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14. ABSTRACT As the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) looks to implement Distributed Maritime Operations in the future, the United States Special Operations Command-Pacific should utilize Naval Special Warfare (NSW) for security cooperation opportunities with the Philippines to lay the groundwork for EABO. NSW is ideally situated to support a mutual-gain approach with the Philippines in three ways. First, NSW's specialized assets support Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Security Force Assistance (SFA). Second, NSW's maritime mobility capabilities provide the opportunity to access sites through future Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Finally, NSW's established history in the Philippines will help lay the necessary foundation for Expeditionary Advanced Bases (EABs). Execution of this three-pronged approach will allow INDOPACOM to achieve a mutual-gain outcome for both the U.S. and the Philippines in the absence of open conflict in the SCS.					
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**Naval Special Warfare Security Cooperation Support to Expeditionary Advanced Basing
Operations in the Philippines**



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INTRODUCTION

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) involvement in gray zone warfare in the South China Sea (SCS) and blatant disregard for the rules-based order continue to perpetuate unrest in the Pacific. The United States and its allies are in a struggle to deter the PRC from its unfounded claims on other weaker coastal nations in the SCS. Freedom of navigation and air operations are the primary method to counter the PRC's claims, however these operations are limited in nature. As such, a persistent presence in the region is essential, although the U.S. cannot carry out this objective alone. The Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Gilday stated, "Our alliances and partnerships remain our key strategic advantage. Every day, the Navy operates forward alongside allies and partners through combined operations, theater security cooperation, and capacity-building initiatives."¹ Expeditionary Advanced Bases Operations (EABO)² will become necessary inside the Weapon Engagement Zone (WEZ) should open conflict arise. In the absence of such conflict, a mutual-gain approach is needed to create and maintain a win-win situation for the United States and partner nations in the SCS.

One notably strategic country in the SCS region is the Philippines. These islands play a vital role in geopolitics due to their strategic position within the SCS. The Philippine government claims portions of the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal that are being contested by China's excessive claim to the Nine-Dash Line. In 2016, the Hague Tribunal Court declared that China violated international law by denying Filipino fishermen access to the Shoals, and ruled that no

¹ Michael M. Gilday, ADM USN, "CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS NAVIGATION PLAN 2022," 2022, 7

² The Marine Corps defines EABO as: "A form of expeditionary warfare that involves the employment of mobile, low-signature, operationally relevant, and relatively easy to maintain and sustain naval expeditionary forces from a series of austere, temporary locations ashore or inshore within a contested or potentially contested maritime area to conduct sea denial, support sea control, or enable fleet sustainment" (Story, 2021).

country could claim Economic Exclusive Zone in the Spratly Islands.³ To date, China refuses to recognize the ruling, resulting in continued tensions within the SCS. The U.S. has a bilateral defense agreement with the Philippines, the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which allow military support, mutual security cooperation, and interoperability.⁴ Leveraging these agreements allows for the U.S. to increase its ability to maintain a presence in the region and to provide persistent support to partner nations.

As the United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) looks to implement Distributed Maritime Operations in the future, the United States Special Operations Command-Pacific should utilize Naval Special Warfare (NSW) for security cooperation opportunities with the Philippines to lay the groundwork for EABOs. NSW is ideally situated to support a mutual-gain approach with the Philippines in three ways. First, NSW's specialized assets support Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Security Force Assistance (SFA). Second, NSW's maritime mobility capabilities provide the opportunity to access sites through future Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Finally, NSW's established history in the Philippines will help lay the necessary foundation for Expeditionary Advanced Bases (EABs). Execution of this three-pronged approach will allow INDOPACOM to achieve a mutual-gain outcome for both the U.S. and the Philippines in the absence of open conflict in the SCS.

³ *Philippines' Dilemma: How to Manage Tensions in the South China Sea* International Crisis Group.

⁴ "The United States-Philippines Relationship Fact Sheet." U.S. Department of State., last modified Aug 5, <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-philippines-relationship/#:~:text=The%20Philippines%20is%20a%20treaty,support%2C%20presence%2C%20and%20interoperability>.

