

## **ABSTRACT**

### **The Role of Middle Powers in the Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): The Case of the Philippines and the Special Japan-Australia Strategic Partnership**

**By**

**Renato Cruz De Castro**

This article explores the efforts of Japan and Australia to enhance the military capabilities of the Philippines in the face of China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea. It observes that both Japan and Australia are middle powers that are members of two associations of maritime democracies called "Democratic Security Diamond (DSD) and the Quadrilateral Defense Dialogue (QUAD)." As members of the DSD and QUAD, both powers are involved in joint assistance to the maritime capacity building of third countries threatened by the rise of China. Since the formation of their special strategic partnership in 2012, Japan and Australia have assisted the Philippines in building up its navy, coast guard, and air force. The article observes that two developments are enhancing this triangular security relationship. On the one hand, the Philippines, under President Rodrigo Duterte, is amenable for closer security partnerships with Japan and Australia because he wants to distance his country from its traditional ally, the U.S, and gravitate to China. On the other hand, Japan and Australia have found it necessary to deepen their security partnerships with the Philippines because they don't want this country to gravitate closer to China. In conclusion, the article argues that both middle powers are enhancing their respective security partnerships with the Philippines despite its rapprochement with China. This will have a long-term consequence of modifying the American hub-and-spoke system of alliance in East Asia by increasing spoke-to-spoke links forming several minilateral and plurilateral arrangements.

**The Role of Middle Powers in the Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): The Case of the Special Japan-Australia Strategic Partnership and the Philippines**

**By**

**Renato Cruz De Castro**

Former President Benigno Aquino III directed the Armed Forces of the Philippines` (AFP`s) focus from internal to territorial defense during his six-year term. His official pronouncements relative to modernizing the AFP were geared toward redirecting the Philippine military away from asymmetric/ low intensity conflicts (LICs) to territorial defense/maritime security. The Aquino Administration`s defense goal was very modest--to develop a credible posture for territorial defense and maritime security through building a competent force capable of defending the country`s interests and the land features it occupies in the South China Sea. Despite this unambitious objective, however, the Aquino administration was immobilized by scant financial resources. The 2012 Scarborough Shoal Stand-off between the Philippines and China, however, pushed it to pursue the modernization of the AFP despite the government`s limited resources.

The stand-off began on 10 April 2012 when the Philippine Navy`s (PN`s) flagship, the *BRP Gregorio Del Pilar* tried to apprehend several Chinese fishing boats at the Scarborough Shoal. However, at this juncture, two Chinese maritime surveillance vessels arrived and prevented the arrest of the Chinese fishermen who were hauling corals, clams, and live sharks into their boats. On 20 June when the tension at the Scarborough Shoal eased up, immediately China consolidated its control over the area. China Marine Surveillance Unit (CMSU) personnel constructed a chain barrier across the mouth of the shoal to block the Philippines` access to it. China also deployed these vessels to protect the fleet of Chinese fishing boats operating deep into the Philippines` EEZ.

The 2012 Scarborough Shoal stand-off underscored an international reality—Chinese economic and naval power cast a long shadow over the Philippines and Vietnam, which are at the forefront of a maritime dispute with China in the South China Sea.<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of the stand-off, then President Aquino realized the urgency of modernizing the Philippine military to secure the Philippines' vast maritime borders and its territorial claim over some islands in the Spratlys. This shift required providing the AFP with the necessary equipment, technical training, and expertise for external defense. It also called for the Philippines to form and foster partnerships with states with common values and mutual interests in maritime security. In this respect, two middle powers—Japan and Australia--have been assisting the Philippines in enhancing its naval capabilities.

Japan and Australia are members of two associations of maritime democracies, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), and the Democratic Security Diamond (DSD).” On the one hand, Australia, India, and Japan, and the U.S. formed the QUAD in 2007 to provide a platform for these Indo-Pacific states to exchange views on regional security issues with a special focus on the rise of China and its implication for Asian Security.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a brain child of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the DSD was formed by the same four powers to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific.<sup>3</sup> As members of these two security groupings, Japan and Australia have emphasized the relevance of the regional

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<sup>1</sup> William Chong, “Path to Scarborough Far from Fair: South China Sea Rivals no Match for China’s Economic, Military Clout,” *The Strait Times*, (21 April 2012). p. 1. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1008636649/fulltext/1368A3A...>

<sup>2</sup> Kanwal Sibal, “The Value of the Quad Plus,” in *The Quad Plus: Towards a Shared Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific* (eds.) Walter Lohman, Ravi, K. Sawhney, Andrew Davies, and Ipeita Nishida (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2015). p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Lavina Lee and John Lee, “Japan-India Cooperation and Abe’s Democratic Security Diamond: Possibilities, Limitations and the View from Southeast Asia,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 38, 2 (2016). p. 285.

security architecture through the creation of multilateral organizations as a means of upholding a stable and rules-based order in East Asia.<sup>4</sup> In pursuit of this goal, both countries are involved in joint assistance to the maritime capacity building of third countries that are threatened by the rise of China.<sup>5</sup>

This paper explores the evolving security partnerships between the Philippines and these two middle powers, Japan and Australia. It addresses two related questions: As two middle powers, why are Japan and Australia assisting the Philippines in enhancing its military capabilities? How are Australia and Japan helping enhance the Philippines' security capabilities? It also addresses the following questions: 1) From the Philippines' perspective, what is the biggest challenge to maritime security governance in East Asia? 2) How is the Philippines addressing this challenge? 3) What are the QUAD and DSD? 4) Why is the Philippines fostering security partnerships with these two middle powers? 5) How is the Philippines maximizing its relations with these two middle powers? 6) What is the future the Philippines' security partnerships with these two middle powers? And 7) what is this long-term consequence of this triangular security partnership?

### **Middle Powers' Approach to Regional Security: The Case of Japan and Australia**

Martin Wight described middle powers as states with limited military capabilities, resources, and strategic position that in peacetime the great powers bid for their support, and in wartime, they have no chance of winning a war against a major power.<sup>6</sup> They, however, can inflict

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Wilkins, "From Strategic Partnership to Strategic Alliance? Australia-Japan Security Ties and the Asia-Pacific" *Asia Policy* 20 (July 2015). 83.

<sup>5</sup> Lee and Lee, *op. cit.* p. 283.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London, Great Britain: Penguin Books Limited, 1979). p. 65.

costs on a great power out of proportion to what the great power can hope to gain by attacking them.<sup>7</sup> Middle powers lack the complete “bundle” of power required to be a great or a superpower, and consequently, they occupy the middle ground between great powers and small powers.<sup>8</sup>

Middle powers’ foreign policy behaviors are directed at maintaining the international order, and they generally follow the relevant great power, but they do so willingly and with alacrity.<sup>9</sup> Many middle powers are also states that have decided to forgo the pursuit of great power status for a variety of reasons such as the need to focus on economic strength while maintaining limited military capacity. Their foreign policies are also directed: a) to limit the use of force in international affairs; b) to establish new norms of international behavior; and c) offer an alternative way of conducting global affairs in contrast with the *realpolitik* of national interest and foreign policy based upon the doctrine that might makes right.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to great powers that behave unilaterally in advancing their security interests, middle powers depend on a modified form of multilateralism. They prefer to work within minilateral and plurilateral arrangements that are deemed as the “middle ground” approach to regional order relative to the usually exclusivist bilateral and inclusivism multilateral groupings in East Asia.<sup>11</sup> These two arrangements formalize and regularize security relations among limited

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Neack, *The New Foreign Policy: U.S. and Comparative Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2003). p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Wight, *op. cit.* p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd Axworthy, “Canada and Anti-Personnel Landmines: The Case of Human Security as a Foreign Policy Priority,” *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, and Cases* (Eds) Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012). p. 286.

