

CHAPTER 5

Philippine Security Outlook for 2015: Shifting to an external defense posture

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For the past several years (and as has been reported in the past NIDS workshops on the Philippine situation), observers of the security situation of the Philippines have emphasized the wide gap between the external defense capability of the Philippines and the increasing realization of its vulnerability to the impact of shifting power relations to its regional security environment. This disparity has played through the picture of an unsteady and inconsistent path towards the resolution of twin longstanding insurgencies in the Philippines—one involving the communist New People’s Army (NPA) and another the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—on one hand, and an increasingly deteriorating relationship with China over disputed territory in the South China Sea on the other. As peace treaties are being negotiated and implemented to resolve the former, the latter has become an increasing source of concern among the country’s security policy-makers and policy-observers. Further complicating the situation for the defense community is the impact of an intensifying political rivalry between China and the United States, as well as intensifying extreme weather events response, which add to the required mission capabilities that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) need to develop. Generally, developments in 2014 have continued these trends. Capability development in defense-related concerns continues to emphasize a shift to external security with the Philippine Air Force and the Philippine Coast Guard being the most immediate beneficiaries. Nonetheless, the still extant communist insurgency and the as yet unrealized but burgeoning threat of operational linkages between those secessionist groups in Mindanao which are not part of the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF, and Al Qaeda and the Islamic State continue to push domestic security issues to the forefront of the Philippine government’s consciousness.

The AFP modernization program

In the aftermath of the departure of United States forces from their bases in the Philippines and the discovery of Chinese-built structures in Mischief Reef, the

Philippine Congress had passed the 1995 AFP Modernization Program. This was to be a 15 year program intended to push for the upgrade of the Armed Forces of the Philippines which had been allowed to deteriorate over the past decades. In the years that followed, however, the program was never given priority as the 1997 financial crisis struck and forced the Philippine government to de-emphasize defense in its budgetary considerations. Even as the country's economy began to recover, the program continued to be neglected and the AFP suffered further deterioration in its capability to act on its mandate especially its responsibility to defend the country from external threats. In 2013, the Philippine Congress passed an amendment to the 1995 Law intended to revive the AFP Modernization Program and give teeth to the external defense capability of the AFP. It extends the program for another 15 years starting in 2012 with an initial allocation of 75 billion PhP for the first five years of its implementation. The funding for this program (as it was with the original legislation) will come from general appropriations, proceeds from the Malampaya gas project, remittances from the Bases Conversion and Development Authority, and Aquino's pledge to provide P632.18 million annually until 2015¹.

According to Undersecretary Fernando Manalo of the Department of National Defense (DND), in February 2013, the DND had forwarded the list of equipment the AFP had indicated it needed in order to perform its mandated tasks to the Office of the President. An allocation of 90.5 billion PhP has been proposed for the implementation of the plan till 2017. This first phase will include the acquisition of 12 lead-in trainer fighters and at least two of four additional frigates to reinforce the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar* and *Ramon Alcaraz*². The former has already been finalized with the signing of an agreement with the Korea Aerospace Industries for the purchase of FA-50 jets (for 18.9 billion PhP). Expected delivery and start of operations for this aircraft is between 2015 and 2017³. These forces are far below what the Philippine Air Force and Philippine Navy believe they need to accomplish their mission of building credible deterrence—but it is only the start of a three-phase

¹ Frances Mangosing, "36 AFP modernization projects completed under Aquino, says Gazmin," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (14 January 2014) downloaded from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/563845/36-afp-modernization-projects-completed-under-aquino-says-gazmin> on 1 November 2014.

² See Jaime Laude, "No approval yet for AFP shopping list," *The Philippine Star* (8 January 2015) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/noapprovalyetafpshopping160000375.html> on 8 January 2015; and Alexis Romero, "Military to acquire 2 more ships," *The Philippine Star* (15 January 2014) downloaded from <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/01/15/1279174/military-acquire-2-more-ships> on 27 January 2014.