FOREIGN INTERNAL DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCE ASSISTANCE

NSW's distinctive capabilities in FID and SFA provide the footing needed to execute EABO in the Philippines. As EABOs will primarily require the use of low-signature and mobile forces, they will heavily rely on partners in the region to help with asset sustainment. It will be crucial, therefore, to develop and to cultivate relationships with the troops and the civilians in the country before a conflict arises. As one of NSW's core activities and Mission Essential Task Lists (METL), FID and SFA play a vital role in developing security cooperation between foreign partners. NSW's surface and undersea platforms provide a unique opportunity to utilize FID and SFA to continue developing relationships with countries such as the Philippines.

One means to accomplish FID and SFA is through training partners, either one-on-one in their home country or through military service schools in the United States. NSW Group FOUR (NSWG-4) is a subordinate command under Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) and is responsible for organizing, training, and equipping assigned Naval Special Warfare personnel to deploy combat-ready forces and surface maritime mobility assets. In addition, NSWG-4 builds foreign security force small craft capability and capacity through Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS) located at National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) John C. Stennis Space Center in Mississippi. The school is the only Special Operations Command (SOCOM) security cooperation schoolhouse operating that trains a partner nation's special operators and security forces. In 2006, the Commander of USSOCOM assigned NAVSCIATTS the mission to "conducts FID in support of Combatant Commanders in accordance with Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, priorities using Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) and in-residence training to prepare

partner nation forces to conduct small craft operations in riverine or littoral environments.”⁵ This is reinforced by the NAVSCIATTS Commanding Officer’s guidance to, “train and educate foreign special operation forces (SOF), combat support forces, and combat service forces across the tactical, operational, and strategic spectrum.”⁶ Since 1963, this program has provided training to more than 13,000 students from 123 partner nations around the world, and continues to serve as an asset in supporting FID and FSA as relating to small craft maritime operations.⁷ Unique only to NSW, NAVSCIATTS provides the ability to build partnerships and leverage relations with foreign partners for future security cooperation opportunities.

Over the years, the Philippines have been an active partner in the NAVSCIATTS training, increasing United States relations in the country. The most recent graduation is a prime example, in which Philippines Defense Attaché Capt. Salvador Henry Quinto, Philippines Embassy, Washington, D.C., served as host and keynote speaker and awarded diplomas to the 49 partner nation security force professionals hailing from the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Guyana, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand.⁸ NAVSCIATTS provides NSW the ability to develop vital relationships in key locations around the world which can be utilized for future EABO. These relationships enable the U.S. to advance its interest and facilitate opportunities to provide solutions to requirements in remote and austere locations.

⁵ Naval Small Craft Instruction & Technical Training School, "NAVSCIATTS History," Accessed September 25, 2022, <https://www.socom.mil/navsoc/NAVSCIATTS/Pages/history.aspx>.

⁶ Naval Small Craft Instruction & Technical Training School, "NAVSCIATTS: Who We Are," Accessed September 26, 2022, <https://www.socom.mil/navsoc/NAVSCIATTS/Pages/Commanders-message.aspx>.

⁷ Leah Tolbert, *NAVSCIATTS Continues to Grow Global Network Powered by Trust*. Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC, 2016, <https://login.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Freports%2Fnavsciatts-continues-grow-global-network-powered%2Fdocview%2F1787274543%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D322>.

⁸ Angela Fry, 2021, "NAVSCIATTS Honors Semester 21-5 Graduates," *Dvids*, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/406003/navsciatts-honors-semester-21-5-graduates>.

One example of successful security cooperation with foreign partners was during a 2022 deployment of a Combatant Craft Medium (CCM) detachment consisting of two CCMs to the United States European Command (EUCOM) theater. The detachment was supporting the theater commander for contingency operations during a rotational deployment. In addition to these operations, units simultaneously conducted FID and SFA to interoperate with partner nations creating opportunity for access and placement. In the spring of 2022, during a long-range navigation exercise with the Norwegian Marinejegerkommandoen (MJK), one of the CCMs suffered a significant crack in the hull of the craft. Due to the expeditionary nature and limited resources available in the remote region, the detachment could not repair the damage organically. They were, however, able to leverage the relationship built with the MJK and repair the CCM to full mission capability. The MJK worked with the local population to find a welder that was able to conduct the repairs. Since U.S. needs are very similar to partner needs, cases like this show the value generated from FID and SFA partnerships. This is especially important when operating assets such as small boats or EABs in remote areas of the world, as equipment and services may not be readily available. It will be important to have strong relations built with the local partner forces to help with any contingencies that may develop.