<sup>11</sup> Ajin Choi and William T. Tow, “Bridging Alliances and Asia-Pacific Multilateralism,” in *Bilateralism, Multilateralism and Asia-Pacific Security: Contending Cooperation* (eds.) William Tow and Brendan Taylor (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). p. 27. *Ibid.* p. 27.

number of regional partners and establish a new grouping with a closed rather than an open membership.<sup>12</sup> This, in turn, provides middle powers the opportunity to coordinate their respective interests and policies within relatively large security groupings such as the United Nations, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asian Summit (EAS).<sup>13</sup>

Minilateral and plurilateral arrangements provide middle powers with mechanisms for coordinating their policy positions on regional security issues and for pushing deeper strategic cooperation in areas that they might have modest capabilities such as defense, intelligence, development assistance, capacity building, humanitarian assistance and disaster (HADR). They foster stronger defense and security ties between middle powers that are separated by geography and their limited power projection capabilities but are linked by common security interests and political values. For middle powers, the only cost effective means to remedy their respective capability gaps in key military areas such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), undersea warfare, missile defense, and amphibious operations is to promote cooperation and greater interoperability among themselves. This is the case of Japan and Australia, two middle powers that are separated by distance but have developed their respective geographic strategic complementarity and forged their own special bilateral security partnership.<sup>14</sup>

Japan and Australia are members of two security associations, the QUAD and the DSD. The QUAD was formed during the May 2007 exploratory meeting among Australia, Japan, India

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<sup>12</sup> Aurelio George Mulgan, "Breaking the Mould: Japan's Subtle Shift from Exclusive Bilateralism to Modest Minilateralism" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 30, 1 (April 2008). p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Choi and Tow, *op. cit.* p. 27.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Shearer, "U.S.-Japan-Australia Strategic Cooperation in the Trump Era: Moving from Aspiration to Action," *Southeast Asian Affairs 2017* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2018).p. 84.

and the United States in Manila on the side of the ARF meeting. In their first meeting, the four powers examined issues of common concerns like disaster relief involving countries that “share some values and growing cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.” There was no formal agenda during the meeting and no decision was made about subsequent meetings. However, there was a vague understanding that the four members of the QUAD would meet again. Immediately, observers assumed that although the meeting was exploratory, the QUAD would become a security arrangement, an alliance, or expansion of the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD) with the goal of eventually evolving into Asian North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that will contain China. This view stemmed from the fact that each member state had its respective concern about China’s emergence as regional power, and this matter was central in the creation of this loose security association.<sup>15</sup>

The diplomatic and strategic exigency to design the QUAD as an anti-China coalition, however, was non-existent in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century since its members have extensive economic ties with China. They were all committed to a policy of constructive engagement, not containment, of this emergent East Asian power.<sup>16</sup> The QUAD could, therefore, be considered as a loose association of maritime democracies seeking to strengthen each other on the basis of shared values and interests. However, its formation indirectly isolated China as a non-democratic power and eroded its diplomatic standing in international gatherings.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the QUAD emphasized multilateralism in contrast to China’s bilateral approach. Hence, it offered a model that was quintessentially antithetical to China’s approach to international issues and problems.

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<sup>15</sup> Sibal, *op. cit.* p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

Finally, all countries represented in the QUAD share a great many security interests and have shared interests in maritime security that extends from East Asia to the Indian Ocean.<sup>18</sup> It has nothing to do with strategic deterrence; it simply offers the multilateralism as a more and better option for the regional states. This association, however, suffered a swift and sudden demise when Australia withdrew from the association after the election of the Rudd government in 2008.<sup>19</sup>

The QUAD was revived in Manila on the sides of the East Asian Summit in mid-November 2017. The four-corner security dialogue was revived with a senior official-level interaction with a hint that could eventually become a ministerial-level consultation in the near future. Upon the initiative of Australia and the U.S., the QUAD took shape again as a four-cornered dialogue, emerging from a phoenix-like creature after a 10-year dormancy signaling the first multilateral pushback against an expansionist China. The QUAD's revival was triggered by tectonic shifts in the regional geopolitics such as:<sup>20</sup> a) China's expanding maritime strategy and increasing assertiveness of its land reclamation and territorial claims in the South and East China Seas; b) China's rejection of the 12 July Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on the South China; and c) its ambitious regional maritime goal of building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road.

The QUAD's goal is not the containment of China nor alliance formation. Its revival is geared towards a more comprehensive partnership among the four member states less explicitly

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Davies, "Democracy and Regional Security: An Australian Perspective," *The QUAD Plus: Towards a Shared Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific* (eds.) Walter Lohman, Ravi, K. Sawhney, Andrew Davies, and Ippeita Nishida (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree, 2015). p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Jesse Barker Gale and Andrew Shearer, "The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative" *CSIS Briefs* (2 April 2018). p. 4. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/quadrilateral-security-dialogue-maritime-silk-road-in...>

focused on defense issues.<sup>21</sup> Rather, its goal is to ensure that the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean remain free and open for multilateral trade and commerce.<sup>22</sup> It emphasizes the importance of rules-based order, connectivity ventures that are not fueled by predatory financing, and that territorial disputes are resolved peacefully and in accordance with international law. Instead of an alliance engaged in military activities, its members plan to use the QUAD as a venue to raise their collective voice about the importance of cooperation, especially when it concerns the freedom of navigation, maritime enforcement capabilities, and the promotion of international standards in infrastructure and ports.<sup>23</sup>

Between 2008 and 2017, the two middle powers also collaborated within the DSD. The DSD was a brain child of PM Abe. He initiated the creation of this loose association of maritime democracies to oppose Chinese maritime expansion and to defend peace, stability and the freedom of navigation within the diamond. Its immediate goal is to prevent the South China Sea from becoming a “Beijing Lake—a sea deep enough for the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) navy to base their nuclear-powered attack submarines, capable of launching missile with nuclear missiles.”<sup>24</sup> According to PM Abe, if Japan (and other countries) were to yield to China’s maritime expansion in the South China Sea, “The naval assets of the United States, in addition to those of Japan, would find it difficult to navigate the entire area, though the large portion of the two China

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<sup>21</sup> David Brewster, “How Australia Can Foster a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” *War on the Rocks* (8 March 2018). p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 1-4

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Shinzo Abe, “Security Diamond to Free Asia’s Sea Lanes,” *New Straits Times* (29 December 2012). p.1 <https://o-search.proquest.com.lib1000.dlsu.edu.ph/docview/1265706455/fulltext/319748AC30D14FD2PQ/8?accountid=28547>

seas is international waters.”<sup>25</sup> According to him, the goal of the DSD is to constrain China’s aggression in the South China Sea.<sup>26</sup> Japan believes that although there is a need to impose cost to China’s coercive actions in East Asia, it should not be done unilaterally since no nation can maintain peace, security and order in the Indo-Pacific alone, and that doing so (imposing a cost on China’s behavior) requires a collective effort.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Special Japan-Australia Strategic Partnership**

Within the QUAD and DSD, Japan and Australia have enhanced their bilateral security ties to forge what is described as a “special strategic partnership.”<sup>28</sup> Starting from the 2007 Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, Japan-Australia strategic partnership has become the most institutionalized bilateral relationship both countries have with any third country except their common ally, the U.S. Their strategic partnership involves the annual “two-plus-two” defense and foreign minister level meetings since 2007, and the establishment of key agreements facilitating deeper defense cooperation between the Australian Defense Force and the Japanese Self-Defense Force; the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (2010) covering logistics, and the General Security of Military Information Agreement (2012) on information security.<sup>29</sup> After the formation of the DSD in 2013, the two countries’ relationship was upgraded from a

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> James Hardy, “Japan’s Abe Calls for Democratic Security Diamond across Asia,” *Jane’s Defense Weekly*; *Horley* 50, 6 (9 January 2013). p. q <https://0-search.proquest.com/lib1000.dlsu.edu.ph/docview/1268564582/fulltext.58BE3CCBBB594B22PQ/3?accountid=28547>

<sup>27</sup> Lee and Lee, *op. cit.* p. 290.

<sup>28</sup> Wilkins, *op. cit.* p. 81

<sup>29</sup> Lee, *op. cit.* p. 6.

strategic partnership to a “new special relationship” and was again upgraded in 2015 to a special strategic partnership.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean that the two countries are already treaty allies. Rather, both states seek to pragmatically advance their national interest in tandem and to multiply their capabilities to meet jointly security challenges in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>31</sup>

Both Australia and Japan are not only bound by their membership in and reliance on the U.S. system of alliances but also are concerned about its possible long-term demise. Neither Australia nor Japan will want to find it abandoned or adrift without their common superpower ally, the U.S. Japan and Australia are also in agreement about the importance of promoting the rules-based international order and open and functioning regional security architecture. Both adhere to a security consensus or shared interests in the freedom of navigation through sea lines of communication and the maintenance of a stable rules-based regional order-ensuring that the partners will continue to deepen their contribution to the partnership.<sup>32</sup> Finally, they also share a common concern about the long-term concerns about the long-term credibility of U.S. security guarantees, due to questions of U.S. political resolve, defense cuts, and its economic dependence on China, as well as the PLA’s increasing ability to threaten U.S. military bases and forward deployed forces in the Asia-Pacific through its A2/AD capabilities.<sup>33</sup>

Japan and Australia are also pursuing two common policies: a) focusing their attention to the security of the Asia-Pacific; and b) cooperating on capacity-building assistance directed on

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Wilkins, *op. cit.* p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Both Japan and Australia underscore the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and share a common vision for the region.<sup>34</sup> Canberra has formulated a number of policy initiatives to strengthen its security engagement in the Asia-Pacific. Japan likewise has assigned greater security priority to this part of the world. In the light of China's emergence in the Asia-Pacific, the two countries are in agreement to what type of regional order they would like to preserve and promote.

