022, the frigates will receive vertical launch system tubes and anti-ship missiles, giving the Philippine Navy a surface-to-surface capability of up to 81 nm.

More broadly, the extent of U.S.-Philippine cooperation—including joint exercises and security assistance—will affect the overall fighting ability of the Philippine armed forces and its interoperability with those of the United States. The approach taken here is that using access as a proxy can help illuminate possible U.S. contributions to the defense of the Philippines while setting aside other factors. The impact of access regimes will also help illustrate potential Philippine military capability shortfalls and the acquisitions that might bridge these gaps.

Access regimes

To investigate the United States' ability to support the Philippines' defense in the envisioned scenario, this paper examines the impact of three different access regimes. The primary difference between regimes is the scope of and speed with which U.S. combat power—particularly airpower—can be brought to bear against Chinese forces, as determined by basing and overflight permissions. These regimes are:

Over-the-horizon—This access regime considers access to the Philippines highly restricted. Any U.S. attempt to assist in Philippine air defense would have to come from its own Pacific bases or the U.S. mainland itself. Additionally, the Philippines might restrict foreign overflight—even that of its ally—to designated corridors under the UN Convention on the Law of Sea's provisions for archipelagic states.³¹

Ready access—This regime is most akin to today's posture. A rotational deployment of aircraft may or may not be present at Clark (indeed, the execution of a Chinese offensive might well be predicated on where U.S. forces are located at the time), while U.S. naval capabilities would be limited to the *possibility* of a port call underway. Additional airpower could arrive at the battlefield by overflying the Philippines from Guam, Palau, and possibly Japan. But longer-range strikes—save those from theater missile systems—could be difficult to execute in time to prevent a *fait accompli*.

Standing presence—The third access regime envisions U.S. forces in the Philippines at a level comparable to its Cold War posture. U.S. air and naval forces would be permanently (or at least if rotating, without coverage gaps) stationed at more bases than just those

permitted by the current VFA, including at Clark Air Base and Subic Bay. Air units would be based at Clark, Antonio Bautista, Cesar Basa, and Edwin Andrews Air Bases, while a small SAG might be homeported at or at least regularly forward-deployed to Subic Bay. Additionally, U.S. ground forces (either Marine Corps or Army) would have a unit of theater-range missiles based at Fort Magsaysay.

How these regimes might come to pass is a question of geopolitics and diverging national interests, but none are wholly inconceivable. Under a post-Duterte administration and with increasing Chinese assertiveness in Philippine maritime zones, Manila might well decide that any perceived political subordination to U.S. interests is outweighed by the sheer combat power a permanent presence might provide. Likewise, a Duterte successor might see any U.S. advantage as having peaked and instead seek an accommodation with Beijing at the cost of any U.S. force presence and/or training exercises. Recent hardening of regional and global attitudes toward Beijing—including in Manila—make this less likely, but hardly rule it out.³² Indeed, there may be less daylight between the potential 2022 Philippine presidential contenders than it once appeared.³³

“...Manila might well decide that any perceived political subordination to U.S. interests is outweighed by the sheer combat power a permanent presence might provide.”

The scenario

Strategic contours

It is difficult to contemplate a Chinese military operation against the Philippines without considering the broader strategic picture of deterrence and escalation. Any possible U.S. military presence in the Philippines will loom large in PLA planning, both in terms of whether to launch such an operation in the first place (deterrent value) and, if so, how widely to conduct kinetic strikes throughout the theater (escalation potential). As to the former, the deterrent value of any U.S. presence is vital and requires a thorough examination outside the scope of this paper. Therefore, the assumption is that deterrence, however effective, has failed, and Beijing has decided to launch a military attack. Chinese doctrine assumes greater risks at an operational level to achieve incremental strategic gains. It is very plausible that a relatively minor gain through decisive military action would be deemed worthwhile, even without achieving a 'game-changing' goal. As Sidharth Kaushal and Magdalena Markiewicz write, the concept of escalation control stemming from "active defense" means "a highly escalatory and risk-acceptant approach to both crisis and war initiation because of, rather than despite, China's risk-averse grand strategy" and

<http://maxdefense.blogspot.com/2020/12/maxdefense-phs-year-ender-for-2020.html>.

29. Tayfun Ozberk, "Philippine Navy Procures BrahMos anti-ship missile system," *Naval News*, 14 January 2022, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/01/philippine-navy-procures-brahmos-anti-ship-missile-system/>.

30. Jon Grevatt, "Philippines – Market Report," *Jane's Emerging Market Reports*, 20 October 2021, <https://customer.janes.com/Janes/Display/JIQ0147-JIQ>.

31. For more on overflight rights and archipelagic states, see this author. "Above or Beyond: Overflight Considerations for U.S. Military Aircraft."

Joint Force Quarterly 104 (Q1 2022). 29 December 2021.

<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2884381/above-or-beyond-overflight-considerations-for-us-military-aircraft/>.

32. Horton, Chris. "The World Is Fed Up with China's Belligerence." *The Atlantic*. 9 November 2021.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/11/china-taiwan-democracy/620647/>.

33. Arugay, Aries A. "The 2022 Philippine Elections: Like Father, like Daughter-te." *Fulcrum*. 17 November 2021. <https://fulcrum.sg/the-2022-philippine-elections-like-father-like-daughter-te/>.

“necessitates...a series of highly risk-acceptant decisions in individual crises and conflicts.”³⁴

For escalation potential, the calculus becomes more difficult. The access regimes characterized in the previous section impose a commensurate demand on China’s war planning: the more widely present—and committed—U.S. forces are, the wider the front would be on which China would likely find it necessary to engage them. Therefore, a more aggressive U.S. presence would carry with it an intrinsic risk of escalation across an even broader geography than that of just the Philippines. The closer the U.S.-Philippine defense relationship appears to be, the more Beijing would see justification for a wider set of strikes. With no U.S. forces in theater and an uncertain commitment to the alliance, for instance, initial Chinese strikes might be limited to anti-air attacks on Philippine aircraft already aloft and an air defense perimeter, eschewing any strikes against the main islands of the Philippine archipelago.

“The closer the U.S.-Philippine defense relationship appears to be, the more Beijing would see justification for a wider set of strikes.”

Conversely, should the alliance appear firm and U.S. forces present in large numbers across the archipelago, China might well attack those forces on the ground and U.S. bases, ships, logistics hubs, and other key locations across the Western Pacific (i.e., Guam and Japan). Therefore, to appropriately assess the implications of each access regime, one must consider the relative complications each would pose to a Chinese threat calculus. In this context, the first strike is of utmost importance—securing gains before an effective defense can be mounted. Kaushal and Markiewicz argue that, “the PLA does not need to destroy follow-on forces being redeployed to a local conflict but *hold them off* until a combination of mutual economic pain and international pressure coerces both parties to desist, leaving China with whatever gains it has secured at the outset of a conflict” [emphasis mine].³⁵

In other words, China would focus on the earliest stages of a military campaign, seeking to seize and consolidate its gains before the conflict grew into a protracted war. In 2015, a RAND study concluded that with anticipated future improvements in Chinese military capabilities, “PLA forces will become more capable of establishing temporary local air and naval superiority at the outset of a conflict. Perhaps even more worrisome,” they continue, “the ability to contest dominance might lead Chinese leaders to believe that they could deter U.S. intervention in a conflict between it and one or more of its neighbors. This, in turn, would undermine U.S. deterrence and could, in a crisis, tip the balance of debate in Beijing as to the advisability of using force.” Writing from the perspective of seven years later, such fears seem even more well-founded.³⁶

Operational contours

A crisis could arise from something similar to 2014: a Chinese blockade of a Philippine-held feature or

another encounter between Philippine and Chinese vessels that results in the deaths of sailors on one or both sides. Such a crisis might escalate when Chinese leadership decides the moment is opportune to force a final settlement of its claims and use the fatal incident as a *casus belli* by mounting an assault against contested Philippine-held islands and reefs in the South China Sea. In such a campaign, forces responding to the Chinese attack will be limited to those in close proximity, with mere hours to mount an effective defense and/or counter-attack.³⁷

The Philippines currently occupies nine features in the South China Sea; only one is large enough to hold an airstrip (Thitu Island, with a 3,000-foot runway).³⁸ A Chinese offensive against Philippine-held land features would likely involve a simultaneous landing against all nine features. Chinese forces would execute simultaneous sea-based amphibious landings, facing little to no resistance at West York, Flat, Nanshan, Loaita; Northeast and Loaita Cays, and Commodore Reef. The exceptions

might be Second Thomas Shoal, where Philippine marines put up a surprisingly stout resistance from the *Sierra Madre*, and Thitu, where China might attempt a joint amphibious-airborne assault staged directly from Subi Reef.

Further assumptions must also be made. In addition to the postulated future Philippine military capabilities, it is assumed that Manila has not taken steps to dredge or fortify its South China Sea holdings; for instance, Thitu remains an unpaved airstrip even under “standing presence” conditions. Japan and Singapore will not allow the United States to launch combat missions from their airfields, but they will allow tanker, medical airlift, and other support missions. South Korea will not permit any mission to be flown from its territory but will allow U.S. aircraft and personnel to be redeployed to other more amenable basing locations. Taiwan will not support the United States in any material way but will eagerly participate in search and rescue and other humanitarian assistance missions. Australia will allow for combat basing, but given the rapid unfolding of any South China Sea scenario, U.S. combat power at Darwin or RAAF Scherger is likely too far away to intervene in a timely manner.

These assumptions are themselves contingent on the parameters of Chinese offensive strikes and are likely to diverge rapidly as events unfold. Wide-ranging attacks on U.S. installations across the Western Pacific are more likely to draw in additional combatants and/or change their willingness to support—or contribute to—U.S.-led operations against Chinese targets. Some conjectures about specific developments are made in the respective access regime analyses; however, the preceding assumptions serve as a baseline.

U.S. operations from over the horizon

In the low access scenario, U.S. security cooperation with Manila has waned to a level not seen since

34. Kaushal, Sidharth, and Magdalena Markiewicz. “Crossing the River by Feeling the Stones: The Trajectory of China’s Maritime Transformation.” Occasional Paper, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), October 2019. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/crossing-river-feeling-stones-trajectory-chinas-maritime-transformation>. p. 13.

35. Kaushal and Markiewicz, “Crossing the River by Feeling the Stones.” p. 15.

36. Heginbotham et al. *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*. p. xxxi.

37. Dahm. “Offensive and Defensive Strike.” p. 39.

38. Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. “Philippines Island Tracker.” Center for Strategic and International Studies. 2021. <https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/philippines/>.

the early 1990s. No U.S. military forces are routinely or even regularly present in country, with Washington treating the Philippines as something close to an extension of Beijing's 'First Island Chain.' Nevertheless, the Mutual Defense Treaty remains in force, and thus U.S. contingency planning has begun to revolve around concepts for defending an uneasy ally. Most planning involves long-range strikes originating from Guam, Palau, and Australia, with any prompt response limited mostly to slow-moving bomber aircraft and land-based theater missile systems. U.S. Army units based on Guam and equipped with the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW), with its range of at least 1,500 nautical miles, form a significant part of these operational designs.³⁹ Given what Beijing perceives as a questionable commitment from Washington to Manila, strikes against Guam and Palau do not form a part of its operational planning. Indeed, Beijing likely sees no need to broaden its strike planning, as the United States has virtually no assets in the vicinity of the South China Sea that could prevent a *fait accompli*.

Guam lies 1,550 nautical miles from Palawan and more than 1,700 from Thitu, while Subi Reef is only 15 nm away from Thitu and Mischieff Reef about 20 from Second Thomas Shoal. Scarborough Shoal is roughly equidistant from Subi Reef and Woody Island in the Paracels, at 330 nm. Given the limitations of Philippines air defense radars and the negligible flight times between reefs, Manila receives no indication of a Chinese invasion until surface groups and landing ships depart for their targets. At most, this would offer 2-3 hours of warning time if detected immediately.⁴⁰ While U.S. space-based sensors pick up the ships, the absence of any formal intelligence-sharing arrangement with the Philippines means that no immediate response is mounted. Manila first realizes the unfolding assault in the last 10 minutes before helicopter-borne PLA forces arrive at Philippine-held land features.

By that point, it would take Philippine F-16s almost 20 minutes to arrive at Thitu from Basa, and then with only limited munitions and little time on station. Interdicting vessels and aircraft bound for Second Thomas Shoal would be marginally more feasible, but with HQ-9b SAMs providing the PLA with air defense coverage over Thitu and Second Thomas Shoal and the closest Philippine aircraft being FA-50s with no real anti-surface strike capability, surviving the flight there is a risky proposition. While a CDCM battery on Palawan is well within range of Second Thomas Shoal, with a flight time of only three or four minutes, the rudimentary nature of the Philippine intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance complex means that for target acquisition, the supersonic missiles still rely on GPS. PLAN shipborne GPS jamming leaves the missiles without targets beyond a few dozen nautical miles, well short of being able to home in on the landing ships approaching the shoal.⁴¹

After a series of increasingly heated calls between Washington and Manila, the United States begins assisting in defense of the Philippines. The distances, however, prove daunting. Both an air wing of a carrier group sailing south from the Philippine Sea and B-52s from Guam are hours away from the Spratlys. Even platforms like the LRHW have insufficient range to target anything in the South China Sea. Thus, in the first few hours of conflict, the

U.S. contribution to defending the Philippines is limited to space-based ISR that has not been jammed or blinded, as neither aircraft nor long-range missiles can reach the Spratlys in time.

With support from Japan and Singapore-based tankers, additional anti-air and strike power can be added by the carrier air wing within hours, but the logistics chain is strung out from Yokota and Changi, and both it and the carrier group itself are vulnerable to air and land-based strikes. It is likely that by the end of the first day's fighting, China would have firmly established a presence across the former Philippine-held islands and reefs, with U.S. forces still too far away to dislodge them, barring an overwhelming effort against well-defended Chinese positions. Flowing additional theater forces, like fighter aircraft from Guam, into Philippine bases would come too late to repel the initial assault. With insufficient Philippine combat power in the immediate area to mount an effective defense, China would be able to strike the first blow and seize the Philippine-held features without difficulty.

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In this case, despite a treaty alliance with the United States, the Philippines would suffer a blow to its security, standing, and prospects. To some extent, the initiative would then rest with Manila and Washington, but given the relative Chinese restraint in limiting its initial strikes, both would be constrained in their military options, both from an operational and an escalatory perspective. Without the ability to prevent a *fait accompli*, it would take a lengthy, concerted campaign of diplomatic lobbying and military action to roll back Beijing's gains — China in 2035 is very far indeed from the Iraq of 1991.

U.S. operations with ready access

In the 'baseline' medium-access scenario, the United States has a handful of rotational combat unit deployments at several bases throughout the Philippines and makes regular port calls at Subic Bay. China would likely avoid its invasion until U.S. forces are at a nadir. Therefore, the assumed presence under these conditions is one USAF squadron of F-16 fighters at Basa Air Base on Luzon and a small contingent of P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft operating from Antonio Bautista Air Base on Palawan. The Philippines have also based their F-16s at Bautista.

A U.S. P-8 is conducting a routine overflight within Philippine waters when they detect the signatures of multiple PLAN amphibious and surface groups steaming from Subi and Mischieff Reefs. Contact with the plane is lost moments later. Almost simultaneously, GPS across the theater goes dark, and early warning detection alarms sound in the Pentagon and at Indo-Pacific Command headquarters. Fourteen minutes later, several

39. Freedburg, Jr., Sydney J. "Army Discloses Hypersonic LRHW Range Of 1,725 Miles; Watch Out China." *Breaking Defense*. 12 May 2021. <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/05/army-discloses-hypersonic-lrhw-range-of-1725-miles-watch-out-china/>.

40. Dahm. "Offensive and Defensive Strike." p. 40.

41. Ho, Ben. "Can the Philippines' BrahMos Missiles Really Deter China?" *The Diplomat*. 27 January 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/can-the-philippines-brahmos-missiles-really-deter-china/>.

salvos of ballistic missiles launched from the east coast of China reach their target: Guam.

Such an attack would carry a risk of escalation, but Beijing's calculus again leans towards the risk acceptant. And the risk seems worth it: the damage is significant. The 14 minutes of warning were enough to get many aircraft off the ground to disperse to more austere bases (like Iwo Jima). Despite some limited success in intercepting Chinese ballistic missiles, the strike has done significant damage to the runways, fuel infrastructure, and parking areas at Andersen Air Force Base, closing it to large aircraft for at least a week.⁴² Beijing has withheld from striking Japanese territory, including Okinawa, in the hopes of avoiding Japanese involvement in the conflict.

A handful of Philippine and U.S. F-16s are scrambled and begin combat air patrols over the Luzon and Palawan coasts. Their sorties come just before bases across the Philippines are struck by additional air-launched ballistic and cruise missiles. These strikes do even more damage to Clark, Bautista, and Basa than was done to Andersen—fewer than 100 IRBMs are sufficient to knock out Bautista for 11 days.⁴³ Airpower in the immediate vicinity of the Spratlys is virtually wiped out except for those fighters already aloft.

U.S.-Philippine CAPs can destroy a handful of PLAAF aircraft from beyond visual range while losing several of their own, almost entirely to Chinese SAMs. The landings are virtually uncontested, however, with only a single landing ship sunk by a U.S. attack submarine. Without sufficient targeting capabilities, CDCM batteries fire blindly in the direction of Second Thomas Shoal and Thitu, with only a superficial hit on a PLAN destroyer to show for it.

“If the United States cannot dominate the airspace from the outset against all air threats, can it maintain the forces necessary to defeat the Chinese air threat through attrition within an operationally relevant time frame?”

China has been able to secure its initial objectives while suffering little in the way of losses and crippling the ability of the United States to operate forward. Though it will not be long before carrier and Japan-based airpower can enter the fray, actually retaking the features in the Spratlys will require sufficient amphibious capabilities and air cover, which in turn necessitates the suppression and destruction of Chinese air defenses. That campaign might also require strikes on mainland Chinese bases to succeed—and Washington may well decide that Thitu is not worth such an escalation, in what is still a *relatively* limited war. The question posed by RAND remains an open one: “If the United States cannot dominate the airspace from the outset against all air threats, can it maintain the forces necessary to defeat the Chinese air threat through attrition within an operationally relevant time frame?”⁴⁴

U.S. operations with a standing presence

In the high access scenario, the United States has several military units already present on Philippine territory. The U.S. Air Force has both F-16s and F-15 Strike Eagles at Basa, while Bautista hosts P-8s. A carrier strike group, homeported at Subic Bay, keeps its air wing at Cubi Point when not embarked. U.S. Marines also have a small presence on Palawan, equipped with rapidly deployable anti-ship high-mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) batteries and an expeditionary force of F-35Bs. The U.S. Army has its own surface-to-surface missile units at Fort Magsaysay on Luzon. Guam has been fortified for years, with B-2 bombers and shorter-range fighters. Close cooperation between the U.S. and Philippine militaries has ensured that the two share a common data link, allowing Philippine units to receive targeting data from U.S. platforms and vice versa.

Based on this correlation of forces, China strikes hard, fast, and across the theater. Cruise missiles from H-6 bombers and ballistic missiles from launchers on the Chinese mainland hit U.S. bases not just at Guam and the Philippines but also at Palau and Kadena Air Base on Okinawa. Some of the carrier's air wing manages to get aloft before the salvo hits. However, the carrier itself suffers significant damage to its flight deck and other vital components above the waterline. The key commonality across Chinese strikes is the impacts on flight operations—with virtually every major U.S. runway in the islands unusable, there is little that can be done from the air to counter the Chinese invasion.

However, the dispersed Marine Corps units offer a counterpunch of sorts. Austere-airfield and vertical takeoff (VTOL) F-35s, coupled with HIMARS batteries and operating from sites across Palawan, can render all of China's major Spratlys bases vulnerable.⁴⁵ With the ability to use U.S. targeting data, including its naval over-the-horizon radars—Philippine BrahMos missiles are also brought to bear on the PLAN. Despite China's overwhelming first strike, sufficient combat power can be cobbled together from these units to repel the invasion of Second Thomas Shoal and to credibly threaten China's hold not only on Thitu but on its own artificial islands.

While the Marines batter the landing forces, a few surviving U.S. and Philippine fighters maintain CAPs around Palawan and Luzon while the United States surges its carrier force forward. Sufficient numbers of U.S. fighters armed with air-to-ground missiles can threaten the progress of Chinese vessels, and enough have survived to challenge Chinese air cover in the area.

The Chinese assault is hardly a success. Though it manages to secure initial gains, tanker-supported fighters from Japan and Australia begin pounding the landing forces at Thitu and Second Thomas Shoal within hours. Some PLA forces manage to hold on, but an uncontested landing has failed. Aircraft and CDCMs delay the assaults long enough to make airpower from farther afield matter. Their support soon dwindles as bombers from Australia strike PLAN vessels from a distance and disable the PLA airfield at Fiery Cross. With China having committed to a wide-reaching theater war, even its temporary gains are insufficient to stave off a massive response from

42. Heginbotham et al. *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*. P. 64-65.

43. Heginbotham et al. *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*. P. 66.

44. Heginbotham et al. *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*. p 91.

45. Ong, Peter. “Black Sea Drill Again Validates HIMARS as an Anti-Ship Weapon System.” *Naval News*. 24 November 2020, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/11/black-sea-drill-again-validates-himars-as-an-anti-ship-weapon-system/>.

conventional U.S. forces, which are soon likely to strike air and naval facilities on Hainan. The 'limited war' is no more—but how far will it go?

Conclusion

While the preceding analyses are simplistic sketches of how a conflict might unfold, a few conclusions stand out. Some might have seemed counterintuitive at the outset of this paper, but this capability- and geography-based assessment should establish that the most useful force posture is neither the closest nor the largest.