³ "Fighter jets from Korea seen to boost PH defense," *The Manila Bulletin* (14 December 2014) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/fighterjetskoreaseenboostphdefense203427337.html> on 15 December 2014.

program. The “second horizon upgrade program” will take place between 2018 and 2023 (at an approximate cost of 90 billion PhP) and the “third horizon” will be implemented between 2024 and 2028⁴. These include plans to acquire an air defense system that would include mobile anti-air and surface-to-air missile launchers, fire-control radar guidance systems, and shoulder-fired portable missile launchers. Also in the pipeline are planned acquisitions for dual-mission capable helicopters (for disaster relief missions), and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)⁵. Outside of the AFP Modernization Program specified in the 2013 law, the AFP has also received equipment through donations from other countries. The Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN) will be sending a *Pohang*-class corvette (PCC) warship to the Philippine Navy that will be decommissioned at the end of 2014. The AFP had already accepted earlier in 2014 a ROKN donation of a landing craft utility and 16 rubber boats⁶.

As of January 2015, however, President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III had not yet approved and submitted to Congress the list of equipment submitted by the AFP and the Department of National Defense (DND) as part of the modernization of the AFP. Instead, these proposals are being approached on a project-to-project basis. According to the DND, this is part of the due diligence that the Aquino Administration is exercising on major programs and projects of the government in order to minimize corruption. President Aquino has always pointed to the negligence of and corruption involved in the treatment of the AFP as a major factor in the deterioration of the AFP⁷. It has, however, the unfortunate effect of delaying the response to what has already been a longstanding situation in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In the face of the acknowledged existence of “real threats,” domestic Philippine politics continue to wreak havoc on what should be overriding strategic considerations and priorities⁸.

⁴ See Jaime Laude, “No approval yet for AFP shopping list,” *The Philippine Star* (8 January 2015) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/noapprovalyetafpshopping160000375.html> on 8 January 2015.

⁵ Explorations in the purchase of surface-to-air missile systems and multiple launch rocket systems have included discussions with various sources including Israel. See J. Michael Cole, “Philippines Seeks Air Defense Systems from Israel,” *The Diplomat* (18 June 2013) downloaded from <http://thediplomat.com/2013/06/philippines-seeks-air-defense-systems-from-israel/> on 27 February 2014.

⁶ “Korea donating warship to PH,” *The Manila Bulletin* (7 June 2014) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/korea-donating-warship-ph-154050231.html> on 9 June 2014.

⁷ See for example Alexis Romero, “PAF weakened by corruption,” *The Philippine Star* (2 July 2014) downloaded from <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/07/02/1341432/paf-weakened-corruption> on 2 July 2014.

⁸ Bong Lozada, “National and territorial threats real, says Navy chief,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (27 May 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/105235/national-and-territorial-threats-real-says-navy-chief> on 28 May 2014.

Separate from the AFP Modernization Program, but having equal significance to the external defense capability of the Philippines, are developments involving the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). While the PCG was established in 1998 by being separated from the Philippine Navy, it is not part of the AFP, and not under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Defense. It is instead a bureau of the Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC) responsible for marine environmental protection (MAREP), maritime law enforcement (MARLEN), maritime sea and air rescue (MARSAR), maritime security (MARSEC), and maritime safety administration (MARSAF). The extent of this mandate and the actual experience of the face-off with Chinese Maritime Surveillance ships off Scarborough Shoal in 2012 showed that most encounters in the disputed territories of the South China Sea will be of the “white on white” variety that will involve the PCG more extensively. It has its own modernization program which is at the very least also partially pushed by the situation with China. The PCG has 54 patrol ships of its own of varying tonnage and capability, and actually provides crew members for ships assigned to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). The Japanese government has made a commitment to helping the PCG with its modernization program and promised to send 10 new coastal patrol boats to strengthen its capabilities⁹. These developments, however, point to the inadequacy of the resources available to the PCG in the performance of its mandate to provide security to the waters of and surrounding the Philippines¹⁰.

Developments in the South China Sea and relations with China

Over the last several years, the principal driver of defense reform in the Philippines has been the territorial dispute over the land and water features of the South China Sea with China¹¹. The principal issue has revolved around three main areas of concern which have all contributed to a continued deterioration of bilateral relations between the Philippines and China, as well as to some degree of uncertainty to the security and stability of the region. The arbitration case filed by the Philippines with the

⁹ See evaluation made by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for the extension of a loan for this project available at http://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/evaluation/oda_loan/economic_cooperation/c8h0vm000001rdjt-att/philippines_131214_01.pdf downloaded on 30 March 2015.