Their vision of a regional order is expressed in three inter-related aspects:<sup>35</sup> 1) the two countries agree about the importance of their respective alliances with the U.S. and hence, support the U.S. role in the Asia-Pacific; 2) Both countries have a common view about the international order that can be seen in their joint support for a liberal international order, which is seen to have underwrite the peace and prosperity of the region since the end of the Second World War; And 3) The two security partners hold a common view on the importance of supporting third countries' increasing active roles in the regional and global stages and the need to develop closer ties with them. In this respect, Japan and Australia have provided third countries with patrol boats, maintenance service, and necessary trainings. This is aimed to enable these countries to effectively control and manage their respective EEZ, and in the process stabilize their maritime domain and promote effective governance for the global maritime domain in the Pacific and in archipelagic Southeast Asia.

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<sup>34</sup> Yusuke Ishihara, "Japan-Australia Defence Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region," *Beyond the Hub and Spokes: Australia-Japan Security Cooperation* (Tokyo, Japan: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2014).p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> Yusuke Ishihara, "Japan-Australia Security Relations and the Rise if China: Pursuing the Bilateral-Plus Approaches," *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 32 (May 2013). p. 95

## **Facing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chinese Naval Expansion: The Case of the Philippines**

China's phenomenal economic prosperity during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century transformed it into an engine of growth in East Asia and, indeed, the wider world. With its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) surpassing Japan in 2010, it has become the second largest economy in the world next only to the U.S. Its rapid economic progress has not only made the country more confident and assertive in foreign affairs but also heightened its military prowess.<sup>36</sup> China has had an annual double-digit increase in defense spending since 2006. At the start of the decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Chinese government increased its defense budget by 13% to boost the People's Liberation Army's Navy's (PLAN's) capability to accomplish a wide range of military functions including winning local wars under information- age conditions. Since the early years of the new millennium, the PLAN has easily acquired a fleet of Russian-made diesel-electric Kilo-class submarines and *Sovremenny*-class destroyers, along with several types of indigenously-built destroyers, frigates, and nuclear-powered attack submarines. It also continues to upgrade its operational capabilities across the waters surrounding Taiwan and has deployed two new classes of ballistic and attack submarines.

Strong economically and militarily, China has taken several provocative actions in the South and East China Seas. These include the unilateral declaration of an East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ); the active conduct of several live-fire naval exercises by the PLAN and the People's Liberation Army's Air Force (PLAAF) in the Western Pacific/South China Sea, and the hardline responses by the PLAN in coordination with other Chinese maritime law-

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<sup>36</sup> National Institute for Defense Studies, *NIDS China Security 2014: Diversification of Roles of the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2015). p. 2.

enforcement agencies on territorial rows with the Philippines and Vietnam in the contested sea.<sup>37</sup> These moves worry the other littoral states about China's maritime design in the region.<sup>38</sup> From their viewpoint, these maneuvers smack of Chinese territorial expansionism and adventurism.<sup>39</sup> However, from China's perspective, it is a case of the country outgrowing its subordinate status in the past and feeling confident enough to press its case in the western Pacific—to stand resolute in managing its territorial and sovereignty issues in the East and South China Seas.<sup>40</sup>

Arguably, China's aggressive pursuit of its territorial claim over the South China Sea has increased in tandem with the expansion of its navy and maritime services.<sup>41</sup> Its regular naval exercises utilize modern surface combatants and even submarines.<sup>42</sup> These actions concretize China's intention to unilaterally and militarily resolve the maritime issue, flaunt its naval capabilities, and impress upon the other claimant states its "de facto" ownership of the disputed territories.<sup>43</sup> In the long run, China's naval capabilities will be directed not only to expand its maritime domain but to deny foreign navies—especially that of the U.S.—access to the South China and East China Seas. In time, it will be capable of depriving the U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet access to

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> David Scott, *China Stands Up: The PRC and the International System* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2007). p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "The Real Challenge in the Pacific: A Response to "How to Deter China," *Foreign Affairs* 94, 3 (May/June 2015). pp. 146-147.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Dutton, "Three Disputes and Three Objectives: China and the South China Sea," *Naval War College Review* (Autumn 2011) 54, 4. p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> For details on China's Training Exercises in its surrounding waters see *National Institute for Defense Studies, NIDS China Security Report 2011* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2011) . pp. 14-21.

<sup>43</sup> See the International Institute for Strategic Studies, *the Military Balance 2011: The Annual Assessment of Global Military Capabilities and Defence Economics* (London: Routledge, 2011). p. 196.

the Western Pacific inside of the so-called first- island chain.<sup>44</sup> Hence, China’s long-term goal to project its naval power not only to the near seas but to the far seas—the sea adjacent to the outer rim of the first-island-chain and those of the north Pacific—is no longer a remote possibility.<sup>45</sup>

By the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China’s fervent nationalism, growing naval prowess, and unilateral moves were overtly directed against a militarily-weak Philippines. As early as the last quarter of 2010, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) noted increased Chinese naval presence and activities in the Spratlys and monitored around six or seven major intrusions by Chinese vessels into the waters claimed by the Philippines. On 25 February 2011, Filipino fishermen alleged that they were fired upon by a *Jianghu*-B class missile frigate off Jackson Atoll, 140 miles west of Palawan.<sup>46</sup> On 2 March 2011, two Chinese patrol boats reportedly harassed a survey vessel commissioned by the Philippines Department of Energy (DOE) to conduct oil exploration in the Reed Bank, 150 kilometers east of the Spratly Islands and 250 kilometers west of the Philippine island of Palawan.

The Aquino Administration was stunned by the Chinese action since this maritime encounter happened east of the Spratlys and within the country’s adjacent waters. The 2 March 2011 incident at the Reed Bank and latter, China’s arrogant response to the Philippines’ diplomatic queries prompted the Aquino Administration to hasten the development of the AFP’s territorial defense capabilities. In June 2011, the executive branch of the Philippine government

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<sup>44</sup> Yoichi Kato, “China’s Naval Expansion in the Western Pacific,” *Global Asia* 5, 4 (Winter 2010). p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher H. Sharman, *China Moves Out: Stepping Stones toward a New Maritime Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> See Carl A. Thayer, “China’s New Wave of Aggressive Assertiveness in the South China Sea,” *International Journal of China Studies*, (December 2011, 2, 3. 561. pp. 561-562.

and the AFP agreed on a multi-year, multi-billion peso defense upgrade spending and military build-up. The Department of Budget Management (DBM) released a Multi-Year Obligation Authority (MOA) to the DND, allowing the AFP to enter into multi-year contracts with other governments or private arms and military hardware manufacturers. The DBM also committed Php 40 billion (estimated US\$800 million) in the next five years (2012-2016) to develop the AFP's capabilities for greater domain awareness of the Philippine territorial waters and EZZ.

Despite its determination to shift the AFP's focus from internal security to territorial defense, the Aquino Administration is constrained by insufficient financial resources even with its modest defense acquisition goals. To acquire the necessary equipment for territorial defense, the AFP waited for the Philippine Congress to legislate the extension of the AFP modernization law (Republic Act 7898) after it expired in February 2010. In December 2012, six months after the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, the Philippine Congress passed and then President Aquino signed Republic Act No. 10349 authorizing the extension of the original AFP modernization law. The law, however, allocated only Php75 billion (US1.5 billion) for the next five years. This amount is miniscule for the purchase of modern fighter planes, missile-armed frigates, sea-and-land based missile systems, patrol vessels, and long-range reconnaissance planes along with support facilities such as radar sites, forward operating bases, hangar, communication, maintenance, and command and control facilities.