If a conflict arises with China, EABs will require support and coordination from the partner nation's military unit and the local population, which can be accomplished using FID and SFA operations. *Joint Publication 3-0 (Joint Operations)*, highlights that "limited contingency operations may lend themselves to using small elements like SOF in coordination with allied nations or partner nations. Initially, SOF may take the lead of these operations as an economy of force measure to enable major operations and campaigns with conventional focus to progress

more effectively.”⁹ NSW is positioned to establish the needed relationship to support future EABs. A future conflict in the INDOPACOM region will not be fought or won alone. It will require the use of the joint force, partners, and allies working together to effectively utilize a disaggregated force to mass effect on future threats.

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES

Joint forces and partner relations thrive when coupled with FMS, as shared technologies provide for cost savings and potential force multipliers in multiple regions worldwide. NSW is the only SOCOM component with specific requirements for surface and subsurface warfare assets that are also shared with allied partner militaries to enhance global capability and interoperability. Unlike the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force SOF units, the NSW-specific assets operate in the maritime environment, thereby providing the only waterborne capability SOCOM retains. The surface capacity of NSW consists of three coastal craft – Combatant Craft Assault (CCA), Medium (CCM), Heavy (CCH) – and the Navy’s only brown-water craft – Special Operations Craft–Riverine (SOC-R). NSW’s subsurface capability consists of the SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) MK8 – which is being replaced by the MK 11 – and the Dry Combat Submersible (DCS). NSW’s requirements often demand developing novel technology not seen in the commercial industry, and with a more traditional acquisition method of building from the ground up. The commercial need for low-signature surface vessels and clandestine submersibles is nonexistent, making these programs military-specific. The peculiar need for military-specific technology increases both costs and time for research & development, procurement, and sustainment. Traditionally, FMS is used as a method to lower costs to the U.S. and to maintain

⁹ JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, 17 January 2017.

surge capacity in case of an emergency.¹⁰ FMS not only provides a way to cross-share the fiscal burden, but also creates opportunities to interoperate with similar equipment. Additionally, the sustainment needs for both countries will be near identical for military logistics on parts and the populous side for contractor support.

The 2018 announcement from the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) on the \$100M arms sale to the Government of Kuwait demonstrates the success of FM. It outlined “fifteen 13.6-meter Fast Patrol Boats outfitted with support equipment, and personnel training and training equipment, U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical and logistics support services, and other related elements of logistical and program support.”¹¹ These boats are manufactured by Vigor, a U.S. company based out of Kent, Washington. The boats are a commercial variant of the U.S. Coast Guard Response Boat-Medium (RB-M), providing the Kuwaiti Naval Force with maritime interdiction and security capabilities. In addition to the RB-M, Vigor also manufactures two of NSW’s crafts – the CCM and the CCH. Although different from the RB-M, the maintenance and sustainment of these craft are very similar. If NSW assets were required to operate out of Kuwait or surrounding areas and an equipment failure occurs outside an area depot-level repair is available, NSW has reach-back capability with Vigor. SOCOM Acquisitions, Technology and Logistics (AT&L) contracts through Vigor have overseas contingency funding in place where contracted support and potential parts from the RB-M program could be utilized for repair. Sales like this not only provide security cooperation

¹⁰ Wesley Hallman, "Value of Foreign Military Sales Exceeds Profits," *National Defense* 105, no. 803 (10, 2020): 4, <https://login.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Ftrade-journals%2Fvalue-foreign-military-sales-exceeds-profits%2Fdocview%2F2449986089%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D322>.

¹¹ *Arms Sales Notification*. 2018. Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC, <https://login.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Freports%2Farms-sales-notification%2Fdocview%2F2012149830%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D322>.

opportunities such as training, but allow for interoperability and interdependence with foreign partners through the establishment of maintenance services worldwide.