1. *Escalation depends on the extent of initial Chinese strikes*

Almost more a truism than a conclusion, the United States is unlikely to risk escalation beyond what is demonstrated by the first Chinese theater strikes. This is particular to the Spratlys (as opposed to, for example, Taiwan), which are materially and strategically unimportant to U.S. interests. It means that the United States will likely not widen its own targeting to the mainland or even Chinese bases unless it perceives China as attacking across such a wide front as to have no choice but to respond in kind. Likewise, though the South China Sea is of significantly more interest to Beijing than Washington, and even with a higher level of risk acceptance, China would likely try to avoid widening a war unless it felt confident of quick success. In that sense, the broader regional U.S. force posture contributes to deterrence rather than simply posing a risk of escalation.

2. *Some forward presence matters more than others*

The greater the concentration of forces at a given base, the more attractive it becomes as a target, especially preemptively. Relatively small units dispersed across a wide operating area appear more survivable and more capable of engaging in an immediate response scenario. Large numbers of highly capable U.S. forces present a different threat profile than relatively less-capable Philippine ones, requiring additional strikes by China to achieve success.

3. *Timing is everything*

The inverse of the previous conclusion: Chinese strategic thought emphasizes the necessity of a swift victory and avoiding a protracted conflict. If Beijing is able to secure its goals within a matter of hours or a single day, it is much less likely to be dislodged. Likewise, the immediate allied response is the most important one, as additional airpower from farther away might well be too late to prevent a *fait accompli*. This also suggests fortifying Thitu to the same extent as Fiery Cross or other reinforced Chinese-held land features—though doing so might invite direct strikes in anticipation of an invasion; it might equally serve as a deterrent to such an invasion in the first place.

4. *The most effective U.S. force posture is one known of but obscured*

If close airpower and large combat formations are counterproductive, then what *should* be forward deployed? If the U.S. military based significantly more forces in the Philippines, they would be effective in a conflict only if they were not eminently preemptable. Any forward-deployed

U.S. forces should preferably be located outside of established basing areas to avoid making an obvious target even more so. Dispersed, land-based, anti-ship missiles and a robust air defense envelope are probably the most efficient (and cost-effective) means of securing a long-time ally, especially if China is aware that they are present but not precisely where they are located. Homeporting a small surface group with anti-air, antiship, and missile defense capabilities at Subic Bay would also be a powerful addition with the ability to defend itself against an incoming strike.

5. *The most effective Philippine improvements are enablers*

The Philippines is developing a modern integrated air defense system. But, to unlock the full capabilities of its new systems, it will need to patch the seams—over-the-horizon detection and tracking, third-party targeting, airborne ISR and command and control, etc. Some of these are promising avenues for an enhanced U.S. presence; others should be given higher priority in the PAF's acquisition strategy. Ensuring compatible data links across the two militaries should be at the forefront of future defense cooperation.

6. *Guam is of limited utility in a time-sensitive scenario*

While it may be the jewel of U.S. holdings in the Western Pacific, Guam is more useful as a potential logistics node than a combat base. It is well within range of Chinese offensive platforms and is far enough away from the most likely combat areas that it would be most useful in a protracted conflict in which it remains immune to a disabling strike. For an immediate response, it offers little more than a staging area—hardly useless, but not of critical importance in the early hours of a U.S./Philippine-China conflict. However, if the fighting continued and escalated to a theater-wide campaign, its importance—along with Australian and Japanese bases—would only grow. On the other hand, if Beijing saw such a protracted conflict as likely, it would likely widen its strikes to encompass these bases—or avoid initiating it entirely.

In terms of the 'ideal' U.S. force posture for defending the Philippines, it is clear that bigger is not necessarily better. An aggressive presence is as likely to engender a widening of a potential conflict as it is to deter it, without significantly improving capabilities. The tyranny of distance works both ways for a Spratlys scenario: too close to survive, yet too far to respond in adequate time. The most useful additional forces are likely those of the U.S. Marine Corps, under their 'distributed operations' concept, with an ability to disperse and provide survivable strike capabilities in the event the worst comes to pass.

While this paper has focused on the U.S. contribution to the defense of the Philippines, it is clear that Manila could also do more to defend itself. A few targeted areas of improvement would have an outsized impact on Manila's defense capabilities. Reinforcing Thitu, establishing a large and modern air defense capability, and investing further in anti-ship weaponry would go a long way toward redefining the Philippines as not a paper tiger but as another Pacific hedgehog—both willing and able to defend its interests and its territory without militarizing its entire economy.

4

Coast guard engagement as an interim alternative to bilateral maritime cooperation

Jay Tristan Tarriela

Abstract

The U.S.-Philippine alliance has been under strain in the past several years due to domestic political challenges, notwithstanding Manila's worsening external security environment. To cope, Washington needs an interim approach to continue its maritime security cooperation with Manila, one that would not be perceived as simply a repackaged strategy to curtail Beijing's aggressive behavior. This paper looks into the United States Coast Guard's (USCG) recent involvement in promoting maritime security in the Philippines and the broader Southeast Asia. It poses the question: Why is coast guard cooperation between the United States and the Philippines serving as an interim approach to sustain maritime security cooperation? This paper contends three reasons why the USCG-Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) engagement is a step in the right direction that could, in the long term, advance a more rules-based and stable regional maritime environment. First, security cooperation through coast guard engagements avoids political intrigues and is welcomed by regional countries. As a regional norm, coast guard cooperation supports the non-militarization of maritime disputes and is not viewed as an escalation of tensions. Second, coast guard organizations have multifaceted functions that play numerous roles and are not solely focused on patrolling contested waters. For instance, coast guards have responsibilities that help maintain maritime order and protect global trade. Lastly, the use of the coast guard is a non-partisan issue regardless of the inclination of the government in power. The paper concludes with policy recommendations that underscore how coast guard cooperation between the Philippines and the United States is a complement (vice substitute) to current and future military engagements advancing the alliance.

Introduction

Two months after becoming president, Rodrigo Duterte declared that the U.S.-Philippines military exercises would soon be halted, citing Beijing's objection to joint naval exercises between Manila and Washington.¹ Before the pandemic, Duterte also hinted that he would abrogate the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), a security pact facilitating joint military exercises between the United States and the Philippines.² These actions reflect Duterte's reluctance to engage in military cooperation with the United States to avoid provoking China.

countries.⁴ Duterte's foreign relations are affected by his rancor toward anyone criticizing his domestic policies. In 2016, Duterte mentioned that he was not breaking ties with the United States but simply broadening ties with others, especially China and Russia.⁵ In public appearances, while in Beijing, he openly stated that he was moving away from the United States and willing to get closer with China and Russia, claiming that he had realigned toward the ideological thinking of the two major powers.⁶ Nevertheless, most security scholars saw the approach as a means to gain China's support for his ambitious infrastructure projects – so much so that he refused to bring

“... PCG ships play an essential role in maintaining the Philippines' control of and presence in its claimed maritime zones.”

Despite his apparent lack of interest in asserting the Philippines' territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea (SCS), Duterte has supported capability development for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). At an event marking the 115th founding anniversary of the PCG in 2016, Duterte emphasized that the Philippines, with more than 7,000 islands, needs more PCG ships for maritime safety, search and rescue, marine environmental protection, and drug interdiction.³ While it sounds like Duterte looks at the coast guard as a tool of the state to deal with domestic concerns and not as an apparatus of maritime strategy, the fact remains that PCG ships play an essential role in maintaining the Philippines' control of and presence in its claimed maritime zones.

Domestic political challenges have strained the U.S.-Philippine alliance, while Manila's external security has worsened. However, the situation also provides an opportunity for Washington to innovate in maintaining maritime cooperation with the Philippines through coast guard engagements. Conversely, the Philippine government should not perceive this alternative as a repackaged strategy to curtail China; instead, it should be acknowledged as an effort to maintain maritime order.

This paper looks at the United States Coast Guard's (USCG) recent involvement in promoting maritime security in the Philippines and the broader Southeast Asia to determine if it has been effective. It poses the question: can coast guard cooperation between the United States and the Philippines serve as an interim approach to sustain maritime security cooperation between the two allies?

The Philippines' coast guard diplomacy

Although it was clear from the beginning that Duterte's foreign policy would depart from his predecessor's approach, criticisms regarding human rights violations precipitated his estrangement toward Western

up the 2016 arbitration award during the visit.⁷

Duterte's quest for an 'independent' foreign policy, being thin-skinned when criticized about his domestic policies, and the need for funds to support his infrastructure projects resulted in the prioritization of coast guard development. It should be emphasized that the idea of supporting PCG development did not originate from Duterte himself but was a continuation of previous presidents' policy that recognized PCG's relevance in the maritime sector and its eventual role in patrolling Philippine waters in the SCS. There were also officials within the PCG who determined Duterte's maritime policies and pushed for the continued modernization of the PCG and made the agency play a greater role in dealing with maritime disputes.

PCG development and capacity building during the Duterte administration is a counter-thesis to the claim that China paved the way for the development of coast guard capabilities in Southeast Asia. Indeed, some scholars argue that coast guard is being used by claimants to push back against Beijing's assertive behavior. But despite Duterte's accommodation of Beijing, he still supported the PCG's development.

There are four main reasons why Duterte supported the PCG: (1) alignment with Duterte's accommodation policy; (2) acquisition of PCG assets overseas can be easily supported through grants or loans; (3) PCG has more functions that address domestic concerns; (4) PCG's functions can generate cooperation in addressing non-traditional security threats.

First, the development and utilization of PCG are in line with Duterte's accommodation policy. Learning from the 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the Aquino began utilizing the coast guard as part of his white ship strategy in the SCS. Since China criticized the Philippines for militarizing the dispute in 2012 when the Philippine Navy (PN) ship attempted to arrest Chinese fishermen,

¹ Martin, Petty. "Duterte declares upcoming Philippines-U.S. War Games 'The Last One,'" *Reuters*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-duterte-idUSKCN11Y1ZI>. (Accessed December 10, 2021).

² Kurlantzick, Joshua. "Duterte Terminates the Visiting Forces Agreement ... or Does He?," *Council for Foreign Relations* (blog), 21 February 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/duterte-terminates-visiting-forces-agreement-or-does-he>. (Accessed December 13, 2021).

³ Duterte, Rodrigo R. "Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the 115th Philippine Coast Guard Anniversary" transcript of speech delivered at Philippine Coast Guard Headquarters, Port Area, Manila, October 12, 2016. <https://pcoo.gov.ph/oct-12-2016-speech-of-president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-during-the-115th-philippine-coast-guard-anniversary/>. (Accessed November 9, 2021).

⁴ Wong, Andrea C. "The Myth of Rodrigo Duterte's 'Independent' Foreign Policy," *The Interpreter*, August 13, 2020.

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/myth-rodrigo-duterte-s-independent-foreign-policy>. (Accessed December 16, 2021).

⁵ Reuters. "Philippines' Duterte wants to 'open alliances' with Russia, China," September 27, 2016.

<https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/27/philippines-duterte-wants-to-open-alliances-with-russia-china.html>. (Accessed November 18, 2021).

⁶ BBC News. "Duterte in China: Xi Lauds 'Milestone' Duterte Visit". October 20, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37700409>. (Accessed November 23, 2021).

⁷ International Arbitration- On 22 January 2013, "The Philippines Instituted Arbitral Proceedings against China in a Dispute concerning their Respective "Maritime Entitlements" and the Legality of Chinese Activities in the South China Sea. On 12 July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favor of the Philippines.

Aquino changed approach and relied on PCG vessels to maintain Filipino presence in the SCS. The Duterte administration continued the approach and utilized the PCG for maritime security and law enforcement without negatively affecting closer ties with Beijing.⁸ The Philippines also took advantage of the PCG to promote cooperation with the Chinese. This is further discussed in the next section.

Second, the Philippines, under Duterte, benefited from the overseas development assistance (ODA) loans initiated by the Aquino administration for the acquisition of 10 44-meter patrol boats from Japan⁹ and four fast boats and an offshore patrol vessel (OPV) from France.¹⁰ Developing PCG capabilities was much easier compared with modernizing the Philippine Navy. Since the PCG would not provoke or agitate China, and the acquisition of its assets could be funded by soft loans, Duterte pursued its development.

Duterte clearly stated, from the beginning of his presidency, that more white hulls were needed to address domestic issues and non-traditional security threats that impact the region. In 2016, he highlighted the challenges that come with Philippine geography and linked them with the need for more PCG vessels, notably for maritime safety, search and rescue, marine environmental protection, and drug interdiction.¹¹ The Duterte administration saw the coast guard as a tool of the state in dealing with domestic concerns and not as a component of a strategy promoting Philippine claims in the SCS. The Duterte administration wanted the PCG, with its practical functions, to address lingering domestic security concerns rather than concentrating its meager resources on patrolling the vast Philippine waters in the South China Sea.

Lastly, the Philippines, under Duterte, recognized the value of PCG in advancing regional security cooperation. This is not something new; Japan had been promoting 'coast guard diplomacy' in the region well before Duterte's presidency.¹² The Philippines' use of the PCG as a civilian maritime force with constabulary roles at sea fit the new approach of dealing with China and the United States and its allies. The PCG's unique identity – not a military force, but a law enforcer – allowed it to conduct patrols without provoking other claimants.

Manila has continuously recalibrated the use of the coast guard. However, in contrast to what some maritime security scholars argue, the aim is not for gray zone tactics. Instead, it hinges on the interest in reducing the risk of armed conflict. The Philippines has used the

PCG to consolidate support for cooperation in addressing non-traditional security threats inclusively. The objective is to address domestic issues, and for the Duterte administration, avoid getting dragged into 'great power rivalry.'

Coast guard cooperation as an interim approach for the United States

While the Philippines' rationale for promoting coast guard cooperation may be grounded on its unique domestic and geopolitical circumstances, it is worth examining why regional countries have become more interested in coast guard utilization and development in recent years.

Rise of the white hulls in Southeast Asia

As the Code of Conduct for the SCS remains elusive, peaceful settlement of disputes and self-restraint in the conduct of activities remained the foremost concerns among the countries in Southeast Asia.¹³ The 2002 Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in South China redefined regional norms in patrolling contested waters.¹⁴ However, the DOC has not been strictly observed by claimant states.

The 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off between the Philippine Navy and Chinese government ships is among the first cases in the region in which the use of warships for maritime law enforcement was interpreted as militarizing the dispute. While this notion was amplified by Chinese propaganda to defend encroachments into waters previously under Filipino control, it made Southeast Asian claimant states recognize the value of white ships for

“The Philippines’ use of the PCG as a civilian maritime force with constabulary roles at sea fit the new approach of dealing with China and the United States and its allies.”

patrolling their waters. Beijing openly condemned the utilization of Philippine Navy ships in arresting Chinese fishermen, viewing it as provocative and an escalation.¹⁵ Some in ASEAN perceived the Philippines to be partly responsible for instigating the crisis by using the navy for maritime law enforcement.¹⁶

After 2012, claimant states, mainly Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and even China, started capacity-building measures for their civilian maritime agencies. Further, Indonesia, which objects to China's nine-dash line, has also bolstered the capability of its *Bakamla*. In recent years, the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), Vietnam Coast Guard (VCG), and the

⁸ Interview with Admiral Joel S Garcia PCG at the National Headquarters Philippine Coast Guard last October 2019.

⁹ Japan International Cooperation Agency. "JICA Hands Over Last Two Multi-Role Response Vessels to PCG as Support to PH Maritime Security and Safety". August 23, 2008. <https://www.jica.go.jp/philippine/english/office/topics/news/180823.htm>. (Accessed 10 October 2022).

¹⁰ Rahmat, Ridzwan. "OCEA Hands Over 84 m OPV to the Philippine Coast Guard". Janes, December 20, 2019. <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/ocea-hands-over-84-m-opv-to-the-philippine-coast-guard>. (Accessed November 20, 2022).

¹¹ Duterte, Rodrigo. "Speech of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the 115th Philippine Coast Guard Anniversary" transcript of speech delivered at Philippine Coast Guard Headquarters, Port Area, Manila, October 12, 2016. <https://pcco.gov.ph/oct-12-2016-speech-of-president-rodrigo-roa-duterte-during-the-115th-philippine-coast-guard-anniversary/>. (accessed November 9, 2021).

¹² Tarruela, Jay T. "Japan: From Gunboat Diplomacy to Coast Guard Diplomacy". *The Diplomat*, May 11, 2018.

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/japan-from-gunboat-diplomacy-to-coast-guard-diplomacy>. (Accessed November, 2022).

¹³ Hoang, Viet. "The Code of Conduct for the South China Sea: A Long and Bumpy Road". *The Diplomat*, September 28, 2020.

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/the-code-of-conduct-for-the-south-china-sea-a-long-and-bumpy-road>. (Accessed November 20, 2022).

¹⁴ Kang, Felix. "Uncertain Prospects: South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiations". *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. October 6, 2020. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/10/uncertain-prospects-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-negotiations>. (Accessed November 20, 2020).

¹⁵ Glaser, Bonnie. "Trouble in the South China Sea". *Foreign Policy*, September 17, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/17/trouble-in-the-south-china-sea>. (Accessed November 25, 2022)

¹⁶ Ratner, Ely. "Learning the Lessons of Scarborough Reef", *The National Interest*, November 21, 2013. <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-the-lessons-scarborough-reef-9442>. (Accessed November 20, 2022).

PCG received substantial support for capability development from their respective governments.

In 2014, VCG's role peaked when China deployed a deep-water oil drilling rig, the *Hai Yang Shi You 981* (HYSY 981), in waters south of the Paracels that Vietnam claimed as part of its continental shelf.¹⁷ The deployment caused tension between the two countries. The oil rig was escorted by almost 100 Chinese government vessels. The VCG responded with white hull vessels, fishing vessels, and militia.¹⁸ Eventually, China was pressured to pull out from the area a month earlier than planned.¹⁹ With the VCG, the Vietnamese government succeeded in de-escalating the stand-off while displaying its resolve in settling disputes through peaceful and legal means.

The capability development of the MMEA was also partly triggered by various Chinese intrusions. With former Prime Minister Najib Razak's 'playing-it-safe' approach, MMEA's white hulls had been increasingly used to respond to intrusions by Chinese government ships, in part, to avoid upsetting Malaysia's biggest trading partner.²⁰ In June 2018, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad emphasized it would be dangerous if naval vessels – gray hulls – were continuously deployed in the SCS's contested waters. Mahathir argued that dangerous and miscalculated maneuvers by navy ships were more likely to trigger an armed conflict that could eventually lead to war.²¹ He recognized that contested maritime spaces are better left for law enforcement ships – white hulls.

"... contested maritime spaces are better left for law enforcement ships – white hulls."

The 2012 incident resulted in stronger support for the capability development of the coast guards in maritime Southeast Asia, notably from extra-regional states, such as Japan, the European Union, and the United States. The Japanese government was particularly interested. Since 2011, Tokyo has increasingly used Official Development Assistance (ODA) to help in improving and strengthening coast guard capacity in the region. Through ODA, Japan provided patrol ships that could support the littoral states' interest in maritime law enforcement and maritime security.²² Furthermore, Japan International Cooperation Agency's (JICA) capacity-building projects in Southeast Asia were expanded to go beyond merely providing hardware. It has sponsored yearlong training and educational activities to support the professional development of coast guard officers in the region.²³

Moreover, the 2012 stand-off accentuated the regional norm of minimizing naval patrols in high-tension areas. Claimant states' increasing preference for civilian agencies to deal with maritime issues results in greater

investments for the coast guard.²⁴ Support from Japan, the European Union, and the United States accelerated this trend.

Bilateral USCG-PCG engagement is a manifestation of the broadening scope of cooperation between Manila and Washington. So far, Beijing has not interpreted this cooperation as provocative. Hence, in the short term, USCG-PCG engagement can serve as an interim approach when domestic political differences may hamper the security engagement between the two countries. In the long term, even when navy-to-navy cooperation resumes, the coast guard engagements can serve as a complementary initiative.

More than just maritime security

Beyond advancing mutual interests in the SCS, coast guard cooperation is valuable in addressing non-traditional security threats, promoting rules-based governance, and ensuring Southeast Asia's waterways are safe and secure. Coast guard organizations have multifaceted maritime safety, marine environmental protection, and maritime law enforcement functions. Though white hulls are primarily seen as a tool of the state to assert maritime claims, coast guards are also in-charge of numerous national security and maritime priorities of governments in the region. They include addressing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, armed robbery at sea, drug trafficking, maritime terrorism, oil spill response, smuggling, ship collision, search and rescue, and responding to maritime disasters. These functions provide more avenues for regional cooperation.

The origins of the coast guard in Southeast Asia can be traced back to the United States' early engagements with the region. The United States first brought a maritime agency to East Asia, separate from the navy, in two instances: first to the Philippines after the Philippine-American War and second to Japan after World War II. These U.S.-established coast guard organizations were primarily focused on maritime safety, maritime law enforcement, and other constabulary roles to support economic recovery and development.²⁵

Japan relied on the coast guard to improve the safety of navigation in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS) since it was a major security concern in the 1960s. Likewise, the grounding of *Showa Maru* in the SOMS in 1975 and oil spill incidents in the different parts of the world led to the addition of marine environmental protection as another critical function of the coast guard. Piracy incidents and armed robbery at sea in the 1990s triggered a shift in JCG's focus to maritime law enforcement. The success of JCG in engaging Southeast Asian countries amplified the USCG template. As noted,

¹⁷ Poling, Gregory. "China-Vietnam Tensions High over Drilling Rig in Disputed Waters". *Center for Strategies and International Studies*, May 7, 2014. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-vietnam-tensions-high-over-drilling-rig-disputed-waters>. (Accessed November 25, 2022).

¹⁸ Rosenfeld, Everett. "What's Really Behind China's Clash with Vietnam". *Consumer News and Business Channel*, May 15, 2014.

