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**STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP: ENHANCING ALLIANCE
WITH THE PHILIPPINES TO COUNTER CHINA'S RISE**

by

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ABSTRACT

China's revanchist approach, fueled by its years of military modernization and economic growth, poses significant threats to the peace and security in the Southeast Asia region. China's aggressive expansion and advancement in Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) capabilities challenge the stability, security, freedom of navigation, and U.S. interests in an increasingly volatile region. The pivot to the Pacific shifts strategic focus and resources in the region to contain China's rise. This report answers the question: how can the U.S. employ its Instruments of National Power (IOPs) with the Philippines to help counter China's rise in the South China Sea? The U.S. can address these threats by bolstering the alliance with the Philippines through the use of all IOPs. This report uses the problem and solution methodology to address challenges by China's preeminence in the region. This method addresses opportunities for the U.S. to strengthen partnership with the Philippines. In conclusion, the U.S. defense posture hinges on reinvigorating partnerships with the Philippines to preserve peace, stability, and prosperity by leveraging a "whole-of-government" approach to protecting U.S. interests. The Philippines, a long-time U.S. ally, is a key stakeholder, and therefore deepening commitment is a top priority. Recommendations for this report include: enhancing US – Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) partnership to address the territorial disputes, modernizing Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) by providing state-of-the-art capabilities, reinvigorating joint military exercises to improve interoperability, unwavering assurance and deterrence messaging, and continuing to elevate Philippines' economy on a path of more inclusive economic growth.

Section 1: Introduction

“This is the future we seek in the Asia Pacific -- security, prosperity, and dignity for all. That is the future we will pursue, in partnership with allies and friends, and with every element of American power. In the Asia Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in.”¹

- President Barack Obama¹

China’s revanchist approach in the South China Sea poses significant threats to the peace and security in the Southeast Asia and has created frictions with the U.S. interests in an increasingly volatile region. The U.S. is a Pacific power and its economy, strength and interests are inextricably linked with Asia’s economic, security, and political order.² The Obama administration’s pivot to the Pacific is an endeavor to maintain U.S. hegemony in response to the emergence of China as an economic and military powerhouse, as well as its increasing power projection through A2/AD capabilities. For the time being, the Trump administration has not formulated its Asia foreign policy and not shifted away, at least militarily, from the previous administration. The U.S. is rebalancing its focus to reflect the growing importance of the region for its long-term interest. The U.S. must commit more focus and resources to contain China’s rise and influence. The U.S., however, has been operating in a financially constrained environment and is facing a mandatory reduction in force in the military. Thus, America’s defense posture hinges on reinvigorating partnerships with allies and partners by helping to build their defense capacities. The Philippines, a long-time ally, is a key stakeholder, and therefore deepening commitment is a top priority. This research answers the question: how can the U.S. employ its Instruments of National Power (IOPs) with the Philippines to help counter China’s rise in the South China Sea?

Modernizing ties between the U.S. and the Philippines through the use of IOPs is central to deterring China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. China's aggressive actions through power projection pose significant threats to the U.S. interests and regional security. The Scarborough Shoal stand-off in June 2012, in which China seized disputed islands from the Philippines, demonstrates the volatile nature of the territorial claims and underlines the fragile peace and security of the region. The Scarborough Shoal is an atoll located well inside the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The U.S. must address these threats such as the Scarborough Shoal incident by bolstering the alliance with the Philippines by using a "whole-of-government" approach. Specifically, the ASEAN, The Hague ruling, consistent assurance and deterrence messaging, Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), and Partnership for Growth (PFG) are opportunities for the U.S. to deepen relations with the Philippines.

Although the renewed partnership between the two countries is to promote peace and security, China sees it as the opposite. China views U.S. involvement as escalatory and as undermining the stability of the region. However, this is necessary to deter China's expansion into disputed territories in the South China Sea. In particular, the U.S. military presence offers opportunities to enhance interoperability training and to provide modern military equipment to the AFP. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a credible defense capacity to enable AFP to have a robust external defense and maritime security to push back against Chinese incursions and protect Philippine sovereignty.

This report uses the problem and solution methodology to address challenges by China's preeminence in the region. Most importantly, this method addresses opportunities for the U.S. to strengthen partnership with the Philippines by leveraging a "whole-of-government" approach to

protect U.S. interests and achieve national objectives in the region. The holistic approach would bolster the alliance with the Philippines to counter China's advances in the disputed territories in the South China Sea. To advance national interests in the Philippines, the U.S. must employ its IOPs to strengthen the U.S. – Philippines alliance.

This report begins with a background discussion regarding the U.S. and the Philippines' strong historical ties, which date back to 1898 when the Philippines was a colonial possession of the U.S. and continuing to the Second World War. After the war, the two signed a Military Basing Agreement (MBA) and subsequently Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). In the Post-Cold War era, the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) renewed the security partnership amid looming threats from China. The 9/11 terrorist attacks further strengthened the partnership and opened up Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) – Philippines to combat terrorist groups affiliated with Al Qaeda. Recently, the U.S. successfully provided assistance when Super Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda created massive devastation across the southern part of the Philippines that prompted Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations. This action ultimately culminated into both countries signing the EDCA.

Next, this report discusses the rebalance posture in the Asia – Pacific region. This section also addresses the U.S. interests in the South China Sea and the Philippines - security, economic, and political stability interests, and the territorial disputes. Then, the analysis section discusses opportunities for the U.S. to bolster ties with the Philippines through the use of different IOPs: Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (DIME).