¹⁰ For ongoing discussions on supporting the PCG Modernization Program, see Charissa Luci, “Coast Guard modernization eyed in House measure,” *Manila Bulletin* (28 December 2014) available at <http://www.mb.com.ph/coast-guard-modernization-eyed-in-house-measure> downloaded on 30 March 2015.

¹¹ See NIDS Joint Research Series Nos. 7 and 9.

International Tribunal on the Law of the Seas (ITLOS) in 2013, increased and more assertive Chinese Coast Guard patrols in the disputed areas, and the enmeshing of Philippines-China relations in the context of an intensifying great power rivalry have all combined to create for the Philippines a more unpredictable external environment it has had to deal with.

The arbitration case. In January 2013, the Philippines sought arbitration on the interpretation and application of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) as these concerned, the Chinese claim to the waters and land features in the South China Sea. After the members of the panel that would be involved in the arbitration case were identified, the Philippines submitted its memorial pleading the merits of its case on 30 March 2014. Speaking before a business convention, Ambassador Jose Cuisia Jr. argued that "... by taking the legal route, the Philippines is setting an international precedent whereby states have other viable options to resolve maritime cases other than in an asymmetrical negotiation, where the big and militarily strong nation would dominate the smaller nation at the negotiating table¹²." Even as it contended that seeking arbitration on the case is a way of strengthening the UNCLOS, Philippine foreign policy spokespersons have also argued that the actions of China in relation to its claims in the area has given the Philippines little choice in what could be done about the dispute. The submission of the case to the ITLOS was prompted by the aftermath of the face-off over Scarborough Shoal in 2013 when the Chinese took effective control of the Shoal and prevented Philippine fishermen from fishing in the area¹³. A decision from the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague would clarify the rights of the Philippines to what it claims are waters that are part of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). At the same time, it would settle the question of China's maritime entitlements in the area it claims to have sovereignty over due to historic rights¹⁴.

¹² "PH case vs China a model for int'l sea disputes," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/102031/ph-case-vs-china-a-model-for-intl-sea-disputes> on 11 July 2014.

¹³ See Nikko Dizon, "Chinese ships fire water cannon at PH fishers," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (25 February 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/99374/chinese-coast-guard-used-water-cannon-vs-filipino-fishermen-bautista/> on 19 January 2015.

¹⁴ See "PH case vs China a model for int'l sea disputes," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/102031/ph-case-vs-china-a-model-for-intl-sea-disputes> on 11 July 2014.

China has refused to participate in the proceedings, arguing that the Permanent Court of Arbitration has no jurisdiction in the case¹⁵. In what has been described as a remarkable document, China made its case unofficially (i.e., without participating directly in the proceedings) by releasing a “position paper” on the case made by the Philippines. Observers pointed out that in doing so, China effectively forced the members of the tribunal to consider its arguments without having to make an official response to the Philippine memorial¹⁶. In fact, the “position paper” (which looks very much like a well-argued memorial) was released on 7 December, a full week before the deadline established by the Permanent Court for China to respond to the Philippine memorial. While the Chinese case was spelled out in the “position paper,” China has more stridently argued through other fora that the course of action taken by the Philippines was making things worse for Philippine-China relations. The Philippines was warned against its “smear campaign” in tarnishing China’s international image through the arbitration case. The Chinese embassy in Manila claimed that the arbitration proceeding “distorts the fact and diverts attention” from the actuality of the “illegal nature of [the] Philippines’ infringement and provocative behavior.” The proceeding itself constitutes an “abuse of process against China, and defraud[s] the international community of its sympathy and support¹⁷.” In a press conference on 1 April 2014, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy pointed out that the course of action taken by the Philippines had the effect of seriously damaging its relations with China with the submission of the memorial to the Tribunal¹⁸, and noted that these actions would have consequences¹⁹.

¹⁵ See “Position Paper of the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Republic of the Philippines” released on 7 December 2014 available at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1217147.shtml and downloaded on 19 January 2015.

