

Japan's Defense Cooperation with the Philippines under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Initiative: The Emergence of a Quasi-Alliance as a New Chapter in Japan-Philippines Relations*

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Abstract

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative serves as a driving force for Japan to deepen its defense cooperation with Southeast Asian countries in the Indo-Pacific region. This article highlights the defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines, which has not been adequately studied hitherto. Progress has been made in terms of defense-related cooperation between Tokyo and Manila in response to China's maritime expansion and its hardline foreign policy as exemplified by the South China Sea disputes. This study primarily examines defense cooperation in Japan-Philippines relations from 2016 onward and explores the nature of the relationship being established between the two countries, with particular focus on Japan's recent proactive policy toward the Philippines under the FOIP concept. The paper observes that a quasi-alliance is gradually coming into existence between Japan and the Philippines, and envisions the future trajectory of the bilateral trend, which will accelerate due in part to macro and structural factors related to the international order as a whole, such as U.S.-China rivalry and the war in Ukraine.

Introduction

Amid the ongoing U.S.-China rivalry and the Ukraine War, the Joe Biden administration in the United States has sought to strengthen alliances with its allies in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to formal allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Thailand,¹ the United States has also been seeking to foster a stronger alliance with the Philippines. The term of the Rodrigo Duterte administration that was inaugurated in 2016 coincided with a period of discordant U.S.-Philippines relations due to harsh criticism of Washington by President Duterte himself and his adoption of a conciliatory posture toward China, which led to widespread views that Manila had

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¹ However, U.S.-Thai relations have stalled since the 2014 coup d'état by the Thai military and have not been as smooth sailing today as U.S. alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines. Benjamin Zawacki, "U.S.-Thai Relations Have an Alliance Problem," *Foreign Policy*, May 23, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/12/united-states-thai-relations-alliance-china-problem/>.

moved closer to Beijing.² However, the new Philippine administration under Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who assumed the presidency in 2022, has attempted to revitalize the U.S.-Philippines alliance, and the Biden administration is acting in concert. In May 2023, Marcos became the first Philippine president to visit the United States in 11 years. During his visit, the leaders of both the United States and the Philippines agreed to reinforce the alliance,³ and defense officials laid out concrete guidelines for future bilateral cooperation.⁴

The United States is not the only country that has enhanced defense-related collaboration with the Philippines. Japan, a main promoter of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative, has also strengthened security cooperation with and provided maritime law enforcement capacity building to the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries for many years.⁵ As a consequence, defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines has progressed in recent years.

Nevertheless, little research in Japan has addressed defense cooperation between Tokyo and Manila. Whereas previous studies on Japan's defense policy have primarily concentrated on the Japan-U.S. alliance,⁶ South Korea,⁷ Australia,⁸ and the United Kingdom,⁹ they have overlooked the Philippines. For instance, a comprehensive analysis of Japan's defense diplomacy covered a number of different countries, but it did not contain a chapter or section on the case of the Philippines.¹⁰ In addition, although existing literature has analyzed the U.S.-Philippines alliance¹¹

² The Duterte administration became increasingly vigilant against China toward the end of its term because of the heightened tension over the South China Sea issue. In response to Chinese harassment in the disputed area, the Philippine president shifted his policy from appeasement to soft balancing against China. Renato Cruz De Castro, "From Appeasement to Soft Balancing: The Duterte Administration's Shifting Policy on the South China Sea Imbroglio," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2022), pp. 35–61.

³ "Joint Statement of the Leaders of the United States and the Philippines," The White House, May 1, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/01/joint-statement-of-the-leaders-of-the-united-states-and-the-philippines/>.

⁴ "The United States and the Republic of the Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines," U.S. Department of Defense, May 3, 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/May/03/2003214357/-1/-1/0/THE-UNITED-STATES-AND-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-THE-PHILIPPINES-BILATERAL-DEFENSE-GUIDELINES.PDF>.

⁵ Ken Jimbo, "Japan's Defense and Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia: Developing Security Networks, Capacities, and Institutions," in *The Courteous Power: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Indo-Pacific Era*, ed. John D. Ciorciari and Kiyoteru Tsutsui (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), pp. 54–72.