Finally, the recommendations section provides pathways for the U.S. to deepen partnership with the Philippines. These recommendations include providing a robust military aid

to modernize AFP defense capacity through export of state-of-the-art weapon systems, strengthening joint military exercises through the integration of strategic bombers and fighter aircraft, unwavering military presence to project assurance and deterrence messages, and elevating Philippines' economy on a path of more inclusive economic growth.

Section 2: Background

"Our long-running defense alliance has been a cornerstone of peace and stability in the region."

- Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter³

U.S. – PHILLIPINES RELATIONSHIP

COLONIAL PERIOD

The Philippines, a former Spanish colony, became a U.S. territory in 1898 after the Spanish-American War. Soon after, a clash between the Americans and Philippine revolutionary forces broke out, and thus began the Philippine-American War in which the U.S. fought a guerilla-type war across the Philippine islands. By July 1902, when the war ended, more than 4,200 U.S. soldiers, 20,000 Filipino soldiers, and 200,000 civilians were dead.⁴ The U.S. controlled the Philippine archipelago until the onset of World War II when the Japanese Imperial forces invaded Manila and quickly defeated the American and Filipino defenders. The Philippines fell under a brutal Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945. After U.S. and Philippine soldiers had defeated Japanese forces, the Philippines was granted official independence on July 4, 1946. Under the guidance of the United Nations, the U.S. and the Philippines signed the Treaty of Manila.⁵

MILITARY BASING AGREEMENT AND MILITARY DEFENSE TREATY

As part of the Treaty of Manila, the two signed a Military Basing Agreement (MBA) in March 1947 that granted the U.S. the right to establish bases in the Philippines.⁶ The subsequent Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) of 1951 supplemented the basing agreement. Under the terms of the MBA, the U.S. military mainly operated in two military installations, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base. The MBA allowed the U.S. “the right to retain the use of bases in the Philippines for 99 years, to permit the U.S. to use such bases as the latter may determine according to military necessity, and to enter into negotiations with the U.S. concerning the expansion of such bases.”⁷ The prime location of the overseas bases in the Philippines served as the American forward defense strategy in Asia and the Pacific.⁸

The MDT further cemented the U.S. commitment with the Philippines. The Article IV of the treaty stated that “each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers.”⁹ The treaty emphasized a mutual commitment to peacefully resolve international disputes, separately or jointly developing the capacity to resist attack, and the need for consultation when the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of the U.S. or the Philippines is under threat of attack in the Pacific.¹⁰

POST-COLD WAR: U.S. BASE CLOSURES

The eruption of Mount Pinatubo in 1991 severely damaged the military installations but remained operational until 1992. This catastrophic event coupled with a rise in nationalistic and anti-U.S. sentiments led to the Philippine government’s decision not to extend the lease of the American bases. The base closures marked a symbolic end to what some in the Philippines

viewed as the legacy of U.S. colonialism.¹¹ Moreover, the international community faced new and emerging security challenges post-Cold War era. The new security environment did not require massive military power spread across the globe, and thus the requirement for deployment of forces and overseas basing were not necessary.¹² Likewise, the Philippines during this time was only facing internal security issues such as Muslim separatist in the southern Philippines and communist groups in the north. Under these conditions, the Philippines did not see any pressing needs to reinvigorate the defense alliance with the U.S.

VISITING FORCES AGREEMENT

During this period, China's aggressive actions, as well as its military modernization and economic power in the South China Sea, created a "growing tension between China and some countries in Southeast Asia over the contested waters."¹³ The looming Chinese threats provided the framework for the U.S. and the Philippines to renew their security partnership to maintain peace and stability in the region. The renewed partnership culminated in the VFA, which was approved by the Philippine Senate in 1999. The agreement was meant to strengthen cooperation by revitalizing joint military exercises between the two countries in fulfillment of their strategic defense objectives.¹⁴

The most significant joint military exercise was the Balikatan exercise. The word "balikatan" means shoulder-to-shoulder in Tagalog. Balikatan exercise focused on interoperability training and developing capabilities in response to contingency or HA/DR operations. Another important joint exercise was the Cooperation and Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise, which boosted "the interoperability of land, sea, and air capabilities."¹⁵ Both countries deem the agreement to be pivotal in sustaining the close

relationship and rebuilding bilateral relations in maintaining the balance of power in the region.¹⁶ Ultimately, the VFA boosted the Philippines' external defense posture and thereby contributed to regional security and stability.¹⁷ For the U.S., the VFA presented opportunities to forward deploy forces and to develop interoperability training with the AFP to protect U.S. interests.

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM - PHILIPPINES

The relationship between the two countries was further strengthened after the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001. After the 9/11 attacks, the Philippines pledged full support to the U.S. led coalition against the war on terror. Similarly, the U.S. vowed to help the “AFP build capacity to defeat the insurgents and terrorists while ensuring that the United States respected the Philippine sovereignty and domestic law.”¹⁸ OEF-Philippines aimed at addressing terrorist threats through “training and equipping Philippine security forces, providing operational advice and assistance, and conducting civil–military and information operations.”¹⁹ As part of this arrangement, U.S. security and development assistance to the Philippines increased dramatically. In 2001, the United States obligated \$10.5 million in military aid to the Philippines, and it has gradually increased every year.²⁰ In 2002, both sides reached an agreement concerning the deployment of U.S. military personnel to train and assist the Philippine armed forces against the Abu Sayyaf Group and Jemaah Islamiyah, a Southeast Asian terrorist organization with links to Al Qaeda.²¹

TYPHOON HAIYAN (YOLANDA)