<https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/15/south-china-sea-the-real-reason-behind-the-china-vietnam-conflict.html>. (Accessed November 25, 2022).

¹⁹ Yen, Trinh Hai, and Ton Nu Thanh Binh. "Current International Legal Issues: Vietnam." In *Asian Yearbook of International Law*, pp. 78-91. Brill Nijhoff, 2019.

²⁰ Parameswaran, Prashanth. "Malaysia's South China Sea Policy: Playing It Safe". *The Diplomat*, March 06, 2015.

<https://thediplomat.com/2015/03/malaysias-south-china-sea-policy-playing-it-safe>. (Accessed November 27, 2022).

²¹ Jaipragas, Bhavan. "Forget the Warships: Malaysian PM Mahathir's Peace Formula for the South China Sea". *South China Morning Post*, June 19, 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2151403/forget-warships-malaysian-pm-ma>. (Accessed November 27, 2022).

²² Tarriela, Jay T. "How Abe Remade the Japan Coast Guard". *The Diplomat*, January 24, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/how-abe-remade-the-japan-coast-guard>. (Accessed November 27, 2022).

²³ Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d., <https://www.jica.go.jp/english/countries/asia/index.html>. (Accessed November 27, 2022).

²⁴ Tarriela, Jay T. "Duterte's Coast Guard Diplomacy". *The Diplomat*, December 23, 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/dutertes-coast-guard-diplomacy>. (Accessed November 27, 2022).

²⁵ Tarriela, Jay T. "Rise of the White Hulls in Southeast Asia". *The National Interest*, August 19, 2018. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/rise-white-hulls-southeast-asia-29167>. (Accessed October 19, 2022).

Japan has extended substantial support to develop coast guard organizations in the region.²⁶

The Philippines, an archipelagic state of more than 7,000 islands, presents unique challenges to the coast guard. To fulfill its mandates in maintaining maritime safety, protecting the marine environment, and enforcing maritime laws, the PCG requires priority support for capability development.²⁷ While the PCG has recently focused on patrolling the Filipino waters in the SCS, day-to-day responsibilities demand more than that. The Japanese government's support was crucial for the PCG to fulfill its mandates. On maritime safety, JICA supported the construction of lighthouses and vessel traffic monitoring systems while also sending maritime safety experts to train PCG personnel. On marine environmental protection, the JCG, together with the Indonesian Coast Guard and the PCG, conducts *Maritime Pollution Training Exercises (MARPOLEX)* in Indonesian or Philippine waters every two years. On maritime law enforcement and maritime security, the Japanese government has supported training PCG personnel in counter-piracy operations and the acquisition of new vessels.

Since Duterte assumed office, the PCG has significantly increased maritime exercises with foreign coast guards. The *Southeast Asian Cooperation and Training (SEACAT)* exercise has been hosted annually by the PCG for four consecutive years before the pandemic. The weeklong activity brings together foreign maritime law enforcers and navy officials from seven nations across the region. Though the USCG spearheaded the exercise, the training is related to the capacity building of maritime agencies to better respond to non-traditional security threats, where all parties have a common interest, for instance, in addressing IUU fishing, smuggling, and drug trafficking.

In 2019, two USCG ships participated in two different maritime exercises with the Philippines. Intriguingly, Duterte did not criticize the last maritime exercise, which included participation by the USCG *Bertholf* in the vicinity of Scarborough Shoal.²⁸ In October 2019, the USCG *Stratton* took part in the Maritime Training Activity *Sama Sama* with the maritime forces of Japan, the United States, and the Philippines, held near Palawan. Another maritime drill was conducted between the USCG *Munro* and three PCG vessels in Subic Bay in 2021, which focused on disaster response, counter-terrorism, and maritime law enforcement.²⁹ Since the objective of the exercises was to develop the capability of the PCG in dealing with non-state actors, Duterte never criticized the presence and activities of the USCG cutters.

Since 2016, Washington has significantly increased the number of PCG personnel visiting the United States for training. Previously, only senior PCG officers attended training and seminars in the United States. Now, even lower-ranking technicians are sent to enhance practical skills. During the recent visit of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, he signed an agreement to bolster strong bilateral cooperation in the field of maritime and

aeronautical search and rescue.³⁰ Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin said the agreement could boost the Philippines' capability in conducting search and rescue and saving lives.³¹

Despite Duterte's effort to distance the Philippines from the United States, he has allowed U.S. engagement with the PCG – albeit with the understanding that capacity building is not exclusively focused on SCS-related issues. By using the PCG as a cushion, Duterte has sought to balance engagements with the United States and China.

Avoiding difficult political issues

White hulls utilization is primarily a non-partisan issue for countries in the region. This is apparent in how Duterte, Jokowi, Najib, Mahathir, and even the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam strengthen their respective Coast Guard organizations. The building of a Coast Guard fleet is not similar to a naval arms race. Its low-intensity firepower intended for maritime law enforcement cannot be construed as a defense posturing against state actors. Instead, maritime patrols that address non-traditional security threats benefit all countries in the region and the global economy. The success in suppressing piracy and armed robbery at sea, may it be in the Strait of Malacca or in Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, is one reason why extra-regional countries support related capacity building in Southeast Asia.

“...white hulls are critical in maintaining maritime order and contribute to economic development in the region.”

Furthermore, coast guard functions related to ensuring maritime safety through port state control inspections, navigational safety, and maritime search and rescue are hardly partisan issues and could avoid geopolitical sensitivities. The safety of life and property at sea is a common interest of all countries. The protection of the marine environment, such as responding better to oil spill incidents, is another reason why all states support coast guard development. From the early 1970s until now, tanker accidents have proved that oil pollution knows no borders. It is crucial to have the capability to combat oil spills to prevent them from reaching the shores of coastal states and disrupting international trade. Despite the recent focus on the coast guard's role in maritime disputes in the SCS, white hulls are critical in maintaining maritime order and contribute to economic development in the region.

Finally, coast guard vessels do not represent escalation and militarization of maritime disputes. Considering that China is the largest trading and economic partner of most littoral states in Southeast Asia, political leaders in the region are careful that their maritime strategies are not necessarily interpreted as defense posturing or militarily provocative. The use of white hulls strikes a reasonable balance between not antagonizing

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Republic Act 9993 'The Philippine Coast Guard Law of 2009.' n.d., http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/republic_acts/ra%209993.pdf.

²⁸ Learning English, "US Coast Guard Holds Exercise with Philippine Ship in South China Sea", May 20, 2019, <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/us-coast-guard-holds-exercise-with-philippine-ship-in-south-china-sea-/4925099.html>. (Accessed November 27, 2022)

²⁹ Sison, Bebot. "Philippines, US Coast Guards Launch Maritime Drills in Subic", *Philstar Global*, September 3, 2021,

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/09/03/2124517/philippines-us-coast-guards-launch-maritime-drills-subic>. (Accessed November 27, 2022).

³⁰ Philippine News Agency, "PH, US ink aeronautical, maritime search and rescue deal," August 1, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1148964>. (Accessed November 26, 2022).

³¹ Philippine News Agency, "PH, US Sign Agreement on Search and Rescue Ops", August 01, 2021, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/198197/ph-us-sign-agreement-on-search-and-rescue-ops>. (Accessed November 26, 2022).

Beijing and protecting the national interest. In the case of Malaysia, the MMEA ships constantly maintain their presence in Luconia Shoals.³² Vietnam has also been reliant on the VCG for patrolling its maritime entitlements.³³ In the case of Indonesia, the Natuna Island region is patrolled by *Bakamla* ships, not just by its navy.³⁴

China has also been tolerant of regional coast guards engaging in bilateral or multilateral training. This is in stark contrast to U.S.-initiated naval engagements and military exercises that constantly draw Beijing's disapproval. Countries that have engaged the USCG and JCG have never been "punished" by China or threatened with economic sanctions.

In the case of the Philippines, employing significant naval patrols in the SCS would negatively impact ties with Beijing. Since 2016, Manila has instead promoted functions of the PCG that could result in cooperation with the Chinese. When Duterte first visited China in 2016, one of the first memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that he signed with Xi Jinping was establishing a joint coast guard committee on maritime cooperation.³⁵ The Philippines wanted to institutionalize bilateral engagement to ensure that Manila's white hull deployment and coast guard cooperation would never be interpreted by Beijing as provocative. During the early years of Duterte's presidency, the Philippines wanted to maintain a good relationship with China to generate funding for infrastructure projects.³⁶ The Duterte administration relied on the white hulls to maintain presence in the SCS while cooperating with the Chinese Coast Guard.

Similarly, with other countries in the region, the Philippines has sought to balance its maritime strategy of engaging in maritime cooperation with other countries, including the United States, while not antagonizing Beijing. Manila maintained close cooperation with Japan and France and acquired new patrol ships without being criticized by China. The PCG also has increasingly active engagements with the USCG, including the maritime exercises, education and training, and support for maritime domain awareness through the National Coast Watch Center. The Philippines also expanded PCG personnel and increased its annual budget.

Conclusion and policy recommendation

There are numerous benefits to the 'white hulls' approach. Coast guards do not provoke China. Regional states can easily secure funding and support from the United States, Japan, Australia, and the European Union. Both of these do not indicate taking sides in the so-called 'great power competition.'

Coast guard cooperation between the Philippines and the United States can serve as an interim approach to sustain bilateral maritime security cooperation. Regardless of who becomes president come June 30, 2022, the closer coast guard engagement between the two countries could help cushion the alliance. Coast guard engagements can ensure maritime cooperation between the two allies would

survive regional security and domestic political challenges. The USCG should engage the PCG in other coast guard functions and not merely focus on maritime security in the South China Sea.

Meanwhile, if domestic political conditions become favorable again to military-to-military engagement, coast guard engagement can complement and amplify naval efforts. In essence, coast guard cooperation between the Philippines and the United States can complement (vice substitute) future military engagements between the two allies.

³² Malay Mail, "Maritime Agency Confirms Chinese Vessel Encroached Malaysian Waters on June 4", June 08, 2021, <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/06/08/maritime-agency-confirms-chinese-vessel-encroached-malaysian-waters-on-june/1980395>. (accessed November 28, 2022).

³³ Long, Drake. "China Lurks Around Disputed South China Sea Features for Months on End", *Radio Free Asia*, October 26, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/southchinasea-lurking-10262020174503.html>. (accessed November 28, 2022).

³⁴ Strangio, Sebastian. "Indonesia Beefs Up Its Natuna Island Patrols: Report", *The Diplomat*, January 14, 2021,

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/indonesia-beefs-up-its-natuna-island-patrols-report>. (accessed November 28, 2022).

³⁵ Ranada, Pia. "PH, China sign coast guard cooperation pact, 12 other deals", *Rappler*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/149774-ph-china-sign-coast-guard-cooperation-pact>. (accessed November 28, 2022).

³⁶ Huang, Kristin. "Duterte's Dilapidated Hometown to Get Makeover with China's 'Belt and Road' Investment", *South China Morning Post*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2093566/dutertes-dilapidated-hometown-get-makeover-chinas-belt>. (accessed November 28, 2022).

5

Understanding the role of the United States in the Philippine disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) system

Rachelle Anne Miranda

Abstract

The United States and the Philippines have been security treaty-allies since 1951. Given the risk profile of the Philippines, the partnership included significant support for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), which has evolved to more proactive and comprehensive support in disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM). This includes disaster preparedness, risk mitigation, early warning, community, and family-based DRRM planning, and rehabilitation and recovery. This study analyzes the role of the United States in strengthening the Philippine DRRM system and highlights the significance of U.S. military support for HADR operations and disaster readiness. This study also fills a key knowledge gap in bridging the disaster, human security, and conflict nexus. The contributions of the United States in three aspects are analyzed: pre-disaster, disaster, and post-disaster. Although data show that the United States has been active in disaster response operations in the Philippines, most of its programs focused on disaster risk reduction or the pre-disaster component. The policy direction in DRRM has raised several important aspects that are discussed in the study.

Introduction

With the increasing intensity and magnitude of natural hazards in the Philippines, the country faces challenges in prevention and mitigation, the linkage of climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR), and the most evident aspects of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). Cooperation among international partners and organizations has been key in increasing the capacity of the Philippine government and other sectors in building disaster resilience. The United States is one of the long-standing partners of the Philippines in disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM).

The military alliance between Washington and Manila has played a significant role in disaster response in the Philippines, particularly in search and rescue, and logistics. The U.S. military has made significant contributions to Philippine military's acquisition of logistics capacity for both security and disaster response operations¹. This cooperation addresses the critical challenges posed by the intense impacts of disasters on vulnerable communities. For the Philippines, cooperation with the U.S. military is important in preventing loss of lives and damage to the economy during disasters. This partnership also underscores the constructive role of the United States in the Indo-Pacific in terms of regional peace and security, including human security.

A study argues that with its focus on localized disaster preparedness, the United States will not need to deploy a huge contingent of military assets to achieve its geostrategic objectives and humanitarian diplomacy goals in the Philippines.² This supports the argument that the U.S.-Philippine security alliance encompasses DRRM, beyond disaster response operations. This paper aims to analyze the role of the United States in strengthening the Philippine DRRM system and fill a knowledge gap related to disaster, human security, and conflict nexus.

This paper is divided into five sections. First, it explains why DRRM is important for the Philippines. Second, it examines the role of the U.S.-Philippine alliance in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Third, it discusses the DRRM contributions of the alliance in terms of pre-disaster, disaster, and post-disaster aspects. Fourth, the study examines the nexus of disasters, conflict, and human security. And lastly, it concludes with recommendations for strengthening U.S.-Philippine DRRM. The study is based on content analysis of related literature, reports, and documents from USAID and the Philippine government. The author also conducted

interviews with personnel from USAID, the Philippine government, and the military.

Disaster risk profile: the Philippine archipelago

The Philippines, an archipelago, is one of the most at-risk countries due to its exposure to geological and hydro-meteorological hazards and human-induced hazards. The country is located in the Pacific typhoon belt, which generates an average of 20 tropical cyclones in a year. It is also within the Pacific ring of fire and along the boundary of major tectonic plates.³ Hence, the country is exposed to natural hazards—typhoons, flooding, landslides, storm surges, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and droughts. At least 60% of the country's total land area is exposed to multiple hazards and 74% of the population is susceptible to their impact.⁴ In 2021, the World Risk Report ranked the Philippines as number eight out of 181 countries, with a risk index of 21.39.⁵ The report highlighted social protection to reduce society's vulnerability to extreme natural events and emphasized the need to have adaptive protection systems. Meanwhile, the Global Climate Risk Index Report 2021 identified the Philippines as the 17th most-affected country from extreme weather events and weather-related losses.⁶ The report described the escalating impacts of climate change. Poorest countries are the hardest hit due to vulnerability to the damaging effects, lower coping capacity, and longer recovery period.

But, disasters are not only a function of physical hazards. Disasters happen when: (1) there is a hazard – either natural or human-induced; (2) there are losses and damages associated with the exposure and aspects of the vulnerability of elements at risk; and (3) the lack of coping and adaptive capacity to deal with the impacts of the hazards.⁷ Disaster is a complex societal issue, a wicked problem, and when it happens, its impacts are both social and physical. Disasters have been interpreted as the disruption of the functioning of the community or society involving widespread human, material, economic, or environmental losses, and impacts, which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its resources⁸. Slow economic development, wealth distribution disparities, high population growth, and rapid urbanization are factors that increase the country's vulnerability to disasters.⁹

From 2010 to 2019, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the damages incurred due to extreme

“The military alliance between Washington and Manila has played a significant role in disaster response in the Philippines...”

¹ Interview with Philippine military official, 2022

² Trajano, Julius Cesar I., *The Humanitarian Face of US-Philippines Security Alliance in Humanitarian Partners, Friends and Allies. Humanitarianism in the Asia-Pacific Engaging the Debate in Policy and Practice*, ed. Alistair D. B. Cook, Lina Gong (Singapore, 2021), 73–78.

³ Department of Interior and Local Government, *Climate Change Scenarios in the Philippines*, (Quezon City, 2011) 17, https://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/reports_resources/DILG-Resources-2012130-2ef223f591.pdf.

⁴ Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Philippine Country Report* (2017), <https://www.gfdr.org/sites/default/files/publication/PHILIPPINES2016.pdf>.

⁵ Aleksandrova, Mariya, Balasko, Sascha, Kaltenborn, Markus, Malerba, Daniele, Mucke, Peter, Neuschafer, Oliver, Radtke, Katrin, Prutz, Ruben, Strupat, Christoph, Weller, Daniel, and Wiebe, Nicola, *WorldRiskReport*

2021” (Berlin, 2021), https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WorldRiskReport_2021_Online.pdf.

⁶ Eckstein, David, Künzel, Vera, and Schäfer, Laura, *Global Climate Risk Index 2019*, (Berlin,

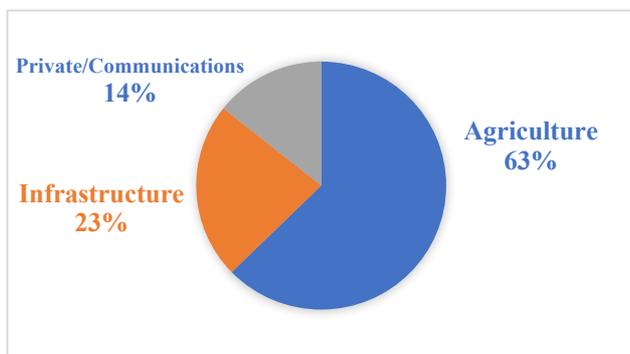
2021) https://cpbrd.congress.gov.ph/images/PDF%20Attachments/Facts%20in%20Figures/FF2021-09_Global_Climate_Risk.pdf.

⁷ Miranda, Rachele Anne, “Why do disasters happen? Debunking common misconceptions”, *Rappler*, July 3, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/imho/opinion-why-do-disasters-happen-debunking-common-misconceptions/>

⁸ President of the Philippines, “Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010”, (Metro Manila, 2010). <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2010/05/27/republic-act-no-10121/>

⁹ Domingo, Sonny N. and Ma. Divina C. Olaguera, *Have we institutionalized DRRM in the Philippines?*, Philippine Institute for Development Studies, no. 12 (2017): 1, accessed Sept. 21, 2021, <https://www.pids.gov.ph/>

disaster events have amounted to PhP 463 billion.¹⁰ As illustrated in figure 1, agriculture posted the largest share with 62.7% or PhP 290 billion, followed by infrastructure, with 23.0% or PhP 106 billion, and private/communications with 14.3% or PhP 66 billion. In 2016, the World Economic Forum cited that vulnerability to disasters is among the leading obstacles to doing business and investing in the country.



Source: Office of Civil Defense, Philippine Statistics Authority

Figure 1. Damages incurred due to extreme events and disasters (2010-2019)

In 2010, the Philippines enacted Republic Act 10121 or the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act. This legislation reinforced the government’s functions to take the lead in reducing vulnerabilities and risks to hazards and increasing measures toward prevention, mitigation, and preparedness. The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council is empowered with policy-making, coordination, integration, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation functions.¹¹ The Council is an inter-agency body composed of civilian and military government institutions with private sector and civil society organization representatives. It is also responsible for the National DRRM Framework and Plan.

DRRM is defined as the systematic process of using administrative directives, organizations, and operational skills and capacities to implement strategies, policies, and improved coping capacities to lessen the adverse impacts of hazards and the possibility of disaster. Prospective disaster risk reduction and management refer to risk reduction and management activities that address and seek to avoid the development of new or increased disaster risks, especially if risk reduction policies are not put in place.¹² Therefore, an effective DRRM scheme requires actions on different fronts and sectors. It embodies the concept of systems thinking, wherein systems are interconnected. It covers the aspects of good governance and institution building, social protection and antipoverty

effort, investment in augmented capacity and resilient infrastructure, and sustainable resource management.¹³ Through the leadership of NDRRMC and its partners, the Philippine government must embed in the plans, policies, and programs on these fronts to reduce vulnerability to the compounded and cascading risks and build resilience.

However, even with enhanced plans, activities, and programs in DRRM, the international community’s role is crucial in achieving the Philippine vision of building ‘safer, adaptive, and disaster-resilient Filipino communities toward sustainable development.’ The United States, as the largest foreign humanitarian donor in the Philippines, through the U.S. military and the USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA), has been particularly helpful in improving disaster preparedness, early recovery, risk reduction, response, and resilience programs. The United States works with the Philippine government, local communities, and non-governmental organizations to help prepare for and respond to disasters and address at-risk communities’ longer-term needs.¹⁴

U.S.-Philippine alliance and the broader concept of security

The U.S.-Philippine alliance has evolved through the years. The security relationship has evolved from its initial focus on war and violent conflicts to include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). Figure 2 shows the timeline, including relevant international agreements and significant disaster events in the country.

In 1951, the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) established the basis for the preservation of peace and security, pending the development of a more comprehensive system of regional security in the Pacific area.¹⁵ In 1990, the USAID Foreign Disaster Assistance was formally established in the Philippines. It is responsible for leading and coordinating the U.S. government’s response to disasters through emergency response, disaster risk reduction, and early recovery.¹⁶ On Dec. 19, 1991, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 46/182, establishing new humanitarian coordination arrangements. This pivotal resolution marked the international community’s collective commitment to helping the world’s most vulnerable people during crises, disasters, and conflicts.¹⁷ In 1994, the UNDP Human Development Report entitled *New Dimensions of Human Security* coined ‘human security’ within the UN system. The report highlighted four characteristics of human security: universal, people-centered, interdependent, and early prevention. It further outlined seven interconnected elements of security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political.¹⁸ To advance the aims of the 1951 MDT, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was signed in 1999 to define the treatment, guidelines, and conditions for U.S. military and civilian personnel temporarily stationed in the

¹⁰ Mapa, Dennis S., *Damages Due to Natural Extreme Events and Disasters Amounted to PHP 463 Billion*, Philippine Statistics Authority, Oct. 28, 2020 <https://psa.gov.ph/content/damages-due-natural-extreme-events-and-disasters-amounted-php-463-billion>.