⁶ An example of a recent study on the Japan-U.S. alliance is Chijiwa Yasuaki, *Sengo Nippon no Anzen Hosho: Nichibei Domei, Kempo 9-jo kara NSC made* [The Security of Postwar Japan: From the Japan-U.S. Alliance and Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution to the NSC] (Tokyo: Chuokoron Shinsha [Chuokoron-Shinsha, Inc.], 2022).

⁷ Togashi Ayumi, *Nikkan Anzen Hosho Kyoryoku no Kensho: Reisenigo no "Kyo" wo Meguru Rikigaku* [Examination of Japanese and South Korean Security Cooperation through the Mechanism of "Threats" after the Cold War] (Tokyo: Aki Shobo [Akishobo Inc.], 2017).

⁸ Satake Tomohiko, *Nichigo no Anzen Hosho Kyoryoku: "Kyori no Sensei" wo Koete* [Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Beyond the "Tyranny of Distance"] (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo [Keiso Shobo Publishing Co., Ltd.], 2022).

⁹ Akimoto Chiaki, *Fukkatsu! Nichiei Domei: Indotaiheiyo Jidai no Makuake* [Revival! The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Dawn of the Indo-Pacific Era] (Tokyo: CCC Media Hausu [CCC Media House Co., Ltd.], 2021).

¹⁰ Watanabe Tsuneo and Nishida Ippeita, eds., *Boei Gaiko to wa Nani ka: Heiji ni Okeru Gunjiryoku no Yakuwari* [What Is Defense Diplomacy? The Role of Military Power in Peace Time] (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo [Keiso Shobo Publishing Co., Ltd.], 2021).

¹¹ Ito Yuko, "Reisengo no Beihhi Domei: Kichi Teppai, VFA, 'Taitero Senso' to Beihhi Kankei [Post Cold War U.S.-Philippine Alliance: Bases Removal, the VFA, and the War against Terrorism]," *Kokusai Seiji* [International Relations], vol. 170 (2007), pp. 168–185; Fukuda Tamotsu, "Tonan Ajia ni Okeru Beikoku Domei: Beihhi Domei wo Chushin ni [U.S. Alliances in Southeast Asia: A Closer Look at the U.S.-Philippines Alliance]," in *Nichibei Kankei no Kongo no Tenkai to Nihon no Gaiko* [The Future of Japan-U.S. Relations and Japanese

and U.S. military bases in the Philippines,¹² Japan-Philippines relations have not been a central theme among them.¹³

Therefore, the present study sheds light on how Japan-Philippines relationships have evolved, with a consideration of defense cooperation mainly from 2016 onward. The year 2016 represented a critical juncture when the Permanent Court of Arbitration delivered its ruling on the South China Sea, which has been characterized as a “watershed moment” in the history of the maritime disputes.¹⁴ The same year became a turning point for the Japanese government as epitomized by its proposal of the FOIP and the Vientiane Vision mentioned below. Prior research has investigated defense cooperation between Tokyo and Manila from the early to late 2010s, but these studies concluded within the same timeframe.¹⁵ This paper thus surveys the evolution of Japan-Philippines ties from the late 2010s to the 2020s. At the same time, this article elucidates what kind of relationship has been established between the two countries and proposes the policy implications for Japan.

In this article, I contend that Japan, under the banner of the FOIP initiative, has assumed a pivotal role in the Indo-Pacific region by expanding its defense cooperation network with numerous governments, particularly those in Southeast Asia. The Philippines stands as a prominent example of how Tokyo's foreign strategy is yielding tangible results, with the bilateral partnership gaining traction owing to Japan's efforts to promote maritime stability in the Indo-Pacific. Chinese assertiveness in the East and South China Seas, coupled with the U.S.-China strategic rivalry, has prompted closer coordination between Tokyo and Manila on mutual defense initiatives. Beijing remains cautious about Japan's defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia, including its engagement with the Philippines, as it could potentially erode China's regional influence. Contemporary Japan-Philippines relations can be described as a quasi-alliance,¹⁶ a phenomenon projected to tighten

Diplomacy] (Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Mondai Kenkyusho [The Japan Institute of International Affairs], 2011), pp. 113–122; Jimbo Ken, “Beihi Domei wo Tatenaoeru ka: Indotaiheiyō ni Okeru ‘Togo Yokushi’ no Mo Hitotsu no Kakushin [Can the U.S.-Philippines Alliance Be Rebuilt? Another Core of ‘Integrated Deterrence’ in the Indo-Pacific],” in *Kenkyū Repoto “Nichibei Domei” Kenkyūkai* [Research Reports, Research Group on ‘The Japan-US Alliance’], FY2021-#2 (Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Mondai Kenkyusho [The Japan Institute of International Affairs], 2022).