Another example where FMS has provided an interoperability and interdependence opportunity was another 2018 announcement from the DSCA on the FMS sale of three SDV MK 11 Shallow Water Combat Submersibles (SWCS) to the United Kingdom. This sale helped continue the U.S./UK maritime partnership and interoperability in support of both countries' foreign policy and defense issues.¹² This capability replaced a legacy capability, SDV MK8, which both NSW and British Special Boat Service (SBS) utilize. With only minor differences between the United States and United Kingdom versions, both units can leverage each other for supporting equipment and consumable items to operate the platform today. On several occasions, the UK used the U.S. pre-dive maintenance equipment to support their exercise, allowing them to reduce overall footprint while traveling to shared locations. Due to the size of the equipment and shipping costs, it was easier to leverage the existing equipment on location. Such examples demonstrate the benefits of having the same or similar equipment so there can be a cross-share between units. Even though the Philippines will not likely invest in SDV technology, this FMS case shows the benefit that can be gained by selling assets to partners that promote interoperability and interdependence in austere locations.

As the U.S. looks to establish EABs in the Philippines, FMS is one avenue to reducing the U.S. operational and maintenance footprint, as the capability for restock and repair would already exist in the region. NSW small surface crafts are positioned in a unique situation to lay the groundwork for Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) by establishing relationships for future

¹² U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "United Kingdom - SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) MK 11 Shallow Water Combat Submersibles (SWCS)," 2018, Targeted News Service, <https://login.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fwire-feeds%2Fuk-kingdom-seal-delivery-vehicle-sdv-mk-11%2Fdocview%2F2110238146%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D322>.

operational and maintenance requirements that can be satisfied by the contractor and local populous support. The EABO handbook references this needs to “forage forward” and be self-sufficient off the local force and resources to reduce the burden on the logistics train.¹³ Foreign partners do not necessarily need to buy the same equipment as the U.S. – as witnessed in the UK’s purchase of the SWCS – however the FMS requirements must be similar enough to U.S. asset needs to support EABs. Combining NAVSCIATTS, as discussed earlier, with FMS will have strategic affects that provide training for both maintenance and operations, and will ensure adequate support when the need arises at an EAB. By combining the two, the U.S. can create an economy of force echoed by *Joint Publication 3.0* that, “the purpose of economy of force is to expend minimum essential combat power on secondary efforts to allocate the maximum possible combat power on primary efforts.”¹⁴ As the U.S. looks at EAB opportunities in the future, FMS can be a force multiplier should conflict arise.

EXPERIENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES

NSW’s history in the Philippines provides future opportunities for the U.S. to lay down the necessary groundwork for EABs. Since 2001, NSW has been conducting one of its primary missions to combat counter-violent extremist organizations (C-VEO) and counterterrorism (CT) operations. During this time, NSW units worked with the Filipinos to counter the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group in the southwestern parts of the Philippines. Since the shift to great power competition, Rear Admiral H.W. Howard III, the NAVSPECWARCOM Commander, messaged his vision to refocus the community. He said, “ we are applying hard-earned combat lessons—

¹³ Art Corbett, "Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) Handbook: Considerations for Force Development and Employment," Marine Corps Warfighting Labs, Concepts and Plans Division (1 June 2018): 28.

¹⁴ *JP 3-0, Joint Operations, 17 January 2017, A-2.*

identifying irregular opportunities; fusing operations and intelligence; planning missions; and rehearsing and integrating with the joint force, other agencies, the intelligence community, and reliable international partners—to expand deterrence options and decision space.”¹⁵ NSW’s extensive experience in the Philippines conducting C-VEO and CT operations has similar requirements to today’s needs, and will help with developing relations in the future.

The successful execution of C-VEO and CT operations against Abu Sayyaf demonstrated the importance and benefits of both countries working together towards a common goal. This success was documented in a 2016 Rand report that indicated that security cooperation activities between 2001 and 2014 in the Philippines likely contributed to a strengthened U.S.-Philippine military relationship. In addition, the Rand Cooperation referenced an “independent polling firm in 2014 found that residents in Mindanao would welcome an increased presence, largely based on their views of the security, infrastructure, medical, and other benefits of the U.S. SOF activities there.”¹⁶ NSW personnel worked with their counterparts in the Philippines by providing them with the tools necessary to develop skill sets on a professional level. This newfound professionalism improved local relations and support that was needed to counter Abu Sayyaf elements. This history in the Philippines combined with small-craft capabilities creates a distinctive advantage over other units in developing relationships in the country.