¹¹ President of the Philippines, “Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010”, Section 6 (Metro Manila, 2010). <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2010/05/27/republic-act-no-10121/>

¹² Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, Section 3

¹³ Domingo, 7-8.

¹⁴ U.S. Agency for International Development Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. (2021, September). Philippines Assistance Overview.

¹⁵ Carlos P Romulo, et al, *Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America*, (Manila, 1951) <https://www.Officialgazette.Gov.Ph>. accessed Oct. 21, 2021

¹⁶ Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. (2019, May 7). Usaid.Gov. Retrieved Nov. 3,2021 from <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/bureau-democracy-conflict-and-humanitarian-assistance/office-us>

¹⁷ United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Resolution 46/182, which created the humanitarian system, turns twenty-five*. (2016, December 16). <https://www.unocha.org/story/resolution-46182-which-created-humanitarian-system-turns-twenty-five>

¹⁸ United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, *Human security milestones and history*. (n.d.). Un.Org. Retrieved Oct. 21, 2021, from <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/human-security-milestones-and-history/>

Philippines.¹⁹ In April 2014, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) was signed to further update the alliance to meet 21st-century challenges. The executive agreement provides for increased rotational military presence of U.S. troops, planes, and ships in the Philippines and gives wider access to Americans in the Philippine military bases.²⁰

In 2009, the Philippines' National Capital Region (NCR) was devastated by Tropical Storm Ketsana, locally known as Ondoy. This led to the enactment of the Republic Act 10121 or the Philippine DRRM Act of 2010, which took 21 years of lobbying before it was approved. In Figure 3, other significant disaster events are listed, such as Typhoon Haiyan (2013), considered as the strongest tropical cyclone in recent history; the Marawi Crisis (2017), which displaced communities in the Bangsamoro region; Taal Volcano eruption (2020), which displaced local communities in Batangas Province; Super Typhoon Goni (2021), which caused extreme flooding in Luzon and Visayas; and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 to present), which disrupted the health and social systems across the country and the world.

optimize the role of the U.S. military in donating aircraft useful during response operations.

Role of the United States in the Philippines' DRRM system

The Philippine DRRM has evolved from a reactive to a proactive system in managing disasters. In the past, it focused on recognizing risks as a function of physical hazards. Now, disasters are viewed as a reflection of people's vulnerability. The enacted law mandates government agencies to have an integrated approach in mitigating, preparing, responding, and recovering from disasters instead of merely focusing on disaster response. Meanwhile, the role and contributions of the United States in the Philippine DRRM system have been significant given the assistance and support provided by Washington through the USAID and the U.S. military.

The United States' key contributions in the Philippines' DRRM system can be categorized into three components: pre-disaster, disaster, and post-disaster. These components are aligned with the National DRRM

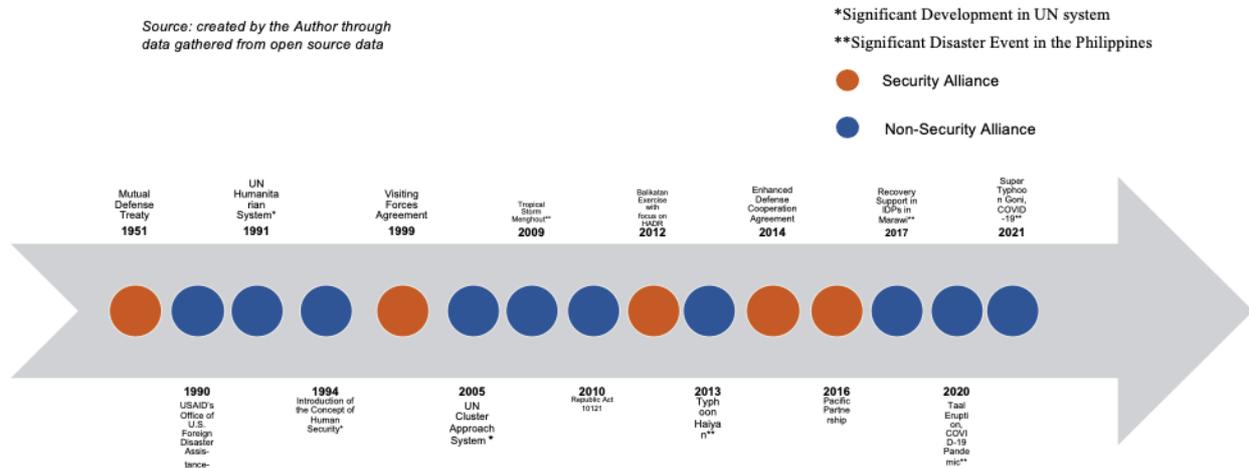


Figure 2. Timeline of U.S.-PH Security and Non-Security Alliance

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), as mandated by the Philippine DRRM Law, is a member of the NDRRMC and is mandated to lead the Search and Rescue Cluster and provide logistical support during disaster response. The Philippine military's engagements with other militaries, including the United States, are governed by the Mutual Defense Board and the Security Engagement Board.²¹ The disaster preparedness component and the HADR component are under the non-traditional activities of this engagement, which allows the U.S. and Philippine militaries to study, prepare and work together in DRRM. Significant preparedness activities of the militaries are evident in the establishment of HADR facilities such as command centers, logistics warehouses, and even evacuation centers. Within the Philippine military, there's a unit under the Philippine Air Force tasked to conduct search and rescue, the 505th Search and Rescue Group. This unit benefits from the U.S.-Philippine agreements that

Framework 2020-2030 of the Philippines, with three key result areas and four mutually reinforcing thematic pillars: prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, early recovery, and rehabilitation and recovery. Figure 3 shows how the thematic pillars are linked to the respective components of the study.

Pre-disaster covers the prevention and mitigation and preparedness programs, projects, and activities (PPAs); disaster covers the response and early recovery interventions; and post-disaster covers the rehabilitation and recovery support and assistance. In an interview with the author, USAID stressed that their strategic and operational role in the Philippine DRRM is aligned with the existing laws and mandates of governing agencies. The USAID has partnered with member agencies of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the local government units (LGUs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector to

¹⁹ Siazon, Jr, Domingo L. and Thomas C Hubbard, *Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the United States of America Regarding the Treatment of United States Armed Forces Visiting the Philippines*, (Manila, 1998). Officialgazette.Gov.Ph. Retrieved Oct. 31, 202. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1998/02/10/agreement-between-the-government-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-and-the-government-of-the>

[united-states-of-america-regarding-the-treatment-of-united-states-armed-forces-visiting-the-philippines-f/](https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1998/02/10/agreement-between-the-government-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-and-the-government-of-the-united-states-of-america-regarding-the-treatment-of-united-states-armed-forces-visiting-the-philippines-f/).

²⁰ Bueza, Michael, *EXPLAINER: Visiting Forces Agreement*, (Manila, 2020). Rappler.Com. Retrieved Sept. 10, 2021, from <https://www.rappler.com/nation/119210-full-text-supreme-court-decision-edca/>

²¹ Interview with PH military official, January 2022

ensure the efficient and effective cascading of USAID programs.

Component 1		Component 2	Component 3
PRE-DISASTER		DISASTER	POST-DISASTER
Prevention and Mitigation	Preparedness	Response and Early Recovery	Rehabilitation and Recovery

Source: created by the Author

Figure 3. Components of the U.S.-PH DRRM Programs, Projects, and Activities

USAID has been pioneering DRR approaches and building local, national, and regional disaster response capacities to confront natural hazards. ²² The programs of USAID aim to fulfill the goal of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction:2015-2030 (SFDRR), which is to “Prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and inclusive economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and thus strengthen resilience.”

In a 2020 report published by USAID, figure 4 shows the Philippines as one of the top recipient countries from 2011-2020 in East Asia and the Pacific. USAID is the largest foreign humanitarian donor in the Philippines.

Top Receiving Countries (FY 2011-2020)



Source: USAID BHA ²³

Figure 4. USAID Humanitarian Assistance Funding for East Asia and the Pacific

Note: FY 2020 figures represent committed or obligated amounts as of September 30, 2020. FY 2020 figures are subject to fluctuation due to end-of-fiscal-year financial review and reconciliation activities. USAID/BHA funding includes emergency food assistance from the former USAID/FFP and non-food humanitarian assistance from the former USAID/OFDA. Figures do not include USAID/FFP development assistance or USAID/OFDA disaster preparedness and mitigation assistance provided outside of declared disaster responses

Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of the key contributions of the U.S. in the Philippine DRRM system.

“USAID has been pioneering DRR approaches and building local, national, and regional disaster response capacities to confront natural hazards...”

No	USAID PROGRAMS (2010-2020)*	Component	Sub-Component			
			Prevention and Mitigation	Preparedness	Response	Rehabilitation and Recovery
1	Program for Hydrometeorological Risk Mitigation in Asian Cities (PROMISE)	Pre-disaster				
2	Volcano Disaster Assistance Project (VDAP)	Pre-disaster				
3	Building Disaster Monitoring and Early Warning Capacity	Pre-disaster				
4	Expanding Flash Flood Warning in East Asia and the Pacific	Pre-disaster				
5	Program for the Enhancement of Emergency Response (PEER)	Pre-disaster				
6	Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Technical Assistance and Training Facility	Pre-disaster				
7	ICS Training for ASEAN Region	Pre-disaster				
8	Conflict Preparedness Program	Pre-disaster				
9	School-based and Community Awareness of Disaster Preparation	Pre-disaster				
10	Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience	Pre-disaster				
11	Increasing Disaster Resilience Through Livelihoods Fortification	Pre-disaster				
12	Supporting Household and Government Awareness and Knowledge for Earthquake Preparedness	Pre-disaster				
13	Enhancing Knowledge and Support to Protect IDP Populations	Pre-disaster				
14	Increasing Public-Private Collaboration on Disaster Preparedness	Pre-disaster				
15	Increasing Logistics Surge Capacity Through Effective Disaster Preparedness	Pre-disaster				
16	Strengthening Humanitarian Coordination, Preparedness, and Information Management	Pre-disaster				
17	Recovery Support to IDPs in Marawi	Post-Disaster				
18	Multi-Sector Assistance for Conflict-Affected Mindanao Communities	Post-Disaster				
19	Shelter Settlements	Post-Disaster				

Source: created by the Author
 *Purposeful selection of USAID programs based on the data available
 **Actual Disaster Response Operations are highlighted in a separate section

Table 1. USAID Significant Contributions to PH DRRM System

Component 1: Pre-Disaster

The U.S.-Philippine alliance was in existence before the enactment of the Philippine DRRM law, since the United States has been an active partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in building capacities related to disaster risk reduction and disaster management. The USAID provided significant support for early warning, preparedness, mitigation, and prevention. Some of the programs include:

- Program for Hydrometeorological Risk Mitigation in Asian Cities (PROMISE) promotes disaster preparedness through demonstration projects in six rapidly growing urban areas that have been significantly impacted by hydrometeorological disasters;
- Volcano Disaster Assistance Project (VDAP) provides technical assistance to national volcano monitoring organizations, including training in hazard assessment, development of early warning plans, and installation and updating of volcano monitoring equipment;

²² U.S. Agency for International Development / Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance, *Approach to Disaster Risk Reduction*, (2019). Usaid.Gov.Ph. Retrieved Nov. 5, 2021, from <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/disaster-risk-reduction/usaidofda-disaster-risk-reduction>

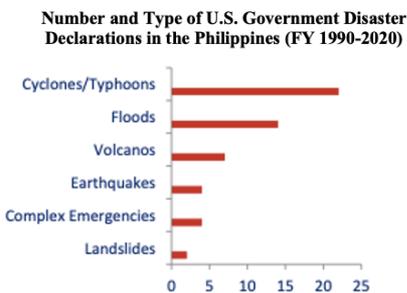
²³ USAID. (2020, September). East Asia and the Pacific Humanitarian Assistance In Review. United States Agency for International Development. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USAID-BHA_EAP_Humanitarian_Assistance_in_Review_-_FYs_2011-2020.pdf

- Program for the Enhancement of Emergency Response (PEER) program was designed primarily for earthquake preparedness but is widely applicable to any collapsed structure or mass casualty situation; and
- Project KONEK aims to increase public-private collaboration on disaster preparedness.

The majority of the output and outcomes of the USAID programs related to enhancing national capacity on DRRM are achieved in partnership with mandated national government agencies.²⁴

Table 1 shows that out of the 19 selected USAID programs, 16 are in the pre-disaster component. This affirms that U.S. role in Philippine DRRM has evolved from humanitarian assistance to development aid.

Component 2: Disaster



Source: USAID/OFDA²⁵

Figure 5. USAID/OFDA Disaster Response Assistance in the Philippines

According to USAID, the agency has responded to more than 50 disasters in the Philippines (figure 5) since 1990. HADR operations are based on the requested needs of the Philippine government and responsive to the declaration of the national state of calamity. The USAID country office in the Philippines orchestrates and coordinates U.S. assistance to the NDRRMC through the international humanitarian assistance cluster led by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) or through local partners. Assistance provided includes search and rescue operations, health assistance, relief, shelter assistance, engineering support, and transportation support. The United States typically initiates military HADR missions upon request. The strong diplomatic relationship and regular military-to-military engagements between the two allies make the coordination possible.

Although civilian organizations play a crucial role in HADR, the military is unmatched in its ability to rapidly mobilize and deploy resources and equipment. The logistical resources are very useful in preparedness for disaster response and the actual operations. Figure 6 shows the military coordination undertaken before, during, and after disasters.

BEFORE	LEAD UP	DURING	AFTER
•Engagement and exercises with partner and host countries can improve speed and efficiency of response	•Anticipate request for assistance. Coordinate between agencies to establish status of forces of agreement.	•Work with host country to coordinate among numerous civilian, non-government and military actors.	•Hand off from relief to recovery efforts.

Source: New America²⁶

Figure 6. Military disaster relief coordination before, during, and after disasters

Based on a document from USAID, table 1 shows four of the 19 programs are directly applied during disaster response operations.

Major humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations

MONTH/ YEAR	DISASTER	Rotary-Wing Aircraft	Fixed-Wing Aircraft	Maritime Assets
September 2009	Tropical Storm Ketsana	/	/	/
October 2009	Tropical Storm Parma	/		
October 2010	Typhoon Megi	/		/
December 2012	Typhoon Bopha		/	
November 2013	Typhoon Haiyan	/	/	/

Source: newamerica.org and other data collected from open-source materials²⁷

Table 2. Overview of U.S. assets deployed for HADR missions in the Philippines

The transportation support provided by the U.S. military listed in Table 2 was significant in ensuring the efficient delivery of services to the affected population. The data also support the aim of the Philippine military to procure air and maritime assets that can be used for HADR and security.

Tropical Storm Ketsana

On Sept. 25, 2009, NCR was heavily impacted by torrential rains brought by Tropical Storm Ketsana (locally known as Ondoy), which caused massive flooding. The strategic location of the U.S. 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa allowed for expedited assistance. ²⁸ U.S. troops assisted in operational planning of the rescue operations, medical operations, distribution of food items, and logistical assistance. Other U.S. Navy personnel later joined the mission.

Tropical Storm Parma

Parma (locally known as Pepeng) devastated Northern Luzon on October 3, 2009. Flooding and mudslides blocked key roads to the area, isolating the upland region. U.S. Marine CH-46 helicopters, facilitated by the Philippine military, delivered food items to Baguio City.

Typhoon Megi

U.S. and Filipino military personnel conducted initial recovery assistance in the areas affected by the typhoon. U.S. Marine Corps CH-46 helicopters delivered

²⁴ Interview with a USAID Official based in Manila, Philippines on Jan. 10, 2022.

²⁵ USAID Philippine Program Summary.

²⁶ Francis Gassert, Sharon Burke, Rachel Zimmerman, *UPTempo: The United States and Natural Disasters in the Pacific*, (Washington, DC, 2020), 61 <https://newamerica.org>

²⁷ Gassert, 65,

²⁸ Government of the United States of America, Press Release: *Marines, sailors bring aid to Philippines*, (Manila, 2009) <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/marines-sailors-bring-aid-philippines>

humanitarian aid supplies to Isabela province and other areas.²⁹

Super Typhoon Haiyan

The U.S.-Philippine partnership on HADR was critical during Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Given the limited military assets of the Philippines related to relief operations, including strategic lift, the close bilateral partnership facilitated the immediate deployment of U.S. military assets (78 ships and aircraft and about 1,040 personnel), particularly to assist isolated coastal communities and mountainous provinces.³⁰ In addition, the United States and the Philippines first established joint operations, which later served as the foundation for the multinational military coordination mechanism, known as the Multinational Coordination Center (MNCC). The MNCC became crucial in ensuring systematic coordination and logistical management, given the large number of international organizations assisting in the operation.³¹ Experts have described the typhoon Haiyan experience as a showcase of unique U.S. capabilities appropriately scaled throughout the response phase. With over \$86 million in total U.S. assistance, the U.S. military response efforts included more than 13,400 personnel, 66 aircraft, and 12 naval vessels, which delivered over 2,495 tons of relief supplies and evacuated more than 21,000 people. More than 1,300 flights were completed in support of the relief effort, delivering goods and services to approximately 450 sites.³²

In summary, all major HADR operations in the Philippines respond to the urgent need to prevent further losses in lives and damages. These notable HADR milestones in the U.S.-Philippine alliance show that the United States has been critical in strengthening DRRM in the Philippines.

“... all major HADR operations in the Philippines respond to the urgent need to prevent further losses in lives and damages..”

The partnership with the U.S. military is important in HADR operations. However, given the changing environment, both in geopolitics and the increase in disaster readiness and capacity of the Philippine military, the U.S. military's presence in disaster response in the Philippines has been decreasing. This shift is partly attributable to the foreign policy approaches of the Duterte administration. But this can also be linked to the shift in the U.S. focus, from humanitarian assistance to development aid, as seen in table 1.

Component 3: Post-Disaster

In 2017, during the Marawi Crisis, the U.S.-Philippine alliance demonstrated its value through the numerous rehabilitation programs to improve the economic and social conditions in the affected communities. The USAID/OFDA supported the Catholic Relief Services

in assisting people displaced by the Marawi Crisis through shelter assistance, economic recovery, market systems, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance.³³ Other significant programs under this component are the livelihood programs, displacement tracking, and emergency shelter assistance.

Table 1 presents a total of five programs linked to post-disaster and rehabilitation and recovery. This shows the development dimension of the U.S.-Philippine partnership in DRRM. In context, the bilateral ties in DRRM have become more comprehensive and proactive. From the initial focus on HADR or disaster response, it now includes pre-disaster and post-disaster components, saving more lives and reducing damage to the economy.

Disasters, human security, and conflict

Disasters erode economic growth and development, but the impact on people is most significant. When disasters and conflict collide, the most vulnerable and the poorest of the poor suffer the most. Conflict areas in the Philippines are the most vulnerable to disasters due to lack of education, shelter, housing capacity, minimal access to social services, lack of disaster risk governance, and other challenges. Conflict or insurgency in the affected areas also impacts the delivery of relief services post-disaster.

Human security is an emerging concept that considers all-natural hazards as threats to humans. This focus is on securing and protecting individuals' "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" and considers the most vulnerable sector, particularly women, children, and the elderly. It emphasizes empowerment strategies to enable people—both individuals and communities—to act on their behalf and the behalf of others.³⁴ It is important to emphasize the significant and distinct role of the military in human security, especially in preparing for and responding to disasters. While the military plays a crucial role as responders with their operational capacity in managing disasters, they can also be a major threat to human security in civil conflicts.

Figure 7 shows the disaster, conflict, and human security nexus wherein hazards and risks are the underlying factor. Hazard is the dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity, or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihood and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.³⁵ Meanwhile, risk is the combination of the probability of an event and its negative consequences.³⁶ As operationally used in this article, all three components have varying hazards, but all pose a risk to the most vulnerable population. Among the identified impacts of disaster and conflict is the displacement of the affected population, migration to urban areas, and the lack of access to social services; for conflict and human security, heightened insurgency and terrorism; and, for human security and disasters, environmental degradation and the spread of infectious diseases. Although DRRM is the main topic of this paper, it

²⁹ Department of National Defense, Victims of Super Typhoon Megi unload humanitarian aid supplies from a U.S. Marine Corps CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter, (2010), <https://dod.defense.gov/OIR/gallery/igphoto/2001249936/>

³⁰ Lum, Thomas, Rhoda Margesson, *Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda): U.S. and International Response to Philippines Disaster*, Congressional Research Service, (Washington DC, 2014) 7-8, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R43309.pdf>

³¹ Trajano, 77.

³² Gassert, 73.

³³ USAID Philippine Program Summary.

³⁴ Madoka Futamura, Christopher Hobson and Nicholas Turner, *Natural Disasters and Human Security*, (Tokyo, 2011) <https://Unu.Edu/>. Accessed Oct. 21, 2021, <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/natural-disasters-and-human-security.html>

³⁵ Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, Section 3

³⁶ Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, Section 3

is important to understand that hazards and risks are related to human security and are affecting the most vulnerable sector – the poor, children, women, and the elderly. U.S. contributions in the Philippines are not limited to disaster management but cut across human security and conflict. Through this lens, humanitarian assistance and development programs will not be limited to reducing disaster risks but also to reducing the risk of conflict and other threats to human security.

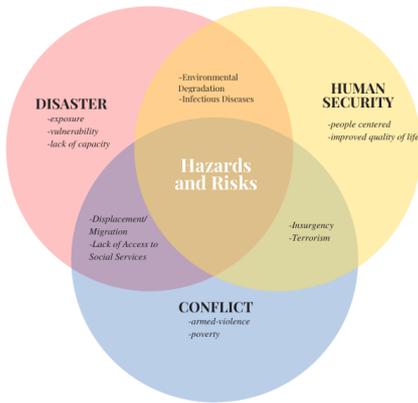


Figure 7. Disaster, Conflict and Human Security Nexus

Conclusion: the ways forward

The U.S.-Philippine alliance, in recent years, has been focused on the shared vision of building disaster resilience in the country. This cooperation has evolved from merely U.S. military support for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to the broader and more comprehensive programs on disaster risk reduction.