## Capacity-Building for Philippine Maritime Security: The Role of the Middle Powers

As members of the QUAD and DSD, Japan and Australia have forged closer bilateral ties and links with third countries—especially other like-minded “regional countries in Southeast Asia and South Pacific.” In pursuing this policy, Canberra and Tokyo believe that they are doing themselves the service of no longer relying exclusively on one great and powerful ally for their security. Instead, they are seeking safety in numbers.<sup>47</sup> Notably, it has been observed that both Australia and Japan have sought to nurture like-minded states to offset a rising Chinese power and a declining U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific. For Tokyo and Canberra, capacity-building cooperation would enable third countries to assume greater roles in their own domestic governance that will eventually improve international security since this will increase the number of states capable of supporting international rules, and principles such as freedom of navigation and maritime rights. In certain cases, this approach is necessary because some Asia-Pacific countries felt more comfortable working with Japan and/or Australia than the U.S., if only because their size and scale are less intimidating.<sup>48</sup> These efforts, however, cannot be a substitute for sustained U.S. engagement with the region, but can complement it powerfully.<sup>49</sup> One of those like-minded states that are being engaged by these two middle powers is the Philippines.

A month after the Scarborough Shoal stand-off, then Japanese Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto and his Filipino counterpart, Voltaire Gazmin, inked a bilateral agreement on maritime

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<sup>47</sup> Wilkins, *op. cit.* p. 108.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> Shearer, *op. cit.* p. 94.

security.<sup>50</sup> The agreement calls for high-level dialogues between defense officials and reciprocal visits by the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) chief-of-staff and the PN flag commander. It also features various security related activities such as the Multinational Cooperation Program in the Asia-Pacific (MCAP); Multilateral Logistic Staff Talks (MLST); Training Exchanges and Subject Matter Exchanges on Humanitarian Assistance and Risk Reduction (HADR) and Logistics; and Exchange Visits and Student Exchanges in the two countries' respective Staff Colleges. A few days later, then Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario announced that Tokyo was likely to provide the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) with ten 40-meter boats as part of Japan's ODA to the Philippines by the end of the year.<sup>51</sup>

In January 2013, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida announced the provision of essential communication system equipment to PCG for maritime safety.<sup>52</sup> On 27 June 2013, Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera and his Philippine counterpart, Voltaire Gazmin, confirmed the continuous "exchanges of information aimed at strengthening Philippine-Japan defense relations and on working together to make U.S. strategic rebalancing a reality in Asia."<sup>53</sup> To further defense cooperation the Asian allies undertake these activities:<sup>54</sup> Reciprocal visits between the Chief of

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, "Japan and Philippines Sign Defense Pact," *Jane's Country Risk Daily Report* (4 July 2012) 19, 134. p. 1. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/102349/13A38763AF488...>

<sup>51</sup> Jerry E. Esplanada, "Philippines, Japan to Enhance Maritime Security Ties," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (9 July 2012). p. 1 <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/43508/philippines-japan-to-enhance...>

<sup>52</sup> Anonymous, "Philippine/Japan: Philippines, Japan Agree to Enhance Cooperation in Maritime Security," *Asia News Monitor* (14 January 2013). p. 1. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1269104724?accountid=28547>

<sup>53</sup> Anonymous, "Philippines, Japan Agree to Strengthen Defense Ties," *BBC Monitoring Asia-Pacific* (27 June 2013). p. 2. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/137173115?accountid=28547>

<sup>54</sup> Embassy of Japan in Manila, "Press Release on the Visit of His Excellency Mr. Itsunori Onodera, Minister of Defense of Japan to the Philippines," (27 June 2013). p. 1.

Staff of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF) and the Flag Officer of the Philippine Navy (PN); the holding of the Japan-Philippines Maritime Chief of Staff Meeting; Port calls in the Philippines by JMSDF vessels; and active participation in the Pacific Partnership 2012. The two defense ministers also extended the two countries' security cooperation to the field of aviation which was highlighted by the visit to the Philippines by the Chief-of-Staff of the Japanese Air Defense Force (JASDF). During the same meeting, former Secretary Gazmin also raised the possibility of allowing the Japanese SDF access to the former American military bases in the Philippines if Tokyo is interested in such arrangement.<sup>55</sup>

During his state visit to Japan in early June 2015, former President Aquino and Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe issued a joint declaration on "A Strengthened Strategic Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals for Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and beyond." The strategic partnership is founded [on the basis] on shared principles and goals.<sup>56</sup> The document also conveyed the two countries' commitment to ensure maritime safety and security in the South China Sea and their serious opposition to unilateral actions to change the status quo in the contested territory including China's large-scale projects and construction of outputs on the land features. This is specifically aimed against China's constructions of artificial islands in the contested sea. In summing up, the communiqué commits Japan to the following: 1) enhancing the capacity of the PCG; 2) cooperating with the Philippines on maritime security and domain

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> The Philippines News Agency (PNA), "Japan Shares Philippines' Serious Concern over China's Reclamation Activities in the West Philippine Sea," *The Philippines News Agency* (PNA) (05 June 2015). p. 1. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1686051792?accountid=28547>

awareness, and c) exploring the possibility of transferring Japanese defense equipment and technology to the Philippines.<sup>57</sup>

On 29 February 2016, Manila and Tokyo signed a new defense pact that establishes the legal parameters for the transfer of defense equipment and technology from Japan to the Philippines. Then Defense Secretary Gazmin and former Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Kazuhide Ishikawa said that the agreement would further strengthen the security and defense cooperation between these the two countries. It also provides for the Philippines and Japan to conduct joint research and development, and engage in the joint production of defense equipment and technology.<sup>58</sup> The accord stipulates the formation of a Philippine-Japan joint committee that will manage the transfer of defense equipment and technology from Japan to the Philippines, as well as how the materiel and know-how can be used.<sup>59</sup> Both parties expect that the agreement will not only enhance their evolving security partnership but will also advance the development, production, and establishment of technological bases of Japan's growing defense industry. Japan has similar defense agreements with the U.S. and Australia. This agreement, however, is Japan's first with an East Asia country that, incidentally, also has a territorial dispute with China.

In May 2016, the two governments agreed in principle to lease five JMSDF TC-90 surveillance planes to the PN. Those planes would be used to patrol the disputed areas of the South

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<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Japan-Philippines Joint Declaration: A Strengthen Partnership for Advancing the Shared Principles and Goals of Peace, Security, and Growth in the Region and Beyond" (Tokyo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 June 2015).

<sup>58</sup> Embassy of Japan, "Signing of the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Philippines concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology," *Press Release* (29 February 2016). p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

China Sea and in search-and-rescue missions during natural disasters.<sup>60</sup> Tokyo assured Manila that would take responsibility for the maintenance of the TC-90s as well as training the PN personnel who would operate the aircraft. An anonymous Philippine defense official remarked that this new security accord “opens the door to a lot of opportunities beyond the confines of mere equipment transfer or sale.”<sup>61</sup>

Australia has also assisted the Philippines’ efforts to build up its maritime security capabilities. In 2007, the Philippines and Australia signed the Philippine-Australia Status-of-Forces Agreement (SOFA). The agreement follows the format of the Philippine-U.S. Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) signed in 1997. The SOFA provides legal guarantees to Australian forces conducting joint-counter terrorism exercises in the Philippines. It also commits the Australian Defense Force (ADF) to advise the AFP on its logistics, and acquisition policy.

In July 2012, after five years of intense debates and deliberations, the Philippine Senate finally ratified the agreement. As mentioned earlier, the SOFA contains the detailed legal framework for Philippine-Australian military activities such as the Coast Watch South project and the Joint Maritime Training Activity *Lumbas*. After the Philippine Senate ratification of the SOFA, the DND announced that Australia looked forward to joining the annual Philippine-U.S. *Balikatan* (Shoulder-to-Shoulder) joint military exercise.<sup>62</sup> In October 2013, the two countries’ defense ministers created the Joint Defense Cooperation Working Group (JDCC) and the Defense

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<sup>60</sup> Associated Press, “Philippines to Discuss Lease of Japan Surveillance Planes,” *Associated Press* (3 May 2016). p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> The Associated Press, “Japan to Supply Philippines with Military Equipment,” *The Associated Press* (25 February 2016). p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Asia News Monitor, “Philippines/United States: Aussies Plan to Join Balikatan Exercise,” *Asia News Monitor* (13 November 2012). p.1. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1151086998?accountid=28547>

Cooperation Working Group (DCWG) to enhance their countries' defense relations through the annual conduct of the previously mentioned Army-to-Army exercise *Dawn Caracha*, *Dusk Caracha*, and the Navy-to-Navy Maritime Training Activity *Lumbas* and *Kakadu* and the Air Force Training *Pitch Black*.<sup>63</sup> Eventually, the Australian Defense Force sent 68 participants to the Philippine-U.S. *Balikatan* Exercise 2014.