¹⁶ See for example Sean Mirski, “China Releases a ‘Position Paper’ in the Ongoing Philippines-China Arbitration,” downloaded from <http://www.lawfareblog.com/2015/01/chinareleasesapositionpaperintheongoingphilippineschinaarbitration/> on 19 January 2015; and Julian Ku, “China Manages to File (and Not File) a Legal Brief in the Philippines Arbitration,” downloaded from <http://opiniojuris.org/2014/12/08/chinamanagesfilenotfilelegalbriefphilippinesarbitration/> on 19 January 2015.

¹⁷ Tarra Quismundo, “China: PH tarnishing Beijing’s international image,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (4 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/101610/china-ph-tarnishing-beijings-international-image> on 11 July 2014.

¹⁸ Tarra Quismundo, “China: PH tarnishing Beijing’s international image,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (4 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/101610/china-ph-tarnishing-beijings-international-image> on 11 July 2014.

¹⁹ Nestor Corrales, “China to PH: Provocations have consequences,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (1 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/101408/china-to-ph-provocations-have-consequences> on 28 May 2014.

Increased Chinese presence and arrested fishermen.

Following the submission of the memorial by the Philippines, the Chinese government has undertaken a number of actions that are evidently aimed at punishing the Philippines and convincing it to discontinue its case. The Philippines reported an increased presence of Chinese Coast Guard vessels around land features claimed by the Philippines and generally in the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)²⁰. Two to three ships are regularly on patrol around Scarborough Shoal. In August 2014, two Chinese hydrographic ships were reported in the Recto Bank area, 80 nautical miles off the island of Palawan²¹. More seriously, the Philippines has protested the land reclamation project China has undertaken around Johnson South Reef (which the Philippines refers to as Mabini Reef and the Chinese refer to as Chigua Reef). This is a feature that is approximately 300 kilometers from Palawan Island, and well within the Philippine EEZ. Philippine officials have claimed that the reclamation project has created a 30 hectare area that could hold an airstrip—a claim that China denies. Reports in Chinese newspapers have been quoted as stating that what is going on is a renovation project to improve living quarters for troops stationed in the reef²². On 10 October, however, the Philippines delivered another diplomatic protest about similar reclamation being conducted in the area of Fiery Cross Reef (Kagitingan Reef to Filipinos). While these developments are taken to be serious threats to the claims to sovereignty over the identified features by the Philippine government, there is an argument that these do not really have any material implications for the nature or legality of the claims made by the countries involved. They do, however, have material consequence for the ability of China to establish its dominance over the area²³.

²⁰ See Nikko Dizon and Tarra Quismundo, “‘It is getting worse’: 12 Chinese ships monitored inside PH’s EEZ,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (19 June 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/106703/it-is-getting-worse-12-chinese-ships-monitored-inside-phs-eez> on 19 June 2014; Nestor Corrales, “Catapang: ‘China getting bolder,’” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (14 August 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/109410/catapang-china-getting-bolder> on 18 August 2014; and Associated Press, “Philippines protests Chinese ‘sovereignty patrols,’” *Yahoo News Philippines* (20 August 2014) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/philippines-protests-chinese-sovereignty-patrols-095705422.html> on 20 August 2014.

²¹ Reuters, “Aquino says Chinese survey ships seen in Philippine waters,” *Yahoo News Philippines* (18 August 2014) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/aquino-says-chinese-survey-ships-seen-philippine-waters-072539016—finance.html#> on 20 August 2014.

²² Marlon Ramos and Tarra Quismundo, “China building airstrip on reef in PH waters,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (15 May 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/104333/manila-says-china-reclaiming-land-in-disputed-sea> on 19 January 2015.

²³ Matikas Santos, “China turning reefs into ‘artificial islands’ for ‘dominance’— expert,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (25 June 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/107097/china-turning-reefs-into-artificial-islands-for-dominance-expert> on 11 July 2014.

As the debate around the land reclamation project around Johnson South Reef proceeded, an incident further sparked a spike in the already poor relations between the Philippines and China. In May 2014, police operatives of the Philippine National Police Maritime Group seized a fishing vessel with a crew of 11 Chinese fishermen off Half Moon Shoal (Hasa-hasa Shoal for Filipinos and Ban Yue Reef for the Chinese) aboard which were found 400 sea turtles (of which around 120 were still alive)—a protected species under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES)²⁴. The policemen were operating in an area within the EEZ of the Philippines around land features that it claimed. A Filipino vessel engaged in a similar illegal activity was likewise seized and the crew arrested. The Chinese fishermen were convicted of poaching by a Philippine court and ordered to pay hefty fines²⁵.