The United States has been one of the Philippines' most involved partners in disaster risk reduction and management. The partnership between the two countries in DRRM is built upon the longstanding partnership, mutual understanding, and diplomatic relations. As analyzed in the study, the majority of the USAID programs fall under the pre-disaster component, which covers disaster preparedness, risk mitigation, early warning, community, and family-based DRRM planning. The findings affirm the significant role and contributions of the United States in development and resilience-building in the country. Since disasters hamper growth and economic development, priority must be placed on prevention, mitigation, and preparedness to progress. This same logic applies to the updated national DRRM framework of the Philippines, which is more focused on disaster risk reduction – preventing and mitigating risks and being fully equipped and prepared for disasters. This norm has also been applied and used by non-government organizations, civil society groups, and the private sector to promote DRRM.

This shift in focus has sustained the momentum of the extensive bilateral cooperation in DRR. While the U.S.-Philippine partnership is primarily linked to its security alliance, HADR operations have strengthened security cooperation. The presence of the U.S. military during major disaster operations in the country exhibit goodwill and camaraderie. Scholars have noted how U.S. soft power diplomacy through military HADR operations can advance

its hard power goals, such as maintaining a security presence and influence in the Philippines and the broader region.³⁷

Although the Philippines is on the receiving end of DRRM assistance, the country has also emerged as an expert in the field. The USAID affirmed the Philippines' role in the international DRR system and contributed to innovations in science, policy, and practice. These experiences broadly reshaped the norms and concepts of DRR.

There are important discussions in the Philippines related to DRR. First is the value of creating a cabinet department for disaster resilience. This is an ongoing policy debate in the Philippines about ensuring disaster resilience. With the U.S. support to the NDRRMC in capacitating on incident command system, emergency operations center, and tactical skills on search and rescue, the United States can significantly assist the proposed department. Second, while climate change and the environment are not covered in this study, USAID has programs related to them. It is important to highlight and link the environment and climate change to discourses on DRR. The United States, as one of the leading industrial countries, is urged to take the lead in addressing climate change and global warming. Third, the concept of localization should be taken into account. Through localization, local governments are strengthened to take the lead in preparing and managing disasters.

According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), every dollar spent on prevention and mitigation saves around seven dollars in economic losses. Prevention and mitigation must be prioritized, and localization is one of the key strategies. Fourth, human security and conflict are linked to disasters under the common context of hazards and risks. Given the role of the United States in counterterrorism in the Philippines, both governments must look into how risks of disasters, conflict, and human security can increase losses and damages. It is apparent that these are systemic problems and are interrelated.

³⁷ Yamada, Seiji, Hearts and minds: Typhoon yolanda/haiyan and the Use of humanitarian assistance / disaster relief to further strategic End. *Social Medicine* 11(2) (2017): 76–82. As cited in: Julius Cesar I. Trajano, Towards a comprehensive security alliance: Evolving

dynamics in the United States' humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to the Philippines, *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6(4) (2021)

6

Advancing the Philippines-U.S. alliance for conflict resolution in the South China Sea: policy options from an issues approach

Edcel John Ibarra

Abstract

Conventional wisdom suggests that advancing the Philippines-U.S. alliance is not conducive to resolving the South China Sea disputes because the United States is external to the conflict. This paper challenges that assertion and explores the range of policy options available to the Philippines and the United States that would contribute to conflict resolution in the South China Sea. The issues approach to international relations is employed to reveal the specific component issues of the South China Sea disputes and identify the direct parties involved and types of conflict resolution implied in each issue. Issue-based analysis affirms that the United States is a direct party on the issues of settling the extent to which coastal states may regulate the activities of user states and managing the risk of miscalculation associated with military operations in the South China Sea. This opens opportunities for Philippines-U.S. cooperation on actual conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and conflict management. There is also an opportunity to cooperate on conflict transformation. The United States could support building Philippine military capabilities and its capacity to handle nonmilitary threats in the South China Sea. Together with the Philippines, the United States could also launch regional and international initiatives to combat common maritime threats in the South China Sea and beyond. Ultimately, sensitivity to the distinct legal, military, and nonmilitary issues that make up the South China Sea disputes could help Filipino and U.S. policymakers appreciate the landscape of policy areas in which Philippine-U.S. cooperation might make a positive difference.

Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that advancing an alliance with a third-party or external state amid an international conflict is not conducive to resolving that conflict. Doing so would only encourage counter-alliances and arms buildups between the conflicting states, increasing the likelihood of war. Therefore, the wisdom holds that conflicting states should avoid involving third-party allies, and conversely, third-party allies should refrain from interfering in their partners' conflicts.¹

Applying this wisdom to the South China Sea disputes would mean that the Philippines should resist dragging into the fray its only ally, the United States—which is conventionally assumed to be a third party in the conflict—and the United States should resist being dragged. Advancing the Philippines-U.S. alliance would only worsen the situation. The Philippines and the United States have only a few policy options, maybe even none, to contribute as allies to resolving the South China Sea disputes. Filipino and U.S. policymakers should therefore concentrate on other concerns instead.

China's view of U.S. involvement in the South China Sea disputes aligns with conventional wisdom. Indeed, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum Foreign Ministers' Meeting in August 2021: "The interference by countries outside the region has constituted the biggest threat to peace and stability in the South China Sea over recent years." He added that countries in the region should be vigilant against 'abuse' of freedom of navigation by foreign military vessels in the waterway. Wang did not name any country, but his remarks unmistakably target the United States, which routinely conducts military operations in the South China Sea to assert freedom of navigation.² In China's view, involving a third party, such as the United States, in the South China Sea disputes would only be counterproductive to conflict resolution.

Yet an analysis of the specific issues in dispute in the South China Sea reveals that the United States is not entirely external to the conflict, that it is not a total third party. Rather, the United States is properly a direct party—a disputant—on certain issues. On these issues, the United States should involve itself in the South China Sea disputes, and the Philippines should invite its ally. Even on issues on

which the United States is undoubtedly a third party, advancing the Philippines-U.S. alliance in the South China Sea disputes could still potentially improve the situation if appropriate policies are adopted.³

"...an analysis of the specific issues in dispute in the South China Sea reveals that the United States is not entirely external to the conflict..."

What policies, then, might the Philippines and the United States adopt as allies to help resolve the South China Sea disputes? An issue-based analysis of the South China Sea disputes reveals the disputants in the conflict and offers hints on how the disputants should go about resolving the conflict. The first hint is that resolving the conflict means dealing with the specific issues that make it up. Rather than attempt to come up with grand solutions to the South China Sea disputes, the allies should come up with targeted solutions for each specific issue in dispute. The second hint is that each issue in the South China Sea disputes implies different actions that could help resolve it.

The aim here, however, is not to offer detailed policy recommendations. Numerous works already offer well-founded proposals.⁴ Rather, the aim is to explore the range of policy options notionally available to expose the landscape of policy areas in which Philippine-U.S. cooperation might make a positive difference. An issue-based analysis of the South China Sea disputes shows the most promise toward this aim.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section introduces the issues approach, which forms the theoretical basis for issue-based analyses of international conflicts. The framework is then deployed to illuminate the United States' standing—as a direct party or a third party—in the South China Sea disputes. The subsequent section extends the issues approach and applies it to conflict resolution. It then discusses issue-by-issue policy options for the Philippines and the United States.

¹ Senese, Paul D., and John A. Vasquez. "Assessing the Steps to War." *British Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (2005): 608, 612, 631–32. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123405000323>.

Vasquez, John A., Vasquez and Brandon Valeriano. "Territory as a Source of Conflict and a Road to Peace." In *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, edited by Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk, and I. William Zartman, 202–3. London: SAGE, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024701.n11>.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. "Wang Yi: Interference by Countries outside the Region Has Constituted the Biggest Threat to Peace and Stability in the South China Sea." News release, Aug. 6, 2021. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202108/t20210807_9133781.html.

³ Recent studies have also shown that in general, and in contrast with conventional wisdom, advancing an external alliance can be conducive to conflict resolution. See: Corbetta, Renato, and Molly M. Melin. "Exploring the Threshold between Conflict Management and Joining in Biased Interventions." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 10 (2017): 2205–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717720754>. Fang, Songying, Jesse C. Johnson, and Brett Ashley Leeds. "To Concede or to Resist? The Restraining Effect of Military Alliances." *International Organization* 68, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 775–809. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818314000137>. Owsiak, Andrew P., and Derrick V. Frazier. "The Conflict Management Efforts of Allies in Interstate Disputes." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 3 (2014): 243–64. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fpa.12011>.

⁴ See: Bautista, Emmanuel T., Julio S. Amador III, Maria Emilynda Jeddahlyn Pia V. Benosa, and Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby.

Reviewing Philippine-US Bilateral Defense Relations: The Legal, Military, and Diplomacy Perspectives. Quezon City: National Defense College of the Philippines, 2020. <http://www.ndcp.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/presidents%20papers/PH-US%20Relations%20Study.pdf>.

Glaser, Bonnie S., and Gregory B. Poling. "China's Power Grab in the South China Sea." *Foreign Affairs*, Aug. 20, 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2021-08-20/chinas-power-grab-south-china-sea>. Grossman, Derek. "Duterte's Dalliance with China Is Over." *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 2, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/02/duterte-china-philippines-united-states-defense-military-geopolitics/>.

Thornton, Susan. "Averting Conflict in the South China Sea: Steps to Restore Rules and Restraint." In *The Future of US Policy toward China: Recommendations for the Biden Administration*, edited by Ryan Haas, Ryan McElveen, and Robert D. Williams, 46–51. Washington, DC: John L. Thornton China Center; New Haven, CT: Paul Tsai China Center, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Future-U.S.-policy-toward-China-v8.pdf>.

Wiegand, Krista E. "How Biden Should Handle the South China Sea Disputes." *War on the Rocks*, Nov. 24, 2020. <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/how-biden-should-handle-the-south-china-sea-disputes/>. Wong, Andrea Chloe. "Philippine Security Implications from China's Growing Maritime Capabilities." In *Meeting China's Military Challenge: Collective Responses of U.S. Allies and Partners*, edited by Bates Gill, 77–89. Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2022. https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/sr96_meeting_chinas_military_challenge_jan2022.pdf.

Identifying direct parties in the South China Sea disputes⁵

The issues approach to international relations can help clarify a state's standing in an international conflict. The issues approach builds on the insight that "different types of issue-areas elicit different sets of motives on the part of different actors in a political system."⁶ Contrary to realism, which assumes that states are always interested in amassing power, the issues approach acknowledges that a state's interests—and behavior—can vary depending on the specific issue in question. Thus, in analyzing an international conflict, one must first identify the specific issues that make up that conflict. Identifying the issues the component issues of a conflict matters because "different system members are . . . activated in different issue-areas."⁷ The direct parties in a conflict vary depending on the specific issue in question: a state can be a direct party on one issue but a third party on another issue in the same conflict.

"... in analyzing an international conflict, one must first identify the specific issues that make up that conflict."

Therefore, to establish the United States' standing in the South China Sea disputes, one must first identify the component issues of the conflict. Disputed issues in the South China Sea may be grouped into three sets of issues: territorial and maritime jurisdiction, traditional or military security, and nontraditional or nonmilitary security.

Territorial and Maritime Jurisdiction Issues

The territorial and maritime jurisdiction issues include territorial sovereignty, maritime boundaries, and maritime rights. First, territorial sovereignty concerns the states that claim islets in the South China Sea. These islets are the Pratas Islands (claimed by China and Taiwan), the Scarborough Shoal (claimed by China, Taiwan, and the Philippines), the Spratly Islands (varying portions claimed by China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam), and the Paracel Islands (claimed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam). China and Taiwan also claim sovereignty over the Macclesfield Bank, but the feature is completely submerged. Under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), completely submerged features cannot be subjects of territorial sovereignty.

Second, maritime boundaries concern the same states involved in the territorial sovereignty issue (China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam) insofar as their claimed islets can generate maritime zones. Under UNCLOS, only features above water at high tide can generate maritime zones. Only a few features in the South China Sea are capable of generating maritime zones. At best, they are likely to generate only 12-nautical mile territorial seas, not 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zones (EEZs) or 350-nautical mile Continental Shelf.

Maritime boundaries also concern all South China Sea coastal states (China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei,

Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia) insofar as their claimed maritime zones generated from their main coasts overlap with those of their neighbors. In Indonesia's case, the Indonesian EEZ and Continental Shelf generated from the Natuna Islands overlap with those of Malaysia and Vietnam and the dashed-line boundary claims of China and Taiwan.

In 2016, an UNCLOS arbitral tribunal in the *South China Sea Arbitration (Philippines v. China)* ruled that China's nine-dash line boundary claim in the South China Sea is unlawful.⁸ China, as well as Taiwan, has the most expansive maritime boundary claim among the coastal states. Based mainly on "historic rights," China's and Taiwan's claimed boundaries enclose about 80% of the South China Sea—extending at one point nearly 1,000 nautical miles from their main coasts—and encroach on the EEZs and Continental Shelf of all the other coastal states.⁹

Third, maritime rights mainly concern the South China Sea coastal states and user states. The primary issue is the extent to which coastal states may regulate the activities of other states (so-called user states) in their maritime zones. The South China Sea user states are mostly the naval powers, whose vessels frequently transit the waterway. The United States is undeniably a user state because it regards the South China Sea as a vital sea lines of communication (SLOC) for accessing its bases and connecting with allies and partners in the western Pacific. Maritime rights are largely regulated by international law, specifically UNCLOS, and ultimately concern all states in the international community.

Traditional Security Issues

Traditional security issues in the South China Sea include territorial defense, sea control, and maritime power projection. Territorial defense concerns the same states involved in the territorial sovereignty issue, so they feel the need to fortify the islets they have occupied in the South China Sea. Similarly, sea control concerns the South China Sea coastal states, so they feel the need to increase patrols in their claimed maritime zones. On both issues, the disputants feel the need to build up their militaries, increasing insecurity and tensions, which could culminate in a violent confrontation.

China holds the largest and most advanced military outposts in the South China Sea and maintains the most persistent maritime presence among the disputants. It has reclaimed land on the islets it occupies and built airstrips and missile shelters. It has also deployed various types of government ships (navy, coast guard, survey, and maritime militia) to patrol within its claimed nine-dash line boundary.

Maritime power projection concerns the naval powers. Maritime power projection increases the risk of miscalculation between the projecting state and the target state. If managed poorly, miscalculations could spiral into a violent confrontation. In the South China Sea, the risk of miscalculation is most pronounced between the United States and China. The United States conducts freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) to assert its maritime

⁵ This section is adapted from: Ibarra, Edcel John A. "Issue-Based Cooperation on Conflict Resolution in the South China Sea: Roles for ASEAN beyond the Code of Conduct." *Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2022): 100–107. https://www.journalofterritorialandmaritimestudies.net/_files/ugd/36708f_1f8a38c9d0d04a92a371be2289399f16.pdf.

⁶ Rosenau, James N. "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy." In *The Study of World Politics*, 187. London: Routledge, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203014721-30>.

⁷ Rosenau, "Pre-theories," 187.

⁸ *South China Sea Arbitration (Philippines v. China)*, PCA Case No. 2013-19, Award of 12 July 2016 (Arbitral Tribunal Constituted under Annex VII to the 1982 UNCLOS), <https://pcacases.com/web/sendAttach/2086>.

⁹ Carpio, Antonio T. *The South China Sea Dispute: Philippine Sovereign Rights and Jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea*. Self-published, 2017, 30, 33. Adobe PDF. <https://drive.google.com/uc?export=download&id=0B8yG5wHbtX83NEVhCERETUVoVTA>.

rights as a user state and challenge what it terms 'excessive claims' to maritime boundaries and maritime rights of some coastal states, most notably China. China, for its part, has responded by attempting to expel U.S. ships and aircraft from its claimed maritime zones. As these hostile interactions continue, the risk of miscalculation grows. Indeed, some states in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have expressed concern that FONOPs may increase tensions in the South China Sea.

Nontraditional security issues

Nontraditional security issues in the South China Sea include maritime law enforcement, safety of navigation, maritime search and rescue, fisheries management, marine environmental protection, marine scientific research, and marine resource development. Although nontraditional security issues are nonmilitary in nature, the coastal states still compete to demonstrate effective control, increasing tensions in the South China Sea. They want to enforce their own maritime regulations and assert exclusive responsibility for combating crimes at sea and preventing and managing maritime disasters in their claimed maritime zones. They also want to assert jurisdiction for regulating fisheries, preserving the marine environment, and supervising scientific undertakings in their claimed maritime zones. Because contested areas in the South China Sea are effectively governed by different, competing national laws, these areas become places of no law and no governance, where threats such as maritime incidents; unauthorized marine surveys; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and marine environmental deterioration can thrive.

“Working together on issues of mutual concern can temper animosities, thus contributing to conflict transformation.”

Indeed, nontraditional maritime security threats are a growing concern among the South China Sea coastal states. Chinese vessels have collided with and have sunk Philippine and Vietnamese fishing boats. China has also been accused of undertaking unauthorized marine scientific research activities in the EEZs and Continental Shelf of the Southeast Asian coastal states. Most serious, China has contributed to the deterioration of coral reef ecosystems and the depletion of fish stocks in the South China Sea through land reclamation of its occupied islets and condonation of IUU fishing by Chinese fishers. Although these nontraditional security issues mainly concern the coastal states, they should also concern all countries in the international community as their impacts extend beyond the South China Sea and require regional and international coordination.

The sole exception is the issue of marine resource development, which concerns only the South China Sea coastal states—as long as exploitation is done sustainably. This issue is a potential flashpoint because of inequitable access to fishery resources and offshore oil and gas among the coastal states. China, for instance, has been subsidizing large numbers of fishers to harvest in the South China Sea,

crowding out fishers from Southeast Asian countries. It has also attempted to intimidate its neighbors from exploring and exploiting hydrocarbon resources within their EEZs and Continental Shelf.

Policy options for the Philippines-U.S. alliance¹⁰

Identifying the component issues of a conflict through the issues approach matters not only to identifying the direct parties in a conflict but also to determining the types of conflict resolution best suited for each issue. Conflict resolution, which may be defined as the “practice of reduction in violence and enhancement of political processes for harmonizing interests,”¹¹ covers many types of actions. Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk, and I. William Zartman identify four: conflict prevention, conflict management, actual conflict resolution (also known as conflict settlement), and conflict transformation.¹² Conflict prevention “does not remove the conflict but puts a lid on its escalation”; conflict management refers to the “channeling of the conflict into political (non-violent) mechanisms”; actual conflict resolution results from a “specific decision to square the incompatibility” that produced the conflict in the first place; and conflict transformation relies on “replacing incompatibilities with ties of cooperation and interdependence.”¹³

Each issue in the South China Sea disputes requires a different type of conflict resolution. First, the territorial and maritime jurisdiction issues, which are largely legal disagreements that represent the root causes of the conflict, require actual conflict resolution. Second, traditional security issues require conflict prevention and

conflict management. Conflict prevention would help avoid a violent confrontation between the disputants, while conflict management would help limit the spread of violence if a clash has occurred. Finally, nontraditional security issues require the disputants to coordinate their policies. Working together on issues of mutual concern can temper animosities, thus contributing to conflict transformation.

Because each issue requires a different type of conflict resolution, the Philippines and the United States should work together to help resolve the South China Sea disputes issue-by-issue.

Table 1 summarizes the framework. It shows the issues in the South China Sea disputes and the direct parties involved and types of conflict resolution best suited for each issue.

¹⁰ This section is adapted from Ibarra, “Issue-Based Cooperation,” 100–103, 105.

¹¹ Bercovitch, Jacob, Victor Kremenyuk, and I. William Zartman. “Introduction: The Nature of Conflict and Conflict Resolution.” In *The Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, edited by Jacob Bercovitch, Victor

Kremenyuk, and I. William Zartman, 1. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024701.n1>.

¹² Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman, “Introduction,” 9–10.

¹³ Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zartman, “Introduction,” 9.

Table 1. Issue-based conflict resolution in the South China Sea

Issue	Direct parties	Type of conflict resolution
<i>Territorial and maritime jurisdiction issues</i>		
Territorial sovereignty	Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam	Actual conflict resolution
Maritime boundaries	Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia	Actual conflict resolution
Maritime rights	Coastal states, user states, all states	Actual conflict resolution
<i>Traditional security issues</i>		
Territorial defense	Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam	Conflict prevention, management
Sea control	Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia	Conflict prevention, management
Maritime power projection	Naval powers	Conflict prevention, management
<i>Nontraditional security issues</i>		
Maritime law enforcement, safety of navigation, maritime search and rescue	Coastal states, regional states, all states	Conflict transformation
Fisheries management, marine environmental protection, marine scientific research	Coastal states; interested states, international organizations	Conflict transformation
Marine resource development	Coastal states	Conflict transformation

Source: Ibarra, Edcel John A. "Issue-Based Cooperation on Conflict Resolution in the South China Sea: Roles for ASEAN beyond the Code of Conduct." *Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2022): table 1.

¹⁴ Carpio, *South China Sea Dispute*, 203–5.

¹⁵ One reason is that biased third-party states can more credibly convey their motivations for why they are intervening in conflicts they are not a party to. In other words, supposedly impartial third-party states must prove their neutrality to the disputants, while biased third-party states do not have to. Owsiak and Frazier, "Conflict Management Efforts," 246–47.

¹⁶ Kabling, Genalyn. "Duterte: United States' Afraid of China, Did 'Nothing' after Botched Panatag Deal." *Manila Bulletin*, May 11, 2021. <https://mb.com.ph/2021/05/11/duterte-united-states-afraid-of-china-did-nothing-after-botched-panatag-deal/>.