The events that unfolded on November 8, 2013, when Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) wreaked havoc in the central provinces of the Philippines brought the U.S. – Philippines relations even closer together. The natural disaster created a humanitarian crisis and prompted the U.S. to

respond in the form of HA/DR operations. The involvement of American military forces in the HA/DR “relief efforts had come at a time of growing U.S.-Philippine security cooperation.”²² At its peak, approximately 50 U.S. military ships and aircraft directly supported the relief efforts, and nearly 1,000 U.S. troops were deployed directly to disaster areas.²³ The USS *George Washington* naval task force, as well as elements of the Marine Expeditionary Unit, formed the majority of the Joint Task Force, which coordinated and carried out U.S. military relief efforts.²⁴ These efforts included military assistance, transporting aid workers, clearing roads, distributing relief supplies, and evacuating those affected by the typhoon.²⁵

ENHANCED DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENT

The EDCA, a ten-year agreement that allowed U.S. military presence in the Philippines with increased rotation of U.S. troops, was signed in 2014 and was upheld by the Philippine Supreme Court in early 2016 due to the legality of the defense agreement.²⁶ The goal of EDCA was to promote peace and security in the Philippines. This agreement was a mutual defense treaty between the U.S. and the Philippines as part of enhancing security alliance. The defense pact complemented the pivot to the Pacific of strengthening partnerships, and further supplemented the MDT of 1951 and the VFA of 1999.

The new defense pact promoted the following between the U.S. and the Philippines: interoperability, capacity building towards AFP modernization, strengthening AFP for external defense, maritime security and domain awareness, and HA/DR.²⁷ Additionally, the deal granted U.S. troops access to bases at the invitation of the Philippine government and would allow for the construction of new and improved facilities.²⁸ Figure 1 shows the basing option for the U.S. troops and supplies under the new security agreement. These bases are Basa Air Base, Fort

Magsaysay, Mactan Air Base, Lumbia Air Base, and Antonio Bautista Air Base.²⁹ Both Basa and Antonio Bautista Air Base are nearby of the disputed waters, Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands respectively. The EDCA deepened the security alliance between the two countries and upheld the commitment to preserving peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

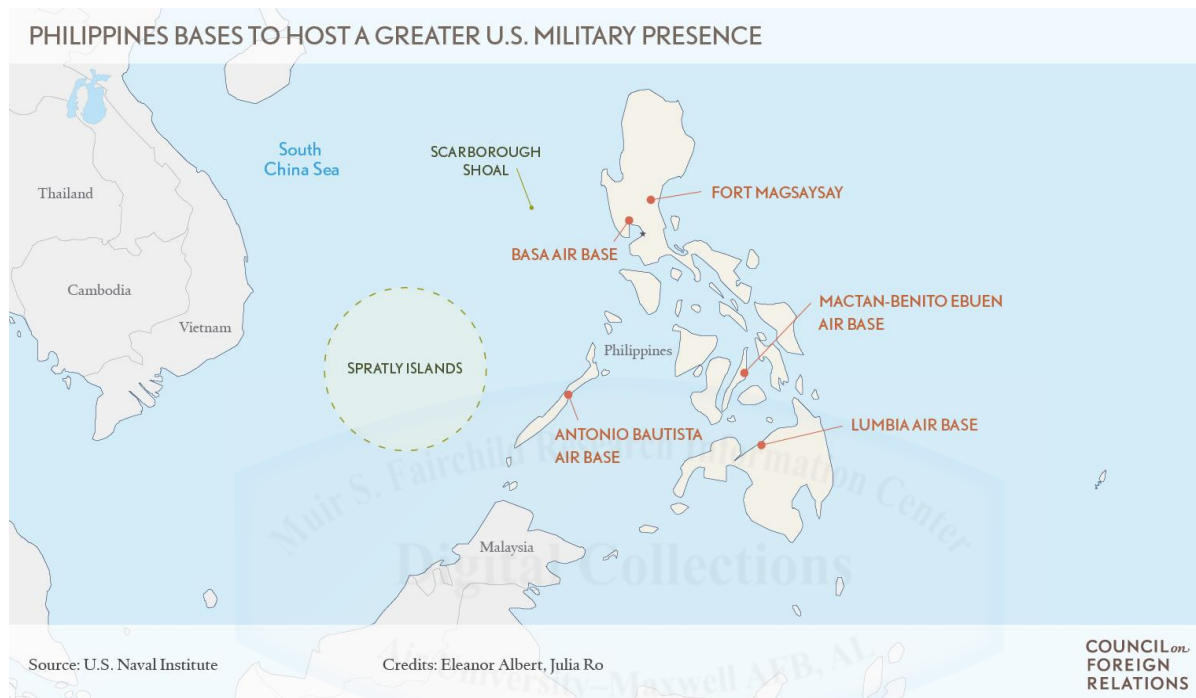


Figure 1: Philippine Basing for U.S. Rotational Forces³⁰

PIVOT TO THE PACIFIC

“The United States has been and will remain a Pacific power. American leadership will remain essential to shaping the region’s long-term trajectory to enhance stability and security, facilitate trade and commerce through an open and transparent system, and ensure respect for universal rights and freedoms.”

-National Security Strategy 2015³¹

President Obama unveiled the rebalance or pivot to the Pacific on November 2011 during the Australian Parliament summit in which he stated that “in the Asia-Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in...the United States will play a larger and long-term role in

shaping this region and its future.”³² As part of Obama administration’s foreign policy, the U.S. shifted its strategic focus to the Asia - Pacific region, commonly referred to as the rebalance or pivot to the Pacific. This strategic shift was a move to protect U.S. interests amid China’s military modernization and expanding presence in Asia.