Former President Aquino offered Australia a strategic partnership similar to what the country has forged with the U.S. and Japan.<sup>64</sup> He commented that both countries have been usually on the same side of issues that confronted them during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.<sup>65</sup> He added that Australia and the Philippines share the same values, and have similar forms of government, as well as face the same regional and global challenges.

On 18 November 2015, on the side of the Asia-Pacific Economic Community's (APEC) Leaders Meeting in Manila, then President Aquino and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull signed the Joint Declaration on Australia-Philippine Comprehensive Partnership. The agreement formalizes what has been a close and comprehensive working bilateral relation between two American allies. In March 2016, the PN officially took delivery of three former Australian *Balikpapan*-class land craft heavy (LCH) from Australia. The three LCHS are

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<sup>63</sup> International Affairs Division, *op. cit.* p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Asia News Monitor, "Philippines/Australia: Aquino says Philippines is Offering Australia a Strategic Partnership," *Asia News Monitor* (19 October 2012). p. 1. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1112912020?accountid=28547>

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* p.2.

former ships of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) ships that were transferred to the Philippines as part of a set of five vessels acquired by the PN from Australia.<sup>66</sup>

The first two vessels were donated and commissioned by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) to the PN in 2015. The three newly acquired ships were sold to Manila for a friendship price of Php270 million (US\$5.8 million). The acquisition of the five LCHs bolstered the PN's strategic sealift capability, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief operations. They are also useful in transporting troops from one island to another and for the conduct of amphibious operations all over the Philippines archipelago. Unfortunately, however, the glaring asymmetry between the Australian Defense Force (ADF) and the AFP hampers any substantial improvement in the two countries' security partnership. As a result, the two countries' security relations remained restricted on maritime safety, counter-terrorism, and Special Forces operations.<sup>67</sup>

### **Continuing the AFP Modernization Program**

Prior to his presidential inauguration on 30 June 2017, defense analysts and observers assumed that President Rodrigo Duterte would simply follow former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's national security policy of gravitating close to China while ignoring territorial defense and focusing on neutralizing domestic security challenges such terrorism and insurgencies. The AFP's modernization was linked to then President Aquino's agenda of challenging China's expansive maritime claim in the South China Sea. President Duterte's agenda to improve bilateral relations with China may mean that public investments to territorial defense would be decreased

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<sup>66</sup> Benjamin Schreer, "Australia-Philippines Strategic Relations: Taking the Long View," *The Strategist* (4 August 2017), p. 2. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-philippines-strategic-relations-taking-long-v...>

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

if not be terminated. This would result to a complete change in focus for the defense establishment from China challenge in the South China to the Abu Sayyaf; from the country's EEZ in the West Philippines Sea/South China Sea to Mindanao, particularly the island provinces of Sulu and Basilan; from modern fighter jets to helicopters and from much needed bigger maritime surface combatants to small patrol craft.<sup>68</sup> From the original goal of territorial defense by the previous administration, the Duterte Administration's initial policy was to revert back to the old (defense) posture of internal defense, or more appropriately, counter-insurgency operations.<sup>69</sup>

The Duterte administration, however, announced in December 2016 that the modernization of the Philippine military would proceed as the program jibes with its plan to develop a credible deterrence to secure Philippine territory, especially its maritime borders.<sup>70</sup> No less than his new defense secretary, Delfin Lorenzana, declared "that the modernization of the AFP is not taking a backseat amidst the (domestic) initiatives as the six-month administration of President Duterte has given the green-light for the construction and acquisition of the country's first two missile-armed frigates."<sup>71</sup> The Duterte Administration is addressing the Philippine military's expectation that it would continue to finance its modernization program that was started and given priority by its predecessor from 2011 to 2016.<sup>72</sup> It increased the 2017 defense budget by 15% from the 2016

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<sup>68</sup> Rene Acosta, "Duterte Administration Refocusing Defense, Security Priorities," *Business Mirror* (5 July 2016). P. 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> The Philippine News Agency, "AFP Modernization to Continue under the Duterte Administration," *Philippine News Agency* (4 January 2017). p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Priam Nepumuceno, "AFP Modernization not Taking a Backseat in Duterte Administration," *The Philippine News Agency* (19 December 2016). p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Philippine News Agency, "AFP Hopes for Continuation of Modernization Program under Duterte Administration," *Philippine News Agency* (27 June 2016). p. 1

level. More significantly, it also augmented the annual supplemental allotment for the AFP's acquisition of military equipment from Php 15 billion (US\$300 million) to Php 25 billion (US\$500 million) reflecting the administration's intention of accelerating the Philippine military's modernization program.<sup>73</sup> It is also introduced new administrative measures to accelerate the procurement of new military equipment given the significant delays the defense department and the AFP experienced in the acquisition of big-ticket items such as the two guided-missile frigates, 12 fighter planes, long-range patrol aircraft and close-air support aircraft.<sup>74</sup>

A week before the anniversary of his second year in office, President Duterte approved the Php300billion (US\$6.5billion) funding for the Second Horizon (stage) of the AFP modernization program that will lead to the transition from internal security operations to territorial defense.<sup>75</sup> To be implemented from 2018 to 2022, the AFP will purchase big-ticket items that will enable the PN and PAF to develop their respective presence and interdiction capabilities in the country's vast maritime domain. The PN will acquire two more guided missile frigates, multi-role vessels, anti-submarine helicopters, and even diesel-electric submarines.<sup>76</sup> The PAF will procure a radar system, unmanned aerial vehicles, special mission and long range patrol aircraft and two squadrons of multi-role fighter planes.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Philippine President Approves 6.7 Billion PhP Budget for 2017," *Xinhua News Agency* (22 December 2016). p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Jon Grevatt, "Philippines Looks to Accelerate Military Procurement," *Jane's Defense Weekly* (30 November 2016). p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Fances Mangosing, "Duterte Oks AFP Modernization Shopping List for Horizon 2," *Inquirer News* (29 June 2018) p.1. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1002560/duterte-oks-afp-modernization-shopping-list-for-h...>

<sup>76</sup> Priam Nepomuceno, "AFP to acquire Diesel-Electric Subs in Phase 2 of Modernization," *Philippine News Agency* (20 June 2018).pp. 1-2. <http://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1038865>

<sup>77</sup> Jaime Laude, "Duterte Oks Acquisition of Fighter Jets," *The Philippine Star* (9 June 2018) pp. 1-2. <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2018/06/09/1822997/duterte-oks-acquisition-fighte...>

More than two years into his term, President Duterte has not changed the national security objective as he continued the previous administration's efforts to modernize the AFP. It is not changing the national security objectives and even the military's previous efforts to modernize, as it is merely reorienting the defense department's and the AFP's key missions to its plan of first addressing domestic security concerns before focus on territorial defense.<sup>78</sup> This, in turn, has led to the implementation of the Aquino Administration's acquisition projects, along with the purchase of new platforms for internal security like night-capable attack helicopters, precision guided missiles, drones, and fast attack crafts in the next three to five years.<sup>79</sup> President Duterte is indeed putting his money where his mouth is when he pledged to the graduating class of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) in 2017 that his administration will provide radar, support, patrol, and assault vehicles as well as new surveillance and fighter aircraft in the next two to three years to be used to secure the country's borders.<sup>80</sup>

### **Supporting the Duterte Administration's Capacity Building Program**

During the Aquino administration, Japan's and Australia's efforts at extending security assistance to the Philippines were based on the rationale that helping equip a third country, which also happened to be an American ally, strengthens its ability and will to resist China's expansion in the South China Sea. This rationale, however, was unraveled by the shift in the Duterte

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<sup>78</sup> Acosta, *op. cit.* p. 1

<sup>79</sup> The Philippine News Agency, "DND Wants More Night-Capable Attack Helicopters, Other Equipment for Second Horizon," *The Philippine News Agency* (12 March 2017). p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Asia News Monitor, "President Duterte Tells PMA Graduates to Serve Nation with Utmost Dedication," *Asia News Monitor* (4 March 2017). p. 1.

Administration's foreign policy. His pronouncements and actions are undoing former President Aquino's agenda of balancing China's expansive claim in the South China Sea. He distances the Philippines from its long-standing treaty ally, the U.S.; while gravitating closer to a regional power bent on effecting a territorial revision in the East Asia, China. His foreign policy is aimed at appeasing China, in contrast to then President Aquino's balancing strategy. The Duterte Administration believes that its appeasement policy on China is worth pursuing because it makes the country a beneficiary of the latter's emergence as a global economic power.