The Chinese government had protested this action taken by the Philippine government and demanded the unconditional release of the fishermen and their boat²⁶. There was also the implication that the arrest and the subsequent court trial are all part of a premeditated act of provocation on the part of the Philippine government meant to stir up trouble in the South China Sea²⁷. This fits into the Chinese narrative that the Philippines is a troublemaker, and is perhaps acting in collusion with the United States.

US–Philippine Relations.

On 28 April 2014, the Philippines and the United States signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) after eight months of negotiations. This is a 10-year agreement with provisions for automatic renewal intended on the Philippine side to provide a “security cover” for the Philippines and boost its defense capability²⁸. A key component of the agreement is that it allows more US troops access to selected Philippine military bases, and for the US to preposition warplanes and ships in the Philippines. Critics of the agreement have argued that it goes against the provision

²⁴ “Philippines nabs 11 Chinese poachers,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (8 May 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/103759/philippines-nabs-11-chinese-poachers> on 11 July 2014.

²⁵ Pia Lee-Brago, “China wants unconditional release of boat, 9 poachers,” *The Philippine Star* (27 November 2014) downloaded from <https://ph.news.yahoo.com/chinawantsunconditionalreleaseboat000000885.html> on 28 November 2014.

²⁶ “PH ignores China bid to free poachers,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (9 May 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/103840/ph-ignores-china-demand-to-free-fishermen> on 11 July 2014.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ “Defense accord with US a ‘security cover’ for PH,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/102028/defense-accord-with-us-a-security-cover-for-ph> on 11 July 2014.

in the Philippine Constitution regarding the requirements of basing arrangements for foreign troops in the Philippines, that it undermines the independence of the Philippines, and that it puts the Philippines squarely in the target sights of enemies of the United States²⁹. More seriously, it has been argued that it would confirm in Chinese eyes that the Philippines is nothing more than a lackey of the United States, thus making it more difficult for the territorial dispute to be settled peacefully³⁰. This was in fact the gist of an article from the state-run *Xinhua News Agency* stated in April 2014 which pointed out that the EDCA would make it more difficult for the dispute to be settled amicably, if only because it emboldens the Aquino Administration to confront China with US backing³¹. In the Philippines, however, the view on the effect of EDCA goes the other way. According to Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin, the EDCA has effectively deterred China from interfering with resupply missions to the Philippine garrison on Second Thomas Shoal (referred to as Ayungin Shoal in the Philippines)³².

The US has indeed been strongly supportive of the Philippines in its dispute with China (perhaps reinforcing the idea in China that the Philippines and the United States are collaborating to contain China and its emergence as a regional power). It gave its backing to the Philippine proposal for a triple action plan towards the resolution of the South China Sea situation. The plan³³ consisted of: 1) freezing of activities deemed provocative (including renovations and reclamations); 2) speedy conclusion to the establishment of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea; and 3) the settlement of disputes through international law. According to the US Ambassador to the Philippines, Philip Goldberg, this triple action plan is very close

²⁹ See Christine Avendaño, "Edca challenged in Supreme Court," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (27 May 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/105126/former-senators-ask-sc-to-declare-edca-unconstitutional> on 19 June 2014; and Matikas Santos, "Edca undermines PH independence—Bayan," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (12 June 2014) downloaded from <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/610734/edca-undermines-ph-independence-bayan#ixzz352erMabm> on 19 June 2014.

³⁰ Camille Diola, "EDCA critic: China execs think Philippines a US lackey," *The Philippine Star* (19 November 2014) downloaded from <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2014/11/19/1393521/edcacrithchinaexecsthinkphilippinesuslackey> on 28 November 2014.

³¹ Matikas Santos, "Xinhua: Amicable settlement of maritime row tougher to achieve with new PH-US defense pact," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (28 April 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/103006/xinhua-amicable-settlement-of-maritime-row-tougher-to-achieve-with-new-ph-us-defense-pact> on 11 July 2014.