The emergence of China, fueled by its advancing military capabilities and a strong economy, directly challenged America’s traditional role in the region and regional stability. Ultimately, the rebalance to Asia was “to implement a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy: strengthening alliances; deepening partnerships with emerging powers; building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; empowering regional institutions; and helping to build a regional economic architecture that can sustain shared prosperity.”³³ To foster strengthening alliances and deepening partnership with emerging nations under the strategy, the Philippines is recognized as a continuing ally, due to its historical roots, for the pursuit of strategic security objectives and securing national interests within the Asia-Pacific region.³⁴

The U.S. Secretary of the State, Hillary Clinton, reiterated the strategic importance of the region in an article in *Foreign Policy*, “America’s Pacific Century,” in which she stated that “one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will, therefore, be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region...to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values.”³⁵ Shortly after, on November 16, 2011, Secretary Hillary Clinton and Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert F. del Rosario signed the Manila Declaration, which reaffirmed the security alliance between the nations and addressed to resolve maritime disputes in the South China Sea.³⁶ The signing happened in Manila Bay, aboard the US Navy guided-missile destroy

USS Fitzgerald, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Mutual Defense Treaty.³⁷ The declaration stated: "the Philippines and the U.S...reflect on the rich history of our alliance and the continuing relevance of the treaty for peace, security, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region...reaffirm the treaty as the foundation of our relationship for the next 60 years and beyond."³⁸

Moreover, in July 2016, Secretary of State John Kerry met with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to reaffirm the U.S. – Philippines relations. The two discussed challenges to include the recent ruling by The Hague on the South China Sea, security and defense cooperation, countering violent extremism, and economic development.³⁹ Secretary Kerry also reasserted U.S. enduring commitment and willingness to provide assistance to the Philippines to strengthen bilateral relations across the board. Since coming power last year, President Duterte had vowed to pursue an independent foreign policy and a “separation” from Washington. Despite the president’s rhetoric against the U.S., according to Department of the State, “the American government remains committed to its alliance with the Philippines” and “to keep that alliance strong and that relationship strong whether it’s through people-to-people ties or military-to-military ties, and government-to-government communications.”⁴⁰

Similarly, the Trump administration has not formulated its Asia foreign policy and has not shifted away, at least militarily, from the previous administration. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recent trip to Asia suggested a more hardline approach, especially towards North Korea. Secretary Tillerson reaffirmed the bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea during the visit. However, Secretary Tillerson’s stance differed when meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Secretary Tillerson referred to a mutual U.S. – China understanding of "non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation," which suggested that “the U.S.

and China are not only both great powers but co-equals.”⁴¹ This stance suggested a more moderate position towards China and contradicted President Trump’s harsh criticism and tough on China position during his presidential campaign. Surprisingly, in one of the sharpest reverses, President Trump also backed off from a campaign promise. The recent summit between President and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Florida revealed a more cordial engagement in which Trump declared the U.S. – China relationship “outstanding” and predicted that “lots of very potentially bad problems will be going away.”⁴² As stated earlier in the report, the current administration had not articulated a clear policy and had not drastically shifted away from Obama’s rebalance to Asia.

U.S. INTERESTS

As outlined in the 2010 National Security Strategy, the enduring national interests are as follows. First, “the security of the U.S. especially its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners” around the world.⁴³ Second, U.S. economy “that is strong, innovative, and growing in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity.”⁴⁴ Third, “respect for universal values at home and around the world.”⁴⁵ Finally, U.S. leadership must advance “a rules-based international order that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.”⁴⁶

U.S. INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

The South China Sea is a great importance because of its geostrategic location and rich natural resources. The U.S. recognized the strategic importance of the region, so therefore rebalancing its focus and resources was critical to preserve regional stability and to help protect U.S interests in the region. Asia accounted for more than one-quarter of global Gross Domestic

Product, and nearly half of all growth outside the U.S. is expected to come from Asia.⁴⁷ The sea lines of communication (SLOCs) of the South China Sea allowed 15.2 million barrels of oil per day in 2013, which transited through the Malacca Straits.⁴⁸ Additionally, \$5.3 trillion dollars of trade goods moved across the SLOCs every year, with \$1.2 trillion belonging to the U.S.⁴⁹ Aside from being a focal point for commerce, the South China Sea is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas, and other minerals. Additionally, this area is a major source for fishing industries. Furthermore, the U.S. had a national interest in maintaining freedom of navigation and over-flight in the resource-rich South China Sea under with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). A disruption to Freedom of Navigation, as governed by international laws, would challenge U.S. interests in the area since the U.S. economy is directly linked to the economies in Asia.

U.S. INTERESTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is located in the world's fastest growing economic region and near the South China Sea, the busiest shipping route in the Asia - Pacific. The Philippines is a stakeholder in curtailing the emergence of China as a global power. The U.S. interests in the Philippines are to deepen the security alliance, enhance security and stability in the South China Sea, modernize the AFP military, and promote economic growth.⁵⁰ Under the terms of pivot to the Pacific, strengthening the alliance and deepening partnership with emerging powers is one of the U.S. interests as outlined in the National Security Strategy. Another key interest is modernizing AFP defense capacity. The U.S. must assist the Philippines in developing military capabilities to be a valuable ally. A "lean but fully capable" military would enable AFP to have a robust external defense and maritime security to repulse against Chinese incursions in the South China Sea and protect Philippine sovereignty.⁵¹

SOUTH CHINA SEA TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

“We share a common interest in maintaining freedom of navigation, unimpeded lawful commerce, and transit of people across the seas and subscribe to a rules-based approach in resolving competing claims in maritime areas...the U.S. will always be in the corner of the Philippines and we will stand and fight with you.”