Both Japan and Australia are uneasy over the reorientation of Philippine foreign policy under President Duterte as it entailed moving away from being a traditional stalwart American ally towards becoming an economic satellite of China. They observed that President Duterte has reversed the momentum in the Philippine-U.S security relations developed during the Aquino Administration and has Manila tilted ostensibly away from Washington to Beijing as he questioned the Philippine-U.S. Enhance Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that was signed by the two allies in 2014.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Canberra and Tokyo are concerned that the prospect of forming a common association with Manila based on the adherence to a rules-based regional order, freedom of navigation, and support for America's role as East Asia's strategic off-shore balancer is contested by President Duterte's increasingly independent foreign and strategic posture vis-à-vis the U.S. and its other Asian allies.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, both middle powers found it urgent to use their

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<sup>81</sup> Shearer, *op. cit.* p. 90.

<sup>82</sup> William Tow, "President Trump and the Implications for the Australia-U.S. Alliance and Australia's Role in Southeast Asia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 39, 1 (April 2017), p.2. <https://search.proquest.com/printviewfile?accountid=47510>

respective security partnerships with the Philippines to influence President Duterte's policy of distancing from the U.S. and moving closer to China.

This is especially true for Japan, whose pressing diplomatic goal is to assist the Philippines in improving its maritime surveillance capabilities in the light of increasing Chinese maritime activities in the South China Sea. Japan has been strengthening its security relations with the Duterte Administration by fostering periodic consultations between the two countries, and buttressing the PN's and PCG's maritime domain awareness capabilities. For the Philippines, keeping its security partnership with Japan intact is necessary because it remains the country's most important trading partner, its largest investor, and the home of several thousands of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and the millions of dollars of remittance income they send home each year, an important boost to the local economy.<sup>83</sup>

In September 2017, PM Abe met President Duterte in Laos for their first summit meeting. Both leaders reached an agreement on cooperation in a wide range of matters such as strengthening cooperation on boosting maritime security through Japanese provision of two large patrol vessels to the Philippines.<sup>84</sup> During his working visit in Japan from October 25 to 27, President Duterte witnessed the signing for the lease of five Japan Maritime Self Defense Force's (JMSDF) TC-90 maritime reconnaissance planes to monitor the Chinese activities in the South China Sea.<sup>85</sup> The leasing of the five TC-90 planes at US\$7,000 per plane a year was one of the important decisions

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<sup>83</sup> See Anthony Rivera, "Simply by Design," *Business Mirror* (28 June 2016). p.1. <http://0-search.proquest.com.lib1000.dlsu.edu.ph/docview/1800132718/fulltext/C41F2428DA1E4763PQ/23?accountid=28547>

<sup>84</sup> The National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review 2017* (Tokyo, Japan: The Japan Times Ltd., March 2017). p. 136.

<sup>85</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Japan-Philippines Joint Statement" Issued in Tokyo, 26 October 2016.

of the Duterte Administration in terms of territorial defense as the AFP lacks valuable assets for maritime domain awareness.<sup>86</sup> President Duterte also raised the prospect of the Philippines and Japan holding military exercises in the future.<sup>87</sup>

In January 2017, PM Abe went on a two-day state visit to Manila as the Philippines became closer to China while taking a taking hostile posture towards the two countries' common security partner—the U.S. PM Abe's visit to the Philippines was his first stop in a four-nation diplomatic swing as he pressed his efforts to boost Japan's trade and security engagements amidst China's increasing economic and diplomatic clout in Southeast Asia. The two leaders also discussed defense matters as they pledged to deepen maritime security cooperation between their two countries. PM Abe emphasized that since both the Philippines and Japan are maritime nations, Japan would support the Philippines' capacity-building in the field of maritime security.<sup>88</sup>

For his part, President Duterte expressed hope for the fast-track delivery to the Philippines of patrol vessels already in the pipeline and the acquisition of new boats.<sup>89</sup> Both leaders also reaffirm their commitments to pursue a peaceful resolution to the long-standing South China Sea dispute. Commenting on the high-profile visit by a Japanese head-of –government to the Philippines, an American analyst observed that PM Abe's 12-13 January 2017 visit to the Philippines reflected “Japan's goal to upset growing Chinese influence in the geopolitically

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<sup>86</sup> Rene Acosta, “Duterte Pushes for Contracts to Modernize Armed Forces,” *New Nations* (October 27, 2016). p.1.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous, “Duterte Says Open to Idea of Military Exercises with Japan,” *Kyodo News* (27 October 2016). P.

<sup>88</sup> Catherin Valente, “Abe Offers PhP430 B Package,” *TCA Regional News* (13 January 2017). p. 2 <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1857825130?accountid=28547>

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

strategic Southeast Asian country by ensuring the steady flow of (Japanese) aid and investment to the Philippines.”<sup>90</sup>

On 10 February 2017, the Philippines and Japan held their fifth annual defense dialogue in Tokyo. During the talks, the Philippines raised the need for the countries to conclude a visiting forces agreement in order to pave way for the conduct of military exercises between the two security partners.<sup>91</sup> The prospect of a visiting forces agreement between Japan and the Philippines was first raised during then President Aquino’s state visit in Japan in June 2015. During the March 2018 Philippine-Japan security dialogue that was held in Tokyo, both sides again stressed the need for a SOFA given that Japan is interested to undertake joint exercises with the Philippine on HADR.<sup>92</sup>

In March 2018, Japan completed its delivery of five TC-90s to the PN. The five donated reconnaissance aircraft augmented the PN’s six 40-year old Britten-Norman Islanders that are used in maritime patrol, surveillance and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and rapid assessment missions. The provision of the TC-90s alleviated the PN’s limited ability to conduct regular and routine patrols of the South China Sea given its few and obsolete air assets. The TC-90s have enabled the PN to conduct more extensive and wider maritime domain awareness operations until it can acquire more advanced maritime patrol aircraft under its Long Range Patrol

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<sup>90</sup> Ralph Jennings, “Japan Seeks to Limit China as Abe Visits Philippines,” *Voice of America News/FIND*; Lanham (13 January 2017). p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, “What’s next for Japan-Philippine Defense Relations under Duterte?” *The Diplomat* (16 February 2017). p. 2. <http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/whats-next-for-japan-philippines-defense-relations-under-duterte/>

<sup>92</sup> Maritime Security Alliance, “Japan Willing to Fight Piracy, Terrorism with Philippines,” *Maritime Security Alliance*, (2 July 2018) p. 1. <http://maritimesecurityalliance.com/japan-willing-fight-piracy-terrorism-philippines/>

Aircraft acquisition program which seeks to purchase two long range reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>93</sup> Along with PM Abe's pledges of more grants and investment, the donation of the five TC-90 reconnaissance aircraft to the PN was part of Tokyo's efforts in assisting the Philippines economically and militarily to counter China's growing political influence on the Duterte Administration. Interestingly, the transfer of these reconnaissance planes to the PN showed that maritime security cooperation between Japan and the Philippines is developing smoothly despite the Sino-Philippine rapprochement.

Japan is completing the delivering of 10 MRRV to the PCG. Six of these vessels had been commissioned by the PCG and the last four will be transferred to the Philippines by the end of 2018. The PCG emphasized that these vessels would be used for routine search and rescue, and law-enforcement operations. However, Philippine defense officials have also indicated that these MRRVs would be directly useful in addressing the country's key security challenges, such as their deployments to fight piracy or providing the PN greater capacity to patrol the country's extensive EZZ given Beijing's concerning behavior in the South China Sea.<sup>94</sup> The Philippines' acceptance of these security hardware suggests the Duterte Administration considers Japan as a balancer between the United States and China in its diplomatic strategy which is aimed at the Philippines' diversification of foreign relations, including the relationships with Japan, China and even Russia.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Mike Yeo, "Japan to Bolster Philippine Maritime Security with TC-90 Aircraft," *Defense News* (30 October 2017), p. 1. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2017/10/30/japan-to-bolster-philippin...>

<sup>94</sup> Prashanth Paramesaran, "A Big Week for Japan-Philippines Defense Ties," *The Diplomat* (29 March 2018), p. 2. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/a-big-week-for-japan-philippines-defense-ties/>

<sup>95</sup> The National Institute for Defense Studies, "East Asian Strategic Review 2017," p. 136.