¹² Oki Yuri, “Firipin [The Philippines],” in *Sekai no Kichi Mondai to Okinawa* [The Global Problem of Bases and Okinawa], ed. Kawana Shinji (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten [Akashi Shoten Co., Ltd.], 2022), pp. 187–202.

¹³ A comprehensive study on Japan-Philippines relations was published around two decades ago in 2004. The work primarily examines the historical context surrounding the period before and after the Pacific War. Ikehata Setsuho and Lydia N. Yu-Jose, eds., *Kingendai Nihon/Firipin Kankeishi* [Philippines-Japan Relations] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten [Iwanami Shoten, Publishers], 2004). A study on defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines was also published just before the publication of this paper. Kiba Saya, “Nippon-Firipin Boei Kyoryoku no Shinten Yoin: Seisaku Komyuniti to Yoron no Bunseki kara [Driving Forces of Japan-Philippines Defense Cooperation: Analysis of Policy Community and Public Opinion in the Philippines],” *Kokusai Kyoryoku Ronshu* [Journal of International Cooperation Studies], no. 31 (2023), pp. 81–95.

¹⁴ Shoji Tomotaka, *Minamishinakai Mondai no Kozu: Chuetsu Funso kara Takokukan Tairitsu e* [Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Approaches of ASEAN, Vietnam, and the Philippines] (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai [The University of Nagoya Press], 2022), p. 231.

¹⁵ Bjørn Elias Mikalsen Grønning, “Japan's Security Cooperation with the Philippines and Vietnam,” *The Pacific Review*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2018), pp. 533–552; John F. Bradford, “Japanese Naval Activities in Southeast Asian Waters: Building on 50 Years of Maritime Security Capacity Building,” *Asian Security*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2021), pp. 79–104.

¹⁶ As mentioned in Section 4, the term “giji-domei” (quasi-alliance) may have appeared earlier in the Japanese lexicon for international relations. However, since “jun-domei” has become more prevalent in recent years in academic research, policymaking, and the media, this paper will use the term “jun-domei.”

in response to global-scale fluctuations, such as shifts in the international order, the U.S.-China competition, and the continuous war in Ukraine.

This article is structured as follows. Section 1 offers an overview of Japan's strategic relationships with Southeast Asian countries, with a particular emphasis on defense. Section 2 identifies the key factors driving Japan's more energetic pathway in its relations with the Philippines and sketches China's response to Japan's activities in Southeast Asia. Section 3 delves into the specifics of Japan-Philippines defense cooperation, focusing primarily on developments since 2016. In Section 4, the author argues that a quasi-alliance between Japan and the Philippines has progressively taken shape and presumes that this bilateral trajectory is likely to endure amid successive crises in the post-Cold War international landscape. The concluding section explores the policy implications for Japan.

1. Japan's Defense Cooperation with Southeast Asian Countries under the FOIP Initiative: Progress in Japan-Philippines Relations

Having been an advocate of the FOIP initiative, Tokyo places the maintenance and stability of the maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region at the heart of its foreign policy. Against the backdrop of escalating U.S.-China confrontations and the Ukraine War, as well as uncertainty about future U.S. engagement in the region, Japan has exerted regional initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region. The intensifying U.S.-China rivalry is a key variable that boosts Japan's influence and status, enabling the Asian power to demonstrate its global and regional leadership in the transitional international order.¹⁷

Japan's leadership in the Indo-Pacific region is evident in economic areas such as trade and finance. The Japanese government led the negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement. Despite the United States' withdrawal under the Donald Trump administration in 2017, the regional multinational trade arrangement entered into force among the remaining members the following year. Tokyo has promoted geo-economic strategies across the Indo-Pacific region. For instance, Japan had encouraged India to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, even though New Delhi ultimately did not do so. Moreover, Tokyo enjoys broad support from many countries in terms of regional cooperation in the areas of infrastructure, supply chains, and finance in the Indo-Pacific region. As described above, the complex external environment represented by the heightened tension between the United States and China has increased Tokyo's clout in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁸

Regional defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is also emblematic of Japan's leadership. The Japanese government undertook defense cooperation in Southeast Asia from the early 1990s. In the past few years, under the flag of the FOIP, Japan has been engaged in defense cooperation

¹⁷ Hakata Kei, "Nihon: 'Jiyu de Hirakareta' no Kachi [Japan: The Value of 'Free and Open']," in *Indotaiheiyo Senryaku: Taikokukan Kyoso no Chiseigaku* [Indo-Pacific Strategies: Navigating Geopolitics at the Dawn of a New Age], ed. Brendon J. Cannon and Hakata Kei (Tokyo: Chuokoron Shinsha [Chuokoron-Shinsha, Inc.], 2022), pp. 75–108; *Beichu Kankei wo Koete: Jiyu de Hirakareta Chiiki Chitsujo Kochiku no "Kijiku Kokka Nippon" no Indotaiheiyo Senryaku* [Beyond U.S.-China Relations: The Indo-Pacific Strategy of Japan as a "Pivot State" in Building a Free and Open Regional Order] (Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Mondai Kenkyusho [The Japan Institute of International Affairs], 2023).

¹⁸ Katada Saori, *Nihon no Chikeigaku Senryaku: Ajia Taiheiyo no Aratana Seiji Keizai Rikigaku* [Japan's New Regional Reality: Geoeconomic Strategy in the Asia-Pacific], trans. Miura Hideyuki (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbun Shuppan [Nikkei Publishing Inc.], 2022), chap. 8.

with regional states implementing schemes as part of FOIP-related projects since the mid-2010s. In the milieu of the U.S.-China rivalry and the South China Sea disputes, Tokyo has bolstered defense cooperation with the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian states bordering the South China Sea with the aim of counterbalancing Beijing.¹⁹

When it comes to the situation surrounding the Philippines, the country was seen as distancing itself from the United States and approaching the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the era of the Duterte administration. President Duterte was vocal in blaming the longstanding ally in the first years of his presidency. While Duterte personally disregarded the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs' official line on China that emphasized compliance with international law, he tackled tasks to improve the capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) during his tenure, which in turn augmented Manila's ability to resist Beijing with respect to the South China Sea issue.²⁰ Additionally, Duterte aspired to consolidate maritime security cooperation with Tokyo just after assuming the presidency. During a Japan-Philippines summit meeting held in September 2016 on the occasion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summits, Japan agreed to provide two large-scale patrol vessels to the Philippines and transfer Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's (JMSDF) TC-90 training aircraft to the Philippine Navy (PN). Manila also underscored its emphasis on relations with Tokyo through Duterte's visit to Japan the next month,²¹ and it has sought to utilize its partnership with the Japanese government to mitigate China's tough stance in terms of the South China Sea issue.²²

The Marcos administration is not only eager to buttress the U.S.-Philippines alliance but has also been actively collaborating with U.S. allies such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia. This move by the current Philippine government is symptomatic of the transformation of the hub-and-spokes alliance system based on bilateral relations in the Indo-Pacific region extending from the United States. Meanwhile Washington remains the linchpin of the alliance network, and diplomatic and defense ties have been simultaneously developing among U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region (e.g., Japan-Philippines, Japan-Australia). These intertwined dynamics in progress between the United States and its allies and those between the U.S. allies themselves (Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Australia, and Thailand) are contributing to the emergence of a more robust network-type alliance system led by Washington.²³

¹⁹ Jimbo, "Japan's Defense and Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia," pp. 54–72.

²⁰ Takagi Yusuke, "Firipin no Taichu Gaiko: Kosakusuru 3-tsu no Akuta to 3-tsu no Seisaku [Philippine Diplomacy toward China: Intersection of Three Actors and Three Policies]," in "*Kyokoku*" *Chugoku to Taijitsuru Indotaiheiyo Shokoku* [Indo-Pacific Nations Facing China Aspiring to Be a "Great Country"], ed. Takenaka Harukata (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo [Chikura Publishing Company], 2022), pp. 225–243.