- Secretary of the State Hillary Clinton⁵²

The South China Sea, also known as the West Philippine Sea, covers an area of about 1,400,000 square miles, comprises over 250 islands, atolls, and reefs, and stretches from the Singapore and Malacca Straits in the southwest to the Straits of Taiwan in the northeast.⁵³ This vast maritime region is virtually all claimed by China and in part by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei. China has territorial claims on most of the area and claims sovereignty over the vast majority of the South China Sea based on historical rights of the “Nine-Dash Line (NDL).” The territorial land grab gives China control over an area that is very rich in natural resources. Most importantly, China can potentially control of maritime common for global merchant shipping and world’s oil shipping, and access to rich fishing grounds. Lastly, the disputed area is believed to contain an enormous amount of oil and gas reserves as well as seabed mineral deposits.⁵⁴ Figure 2 shows China’s so-called NDL, which lines the coasts of other countries and in some case, inside the territorial waters and EEZ such as the Philippines.



Figure 2: China's historic rights of the Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea⁵⁵

For these reasons, the South China Sea is a region of complex territorial disputes among its surrounding nations. The disputes have six claimants as seen in Figure 2 as well. China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei all have vested interests and competing claims to the disputed islands. The overlapping territorial claims and the assertiveness in the sovereignty of these countries, especially among China and the Philippines, have caused frictions in the past. The Scarborough Shoal incident between Filipino and Chinese civilian vessels in which China seized disputed islands from the Philippines, demonstrated the volatile nature of the territorial claims and highlighted the fragile peace and security of the region. The Scarborough Shoal is located north of the Spratly Islands, 124 nautical miles from the mainland of Luzon, and well inside the Philippines' EEZ.⁵⁶ The standoff at Scarborough Shoal exposed Philippines' military weakness and lack of air defense and maritime domain awareness when dealing with

China's pressure. The Scarborough Shoal impasse uncovered Philippines' vulnerability and utter desperation against a more powerful country. The stand-off showed regional instability and a major source for a flashpoint.

CHINA'S MILITARIZATION AND ANTI-ACCESS/AREA DENIAL

China's aggressive actions such as militarization of the artificial islands posed significant threats in the South China Sea. China had constructed an airfield on the Fiery Cross Reef, which is part of the Spratly Islands, an archipelago which is claimed in part by China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Brunei.⁵⁷ The airfield in Fiery Cross extended China's military reach because of its runway length could accommodate nearly all aircraft in the Chinese military.⁵⁸ Furthermore, China continues to develop its A2/AD capabilities in the disputed islands. The emerging A2/AD capabilities include "long-range cruise and ballistic missiles, advanced integrated air and missile defense systems, and submarines" that can challenge U.S. military superiority – aircraft carriers and modern fighter aircraft.⁵⁹ The A2/AD challenge could put American forces at risk in the region.

Section 3: Analysis

DIPLOMATIC LEVERAGE: ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

The top priorities for the U.S. and its allies and partners such as the Philippines and ASEAN are to ensure that the South China Sea disputes are resolved peacefully and according to international law. The Philippines, with guidance from the U.S., can provide a more effective voice in ASEAN and spearhead efforts in defusing tensions among the claimants. Ultimately, the goal is to seek a long-term solution in negotiation with China.

The ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration by the representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.⁶⁰ Subsequently, Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia 1999, making up what is today the ten Member States of ASEAN.⁶¹ The aims and purposes of ASEAN were about “cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, technical, educational and other fields, and in the promotion of regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.”⁶² Additionally, the association represented “the collective will of the nations of Southeast Asia to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and posterity the blessings of peace, freedom, and prosperity.”⁶³

The ASEAN, as a regional stakeholder, could address the issues surrounding the territorial disputes among the claimants. The association could develop a long-term agreement in negotiation between China and its four involved member states in maintaining peace and stability in the region. For the U.S., the association is a vital partner to advance “U.S. interests in a peaceful, prosperous, and integrated Southeast Asia that respects the rule of law, upholds the dignity of its people and actively addresses regional and global concerns.”⁶⁴ The strategic partnership between the U.S. and ASEAN aimed at five areas to include supporting economic integration, expanding maritime cooperation, cultivating ASEAN emerging leaders, promoting opportunity for ASEAN women, and addressing transnational challenges.⁶⁵ The U.S. – ASEAN partnership focused on strengthening a rules-based order in Asia, openness, sustainable development, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.⁶⁶

DIPLOMATIC LEVERAGE: THE HAGUE RULING

In 2013, the Philippines moved forward with a case against China's territorial claims to a tribunal court at the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague amidst China's aggressive advances in the South China Sea. China was unwilling to negotiate with the Philippines in good faith on a Code of Conduct and in accordance with UNCLOS, which both countries have ratified.⁶⁷ In July 2016, the tribunal court ruled for the Philippines regarding the maritime disputes. However, the Chinese government quickly rejected the international tribunal court's decision. The court determined that China has no foundation to claim historic rights of the South China Sea, and therefore invalidated China's ambiguous nine-dash-line, which Beijing used to demarcate its territorial claims. Additionally, the court concluded that China's activities within the Philippines' EEZ infringed on Manila's sovereign rights. These activities include illegal fishing and artificial island construction. The Hague ruling provided landmark victory for the Philippines and could force Beijing to reconsider its aggressive actions in the region or risk being labeled an international outlaw. The decision provided a basis to promote further cooperation and potential negotiations with China and other claimants. External parties with an interest in the region, including the U.S., should focus on fostering cooperation.⁶⁸