In August 2017, Japan announced that it will give the Philippines thousands of helicopter spare parts to keep the PAF fleet of UH-1 Iroquois (or Huey) Helicopters operational.<sup>96</sup> The Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) retired its older H version of the Vietnam War-era Huey Helicopters in 2012, but kept its spare parts. The spare parts that would be given to the Philippines are meant for the PAF's workhorse UH-1 Huey helicopters that are still used for transport and gunships in the Philippine military's counter-insurgency operations. This deal could be the first of a series of agreements that Tokyo aims to forge with some Southeast Asian states that are willing to accept second-hand Japanese patrol aircraft, ships and other military equipment. This is part of the Japan's military diplomacy that is aimed to confound China's growing political and economic influence in Southeast Asia.<sup>97</sup>

The November 2015 Joint Declaration on Australia-The Philippines Comprehensive Partnership (DCP) commits Australia to assist the Philippines in defense modernization, including through bilateral and multilateral exercises, education and training, and maritime cooperation. Australian troops participate in the annual Philippine-U.S *Balikatan* (Shoulder-to Shoulder) exercises. In 2016, Australia sent 86 Australian Defense Force (ADF) personnel, with a contingent of a 30-strong Special Forces element from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commando Regiment. Australia also deployed a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) AP-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft. In 2017, it deployed 80 ADF personnel, and a RAAF Orion patrol aircraft. By participating in four consecutive

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<sup>96</sup> Tim Kelly and Nobuhiro Kubo, "Japan Said to Offer Chopper Parts to the Philippines as Counter to China," *Reuters* (11 August 2017), p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

*Balikatan* exercises, the ADF aims to build strong security partnership with the AFP, while maintaining interoperability with the United States Pacific Command (PACOM).<sup>98</sup>

### **Assisting the Philippines Confront the ISIS Threat in Southeast Asia**

In late May 2017, the Islamic militants' occupation of Marawi City pitted the Philippine military against a well-trained and ruthless transnational extremist insurgency that declared allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Middle East. Led by the Maute group, an organization with strong support in the Muslim dominated part of central Mindanao, about 500 Islamic militants fighting under the black flag of ISIS took control of the central business district of the said city. Trained for jungle warfare and used in operating in small-units, government forces were unable dislodge the militants despite deploying ground troops, and armor personnel carriers, and bombing the city from the air. Urban fighting in Marawi City exposed the Philippine military's limitations. However, for the AFP, defeating the ISIS militants in Marawi City as soon as possible is an imperative because a lengthy siege would attract more militants to Mindanao to reinforce their fellow fighters in the city or be deployed in other parts of the island.

The intensification of this non-state security challenge pushed Japan and Australia to ramp up their defense and security cooperation activities with Southeast Asian countries particularly, the Philippines. During the Marawi City Siege, Australia sent two RAAF AP-3C Orion aircrafts to provide surveillance and reconnaissance support to the AFP's combat operation against Muslim

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<sup>98</sup> Amanda Hodge, "Duterte Winds Back U.S., Allies Military Exercise," *The Australian* (9 May 2017). p. <https://0-search.proquest.com.lib1000.dlsu.edu.ph/docview/1896080089/fulltext/3430C4DE48C4F14PQ/100?accountid=28547>

militants who took control of the city.<sup>99</sup> Australia also considered sending ADF personnel to the Philippines to advise and assist the AFP in its counter-terrorism campaign against the Islamic militants—something that the ADF has been doing in Iraq.<sup>100</sup> Since 2015, the ADF’s Task Force *Taji* has trained thousands of Iraqi military personnel in urban warfare.

In his meeting with President Duterte, the director-general of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service, Mr. Nick Warner, offered Australian technical assistance, training, and information gathering and sharing to the Philippines in its fight against international terrorism.<sup>101</sup> The presidential spokesperson, in turn, said that the Philippines is most interested in gaining Australian intelligence assistance, and this country is keen to strengthen its defense relationship with Australia.<sup>102</sup> Australia is currently looking at further collaboration and capacity-building work with the Philippines and other regional partners on fostering cooperation among regional coast guards to tighten border control in the Sulu Sea in an effort to limit the movement of money, technology and fighters to extremist groups in the Southern Philippines.<sup>103</sup>

In October 2017, the Philippines and Australia signed an agreement that will increase military cooperation between the two countries for capacity-building and address the threat of terrorism. Under this agreement, the ADF will send mobile training teams that will train the AFP

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<sup>99</sup> Mena Report, “Australia: Australian Defense Force Assistance to the Philippines,” *MENA Report* (24 June 2017), p. 1. <https://0-search.proquest.com.lib1000.dlsu.edu.ph/docview/1913045479/fulltext/34630C4DEC4F14PQ/44accountid=28547>

<sup>100</sup> Priomrose Riordan, “Philippines Keen for Australian Intelligence Help in Marawi City,” *The Australian* (30 August 2017), p. 1. <http://theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/philippines-keen-f...>

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> John Blaxland, Jacinta Carroll, Andrew Carr, and Marty Harris, “Marawi and After: How Australia Can Help,” *Policy Option Paper No. 6*, (August 2017), p. 2. <https://nsc.crawford.annu.edu.au/department-news/11260/marai-an...>

on urban warfare and counter-terrorism.<sup>104</sup> The agreement also provides that the RAN will conduct port visits to the Philippines to engage the Philippine Navy in a range of cooperative activities to support its capability development.<sup>105</sup>

For its part, Japan is building four coast guard radar stations on the Philippines islands in the Sulu Celebs Seas to help Manila monitor the movement of terrorist groups transiting between Indonesia and the southern island of Mindanao.<sup>106</sup> Tokyo also promised to provide training to the local coast guard personnel who will be assigned to man these stations. PM Abe also offered \$2million to help the Philippines rebuild Marawi City after it was extensively damaged during the five months of fighting between the AFP and Islamic militants.<sup>107</sup> Japan`s provision of four radar stations to Manila is part of a wider ODA package that include helicopter parts of the PAF, financing for infrastructure projects such as railroads, and financial assistance for the rehabilitation of the war-torn city of Marawi are aimed to deepen its economic and security ties with Manila in order to constrain growing Chinese influence in the country. Despite the Sino-Philippine rapprochement, Japan still considers the Philippines as a key security partner in helping prevent China`s political and diplomatic influence from spreading into the western Pacific.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Willard Cheng, "Australia Welcomes Philippine Announcement that Combat in Marawi had Ended," *ABS-CBN News* (24 October 2017).p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Tim Kelly and Nobuhior Kubo, "Japan to Build Four Radar Stations for the Philippines to Counter Piracy Surge, Sources Say," *The Japan Times* (11 November 2017). p. 1. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/11/11/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-build-...>

<sup>107</sup> Ralp Jennings, "Japan Deepens Economic Support for Philippines in Rivalry with China," *Voice of America News* (3 November 2017). p. 3. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1959227775/fulltext/19E45C6176B14116PQ/14?a...>

<sup>108</sup> Kelly and Kubo, *op. cit.* p. 2.

## **The Future of the Philippines` Relation with the Special Japan-Australia Strategic Partnership**

Japan and Australia are extending security assistance to the Philippines because of their membership in the QUAD, DSD, and more significantly, as two American allies in the Indo-Pacific region. Capacity-building of like-minded countries is a new and important area of the Japan-Australia strategic partnership. It is premised on the belief that the liberal international order is broad and inclusive so that other countries can share it. Embedding their bilateral security cooperation into a broader, either trilateral or multilateral, context is a more optional approach than confining themselves with the narrow bilateral framework.<sup>109</sup> Although Japan and Australia agree on the increasing importance of their alliance with the U.S. in the face of China's emergence as a great power in East Asia, the two strategic partners believe that it is necessary for them to go beyond a narrow bilateral security relations and establish a trilateral framework that include other like-minded countries.

In the light of the uncertainty in U.S. foreign policy in East Asia under the Trump Administration, Japan and Australia have independently forged stronger ties with each other by concluding an updated acquisition and cross-servicing agreement.<sup>110</sup> Both countries have engaged in several rounds of security dialogues on increasing aggressive Chinese behavior in the East and South China Sea.<sup>111</sup> The leaders of both countries have also reiterated their opposition to any

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<sup>109</sup> Wilkin, *op. cit.* p. 108.