Resolving the territorial and maritime jurisdiction issues

On the territorial sovereignty issue, only the Philippines is a direct party. The United States is neutral on the question of ownership of the South China Sea islets, except maybe Scarborough Shoal, which, historical documents suggest, the United States once considered to be under Philippine sovereignty.¹⁴

Still, one option for the United States is to offer mediation, conciliation, or good offices. The United States may seem biased to its ally, the Philippines, but research suggests that states generally prefer biased interveners over supposedly impartial third-party states.¹⁵ The United States should assure the other disputants that although it remains firm to its commitment to defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack on its ally's vessels, it would prefer to avoid being dragged into a violent confrontation with any disputant and would readily support efforts to peacefully settle the territorial sovereignty issue. At the same time, the United States should assure its ally that it could broker enforceable agreements. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte had already questioned U.S. credibility as a mediator by attributing the Philippines' "loss" of the Scarborough Shoal to the United States when it intervened in a standoff between Philippine and Chinese ships in 2012.¹⁶ The United States reportedly brokered a private agreement for both sides to withdraw their ships, but China reneged and has since gained de facto control of the islet.¹⁷

On the maritime boundaries issue, only the Philippines is a direct party, but the United States has explicitly aligned itself with the Philippines over the ruling in the *South China Sea Arbitration*, which the Philippines overwhelmingly won. The United States now openly rejects China's expansive nine-dash line boundary claim in the South China Sea, its claim to territorial seas over completely submerged features, and its claims to EEZs and Continental Shelf from unqualified islets.¹⁸ Therefore, the allies now share the same views on the maritime boundaries issue.

Capitalizing on these shared views, one option for the Philippines and the United States is to jointly promote the arbitral ruling and defend it from disinformation propagated by China. The goal would be to persuade as many countries as possible to side with the ruling, which could raise the diplomatic stakes for China for its continued noncompliance.

For the United States, in particular, offering mediation remains an option. Another option is linking the maritime boundary issue with another unrelated issue where the United States has leverage, for example, bilateral trade. Doing so could induce the Chinese government to offer or accept a settlement with the Philippines aligned with UNCLOS.

On the maritime rights issue, both the Philippines and the United States are direct parties, the former as a coastal state of the South China Sea and the latter, a user state. However, because this issue relates to upholding the rules-based order at sea, which concerns all states, the

¹⁷ Ratner, Ely. "Learning the Lessons of Scarborough Reef." *National Interest*, Nov. 21, 2013. <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-the-lessons-scarborough-reef-9442>.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State. "US Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea." News release, July 13, 2020. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea>. See also: U.S. Department of State. "People's Republic of China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea." *Limits in the Seas*, no. 150. Washington, DC, Jan. 2022. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/LIS150-SCS.pdf>.

United States' other allies and partners are also direct parties that may be rightfully tapped for support.

In general, the Philippines and the United States could challenge China's self-serving interpretations of UNCLOS operationally and diplomatically with other U.S. allies and like-minded countries. Operationally, the United States could continue conducting FONOPs in the South China Sea, and the Philippines could join those missions or conduct its own FONOPs. The Philippines and the United States could also convince other countries, especially other U.S. allies and like-minded naval powers (e.g., Australia, Japan, South Korea, and maybe India), to join in FONOPs or conduct similar missions on their own. To assuage concerns about the risk of miscalculation in FONOPs, the allies should repeatedly stress that the missions do not aim to project power in the South China Sea but merely to challenge unlawful maritime claims. The allies should also repeatedly stress that the missions would follow existing international rules and conventions on avoiding incidents at sea. The allies could consider using coast guard vessels instead to conduct FONOPs in the South China Sea as an alternative.

Diplomatically, the Philippines and the United States have two options. The allies could gather support from other U.S. allies and like-minded countries to mount a coordinated diplomatic campaign to call out China's noncompliance with UNCLOS, including the ruling in the *South China Sea Arbitration*, in regional and international forums. Alternatively, a diplomatic campaign could aim instead to launch an international conference that includes China to review the law of the sea, especially to clarify ambiguities regarding navigational rights and freedoms. Ideally, this should happen through meaningful dialogue at the United Nations. Nonetheless, the disagreements could be settled first in a smaller forum, for example, comprising only the South China Sea coastal states and the user states. The outcome could be a joint statement or a regional agreement specifying a mutual understanding of the extent to which coastal states may regulate the activities of user states in the South China Sea. If successful, discussions at the regional level could inform future discussions at the international level.

Preventing and managing traditional security issues

On the issues of territorial defense and sea control, the Philippines is a direct party, but the United States is not. Nonetheless, one option for the United States is to help build its ally's self-defense capabilities. It could do so by supporting the Philippines' objective of attaining a minimum credible defense posture. Options include increasing cooperation to modernize Philippine military assets and enhance the country's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, providing training and capacity-building programs for Filipino military officials, and offering favorable arms sales or transfers. The United States could also increase combined naval and air exercises with the Philippines to improve interoperability. It could also repeatedly underline its commitment to come to the Philippines' aid in case of armed attacks against Philippine vessels. In general, U.S. military assistance to the Philippines should focus away from counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief to external

defense. Doing all or any of these may help deter, or at least dampen, China's military intimidation and aggressive acts short of war (so-called gray-zone challenges) in the South China Sea. Aiding the Philippines militarily should not exacerbate arms buildups in the region because the country still lags far behind its neighbors in terms of military strength.¹⁹

Another option for the allies is to work on implementing the 2014 Philippines-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. The agreement allows the United States to pre-position its military assets and improves infrastructure in jointly agreed locations in the Philippines, but implementation has stalled under President Duterte, who has been ambivalent about the Philippines' alliance with the United States, preferring to forge closer ties with China instead.

On the issue of maritime power projection, the United States is a direct party, but the Philippines is not. Nonetheless, one option for the Philippines is to mediate or simply promote dialogue between its ally and China, especially while the Philippines enjoys relatively warm relations with China. The aim would be to ensure that encounters between their navies and air forces in the South China Sea, especially during FONOPs, do not spiral into a violent confrontation. Toward this end, the Philippines should encourage the two great powers to hold regular talks to review their implementation of existing bilateral agreements and international rules and conventions on avoiding incidents at sea. The Philippines should also urge the United States and China to enhance their bilateral crisis management mechanisms.

“... the point of conflict transformation is to foster cooperation rather than competition among the disputants.”

Transforming nontraditional security issues

On most nontraditional security issues in the South China Sea, the Philippines is a direct party, and so, too, is the United States because the impacts of nonmilitary maritime threats often extend beyond the South China Sea. The Philippines and the United States could pursue two broad policy directions. First, the allies could jointly champion practical cooperative initiatives on nontraditional security issues at sea in regional and international forums. Such initiatives do not have to be specific only to the South China Sea but could also extend to larger sea areas in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. However, to maximize the benefits of conflict transformation, all disputants, including China, must be included; after all, the point of conflict transformation is to foster cooperation rather than competition among the disputants. Cooperation could occur on existing platforms that already include all the South China Sea coastal states, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum under the East Asia Summit.

Second, the United States could help its ally build sufficient capacity to address nonmilitary threats. The Philippines needs the most capacity for maritime law enforcement and maritime search and rescue. The country's coast guard fleet compares poorly with its

¹⁹ See: *Asia Power Index*. Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2021. <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/>.

neighbors, which affects the Philippines' capacity to apprehend IUU fishers and rescue fishing boats and commercial ships in distress. The United States could help its ally by providing assistance on maritime domain awareness, assisting in the coast guard's modernization, or training maritime law enforcement personnel.

Particularly on the issues of fisheries management, marine environmental protection, and marine scientific research, UNCLOS provides a framework for international cooperation. Article 123 obliges coastal states of semi-enclosed seas, such as the South China Sea, to coordinate policies on these issues among themselves or with other interested countries and international organizations. Three existing mechanisms covering the South China Sea may qualify as Article 123 cooperation: the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), and the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA).²⁰ Both the Philippines and the United States are members of APFIC, while only the Philippines is a member of COBSEA and PEMSEA.

The Philippines and the United States have three options to contribute to Article 123 cooperation in the South China Sea. First, the allies could use APFIC as a platform for promoting cooperative initiatives on fisheries management in the South China Sea. Second, although the United States is not a member of COBSEA and PEMSEA, it could still support these platforms through financial or technical assistance. Third, the allies could cooperate to launch a new initiative for joint marine scientific research surveys in the South China Sea, which could spill over into a subsequent initiative for regional marine conservation.

On the issue of marine economic development, the United States is not a direct party. Nonetheless, one option for the United States is to help its ally build capacity to sustainably develop marine resources. For example, the United States could help the Philippines improve its capacity to sustainably harvest fish by providing assistance in growing and modernizing its ally's fishing fleet. The United States could also help the Philippines build its capacity to sustainably extract offshore oil and gas resources in undisputed areas in the South China Sea. Extracting hydrocarbons from new sources in the South China Sea will be especially urgent for the Philippines as the Malampaya gas field—which supplies a large portion of the country's energy needs—nears depletion. With boosted economic capacity, the Philippines would be in a stronger position to negotiate and enter joint development agreements on fisheries or offshore oil and gas development in overlapping EEZs and Continental Shelf in the South China Sea.

Other policy options

Apart from the above issue-based policy options, another option for the Philippines and the United States is to cooperate on a cross-cutting issue: a future code of conduct in the South China Sea (COC) between ASEAN countries and China. The COC is likely to touch on the issues of maritime rights, traditional security, and nontraditional security. Although the COC is currently an ASEAN-China document, the repercussions extend beyond the grouping. China's proposed provisions, for

example, would limit combined military exercises and joint marine economic partnerships with countries outside the region.²¹ The United States, then, should coordinate with the Philippines to ensure that the rights of user states are preserved in the final document. The allies should also come up with shared expectations for the COC and signal them to ASEAN countries and China.

On several issues, the Philippines and the United States are not alone. They could tap the network of U.S. allies and partners in the western Pacific, such as Japan and Australia, and around the world, such as the United Kingdom. On the maritime boundaries and maritime rights issues, the Philippines and United States could enlist these countries to join a pro-compliance coalition to encourage China to abide by the arbitral ruling. On nontraditional security issues, the allies could tap these countries to help in conflict transformation by encouraging the South China Sea coastal states, including China, to join cooperative initiatives to combat common threats such as fish stock depletion and marine ecosystem deterioration. On issues where the United States could support the Philippines, it could also ask its other allies for assistance.

Taking on any of these options assumes that the Philippines-U.S. alliance has the required capacity to do so. To improve coordination, the Philippines and the United States must strengthen inter-ally mechanisms, for instance, by institutionalizing existing bilateral dialogue mechanisms, such as the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue and two-plus-two meetings between their foreign and defense secretaries.

Conclusion

The case for U.S. involvement in the South China Sea disputes is often couched in the language of interests. Certainly, the United States has vital interests in the South China Sea, but interests change over time. More important, the United States should be acknowledged not only as an interested party in the South China Sea disputes but as a direct party—a disputant—on certain issues. Indeed, an issue-based analysis of the conflict reveals that the United States is not a total third party in the conflict.

Even on issues on which the United States is undoubtedly a third party, advancing the Philippines-U.S. alliance in the South China Sea disputes could still potentially improve the situation if appropriate policies are adopted. Rather than come up with grand solutions, the allies should focus on targeted solutions that would address each disputed issue in the South China Sea. Toward this end, this paper has explored the range of policy options notionally available to the Philippines and the United States for them to contribute as allies to resolving the South China Sea disputes.

However, the policy options identified in this paper are precisely that—options. It remains to be seen whether, in practice, Filipino and U.S. policymakers could muster the political will needed to take on any of the options to bring about conflict resolution in the South China Sea.

²⁰ Hu, Nien-Tsu Alfred. "Semi-enclosed Troubled Waters: A New Thinking on the Application of the 1982 UNCLOS Article 123 to the South China Sea." *Ocean Development and International Law* 41, no. 3 (2010): 299–304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00908320.2010.499306>.

²¹ Thayer, Carl. "A Closer Look at the ASEAN-China Single Draft South China Sea Code of Conduct." *Diplomat*, Aug. 3, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/a-closer-look-at-the-asean-china-single-draft-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/>.

7

Onward and upward: the Philippines-U.S. security alliance

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Abstract

As Asia's oldest security allies, the Philippines and the United States have cooperated on many wars, defense, and security activities and initiatives that served their common interests. However, the constant changes in their domestic and international environments and the rise of new threats bring uncertainties that fuel aspersions on the security relationship. This paper explains why the Philippines-U.S. alliance has been and will continue to be important for the two states. It also compares the alliance with others in the region. An analytical framework is presented to show Manila's disposition toward its alliance with Washington. The framework combines a binary choice model and the unique country categorization vis-à-vis engagement with the United States as an ally or partner. This provides context and nuance for why the Philippines acts the way it does and still prefers operating closely within the U.S. ambit. The paper concludes with recommendations for moving the U.S-Philippine security relations forward.

An alliance adrift

The Philippines-United States alliance has been in place for well over seven decades. As Asia's oldest security allies, the two countries have cooperated on many wars, defense, and security activities and initiatives that serve their common interests. However, the constant changes in their domestic and international environments and the rise of new threats brings doubts and fuel uncertainty regarding U.S. commitments to the security of the Philippines. Philippine leaders had to craft their foreign policies and strategies to navigate major power relations, considering the perceived decline in U.S. power and China's unprecedented economic and military rise.

Under President Benigno Aquino, the alliance has flourished. Aquino adopted a balancing strategy against China and aligned closely with the United States. His administration pursued the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to deepen security cooperation.

However, much has changed since Rodrigo Duterte became president. Duterte's warm relations with and preference toward China fundamentally impacted the Philippines' ties with the United States. In 2016, Duterte announced his "separation" from the United States, froze EDCA, and threatened to terminate the *Balikatan* (trans., Shoulder-to-shoulder) exercises between the two militaries.¹ Alongside U.S. President Donald Trump's isolationist policies and his calling for allies to "pay for their share," Duterte's pronouncements have been concerning for the defense establishments in Manila and Washington.

The Duterte administration has since prioritized friendly relations with China, accommodating Beijing's policy preferences to generate funding for his ambitious infrastructure and development projects under the "Build, Build, Build" program.² In the years that followed, President Duterte continued to appease Beijing at the expense of the Philippines' oldest ally, evidenced by his public refusal to cooperate with the United States, shifting blame and daring Washington to do something about China's actions in the South China Sea.³ In 2020, Duterte

ordered the termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).⁴ Thanks, in part, to the strong and well-established ties between Manila and Washington and pushback from defense institutions in both countries, Duterte reversed course and did not terminate the VFA.⁵ The alliance lives on, though it undoubtedly came closer to dangerous waters following these developments.

Duterte's tone and demeanor toward the United States shifted in his final year in office. Not only did he cancel the abrogation of the VFA, the *Balikatan* exercises were conducted in 2020 and 2021, despite the COVID19 pandemic.⁶ The EDCA, meanwhile, is now set to be implemented, enabling the United States to resume operations in select Philippine military bases.⁷ Two important developments explain this about-face. First, Duterte's accommodation of Beijing proved ineffective and unproductive.⁸ China continues to marginalize Filipino interests in the South China Sea and insists on operationalizing its illegal claims.⁹ Chinese investment pledges have barely trickled down into feasible and tangible projects, at least not far enough to shift public skepticism toward Beijing.¹⁰ Second, the continuing public diplomacy efforts and other assistance by the United States have led to notable benefits in the short term. Prominent among these are the vaccine donations to help the Philippines cope with COVID-19.¹¹ The comparative disconnect between the words and actions of both Beijing and Washington is quite revealing, enough for Duterte to re-think his hedging strategy between the two as he nears the end of his term.

This article explores the Philippines-U.S. alliance in three critical respects. First, the article explains why the alliance is important and why it will continue to benefit the two states. Second, an analytical framework is presented to show the Philippines' disposition toward its alliance with Washington. This framework combines the binary choice model and the unique country categorization *vis-à-vis* U.S. engagement. The framework offers a unique explanation of why countries like the Philippines link and delink or hedge against major powers. The article concludes by exploring

¹ The Philippine Star, "Duterte: 2016 Philippines-U.S. Balikatan to be the last." *The Philippine Star*. September 30, 2016.

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/09/30/1628875/duterte-2016-philippines-us-balikatan-be-last>

² Remo, Amy R. "Itemized list of PH projects covered by China's \$15-B investment pledges to Duterte." *Inquirer*. October 23, 2016.

<https://business.inquirer.net/217269/itemized-list-ph-projects-covered-chinas-15-b-investment-pledges-duterte#ixzz4XabVCPwQ>

³ Tomacruz, Sofia. "With VFA uncertain, Duterte lashes out at U.S. once again." *Rappler*. February 10, 2020.

<https://www.rappler.com/nation/251475-vfa-uncertain-duterte-lashes-out-united-states-again/>

⁴ Esguerra, Darryl John. "Duterte officially orders termination of VFA." *Inquirer*. February 7, 2020.

<https://globalnation.inquirer.net/185007/breaking-duterte-officially-orders-termination-of-vfa>

⁵ Bautista, Emmanuel T. "The Resilience of the Philippines-United States Defense Relations." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. July 1, 2021.

<https://www.stratforumph.com/post/the-resilience-of-philippines-united-states-defense-relations-1d/>, "U.S.-Philippines Alliance: Strategic and Operational Value of the Alliance and its Future." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. September 21, 2021.

<https://www.stratforumph.com/post/us-philippines-alliance-strategic-and-operational-value-of-the-alliance-and-its-future>

⁶ Global Security, "Philippines Hosts U.S. for Scaled-Down Joint Military Drills." *Global Security*. April 12, 2021.

<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2021/04/mil-210412-rfa01.htm>

⁷ Herzinger, Blake. "Facing the Future Shoulder to Shoulder: The Critical Question of Access in the U.S.-PH Alliance." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. July 1, 2021.

<https://www.stratforumph.com/post/facing-the-future-shoulder-to-shoulder-the-critical-question-of-access-in-the-us-ph-alliance/>

Hammond, Joseph. "Philippine, U.S. forces improve defense cooperation." *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum*. November 9, 2021.

<https://ipdefenseforum.com/2021/11/philippine-u-s-forces-improve-defense-cooperation/>

⁸ Amador, Julio S. III and Deryk Matthew N. Baladjay, "The New Normal of President Duterte's "Independent" Foreign Policy." *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 540. December 16, 2020.

<https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/the-new-normal-president-duterte-s-independent-foreign-policy>

⁹ Associated Press, "South China Sea: alarm in Philippines as 200 Chinese vessels gather at disputed reef." *The Guardian*. March 22, 2021.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/22/south-china-sea-philippines-200-chinese-vessels-whitsun-reef>; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Caught on Camera: Two dozen militia boats at Whitsun Reef identified." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. April 21, 2021.

<https://amti.csis.org/caught-on-camera-two-dozen-militia-boats-at-whitsun-reef-identified/>; Gomez, Jim. "China Coast Guard Uses Water Cannon Against Philippine Boats." *The Diplomat*. November 18, 2021.

<https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/china-coast-guard-uses-water-cannon-against-philippine-boats/>; U.S. Department of State, "Limits in the Seas, No. 150, People's Republic of China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea." *Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs*, U.S. Department of State. January 14, 2022.

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/LIS150-SCS.pdf>

¹⁰ Heydarian, Richard. "Chinese chimera: the real concern with BRI." *The Interpreter (Lowy Institute)*. July 24, 2018.

<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/chinese-chimera-real-concern-bri/>; Robles, Raissa. "Duterte said China pledged billions of dollars to the Philippines. What happened to it?" *South China Morning Post*. August 14, 2021.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3144898/duterte-said-china-pledged-billions-dollars-philippines-what>

¹¹ Grossman, Derek. "Duterte's Dalliance with China Is Over." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. November 4, 2021.

<https://www.stratforumph.com/post/duterte-s-dalliance-with-china-is-over>

what the Philippines and the U.S. can do moving forward, given these assessments.

Why the alliance (still) matters

Since World War II, the Philippines has been an important ally, partner, and friend for the United States. Manila had served as a strategic location for U.S. bases. Filipino and American soldiers fought and died in battles against Imperial Japan during World War II. In the Cold War period, the Philippines supported the U.S. strategy of containing Communism and the influence of the Soviet Union. The United States has been helping the Philippines combat internal insurgencies. The Philippines also played a role in America's War on Terror, soon after 9/11. A few years after the end of the Cold War, the region has seen a more aggressive and assertive China – a rising competitor for the United States and a threat to Philippine sovereignty and territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Since 2018, Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has been calling for a re-examination of the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) to reconsider the interests of both and to aptly respond to modern challenges. At an event hosted by the U.S.-based Pacific Forum in September 2021, Lorenzana argued that the MDT should evolve to recognize new geopolitical realities, especially the rise of China and Manila's constitutional commitment to a more 'independent' foreign policy.¹²

Common geopolitical threats and mutual interests surely serve as a basis for keeping and strengthening the Philippines-U.S. alliance. However, across American alliances (i.e., Japan, South Korea, and Australia) in the Indo-Pacific region, the Philippines has been characterized as lagging, even compared to U.S. security partners (i.e., Vietnam and Singapore).¹³

A report released by CSIS, *Alliances in Need of Upkeep*, validates the importance of revisiting and maintaining the defense ties between the United States and its two allies in Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Beyond counterterrorism and counterinsurgency cooperation, China and its gray zone strategies, coupled with weak defense coordination in the South China Sea among claimants, are priorities for the Philippines.