INFORMATION LEVERAGE: ASSURANCE AND DETERRENCE MESSAGING

Under the terms of the EDCA, the U.S. military gained permission to place troops and equipment on a rotational basis in the Philippines. This agreement signaled a strong commitment between the two countries and put pressure on China's actions in the South China Sea. The U.S. must show assurance in the region by displaying constant military presence as well as a continuous U.S. military pressure to deter Chinese aggression. By basing military

forces in the Philippines on a rotational basis, Washington sent a clear message to China of U.S. commitment to its alliance with the Philippines and regional stability in the South China Sea. The location of the two bases, Basa and Antonio Bautista Air Base, are near the disputed islands of Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands. Thus, these bases are ideal for AFP and U.S. forces conducting maritime security operations and staging for forces involved in freedom of navigation and overflight in the disputed waters. Additionally, routine military presence should be executed on a regular basis to showcase American military might and to demonstrate U.S. resolve to fly, sail, and operate throughout the South China Sea in accordance with international laws.

Furthermore, the Manila Declaration in 2011, which was attended by Secretary Hillary Clinton and Philippine Secretary Albert F. del Rosario, reaffirmed the security alliance between the nations. The ceremony happened in Manila Bay, aboard the US Navy guided-missile destroyer *USS Fitzgerald*, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the MDT. Additionally, in November 2015, former President Obama visited the Philippines to participate in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting in Manila.⁶⁹ The visit also included a bilateral meeting with his Philippine counterpart President Aquino III in which both reaffirmed the commitment of the U.S. – Philippine alliance. These events displayed America’s resolve to support the region. President Obama’s visit assured allies and partners while also advancing U.S. interests “in all of its dimensions including political, economic, security, and people-to-people engagement.”⁷⁰ Most importantly, these visits sent a clear deterrence message to China and reinforced regional stability in the South China Sea.

MILITARY LEVERAGE: ENHANCED DEFENSE COOPERATION AGREEMENT

The EDCA, an agreement that allowed U.S. military presence in the Philippines with increased rotation of U.S. troops, was signed in 2014 and upheld by the Philippine Supreme Court in early 2016. As discussed earlier in the report, the defense pact promoted joint military exercises to improve interoperability and strengthened AFP's capabilities in conducting territorial defense, maritime security, and HA/DR. Additionally, the deal granted U.S. troops access to bases at the invitation of the Philippine government. These military bases are shown in Figure 1. The EDCA deepened the security alliance between the two countries and buttressed the commitment to preserving peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

As part of modernizing the AFP, the U.S. delivered military equipment to help the Philippines build a credible internal and external defense. Internally, the Philippine government still has on-going counterterrorism operations in the southern Philippines. In recent months, the U.S. delivered new military equipment to the Philippine Army and Marine Corps to help enhance the AFP's counter-terrorism capabilities, and protect Philippine security forces actively engaged in counter-terrorism operations.⁷¹ The transfer included over 400 M203 grenade launchers, 85 M40A5 sniper rifles, and an RQ-11B Raven unmanned aerial vehicle system.⁷² The Raven is a hand-launched unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that increases the AFP's capabilities to conduct intelligence collection, mission planning, and reconnaissance operations.⁷³ These small-arms weapons and drones were acquired through the FMS program.

For external and territorial defense, the Philippine Navy acquired three refurbished U.S. Coast Guard Hamilton-class cutters through the Excess Defense Articles program.⁷⁴ The Hamilton-class cutters would improve maritime security and domain awareness of the

Philippines' territorial waters and EEZ. To complement the Hamilton-class cutters, a radar system, AN/SPS-77 Sea Giraffe 3D Air Search Radars, would be outfitted on the ship.⁷⁵ The Air Search Radars would provide an enhanced ability to detect and track air contacts. The radar system would increase Philippines' Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities to improve monitoring of its vast territorial seas and EEZ.⁷⁶ An effective Philippine MDA capability strengthens its self-defense capabilities and supports regional stability and U.S. national interests.⁷⁷ Additionally, the Philippine Air Force (PAF) received two C-130T.⁷⁸ The sale would contribute to U.S. security and foreign policy goals by building the Philippines' maritime domain security capacity and deepening our overall strategic partnership with the Philippines.⁷⁹ The C-130s would bolster its lift capabilities, which are essential for providing HA/DR support.

The defense agreement deepened the security relationship between the two countries and demonstrated shared commitments to preserving peace and stability in the region. The agreement was also meant to revitalize joint military exercises such as Balikatan Exercise, Philippines Amphibious Landing Exercise (PHILBEX), and Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) to enhance training and interoperability.