NSW teams have played an important role in supporting the island nation of the Philippines in the past. As the Marines Corps looks to establish EABs in the Philippines, it is important to have units with experience and history in the area to lay the groundwork. The

¹⁵ H. W. Howard III, RADM USN, "Frogmen Solve Hard Problems – From and on the Sea," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, April 2022, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2022/april/frogmen-solve-hard-problems-and-sea>.

¹⁶ Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gillian S. Oak. 2016, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001-2014*, Santa Monica, Calif: Rand Corporation.

lessons learned from conducting C-VEO and CT operations will benefit the U.S. as it looks to great power competition. Total success will not depend on one portion of security cooperation, but will rather take a combination of the different elements discussed earlier. NSW is well-positioned to expand and establish INDOPACOM's initial footholds in remote area for future EABO sites in the Philippines.

COUNTER ARGUMENT

One may argue that NSW is too small, or not the proper force, to lay the groundwork for the EABs concept within the first island chain. With only an active-duty force structure of approximately 2,500 Special Operators (SEALs) and 600 Special Warfare Combatant-Craft Crewmen (SWCC), NSW makes up less than one percent of the Navy. As part of SOCOM, Marine Special Operations Forces (MARSOF) might make a better choice due to the simple fact that this is a Marine Corps concept and MARSOF are part of the Marine Corps. In addition, the Marine Corps is making movements to internally redesign the force to meet the Commandant's vision of an organized, trained, and equipped force that fulfills this new desired end state in partnership with the broader Navy.¹⁷ This force will be nested with EABs as a Stand In Force (SIF), "small but lethal, low signature, mobile, relatively simple to maintain and sustain forces designed to operate across the competition continuum within a contested area as the leading edge of a maritime defense-in-depth to intentionally disrupt the plans of a potential or actual adversary."¹⁸ Since the Marine Corps is structuring itself for these concepts, this does not leave much reason for NSW to support.

¹⁷ General David Berger, USMC, "Force Design 2030," (Headquarters USMC, Washington, DC: 2020): 22.

¹⁸ General David Berger, USMC, "*A Concept for Stand-in Forces*," (Headquarters USMC, Washington, DC: 2021): 4.

REBUTTAL

Despite these contrary views, NSW is the best choice as an advanced force to lay the groundwork for the Commandant's vision of a Navy-Marine joint force in the INDOPACOM environment. Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) units make a good choice as this initial force, but suffer from similar manning issues to NSW with approximately 3,000 personnel. Also, like NSW, MARSOC falls under SOCOM, where most direction comes from and with limited connection to the Fleet and conventional units. In the Commandant's Force Design 2030, there is a recommendation to revisit the current manpower policies from the Fleet Marine Force supporting MARSOC.¹⁹ While the Marines are going through force design, NSW is shifting its focus back to the maritime environment. The shift from counterterrorism to near-peer competition has given the SEAL Teams the "opportunities to train, learn, and operate new technologies and share data for common intelligence and domain awareness resulting in integrated capabilities to deter those who would threaten freedom."²⁰ In addition, NSW's surface capabilities are already doing the majority of what the Commandant is looking for to help lay the foundation for EABs in the region.

CONCLUSION

As the U.S. looks at ways to increase its presence in the region without pushing the competition continuum with China, NSW is a capable force postured to support future operations. The U.S. is already at a disadvantage in the region due to the factors of space, time,

¹⁹ General David Berger, USMC, "Force Design 2030," (Headquarters USMC, Washington, DC: 2020): 10.

²⁰ Rear Admiral H. W. Howard III, USN, "Frogmen Solve Hard Problems – From and on the Sea," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, April 2022, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2022/april/frogmen-solve-hard-problems-and-sea>.

and force. If the U.S. does not take advantage of the time before a conflict arises, and matures the space and force in the region, it will expend valuable resources and incur unnecessary casualties to re-establish military presence. NSW provides a unique capability and resources that, if implemented correctly, will lay the groundwork for EABs in the Philippines. In utilizing security cooperation, NSW can develop the partnership interoperability needed in the region, while simultaneously providing opportunities to prepare the environment for future conflict. Finally, NSW is presently capable of leveraging its experiences developed from years of counterinsurgency operations with the Philippines to lay the foundation for the Marine's SIF. NSW is ideally situated to develop and strengthen the U.S. fundamental success of interoperability with allies in the region.²¹

²¹ Michael M. Gilday. ADM USN, "CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS NAVIGATION PLAN 2022."

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