The alliance with the Philippines continues to be important for the United States. Manila's strategic location, emerging role as a middle power, and position in the hub-and-spokes system remain vital and beneficial.¹⁵ Experts argue that no other people in Southeast Asia are as

supportive and welcoming of the United States as the Filipinos.¹⁶ Losing influence and a footing in the Philippines would have negative consequences for U.S. strategy. Nevertheless, relatively little effort has gone into strengthening the Philippines. U.S. relations and military cooperation with Japan, South Korea, and Australia are more institutionalized and entail stronger commitments.¹⁷ It also appears that the United States has been slowly shifting its attention and priorities in the region. Under the Biden administration's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, two non-treaty allies (Vietnam and Singapore) were mentioned, but its treaty allies (Thailand and the Philippines) were not.¹⁸ U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and State Secretary Antony Blinken visited Vietnam, Singapore, Seoul, and Tokyo in their separate tours in Asia early this year, but not the Philippines or Thailand. Only when the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was under threat of abrogation did the visit from U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin happen. The visit was credited with having restored confidence on both sides, resulting in the restoration of the VFA and the resumption of war games in 2020.¹⁹

“Common geopolitical threats and mutual interests surely serve as a basis for keeping and strengthening the Philippines-U.S. alliance.”

Disposition in the U.S. security alliance

To understand the necessity of doing more for the alliance, it is important to critically examine the Philippines' disposition in the U.S. security network in Asia. In a 2021 webinar on alliance resilience, Victor Cha proposed a model for understanding all U.S. alliances.²⁰ He argues that countries' choices depend largely on the geostrategic competition between the United States and China and the nuances of domestic and foreign policies.²¹ Taken together, decision-making and disposition in the U.S. security alliance network are shaped by the U.S.-China competition narrative. More importantly, countries' decisions are shaped by how they see the patron country, the United States as either a reliable *guardian* of the liberal international

¹² Lorenzana, Delfin N. "Commentary on the 70th Anniversary of the PH-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. September 16, 2021. <https://www.stratforumph.com/post/commentary-on-the-70th-anniversary-of-the-ph-us-mutual-defense-treaty>

¹³ Amador, Julio S. "Mind the Gaps, Fill the Needs: A Strategic Outlook for the Philippine-U.S. Alliance." *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Perspectives*, no. 162. December 10, 2021. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_162.pdf

¹⁴ Poling, Gregory B., Simon Tran Hudes, and Andreyka Natalegawa. "Alliances in Need of Upkeep: Strengthening the U.S.-Philippines and U.S.-Thailand Partnerships." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. August 5, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/alliances-need-upkeep-strengthening-us-philippines-and-us-thailand-partnerships>

¹⁵ Cabalza, Chester. "The Philippines' Stealthy Ascent to Middle Power." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. August 5, 2021. <https://www.stratforumph.com/post/the-philippines-stealthy-ascent-to-middle-power>

¹⁶ Amador, *Mind the Gaps, Fill the Needs*.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Reaffirming the Unbreakable U.S.-Japan Alliance." *U.S. Department of State*. March 14, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/reaffirming-the-unbreakable-u-s-japan-alliance/>; Haggard, Stephen. "U.S. Security Ties with Korea and Japan: Getting Beyond Deterrence." *UC Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation*. April 2021. <https://igcc.ucsd.edu/news-events/news/us-security-ties-with-korea-and-japan-getting-beyond-deterrence.html>; Schaus, John and Michael Shoebridge. "Five Opportunities for the U.S.-Australia Alliance to

Lead." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. September 15, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/five-opportunities-us-australia-alliance-lead>; Strating, Bec. "AUKUS and Australia's security policy." *Philippine Strategic Forum*. November 6, 2021. <https://www.stratforumph.com/post/aukus-and-australia-s-security-policy>

¹⁸ Biden, Joseph R. Jr. *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*. Washington, D.C.: The White House, March 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>

¹⁹ Santos, David. "PH, U.S. Marines resume war games, restore VFA amid pandemic." *CNN Philippines*. September 29, 2021. <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/9/29/PH-US-Marines-war-games-VFA.html>

²⁰ East-West Center. "EWC Insights: Asia-Pacific Political Transitions featuring Victor Cha." *East-West Center*. October 20, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OotdrEWZYdU>. Dr. Victor Cha is Visiting Fellow at the East-West Center, Senior Vice President and Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic & International Studies. He is a former Director for Asian Affairs in the White House's National Security Council, responsible for managing U.S. relations with Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Australia, and New Zealand. Cha mentions four variables: i) relative size (between the U.S. and the ally), ii) geography, iii) normative belief in the international rules-based order, and iv) conceptions of the U.S. alliance.

²¹ Cha, Victor D. *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016.

order or not. Based on these considerations, countries may opt for two different strategies. On the one hand, countries that have internalized rules-based decision-making, view Washington in high regard, and have the capacity to push back against China become *shapers*. On the other hand, *takers* are countries that have relatively weak capacities against coercion and are likely to accommodate China for various reasons, not necessarily to the detriment of the United States.

administration, the Biden administration seeks to reposition the United States as a reliable partner. The heart of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is coordination between alliances, partnerships, and other actors that share values and are interested in deeper and comprehensive forms of engagement (i.e., the EU and Great Britain).

Third, coalition building is important in transforming the ‘takers’ of the U.S. alliance system into ‘shapers’ of international and regional affairs. Japan is a good example.²⁵ The recent debut of the Australia-United

Table 1. Shapers, takers, guardianship, and the binary choice model.

	State as a <i>shaper</i>	State as a <i>taker</i>
The U.S. is a <i>guardian</i> of the order	(Quadrant I) Link with the U.S.	(Q II) Hedge with/delink from the U.S.
	<i>Australia & Japan</i> (link; the U.S. a strong guardian)	<i>South Korea</i> (delink; the U.S. as a weak guardian)
The U.S. is not a <i>guardian</i> of the order	(Q III) Hedge/link with the U.S.	(Q IV) Delink from the U.S.
	-	<i>Brazil, Chile, & Germany</i>

Authors’ rendition of Cha’s framework. Country categorizations by Victor Cha.

Implications

The model has three notable implications. First, delinking (or deviating from alliance management orthodoxies) may be mistakenly attributed to alliance disloyalty.²² To delink from the United States on certain issues may be associated more with a desire to pursue other constructive strategies than the prominent security linkages that Washington is known for. This was the case with Germany when it developed its [own](#) Indo-Pacific strategy.²³ But for countries with deeply embedded systems and processes with Washington, suddenly delinking from the United States is easier said than done. Linking with the United States leads to alliance surpluses and benefits both sides. On the other hand, delinking alters the security calculus, in which deficits outweigh benefits. This, in part, explains the varied approaches to security issues in the Indo-Pacific region (i.e., North Korea and China).

Second, the perception of Washington as a stalwart global player is important.²⁴ Following the seeming retreat from global leadership under the Trump

Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) Trilateral Security Partnership arrangement now positions Canberra in a similar vein.²⁶

Linking with and delinking from the United States: Northeast and Southeast Asia

A notable comparison is South Korea and Australia. On the question of an ascendant China, both are U.S. allies, and both are strong economic and security players in the region. However, Seoul and Canberra respond differently to Beijing’s rise – where the former is accommodating, and the latter is resisting.²⁷ The same can be said of Japan and South Korea – both are U.S. allies but have markedly different aims and approaches toward economic and security cooperation with the United States in the region, especially on the question of China.²⁸

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) supports a U.S. regional presence to keep emerging powers in check and put ASEAN interests at the forefront.²⁹ Some argue that the Indo-Pacific strategy should put ASEAN at the core.³⁰

²² Rabena, Aaron Jed and Elliot Silverbeg. “Is the U.S.-Philippines Alliance Obsolete?” *The Diplomat*. April 22, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/is-the-us-philippines-alliance-obsolete/>

²³ The Federal Government (Germany), *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region. Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping the 21st century together*. Berlin: Bundesregierung, September 2020. <https://rangun.diplo.de/blob/2380824/a27b62057f2d2675ce2bbfc5be01099a/policy-guidelines-summary-data.pdf>

²⁴ Biden, Joseph R. Jr. “Remarks by President Biden on America’s Place in the World.” *The White House*. February 4, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

²⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. “Overview of Japan-U.S. Security Relationship.” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*. December 16, 2021 (last updated). <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/index.html>

²⁶ Jackson, Douglas D. “More Than Submarines: Implications of AUKUS in the Air Domain.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. October 5, 2021.

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/more-submarines-implications-aukus-air-domain>; Oxford Analytica. “Australia will benefit most from AUKUS alliance.” *Expert Briefings*. September 24, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB264315>

²⁷ Cha, Victor D. “Leading by example: Two different responses to China’s rise.” *The Interpreter (Lowy Institute)*. November 11, 2020. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/leading-example-two-different-responses-chinas-rise>

²⁸ Yoon, Sukjoon. “Like It or Not, the South Korea-U.S. Alliance Is Changing.” *The Diplomat*. August 27, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/like-it-or-not-the-south-korea-us-alliance-is-changing/>

²⁹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.” *ASEAN.org*. January 1, 2021 (last edited). https://asean.org/asean2020/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf

³⁰ Anwar, Anu. “Why the U.S. and its allies should keep ASEAN at the centre.” *The Interpreter (Lowy Institute)*. September 10, 2019. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-us-and-its-allies-should-keep-asean-centre>

Table 2. Dr. Cha's model across Southeast Asia.

	State as a <i>shaper</i>	State as a <i>taker</i>
The U.S. is a <i>guardian</i> of the order	(Quadrant I) Link with the U.S.	(Q II) Hedge with/delink from the U.S.
	<i>ASEAN (link with the U.S. on all agreed issues owed in part to ASEAN-centrism)</i>	<i>Malaysia, The Philippines (all hedge and link on agreed issues)</i>
The U.S. is not a <i>guardian</i> of the order	(Q III) Hedge/link with the U.S.	(Q IV) Delink from the U.S.
	<i>Singapore, Vietnam</i>	<i>Indonesia</i>

Individually, ASEAN states vary in their disposition toward the United States with regard to China. Vietnam has shown great promise, reaching new levels of cooperation with Washington. Hanoi's integration into the U.S. security network is not wholesome *per se*, but thanks to the development of its security and economic ties with Japan, this is increasingly becoming more apparent.³¹ Thanks to Washington's heightened attention to Asia, Singapore poses as a partner replete with climate change and cybersecurity initiatives and cooperative measures in economic resiliency, innovation, and public health.³² Malaysia is likewise poised to enhance its partnership with the United States in public health and maritime security issues.³³ Like some ASEAN countries, Malaysia maintains a 'wait-and-see' position due to what it sees as 'functional deficits' in U.S. Asia policy and the risk of entrapment that may ensue.³⁴

The case of Indonesia paints a different picture but robustly supports Dr. Cha's postulations. Despite extensive ties with the United States, Jakarta has been delinking from Washington based on several concerns: the Trump and Biden administrations' 'aggressive' China policy, the expansion of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which risks undermining ASEAN centrality, the inability of the United States to promote democracy and human rights, and position against the United Nations (UN) principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) for fear of justifying American interventionism.³⁵

These cases strongly reinforce Dr. Cha's insights on alliance dynamics in the context of U.S.-China strategic

competition. The Philippines is also engaged in its own unique strategic calculus.

Hedging as a means of survival: The Philippines as a taker

The question now for Manila: Is the Philippines a *shaper* or a *taker* in the U.S. alliance? By its actions, Manila's disposition *vis-a-vis* the U.S. alliance is crystal clear: the United States is an important friend, partner, and ally. However, as evidenced by statements, events, and policies during the Duterte administration, the country has pursued a hedging strategy. While Duterte's personalistic foreign policy, preference for China, and mistrust toward the United States have swayed the Philippines from the balancing approach of the Aquino administration, he has acknowledged the importance of the alliance and recalibrated his approach.

Experts argue that states hedge when power structures are uncertain, and there are substantial, mixed, and multiple risks.³⁶ Due to the uncertain commitments and intentions of the great powers, smaller states like the Philippines avoid taking sides while pursuing opposing measures to offset risks and keep their fallback positions viable for as long as possible. This happened under the Duterte administration – seemingly antagonistic toward the United States in his rhetoric but not keen on following through the harsh statements with actual policy actions. Duterte's statements even resulted in the strengthening of ties with the United States.

Does the Philippine strategy show that it values the United States less as an ally? Not necessarily.³⁷ The Philippines has gained so much from the alliance.³⁸

³¹ Mishra, Rahul. "Keeping Strategic Anxieties at Bay: Growing Japan-Vietnam Bonhomie." *The Diplomat*. June 4, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/keeping-strategic-anxieties-at-bay-growing-japan-vietnam-bonhomie/>

³² The White House, "FACT SHEET: Strengthening the U.S.-Singapore Strategic Partnership." *The White House*. August 23, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/08/23/fact-sheet-strengthening-the-u-s-singapore-strategic-partnership/>

³³ Kuik, Cheng-chwee, Abdul Razak Ahmad, and Khor Swee Kheng, "Malaysia-U.S. Relations and the Biden Administration: Mapping Excitement, Managing Expectations." *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Perspectives*, no. 46. April 16, 2021. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ISEAS_Perspective_2021_46.pdf

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ Arifianto, Alexander R. "U.S.-Indonesia relations need a reboot." *East Asia Forum*. June 28, 2021. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/06/28/us-indonesia-relations-need-a-reboot/>; Allard, Tom and Stanley Widiyanto. "Indonesia to U.S.,

China: Don't trap us in your rivalry." *Reuters*. September 8, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-politics-foreign-minister/indonesia-to-u-s-china-dont-trap-us-in-your-rivalry-idUSKBN25Z1ZD>; Saha, Premesha. "The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Why ASEAN remains cautious." *Observer Research Foundation*. February 26, 2018. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/asean-quad/>; Afifa, Leila. "Indonesia Votes Against Adoption of Responsibility to Protect; Minister Explains." *Tempo.co*. May 20, 2021. <https://en.tempo.co/read/1464097/indonesia-votes-against-adoption-of-responsibility-to-protect-minister-explains>

³⁶ Kuik, Cheng-chwee. "Hedging in the Post-Pandemic Asia: How, What and Why?" *The Asan Forum*. June 6, 2020. <https://theasanforum.org/hedging-in-post-pandemic-asia-what-how-and-why/>

³⁷ De Castro, Renato Cruz. "The US-Philippine Alliance: An Evolving Hedge against an Emerging China Challenge." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 31, no. 3 (December 2009): 399-423. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41487397>

³⁸ Bautista, *US-Philippines Alliance: Strategic and Operational Value of the Alliance and its Future*; Trajano, Julius Cesar Imperial. "US-Philippines:

Hedging is a strategy that smaller states use to ensure their security and survivability while avoiding getting entangled or abandoned by major powers, especially in times of uncertainty. The next Philippine administration will likely attempt to hedge with the United States and China, depending on several factors, including leadership, levels of threat, and great power interactions.³⁹

The Philippines-U.S. alliance could be as effective as the others in the region if given sufficient attention and investment.⁴⁰ While hedging may continue to be a Filipino strategy, there will be mutual benefits if the Philippines strengthens its already well-established ties with the United States. For the Philippines to become a *shaper* in the foreseeable future, it must be proactive and clear in what it wants to advance.⁴¹ Finishing the modernization of its armed forces and jumpstarting its self-reliant defense posture between the private and public sectors are two important starting points.⁴² Synchronizing these programs with the recommendations in the CSIS report would be a great leap forward for both countries. The United States and the Philippines have recently taken steps to push the security ties forward.⁴³ This comes after President Duterte restored the Visiting Forces Agreement and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana's visited the United States.⁴⁴

While the alliance has faced significant hurdles during the Duterte administration, this is only expected given Manila's calculus of foreign policy hedging between Beijing and Washington.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Duterte's persistent mistrust of Washington in the early years of his administration influenced Philippines-U.S. relations and threatened vital cooperation activities and agreements. This uncertain footing has led to an uncomfortable start to the Biden administration's Asia engagement. There was an apparent snub of the Philippines in the Asia tours by senior U.S. officials and in the U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance.

The Philippines: a shaper in the foreseeable future?

Hedging has been beneficial for the Philippines in dealing with geopolitical uncertainties and continues to be an effective policy that cyclically reinvigorates its security alliance with the United States. However, the time has come for the Philippines to decide whether or not it wants to be a *shaper* in international relations or continue to be a *taker*. While the pandemic has posed challenges for U.S.-Philippine relations, it has also created opportunities for cooperation that reinforce trust and goodwill, with a spill-over effect on the alliance. 2022 will be remain challenging

for the relationship as the Philippines is scheduled to elect a new president. Experts have already warned of the possibility of China backing several candidates to ensure an outcome favorable to its strategic goals.⁴⁶ The next president will determine Philippine relations with China and the United States over the next six years. From this, the alliance may undergo either a re-examination, a reshaping, or a redirecting.

The United States must work hard to ensure that the Philippines becomes a *shaper* and proactively strengthen the alliance. A strong link with the United States would be beneficial in maintaining regional peace and security. So much more can be done by cooperating and communicating on a wide range of issues – diplomatic, traditional (and non-traditional) security, economic, and post-pandemic recovery.⁴⁷

Uncertainties, unmet needs, and evolving geopolitical challenges do not necessarily mean terminating the alliance. The two countries can find the convergence of their strategic goals and mutual benefits so long as both begin and are willing to put to rest the persisting qualms about the alliance. Therefore, it is important for both to institute much-needed reforms to make the alliance resilient and relevant but ever-evolving.⁴⁸

“The Philippines-U.S. alliance could be as effective as the others in the region if given sufficient attention and investment.”

Resetting the Security Alliance?” *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*. February 24, 2021. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/nts/us-philippines-resetting-the-security-alliance/#.YdULyi2CZQJ>

³⁹ Kuik, *Hedging in the Post-Pandemic Asia*.

⁴⁰ Poling, Hudes, & Natalegawa, *Alliances in Need of Upkeep*.

⁴¹ Amador, Julio S. III, Aries A. Arugay, Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby, and Justin Keith Baquisal. *National Security Priorities and Agenda of the Philippines: Perceptions from the Filipino Strategic Community*. Philippines: Amador Research Services and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, December 22, 2020. <https://www.amadorresearchservices.com/publications/national-security-priorities-and-agenda-in-the-philippines>

⁴² Amador, Julio S. III, Deryk Matthew N. Baladjay, and Sheena Valenzuela. “Modernizing or equalizing? Defence budget and military modernization in the Philippines, 2010-2020.” *Defence Studies* (January 31, 2022). DOI: 10.1080/14702436.2022.2030713

⁴³ U.S. Department of Defense. “Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s Meeting With Philippine Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana.” *U.S. Department of Defense*. September 10, 2021. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2771441/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-meeting-with-philippine-sec/>

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Readout of Defense Secretaries Austin III and Lorenzana; Ali, Idrees and Karen Lema. “Philippines’ Duterte fully restores key U.S. troop pact.” Reuters*. July 30, 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-aims-shore-up-philippine-ties-troop-pact-future-lingers-2021-07-29/>; Pitlo, Lucio Blanco III. “High-level visits underpin renewed PH-US alliance ties post VFA restoration.” *Philippine Strategic Forum*. October 7, 2021.

<https://www.stratforumph.com/post/high-level-visits-underpin-renewed-ph-us-alliance-ties-post-vfa-restoration>

⁴⁵ Grossman, *Duterte’s Dalliance with China Is Over*.

⁴⁶ Gotinga, J.C. “Experts warn of China-backed candidates in 2022 PH elections.” *Rappler*. June 11, 2020. <https://r3.rappler.com/nation/263364-former-admiral-ambassador-warn-chinese-influence-elections-2022>

⁴⁷ Amador, Arugay, Misalucha-Willoughby, & Baquisal, *National Security Priorities and Agenda of the Philippines*.

⁴⁸ Poling, Hudes, & Natalegawa, *Alliances in Need of Upkeep*; Bautista, Emmanuel T., Julio S. Amador III, Maria Emilynda Jeddahlyn Pia V. Benosa, and Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby. *Reviewing Philippine-U.S. Bilateral Defense Relations: The Legal, Military, and Diplomacy Perspectives*. Quezon City: National Defense College of the Philippines, 2020.

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8

The EDCA and the Philippines' external defense capability development

Santiago Juditho Emmanuel Castillo

Abstract

This research examines how the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) can further improve the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) external defense capabilities and improve the defense ties of the United States and the Philippines. A particular area where the EDCA can advance U.S.-Philippine military partnership is improving the AFP's ability to protect the country from external military threats and adapt or effectively respond to a dynamic geopolitical environment. To be sufficiently up to such tasks, the AFP needs to drastically improve its military assets and materiel that focus on aerospace and maritime capabilities. Article I, section 1, subsection (a) of the EDCA on "Purpose and Scope," mandates "Supporting the Parties' shared goal of improving interoperability of the Parties' forces, and for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), addressing short-term capabilities gaps, promoting long-term modernization, and helping maintain and develop additional maritime security and maritime domain awareness and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities." While the agreement's goals are set, there are still challenges that need to be addressed between the United States and the Philippines, such as different levels of commitment to the alliance as perceived by the leadership on both sides. This research highlights the importance of the EDCA in improving the Philippines' external defense capabilities and strengthening U.S.-Philippines defense ties. Two issues will be examined: the challenge of developing AFP's external defense capabilities and the under-utilization of the EDCA for such purpose.