Balikatan Exercise is the biggest annual U.S. - Philippines military exercises. This joint exercise contained a significant humanitarian component and included the following activities: "training for combat, rescue, and the evacuation and care of casualties; defusing and disposing of bombs; maritime security exercises; disaster relief; and joint force management. Soldiers also provided medical and veterinary care; constructed, refurbished, and supplied schools and clinics; and built a floodwall."⁸⁰ In April 2012, nearly 7,000 AFP personnel and U.S. troops participated in Balikatan exercises in Luzon and off the coast of Palawan island.⁸¹ Palawan is the closest island to the disputed islands and near the country's largest offshore oil field. The joint activities

included mock assaults to retake a small island and an oil rig. Although Philippine and U.S. officials denied that the 2012 exercises were aimed specifically at China, the Chinese government expressed suspicions about their aims and warned that they “raised risks of armed confrontation” in the South China Sea.⁸²

Other annual joint exercises include CARAT and PHIBLEX. CARAT exercises are conducted bilaterally and multilaterally between the U.S. Navy and several Southeast Asian countries. In June 2011, the naval exercises involving two U.S. destroyers and two Philippine patrol ships along with 800 U.S. and 400 AFP sailors were held in the Sulu Sea.⁸³ In October 2011, 2,000 U.S. and 1,000 AFP troops participated in the annual PHIBLEX event, which included a mock hostile beach assault.⁸³ The U.S. and Philippine officials stated that the CARAT exercises and PHIBLEX drills were not related to Spratly Islands incidents.⁸⁴

ECONOMIC LEVERAGE: PARTNERSHIP FOR GROWTH

In November 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario signed a Statement of Principles on the U.S.-Philippines Partnership for Growth (PFG). The Philippines is one of four countries selected to participate in the PFG program, and the only one in Asia, based on its performance on Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) selection criteria, the record of partnering with the U.S., policy performance, and the potential for continued economic growth.⁸⁵ The PFG provided a framework for deepening and strengthening bilateral engagement towards promoting economic growth. The PFG aimed at addressing problems that have prevented the Philippines from achieving its full economic potential and intended to promote positive growth trajectory in line with other emerging economies. The PFG, a U.S. interagency effort, aimed to remove obstacles to,

accelerate, and sustain broad-based economic growth in the Philippines, identify areas to promote investment and solicit the involvement of both the public and private sectors and civil society.⁸⁶ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has developed and led the implementation of the PFG. USAID and MCC funding provided more than \$800 million and implemented 22 projects to support PFG programs.⁸⁷ As a result of the projects, Philippine economy had steadily achieved significant improvements. From 2011 – 2014, the country’s GDP growth increased on average 6.7%, advanced 49 places in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, and upgraded the Philippines’ sovereign credit ratings to investment grade.⁸⁸

Section 4: Conclusion

The U.S. defense posture in Asia - Pacific region hinges on reinvigorating partnerships with allies and partners by strengthening security alliance through modernizing defense capacities and promoting inclusive economic growth. The U.S. should deepen ties with the Philippines by employing its Instruments of National Power (IOP) to counter China’s rise in the South China Sea and protect U.S. interests in the region. The “whole of government” approach provides opportunities for the U.S. and the Philippines to be once again strategic partners in preserving peace, stability, and prosperity. The Philippines, a long-time ally due to historical ties, is a vital stakeholder in curtailing the emergence of China as a global power. China’s influence goes beyond mere economics, as it is leveraging years of investment in A2/AD capabilities to assert its preeminence in the region.

In diplomatic efforts, ASEAN could address the territorial disputes, defuse tensions among the claimants, and seek a long-term agreement in negotiation through Code of Conduct with China.⁸⁹ Additionally, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in favor of

the Philippines regarding the maritime disputes. The court also concluded that China has no legal basis to claim historical rights of the South China Sea and invalidated China's so-called "nine-dash-line."

In information realm, the Manila Declaration in 2011 and signing of EDCA in 2014 boosted the security relations between the two nations and reinforced regional stability in the South China Sea by displaying constant military pressure against China as well as a continuous U.S. military presence to deter Chinese aggression. Additionally, President Obama's visit to the Philippines and other countries in Asia assured allies and partners and sent a clear deterrence message to China. These measures displayed America's resolve in supporting the region.

Militarily, the EDCA allowed a U.S. military presence in the Philippines with increased rotation of U.S. troops. The defense agreement deepened the security relationship between the two countries and demonstrated a shared commitment to preserving peace and stability in the region. The agreement was also meant to revitalize joint military exercises such as Balikatan Exercise, PHILBEX, and CARAT to enhance interoperability and to modernize AFP defense capabilities.

Economically, the Partnership for Growth (PFG) provided a framework for deepening and strengthening bilateral engagement towards promoting economic growth. The PFG aimed at addressing problems that have prevented the Philippines from achieving its full economic potential and intended to promote positive growth trajectory in line with other emerging economies. The USAID has developed and led the implementation of the PFG projects.

Section 5: Recommendations

This section provides pathways for the U.S. to deepen its partnership with the Philippines. The recommendations are in line with the current policies in place and are meant to advance partnership with the Philippines even further. The recommendations do not require a drastic shift regarding U.S. – Philippines relations.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - ASEAN TO ADDRESS SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTES

ASEAN is a key player in resolving South China Sea disputes. A stronger and unified ASEAN, with support from the U.S. and other countries such as Japan, Australia, and Korea, can strengthen its position in negotiations with China. Strengthening U.S. – ASEAN relation is a step in the right direction. Other nations who have vested interests in freedom of navigation and regional stability in the South China Sea should also enhance partnership with ASEAN. With support from external parties such the U.S., the ASEAN can push forward the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea between China and other claimants to resolve the disputes peacefully in accordance with international law.