²¹ Shoji Tomotaka, "Minamishinakai to ASEAN: Firipin to Betonamu no Taio [Comparative Analysis of Approaches toward the South China Sea: The Philippines and Vietnam]," *Ajia Kenkyu* [Asian Studies], vol. 63, no. 4 (2017), pp. 30–31.

²² Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Duterte Administration's Foreign Policy: Unravelling the Aquino Administration's Balancing Agenda on an Emergent China," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2016), pp. 139–159.

²³ Takagi Yusuke, "Shinkokoku Firipin no Gaiko: Taibei Kankei no Kyoka, Chiiki Gaiko no Shinka to Kokusai Shugi Gaiko no Tenkai [Diplomacy in the Philippines as an Emerging Country: Strengthening Relations with the United States, Deepening Regional Diplomacy, and Developing Internationalist Diplomacy]," *Kokusai Mondai* [International Affairs], no. 714 (2023), p. 14; Bates Gill, "The Asian Security Environment," in *International Relations of Asia*, 3rd ed., ed. David Shambaugh (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), pp. 385–386.

According to a public poll conducted by PUBLiCUS Asia in the Philippines in 2023, nearly 80% of Filipinos perceive China as a threat, and Japan emerged as the most trusted country, with 55% of respondents.²⁴

Considering China's pugnacious deeds and words in the East and South China Seas, the PRC poses a common security threat to both Tokyo and Manila, and the shared threat perceptions toward Beijing are the catalyst for solidifying the strategic partnership between Japan and the Philippines.

2. Factors Driving Japan's Defense Cooperation with the Philippines: Shifts in International and Regional Dynamics and China's Response

This section assesses how these Japan-specific factors have influenced the recent expansion of defense cooperation with the Philippines. Through this analysis, it underscores Japan's evolving role in regional security and its strategic initiatives to navigate growing uncertainties in the Indo-Pacific region.

The first factor is the general course of global affairs, which has been accentuated by the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry and the Ukraine War. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine has further polarized the international community, reinforcing ties between China and Russia and pushing U.S. allies—such as Japan and European states—into more unified strategic alignment. The shared sense of urgency has propelled Japan, the United States, and Europe to cooperate more closely on security matters and has encouraged other U.S. allies in East Asia, including the Philippines, to align with this bloc.²⁵ Moscow's military aggression toward Ukraine, which began in February 2022, had a significant impact on the Philippines, amplifying its concerns about the possibility of being drawn into an armed conflict between the United States and China. This fear emanates from the Philippines' geographical proximity to Taiwan and the provisions of the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).²⁶ In the context of the growing polarization of the world into opposing blocs of Japan, the U.S., and Europe on one side, and China and Russia on the other, the positions of Japan and the Philippines in both the international and regional orders are also converging in the same direction.²⁷

The second factor is Japan's leadership in the Indo-Pacific region illustrated by the FOIP initiative as an external strategy. From Japan's perspective, enhancing the national strength and resilience of countries in the region—particularly ASEAN member states that are attempting to resist Beijing's maritime expansion—serves a strategic purpose. By assisting these governments,

²⁴ "Survey Reveals Shifting Filipino Views on International Relations," *PUBLiCUS Asia*, August 17, 2023, <https://www.publicusasia.com/shifting-filipino-views/>.

²⁵ Masuda Masayuki, "Taikokukan Kyoso no Dainamizumu [The Dynamics of Great Power Competition]," in *Taikokukan Kyoso no Shinjotai* [The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition], ed. Masuda Masayuki (Tokyo: Intabukkusu [Interbooks Co., Ltd.], 2023), pp. 1–10.

²⁶ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Philippines, the Ukraine-Russia War, and the Taiwan Strait Crisis," *Global Taiwan Institute*, October 19, 2022, <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/10/the-philippines-the-ukraine-russia-war-and-the-taiwan-strait-crisis/>.