<sup>110</sup> Julian Ryall, "Japan, Australia Eye Deeper Defense Alliance," *DW TOP STORIES* (18 January 2018). p. 2. <http://www.dw.com/en/japan-australia-eye-deeper-defense-alliance/a-42198311>

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

unilateral or coercive actions that could later the status quo and increase tensions in the two bodies of waters.<sup>112</sup>

Canberra and Tokyo consider fostering relations with third countries through capacity building as important for two reasons:<sup>113</sup> a) a concert of order-reinforcing middle powers would enmesh China in a web of regional institutions, and norms; and b) an association of middle powers could be transformed into a counter-vailing military alliance or coalition (hard balancing), even if the United States is absent, and with Japan as a prospective leader. Japan and Australia considered the Philippines as one of those like-minded countries that can play an important security role in preserving the liberal international order in East Asia. This is shown by how Japan and Australia are assisting the Philippine government in its efforts to develop its maritime security capabilities.

Japan's and Australia's assistance to the AFP's modernization program is conducted within the broader frameworks of their respective security partnerships with the Philippines. As a form security cooperation, a security partnership is a loose form of alignment that has certain structured framework of collaboration between two or more states with the goal of addressing a common security challenge.<sup>114</sup> A security partnership, however, has no binding commitment to assist a partner during a conflict compared to a formal alliance and is multidimensional rather than simply focused on military cooperation. The Philippine-Japan security partnership was formalized in June 2015. The Philippine-Australian security partnership became effective in October 2013.

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<sup>112</sup> MENA Report, "Australia: Visit to Australia by Japanese Prime Minister Abe," *MENA Report* (19 January 2017).p. 2. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1863765685/fulltext/16FE2BB31F234F41PQ/7?ac...>

<sup>113</sup> Wilkins, *op. cit.* p. 108.

<sup>114</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "Explaining U.S. Strategic Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific Region\* Origins, Developments, and Prospects," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (August 2014) 36, 2 p. 263.

Through their respective security partnerships, Japan and Australia have provided the Philippines with patrol boats, reconnaissance planes, transport ships and training on a grant basis. Their goal is to strengthen the Philippines' political will and naval capabilities to confront China's maritime expansion in the Western Pacific and the resurgence of Islamic militancy in Southeast Asia. From the perspective of Tokyo and Canberra, however, their security partnerships with the Philippines can never be substitutes for sustained U.S. security engagement in East Asia but simply to complement it.

Japan and Australia's security partnerships with the Philippines, however, are constrained by two policies. First, both middle powers have only provided military equipment that are geared for maritime surveillance and transport. Japan and Australia are yet to provide any combat hardware to the Philippines. Second these two middle powers will never extend any security guarantee to the Philippines. This is because they have no intention to replace the U.S. as the Philippines' sole formal treaty ally. Both middle powers value their respective alliances with the U.S. and actively support their ally's role as the indispensable strategic off-shore balancer in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Philippines' security partnerships with the two middle powers, Japan and Australia, are hedged on its strategic bets in the light of its limited military capabilities. Establishing security ties with those two American allies likewise augment the country's alliance with the U.S. that serves as a major deterrence against external threats. The *2010 Strategic Direction of AFP International Military Affairs* indicated that the Philippine military shall maximize gains from the alliance with the U.S., while seeking security arrangements with other potential allies such as

Australia, South Korea, and Japan which are key players in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>115</sup> The document also confirmed that the Philippines intends to develop relations with them to enhance the country's security and develop its military (specifically territorial defense) capabilities.<sup>116</sup>

Since 2012, the Philippines has found it necessary to foster security partnerships with two middle powers—Japan and Australia. The Philippines has sought security materiel and technical assistance from Japan and Australia given its limited military capabilities. The Philippines taps Japan in providing technical and material assistance to the PCG. As part of its security arrangements with Japan, Tokyo is currently providing 12 patrol boats for the PCG. A well-developed PCG is extremely important in deterring Chinese intrusion into the country's EEZ. The Philippines has also signed and ratified a SOFA with the ADF to enhance security cooperation that includes the Coast Watch South project and the joint Maritime Training Activity *Lumbas*. All these efforts are aimed to strengthen the Philippines' maritime security capabilities. By establishing security ties with these two middle powers, the Philippines harnesses the military know-how and resources of two American allies against a pressing strategic concern in maritime Southeast Asia—China's expansion in the South China Sea.

President Duterte has not changed the Aquino Administration's national security objective as he continued to modernize the Philippine military. The Duterte Administration's defense policy, however, doesn't take into account any American security assistance or guarantee. This stems from its foreign policy goal of unravelling the Aquino Administration's agenda of balancing China's

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<sup>115</sup> Office of the Deputy Chief-of-Staff, *Armed Forces of the Philippines: Strategic Intent* (Quezon City: Camp Aguinaldo, 2011). p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

expansive claim in the South China Sea. Consequently, he distances the Philippines from the U.S.; while moving closer to China which is bent on effecting a territorial revision in the East Asia.

This, however, makes the Duterte Administration more amenable to closer and more intense security partnerships with these two middle powers. On the one hand, for him, Japan and Australia can fill up the diplomatic/strategic void since he simply does not trust nor like the U.S. Like other Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines under President Duterte considers Japan and Australia as “middle powers that have extended soft power outreach in the region through military personnel exchanges, information sharing, capacity-building, and people-to-people exchanges.”<sup>117</sup> For him, both middle powers just need to turn up the volume another notch or two to fill in where the United States comes short.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, strengthening security cooperation with Japan and Australia also serve as the best alternative to succumbing to a rising China`s interests and preferences.<sup>119</sup>

Coincidentally, Japan and Australia found it imperative to further enhance their security partnerships with the Philippines because they don`t want the Duterte Administration to gravitate closer to China. Both countries are concerned that President Duterte`s anti-American posturing can adversely affect joint Philippine-U.S. exercises and other defense cooperation activities that have already included other American allies. Both middle powers have used their respective security partnerships with the Philippines to strengthen its military capabilities despite

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<sup>117</sup> For an interesting discussion on why Japan and Australis should pursue a more activist foreign policy in Southeast Asia see Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “Southeast Asia and the Trump Administration: Between a Rock and A Hard Place,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, 1 (April 2017). p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>119</sup> Tow, *op. cit.* p. 58.

its rapprochement with China. This enabled Japan and Australia to influence the Philippines as it adjust its relations away from the U.S. to China: while at the same time, exercise an independent initiative in modifying the American hub-and-spoke system of alliance in East Asia by increasing spoke-to-spoke links forming several minilateral and plurilateral arrangements.

## **Conclusion**

A significant development in Philippine foreign policy in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the country's efforts to forge security ties with two middle powers, Japan and Australia. Confronted by China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea, the Philippines consider it both crucial and urgent to engage the U.S. and its other bilateral allies strategically. This partnership enables the Philippines to address its pressing security concern of territorial/maritime defense through domain awareness. The Philippines taps Japan in providing technical and material assistance to the PCG. As part of its security arrangements with Japan, Tokyo is giving 12 patrol boats to the PCG. A well-developed PCG is extremely important in deterring Chinese intrusion into the country's EEZ. The Philippines has also signed and ratified a SOFA with the Australian Defense Force to enhance security cooperation that includes the Coast Watch South project and the joint Maritime Training Activity *Lumbas*. All these efforts are aimed to strengthen the Philippines' maritime security capabilities. By establishing security partnerships with these two middle powers. The Philippines harnesses the military know-how and resources of these American allies against a pressing strategic concern in maritime Southeast Asia—China's expansionist moves in the South China Sea.

President Duterte has not changed the Aquino Administration's national security objective as he continued its efforts to modernize the Philippine military. The Duterte

Administration's defense policy, however, doesn't take into account in any American security assistance or guarantee. This stems from its foreign policy goal of unravelling the Aquino Administration's agenda of balancing China's expansive claim in the South China Sea. Consequently, he distances the Philippines from the U.S.; while moving closer to China which is bent on effecting a territorial revision in the East Asia. This, however, makes the Duterte Administration more amenable to closer and more intense security partnerships with these two middle powers, Japan and Australia. On the one hand, for him, Japan and Australia can fill up the diplomatic/strategic void since he simply does not trust nor like the U.S. On the other hand, strengthening security cooperation with Japan and Australia also serve as the best alternative to succumbing to a rising China's interests and preferences.

Coincidentally, Japan and Australia have found it necessary to deepen their security partnerships with the Philippines because they do not want the Duterte Administration to gravitate closer to China. Both middle powers have enhanced their respective security partnerships with the Philippines to strengthen its military capabilities despite its rapprochement with China. This enabled Japan and Australia to influence the Philippines as it adjust its relations away from the U.S. to China: while at the same time, to exercise an unintended effort of modifying the American hub-and-spoke system of alliance by increasing spoke-to-spoke linkages forming several minilateral and plurilateral arrangements in the Indo-Pacific region.

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