³² TJ Burgonio, "Gazmin: Edca deterrent but doesn't assure US help," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2 December 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/114979/gazminedcadeterrentbutdoesntassureushelp/> on 23 December 2014.

³³ Erika Sauler, "US backs PH plan for sea dispute, says Goldberg," *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 August 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/109357/us-backs-ph-plan-for-sea-dispute-says-goldberg> on 13 August 2014.

to the US own views on the issue—a statement that would have only strengthened Chinese suspicions³⁴. Needless to say, the proposal made in August at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Myanmar was rejected by China. It will not be surprising if Chinese policymakers believe that the Philippines is acting in collusion with the United States.

Intensifying extreme weather events

Even as the Philippines grapples with the issue of what warfighting capabilities the AFP needs to possess in order to address “real threats” to its territorial integrity, the fact of increasingly intense extreme weather events have placed the need for the AFP to strengthen its Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) capability of foremost concern. The experience with Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 when the Philippine Air Force could only put one C-130 at the service of HADR operations continues to grate in the collective memory of the AFP. When considering that the Philippines experiences no less than 20 of these events, with an increasing number of them of similar intensity, it only emphasizes the importance of the AFP increasing its capability in this area.

The irony, however, is that as the country looks towards the development of a modernized AFP that could defend the country’s territorial integrity and sovereignty from external threats, more and more people in the Philippines are killed or injured every year by extreme weather events (normally typhoons or heavy monsoon rains) than by violent conflict³⁵. As it is, the Philippines is ranked sixth in the 2011 Climate Change Vulnerability Index (CCVI) released by the global risks advisory firm Maplecroft, and is considered to be among those facing “extreme risk³⁶.” The Philippines could possibly face more food and water shortages, more poverty, and more droughts and floods if current climate change trends continue.

³⁴ Erika Sauler, “US backs PH plan for sea dispute, says Goldberg,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 August 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/109357/us-backs-ph-plan-for-sea-dispute-says-goldberg> on 13 August 2014.

³⁵ Nikko Dizon, “PH is fighting more disasters than wars,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (24 September 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/111585/ph-is-fighting-more-disasters-than-wars> on 3 October 2014.

³⁶ Matikas Santos, “The risks PH faces due to climate change,” *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (24 September 2014) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/111616/the-risks-ph-faces-due-to-climate-change> on 3 October 2014.

As far as the AFP is concerned, this means the acquisition of more airlift and sealift capability. This emphasizes the need for the Philippine Air Force and Philippine Navy to focus not only on external defense but also on HADR mission capabilities.

International terrorism and domestic insurgency

Reports of the Abu Sayyaff and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) declaring their allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have raised questions about the threat posed by these groups. There is still some uncertainty about whether or not there are Filipinos who have gone to Iraq or Syria to fight with ISIS. There are no reports yet of the presence of the ISIS in the country. Nonetheless, additional troops are being deployed to Mindanao to monitor activities and developments there. Outside of the Abu Sayyaff and the BIFF, there have been rallies held in support of the ISIS. Politicians from the area where these rallies are held argue, however, that those involved are sympathizers not ISIS members themselves.

The success of the Framework Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in ensuring peace in Mindanao lies in the strict implementation of the provisions of the agreement. While both sides are intent on resolving this, there are factors on both sides which could derail the long-term stability of peace in Mindanao. The principal concern now is the extent to which the ISIS phenomena could impact on the successful implementation of the peace agreement.

Concluding points

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the AFP Modernization Program is focused primarily on strengthening the external defense capability of the AFP. This is largely in reaction to the neglect over several decades of the maintenance and continued development of AFP capabilities. The principal driver right now of the need to pay attention to external defense are developments in the South China Sea where territorial disputes involving the Philippines and a number of countries in the region, but especially China, have been raising the temperature of relations in the region. These disputes, coupled with a burgeoning and intensifying rivalry between China and the United States, has made the region less predictable as far as peaceful relations and regional security is concerned. The Philippines has been a late starter

as far as bringing its external defense capability up to standard is concerned. Due to developments in the South China Sea, however, this shortfall is being filled up. Whether events will catch up with these efforts at modernization remain uncertain. Hopefully the better angels of countries around the region will emerge and ensure that current levels of tension will not get any worse.