Introduction

The 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the United States and the Philippines is a key supplement to the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). EDCA’s purpose, as stated in Article I paragraph 1, is to deepen defense cooperation between the parties and develop their individual and collective capacities in furtherance of Article II of the MDT. The signing of the EDCA came at a crucial time for the Philippines as it continues to contend with the South China Sea disputes with the People’s Republic of China. What seemed to have triggered the EDCA was the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff between Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Coast Guard and Marine Surveillance vessels and Philippine Navy (PN) and Coast Guard (CG) vessels. The incident was summarized by Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI):

The Philippines’ *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* reached the shoal early on April 10. Armed sailors boarded and inspected the Chinese ships (fishing vessels), but when the Filipinos disembarked to prepare to make arrests, the trawlers sent out a distress call to authorities in China’s Hainan Province. Two unarmed China Marine Surveillance (CMS) vessels happened to be on a routine patrol nearby. They quickly arrived and took position just outside the narrow mouth of Scarborough Shoal’s lagoon. As night fell, the two sides settled into an uneasy standoff.¹

What followed was a tit-for-tat situation between the Philippine and Chinese governments, from 12 April to 15 June 2012. Figure 1 provides a detailed timeline of the standoff.

Figure 1. Timeline of the Scarborough Shoal Standoff

	China	Philippines	United States
Phase I: Philippine navy detains Chinese fishermen			
Apr 8	Fishermen seen at shoal	Deploys naval frigate	
Apr 10	Coast guard responds	Navy begins arrests	
Apr 12-13	Deploys armed ship, withdraws other vessels	Replaces frigate with coast guard vessel	
Phase II: Standoff ensues when initial negotiations fail			
Apr 13	Both refuse to be the first party to withdraw		
Apr 17-22		Calls for arbitration, ASEAN’s support	Affirms (vague) alliance commitment
Apr 23	Withdraws over horizon	Deploys second vessel	
Phase III: Manila seeks U.S. help while China escalates			
Apr 26	Threatens military escalation	Calls for maximum U.S. intervention	
Apr 28-30	Vessels return and harass Philippine ships	Consultations result in only indirect U.S. support	
May 3	Quarantines fruit imports		
Phase IV: New talks lead to some de-escalation			
May 26-27	Back channel talks end fruit quarantine, some Chinese ships depart		
early Jun	U.S.-brokered negotiations occur, but unclear whether deal reached		
Jun 15	Presence peaks at sea	Withdraws all vessels	
Phase V: Final negotiations fail to restore status quo ante			
Jun 17-18	Denies existence of deal	Publicizes alleged agreement	
late Jun	Ships return/remain		
Jul	Erects barrier across lagoon	ASEAN fails to give support	

Source: Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.²

¹ Green, Michael et al. “Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, May 22, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>.

² Green, Michael et al. “Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff”.

The incident tested the U.S.-Philippines alliance. Most analyses describe the U.S. response as being 'reluctant' to be drawn into a conflict with China over 'uninhabited rocks.' When the Philippines requested a clarification of the coverage of the Mutual Defense Treaty, Washington held to its policy of strategic ambiguity.³ This became a source of frustration for many in the Philippines defense and foreign policy establishment. The United States tried to de-escalate by brokering a mutual withdrawal deal, if not a return to the status quo ante. Still, many questioned U.S. commitment, especially when Beijing did not keep its side of the bargain:

After weeks of discussions, demarches, and negotiations, U.S. officials brokered what they thought was a deal for a mutual withdrawal in mid-June. Exhausted, outnumbered, and lacking viable alternatives, Manila withdrew its remaining ships under the face-saving auspices of an oncoming typhoon. On the other hand, China failed to comply with the agreed-upon deadline and retained its maritime vessels at the shoal, where they remain today on near-constant patrol.⁴

The unfavorable end to the Scarborough Shoal standoff led many in the Philippines to question U.S. security guarantee vis-à-vis the South China Sea issue, in particular, and the value of the alliance in general. President Benigno Aquino III's successor, Rodrigo Duterte, lamented that the past administration, upon the U.S. advice, ordered the withdrawal of Philippine ships without considering the possibility that China might "renege on its commitment to everybody" and "stay there and claim the West Philippine Sea as their property."⁵ Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana also noted this at CSIS and Pacific Forum events marking the 70th anniversary of the MDT, arguing there was a need to "upgrade" and "update" the alliance and to make clear the "extent of American commitments" and added that the U.S. stated commitment with Japan on the East China Sea issue was more explicit than that with Manila on the South China Sea disputes.⁶

Following the standoff, the two governments negotiated the EDCA to address the maritime challenges in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, it was never really fully implemented to achieve its full potential. While the agreement was signed during the administration of President Benigno Aquino III, its implementation was started during the administration of President Duterte. Early in his term, Duterte made no secret his foreign policy direction of distancing the Philippines from the U.S. and seeking closer ties with China. An example of this was when Duterte wanted U.S. Special Forces units out of Mindanao in September 2016, alleging that their presence was a cause for more conflict in the region. In the same month, Duterte also stated that the Philippine Navy would not have joined the U.S. Navy in the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The strong statements made by Duterte raised concerns from U.S. policymakers on the reliability of the Philippines as an alliance partner, making the EDCA's initial implementation rocky. This was further

exacerbated in 2017 where Duterte threatened to unilaterally cancel the EDCA when he claimed that the storage facilities made under the EDCA could store U.S. nuclear weapons.

This research examines why the EDCA has not served as a framework for the United States to improve the Filipino military's external defense and deterrent capabilities. Exploring this further can help illuminate policy solutions and approaches for U.S. and Philippines defense and foreign policymakers. Specifically, it will look into areas of defense capabilities that would be most helpful in improving Manila's air and naval capabilities critical for the South China Sea issue while also enhancing the AFP's interoperability with the U.S. military to make the Philippines a reliable and effective partner in the alliance. It will also consider the challenges and concerns with pursuing those goals.

"...enhancing the AFP's interoperability with the U.S. military (will) make the Philippines a reliable and effective partner in the alliance..."

The Armed Forces of the Philippines and the shift from internal security to external defense

Since the 1970s, the AFP has focused mostly on combatting domestic insurgencies like the New People's Army (NPA) and local terrorist groups based in Mindanao such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the recent ISIS-inspired Maute Group. This has earned the AFP decades of combat experience confronting multiple and simultaneous insurgencies. While not posing an existential threat to the state, domestic insurgencies drain the AFP's resources and inhibit economic development.⁷

The decades-long focus on internal security operations left the AFP dangerously unprepared and underequipped to safeguard the Philippines' air and maritime spaces. Since the Cold War, the Philippines has been overly dependent on the United States for its external defense. This dependence is often cited as one of the reasons for the slow development of national defense capabilities.⁸ The AFP's army branch has traditionally been prioritized as the government focused on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. The navy and air force branches were not provided sufficient resources to upgrade their assets and capabilities. While the AFP Modernization Act of 1995, implemented during the administration of Fidel V. Ramos, was intended to modernize the AFP, implementation was selective due to continued prioritization of internal security operations and a lack of funding that was exacerbated by the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. However, the Scarborough Shoal standoff served as a wake-up call for the Philippines. It became apparent that Beijing was serious in operationalizing its nine-dash line claim in the South China Sea.

³ Townshend, Ashley. "Duterte deal with China over Scarborough Shoal exposes US failure," *CNN*, October 31, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/31/opinions/philippines-china-us-scarborough-shoal-south-china-sea/index.html>.

⁴ Ratner, Ely. "Learning the Lessons of Scarborough Reef," *The National Interest*, November 21, 2013, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-the-lessons-scarborough-reef-9442>.

⁵ Gita-Carlos, Ruth. "I won't allow PH to join any war with US': Duterte," *Philippine News Agency*, May 14, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1140268>.

⁶ Brunnstrom, David and Lema, Karen. "Philippines defense minister says U.S. treaty needs comprehensive review," *Reuters*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/philippines-defense-minister-says-us-treaty-needs-comprehensive-review-2021-09-08/>.

⁷ Abuza, Zachary. "The Philippines Internal and external security challenges," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* 45 (2012): 4.

⁸ Malala, Sannie. "What the Philippines Must Do to Defend Itself from China," *The Journal of Political Risk* 7, no. 9 (2019): Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.jpolorisk.com/what-the-philippines-must-do-to-defend-itself-from-china/>.

Before EDCA, the Aquino administration pushed Congress to pass the Revised AFP Modernization Act in 2012. The passage of the legislation was timely as Aquino sought to prioritize improving the capabilities of the navy and air force by acquiring new naval vessels and combat aircraft and their essential system packages to cope with future contingencies in the South China Sea. In August 2012, the Department of National Defense (DND) announced the planned acquisition of 12 Korean Aerospace Industries (KAI) TA-50 light attack and lead-in fighter trainer aircraft. Congress approved funding for the acquisition in September 2012.⁹ For the Philippine Navy, a contract to build two new frigates was awarded to South Korean shipbuilder Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI).¹⁰ Most of the planned acquisitions were delivered during the Duterte administration. AFP modernization remains slow as Duterte's prioritization of ending domestic insurgencies and the Philippines' warming ties with China have complicated the effort. It is in this context that the United States has an opportunity to assist the Philippines in the development of its external defense capability through the EDCA. Fully implementing EDCA could restore Filipinos' confidence in the alliance badly damaged by Washington's handling of the Scarborough Shoal standoff.

“Fully implementing EDCA could restore Filipinos’ confidence in the alliance...”

EDCA and external defense capability development

Article I section (a) of the EDCA states that the agreement is intended to improve interoperability of the U.S. and Filipino forces and for the AFP to address short-term capabilities gaps, promote long-term modernization, and help maintain and develop additional maritime security, maritime domain awareness (MDA), and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) capabilities. In 2016, the two countries approved five locations where U.S. forces are allowed access under EDCA through a rotational deployment of troops. During the Sixth Annual Bilateral Security Dialogue (BSD) in Washington, D.C. on March 18, 2016, American and Filipino defense officials announced that U.S. forces had been allowed access to five AFP base locations: Antonio Bautista Air Base in the western-most island of Palawan; Basa Air Base in Pampanga and Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, both on the main island of Luzon; Lumbia Air Base in Northern Mindanao; and Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base on the central Philippine island of Cebu.¹¹

While construction of new facilities has focused on supporting HADR and counterterrorism efforts, little

progress has been made on improving the AFP's external defense capabilities. With the AFP modernization program still underway, albeit with delays, the EDCA could augment the AFP's naval and air capabilities. This can come in the form of providing defense equipment and/or training and operational experience related to maritime and air defense operations. By providing PAF officers and personnel with the essential skills and knowledge on air defense capabilities, skills, and tactics, the U.S. can help the PAF adapt better to growing external defense challenges. This is essential as the Philippine military is shifting toward an external defense posture.

The AFP needs to learn how to operate effectively concerning territorial defense since its combat experience has been primarily on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. The AFP needs U.S. assistance to catch up with neighbors and achieve its desired 'credible defense posture.' The Duterte administration's attitude towards the alliance has complicated the implementation of the EDCA. While Duterte still questions U.S. security commitment, Defense Secretary Lorenzana insists the alliance is important. The EDCA should help develop the AFP's external defense capabilities and improve the broader defense ties between the two countries that have been weakened in recent years.

Developing the Philippines' maritime and air defense capabilities through EDCA

The AFP's acquisition of new weapons systems will require proper training and knowledge to translate them into credible deterrence capabilities. To that end, the EDCA's Article I section (a) should serve as the basis to expand activities and cover those related to territorial defense, from tactical to the operational level. The U.S. military's extensive combat experience in a variety of military operations will prove helpful for the AFP beyond just the usual counterterrorism and HADR exercises.

Credible air defense capabilities

Since the Cold War, the Philippine Air Force (PAF) has mostly focused on providing close air support to internal security operations. Its 14-year strategic roadmap, *Flight Plan 2028*, identified limited equipment, bases, and facilities as obstacles to fulfilling its mission of defending the Philippine airspace, a task made more crucial by China's aggressive expansion in the South China Sea.¹² The PAF lacks air defense and surveillance capabilities. Several units of the F-5 were the last fighter jets the Philippines had, and they were all decommissioned in 2005 after being in service for 40 years.¹³ The recent acquisition of 12 KAI FA-50 combat aircraft from South Korea is a small but important step for the PAF to regain credible air defense capabilities. Moreover, PAF is planning to acquire multi-role fighter jets. Media reports indicate that Manila is considering the Swedish Saab JAS-39 Gripen.¹⁴ These are a

⁹ Cohen, Michael. "Philippines confirms T/A-50 purchase," *Janes Defence Weekly* 49, no. 32 (2012).

¹⁰ Rahmat, Ridzwan. "Hyundai Wins USD337 Million Frigate Contract from Philippine Navy," *ADAS 2022*, September 2, 2016, <https://www.adas.ph/2016/09/02/hyundai-wins-usd337-million-frigate-contract-philippine-navy/>.

¹¹ De Castro, Renato. "Bilateral and Regional Implications of the U.S. - Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," *East-West Center Asia Pacific Bulletin Analysis*, no. 365 (2016): 2.

¹² Romero, Alexis. "Air Force admits PH's weaknesses in defending territory," *ABS-CBN*, June 23, 2015, <https://news.abs->

cbn.com/nation/06/23/15/air-force-admits-phs-weaknesses-defending-territory.

¹³ Evangelista, Kate. "Philippine Air Force to buy 6 fighter jets," *Inquirer.Net*, July 1, 2011, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/5162/philippine-air-force-to-buy-6-fighter-jets>.

¹⁴ Nepomuceno, Priam. "Multi-role jet fighters acquisition program on track: Lorenzana," *Philippine News Agency*, May 7, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1139439>.

few indications that the AFP is deliberately in the process of improving its air defense capabilities.

The PAF also needs to develop capabilities to deal with gray-zone activities involving Chinese maritime fishing militias, Coast Guard, and marine surveillance vessels in the South China Sea. Its long-term plan is to acquire new advanced fighters by 2021 and airborne early warning systems and ground-based anti-air missiles and radars.¹⁵ In its report with the National Defense College of the Philippines' (NDCP) on future capabilities, the PAF stated:

The PAF stands to complete its IADS [Integrated Air Defense System] with the pending acquisition of Multi-Role Fighters in its Modernization horizon. The Radar Systems and Ground-Based Air Defense Systems are still being completed, possibly in the next 3-5 years. In conclusion, the PAF has little to no power against a frontal attack from China. The PAF's forward operating bases also need to be equipped with an additional rotor and fixed-wing fleets for faster response time.¹⁶

On dealing with China's gray-zone activities, the same report indicated that the PAF could conduct round-the-clock and joint maritime patrols with the PN only when the planned long-range patrol aircraft (LRPA) and additional ISR platforms are added to the fleet.¹⁷ With the expected acquisition of new equipment, PAF would require additional pilots, officers, and technical personnel who would then require training. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and persistent internal security focus led to budget constraints, further delaying the acquisition of more advanced equipment for the PAF. These constraints prevent the PAF from acquiring advanced fighter aircraft from the U.S. while Philippine defense officials are still mulling over the acquisition of the Swedish Gripen fighter aircraft.

Credible maritime deterrence capabilities

As with the PAF, the PN's territorial defense capability is negligible. For many years, the PN has served mainly to support counterterrorism operations against terrorist groups in Mindanao. While the PN also does maritime patrols in the West Philippine Sea and the Sulu-Celebes Seas, it lacks surface assets and the advanced equipment necessary to monitor and safeguard its vast maritime zones. Nevertheless, the PN is in the process of developing "an expanded green-water Navy capable of projecting power in our aspired operational area within our maritime zones."¹⁸ While the Philippines cannot build a fleet to match China's, it wants to form a naval force that can deter and provide a limited capability to respond to Chinese intrusions.¹⁹

As part of the AFP's modernization program to protect the country's territorial waters, the PN has ordered two Jose Rizal-class multi-mission capable frigates from South Korean shipbuilding company Hyundai Heavy

Industries (HHI) under the Frigate Acquisition Project (FAP). The vessels are based on the Incheon/FFX-I/HDF-3000-type multi-purpose frigate of the Republic of Korea Navy (RoKN).²⁰ In addition, the PN has acquired three AgustaWestland AW109 Power helicopters from Italy's Leonardo Finmeccanica to be used for a wide range of naval missions, including exclusive economic zone (EEZ) monitoring and protection, surface surveillance, SAR, and maritime security.²¹ These newly acquired defense systems for the PN are meant to address the growing challenge of China's presence in the South China Sea and achieve credible naval deterrence.

The PN has also been developing its strategy dubbed 'Active Archipelagic Defense Strategy' (AADS) and Naval Operating Concept (NOC). The former outlines the PN's naval defense and security approach, while the latter outlines naval deployment in peacetime and conflict. Founded on three mutually supporting strategic approaches, namely maritime operations, maritime situational awareness, and maritime cooperation, the AADS explains how naval forces can contribute to national military objectives.²² This rationalizes the acquisition of new weapon platforms that the PN sorely needs. The Navy's acquisitions have hewed closely to what is laid out in its *Strategic Sail Plan 2020* and its *Philippine Fleet Desired Force Mix* proposal in 2012. The documents envisaged a naval force structure comprised of three diesel-electric submarines, six anti-air warfare frigates, 12 anti-submarine warfare corvettes, and four strategic sealift ships by 2027.²³ With the arrival of the two new Jose Rizal Class-frigates from South Korea and the future acquisition of weapon platforms such as diesel-electric submarines, it is essential for the PN to also be familiar with their new defense equipment and how to use them effectively for external defense.

The way forward: strengthening the alliance and defending the country

The Philippines will have a new president come June 30, 2022. The next administration should make full use of the country's alliance with the United States to modernize the AFP, increase its maritime and territorial defense capabilities, and achieve the long-desired minimum credible defense posture. The United States, through the EDCA, can assist by helping provide the necessary skills and capabilities in addition to provisions of needed defense equipment and materiel. As of this time alliance has no mechanism that can help the PAF become more experienced with the new technologies, tactics, and operations related to operating multi-role combat aircraft, ground control/surveillance radars, and C4ISTAR (Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Reconnaissance) assets. The EDCA could serve as a basis for the United States to conduct training programs and

¹⁵ Paulsson, Henrik. "Air power in the South China Sea: Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines." *The Interpreter*, December 11, 2016, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/air-power-south-china-sea-vietnam-malaysia-and-philippines>.

¹⁶ Ricaplaza, Jeremeih et al. "The Future of Philippine Air Warfare," *President's Papers: The Future of Philippine Warfare 1* (2021): 43.

¹⁷ Ricaplaza et al. "The Future of Philippine Air Warfare," 44.

¹⁸ Nepomuceno, Priam. "PH Navy upgrades to improve 'green-water' capabilities," *Philippine News Agency*, October 9, 2020, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1117985>.

¹⁹ Beckhusen, Robert. "The Philippines' Biggest South China Sea Problem: It Has Almost No Navy," *The National Interest*, July 27, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/the-philippines-biggest-south-china-sea-problem-it-has-17139>.

²⁰ "Jose Rizal-Class Frigates, Philippines," *Naval Technology*, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/philippine-navys-frigate-acquisition-project/>.

²¹ "AW1040 Philippine Navy Signs Contract for Three AW109 Power Helicopters," *Leonardo*, March 27, 2014, <https://www.leonardocompany.com/en/press-release-detail/-/detail/philippine-navy-signs-contract-for-3-aw109power>.

²² Paculba, Xylee et al. "The Future of Philippine Naval Warfare," *President's Papers: The Future of Philippine Warfare 1* (2021): 62.

²³ Chang, Felix. "Building from Scratch: The Rebirth of the Philippine Navy," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, October 10, 2019, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/10/building-from-scratch-rebirth-of-the-philippine-navy/>.

additional exercises and technical working group activities that can focus specifically on new air defense capabilities outside the *Balikatan*'s framework and calendar. While joint military exercises like *Balikatan* and *Kamandag* are essential to improving defense ties between the U.S. and the Philippines, the EDCA could also serve as a basis for more specialized long-term training and capacity-building programs for PAF officers to develop better strategies and skills. These could be in the form of dedicated programs which can be done outside the scope and duration of the annual joint military exercises.

The United States could also assist the PAF in formulating a new doctrine on Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) for maritime-domain awareness and joint operations; form a joint committee to formulate a multiyear program guiding the re-establishment of the country's air-defense system in tandem with maritime surveillance capabilities; deploy, on a six-month rotational basis, a U.S. Marine or Navy fighter squadron to be based in cooperative security locations (CSLs) in the Philippines; and recruit volunteer trained pilots and ground crews for temporary deployment to the PAF once it transitions into an advanced stage of air-defense readiness.²⁴ Doing all these would allow the U.S. Air Force to gain a closer working relationship with its Filipino counterpart and improve operational coordination. A more capable PAF is in the interest of the United States.

As with the PAF, the EDCA can serve as the basis for the United States to help the PN improve its maritime security and territorial defense capabilities. Over the past years, U.S. assistance has included help in enhancing the institutional capacity of the PN and the Philippine Coast Guard and in providing funding, human resources development, training, and exercises. U.S. assistance also supported the construction of a coastal surveillance network and the acquisition of patrol vessels of various displacements.²⁵ With the rotational deployment of U.S. military personnel and equipment to the Philippines, the United States could provide training for PN counterparts in naval operations such as anti-submarine warfare, naval surface warfare, and joint air-sea patrol, in addition to the existing amphibious exercises during *Balikatan*. Regular table-top exercises and technical working group workshops and consultations should also be considered.

The EDCA can also serve as a basis for the United States to further assist the Philippines in developing maritime domain awareness. The AFP currently lacks advanced surveillance, intelligence, and information technology, and has difficulty generating a comprehensive common operating picture (COP).²⁶ The U.S. Navy could help the PN improve its C4ISTAR capabilities for better coordination with other linked military units and allied forces. The U.S. Navy P-8A deployments and maritime domain awareness patrols launched from AFP bases should routinely carry Filipino crew members and conduct missions that address Filipino maritime security needs.²⁷

“The EDCA can serve as a basis for the United States to further assist the Philippines in developing maritime domain awareness.”

²⁴ De Castro, Renato and Lohman, Walter. “Getting the Philippines Air Force Flying Again: The Role of the U.S.–Philippines Alliance,” *The Heritage Foundation*, September 24, 2012, https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/getting-the-philippines-air-force-flying-again-the-role-the-us-philippines-alliance#_ftn14.

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