RECOMMENDATION 2 - MILITARY AID AND STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

The U.S. must remain committed to providing military aid and equipment to modernize AFP defense capacity. The U.S., and other countries such as Japan and Australia, have provided the AFP with military equipment. This equipment certainly improved AFP's defense capacity. However, the majority of the equipment are secondhand. To truly enhance AFP military capabilities, the U.S. should export state-of-the-art technologies such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and fourth-generation jet aircraft to the Philippines. The export could be a

catalyst in further strengthening the U.S. - Philippines alliance by improving interoperability between both militaries. UAVs can provide low-cost maritime surveillance while the fourth-generation fighters can enhance Philippines' air defense of its territories and claims.

UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES FOR MARITIME SECURITY

In order to modernize the AFP, the U.S. should consider exporting cutting-edge technology to the Philippines. Specifically, the U.S. should export UAVs through FMS program. The FMS program is a form of security assistance in which the "U.S. may sell defense articles and services to foreign countries and international organizations when the President formally finds that to do so will strengthen the security of the U.S. and promote world peace."⁹⁰ Secretary of State determines which countries will have programs and executes the program.⁹¹ On February 2015, the U.S. State Department released new rules to loosen restrictions on exports of drones to its allies. The move arises from the Obama administration's placing a high priority on training and equipping its allies to allow them to assume a greater role in regional stability, humanitarian and counterterrorism operations.⁹²

The drones would be set up in an unarmed configuration, and exclusively used for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations to strengthen maritime security and domain awareness as part of the defense agreement. UAVs offers low-cost ISR-focused systems that can provide persistent maritime surveillance of the disputed islands without risking human lives. Additionally, these systems can improve the internal defense by enhancing the AFP's counter-terrorism capabilities. In HA/DR operations, UAVs can be utilized to locate stranded and injured victims, survey damage, and assess threats without risking the safety of rescuers.

FOURTH-GENERATION INTERCEPTOR FOR TERRITORIAL DEFENSE

Last year, the AFP acquired 10 FA-50 Light Combat Aircraft, the *Golden Eagle*, as lead-in jet trainers for Philippine Air Force (PAF). The next logical step for the AFP is to procure fourth-generation jet fighter, such as the F-16 *Fighting Falcons*, through the Excess Defense Articles to include pilot training and maintenance of the aircraft. The F-16s can be used for territorial defense to protect its sovereignty from the air from Chinese incursions. Additionally, this type of air capability would enable the PAF to develop a credible air defense and enable it to optimize its role in the territorial defense.⁹³ The Philippines should model the acquisition similar to Indonesian Air Force (IAF). The IAF recently received four more additional F-16 C/D to replace its aging F-5 *Freedom Fighters* fleet.⁹⁴ So far, IAF has acquired 9 of the 24 refurbished fighter aircraft. Indonesia desires the fourth-generation aircraft to modernize the IAF fleet with aircraft more capable of conducting operations in the outermost border regions of Indonesia.⁹⁵

RECOMMENDATION 3 - INTEGRATING BAAD IN JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES

The U.S. must strengthen bilateral military exercises by integrating strategic bombers in the region. The U.S. must remain committed to the new defense pact through constant military pressure as well as a continuous military presence in the area to deter further Chinese aggression. The U.S. should implement Bomber Assurance and Deterrence (BAAD) missions to assure U.S. allies and partners in the region. The purpose of the BAAD missions is to provide assurance to allies and deterrence to potential enemies. Currently, the United States Air Force (USAF) has strategic bombers in a continuous deployment rotation in the Pacific Command Area of Responsibility (AOR) as part of the Continuous Bomber Presence at Andersen Air Base, Guam. These bombers can potentially integrate with the AFP in joint training exercise such as the Balikatan exercise to strengthen partnership and increase interoperability with the Philippines.

The bomber participation in joint exercises also signals commitment and resolve to the security alliance.

RECCOMENDATION 4 – ASSURANCE AND DETERRENCE MESSAGING TO CHINA

The Trump administration must reinforce U.S. commitment to the security alliance between the two nations to assure regional stability in the South China Sea. The new administration should have a consistent strategic messaging to contain China's rising power and assurance to U.S. allies and partners to include freedom of navigation and routine presence operations. The bomber presence demonstrates a credible deterrence capability by a sending strategic message to China and assuring allies and partners of U.S. commitment in the region. There needs to be a visible demonstration of assurance and deterrence that integrates air operations of USAF strategic bombers (B-1B *Lancer* or B-52H *Stratofortress*), USAF strike fighters, U.S. Navy air assets, and PAF aircraft. For the PAF, this is an opportunity to showcase its newly acquired FA-50 Light Combat Aircraft. A similar display of strategic messaging occurs in the European Command (EUCOM) AOR during exercise Baltic Operations (BALTOPS). This messaging sends a clear signal of the U.S. resolve and commitment to the region, thus strengthening the NATO alliance. Figure 3 shows U.S. and NATO assets air operations integration during BALTOPS in 2016. An aerial demonstration that is similar to BALTOPS between the U.S. and the Philippines will undoubtedly send a very clear deterrence signal to China and display strong the commitment to allies and partners in the region.



Figure 3: U.S. and NATO aircraft during BALTOPS 2016⁹⁶

RECOMMENDATION 5 - UPWARD ECONOMIC GROWTH

Economically, the U.S. must continue to elevate Philippines' economy on a path of more inclusive economic growth and development. The PFG was a "whole of government" approach to unlocking the growth potential of the Philippines to become a member of the next generation of emerging economies. The PFG initiative was a five-year plan that ended in 2016. Thus, the two governments must ensure the PFG initiative is renewed immediately and additional funds allocated in the program. Based on the positive achievements since the implementation of the PFG, the U.S. and the Philippines must continue to work together to ensure a stronger economy and that the growth generated is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.⁹⁷

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