²⁷ There are differences in the approaches and positions adopted by Japan and the Philippines on the Taiwan issue, which is directly linked to U.S.-China rivalry. See the following for more detailed analysis on the Philippines' perception of and policy toward the Taiwan issue. "The Philippines," in Jeffrey W. Hornung, Miranda Priebe, Bryan Rooney, Patrick Hulme, Nobuhiko Tamaki, and Yu Inagaki, *Like-Minded Allies? Indo-Pacific Partners' Views on Possible Changes in the U.S. Relationship with Taiwan* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2023), chap. 5.

Japan can help curb China's naval expansion into the South China Sea.²⁸ The progress in Japan-Philippines relations may also be a testament to Tokyo's role as a major power in the Indo-Pacific region and the positive effect of its practical mindset toward relations with ASEAN.

The third factor, which is related to the second, is the escalation of the South China Sea issue (a dispute to which the Philippines is also a party). Japan strives to oppose China's maritime ambitions and its expanding influence across the Indo-Pacific. For Japan, a state encircled by seas, securing vital sea lanes is of paramount importance, highlighting the South China Sea's geopolitical significance. A key objective of the FOIP initiative is to offset the PRC's actions to alter the maritime order in the region. To this end, the Japanese government has pursued a policy of sharing guidelines with relevant countries, rooted in the principle of respect for international law and emphasizing universal values, as well as the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling. Stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific maritime order is a crucial goal of the FOIP vision, which Tokyo seeks to achieve through its relations with countries in the region. Japan has prioritized offering capacity-building assistance to Southeast Asian nations to enhance their Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities and bolster their maritime law enforcement agencies. These initiatives are intended to stabilize the South China Sea by empowering these countries to more efficiently monitor and protect their maritime territories. It is evident that Japan's FOIP initiative functions as a statecraft designed to counterbalance China,²⁹ and Tokyo has collaborated with Manila to safeguard essential sea lanes in the East and South China Seas, which act as critical lifelines for maritime transportation.

Fourth, Japan is advancing the expansion of Japan-U.S.+ α cooperation to incorporate additional countries as part of the FOIP initiative. For example, the JMSDF took part in the U.S.-Philippines Maritime Training Activity (MTA) "Sama Sama" for the first time in October 2019,³⁰ which attests to the major headway made in Japan-U.S.-Philippines trilateral cooperation. The joint statement between the United States and the Philippines, released during President Marcos's visit to Washington in May 2023, also alluded to Japan-U.S.-Philippines trilateral cooperation, as well as U.S.-Philippines-Australia cooperation.³¹ At the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore in June of the same year, the defense ministers of Japan, the United States, Australia, and the Philippines met for the first time to discuss expanding the scope of cooperation among the four countries, while reaffirming their commitment to realizing the objectives of the FOIP vision.³² In addition, the inaugural joint exercise involving the Japan, U.S., and Philippine Coast Guards seemed deliberately scheduled to align with the meeting of the four countries' defense ministers.³³

²⁸ Jimbo, "Japan's Defense and Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia," p. 56.

²⁹ Iida Masafumi, "'Jiyu de Hirakareta Indotaiheiyo' wo Meguru Nihon no Seisaku no Tenkai [The Development of Japanese Policies regarding a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific']," *Mondai to Kenkyu* [Issues & Studies], vol. 50, no. 1 (2021), pp. 8–9.

³⁰ "Beihi Kyodo Kunren (MTA Sama Sama 2019) [U.S.-Philippines Joint Exercise (MTA Sama Sama 2019)]," Kaijo Jieitai [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force], October 14, 2019, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msddf/release/201910/20191014.pdf>.

³¹ "Joint Statement of the Leaders of the United States and the Philippines."

³² "Nichibeigohi Boeisho Kaidan ni tsuite [Japan-Australia-Philippines-U.S. Defense Ministerial Meeting], Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], June 3, 2023, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/anpo/2023/0603a_usa_au_phl-j.html.

³³ "Nichibeihai Kaijo Hoan Kikan no Renkei ni Yoru Hatsu no Godo Kunrento wo Okonaimashita: Sankikan Godo Kunren, Noryoku Kojo Shien to wo Jisshi [The First Joint Trilateral Exercises of the Coast Guard Agencies

The meeting of the defense ministers of Japan, the United States, the Philippines, Australia, and South Korea on the sidelines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) in Laos in November 2024 proved to be a watershed moment because it was the first such five-nation consultation.³⁴ This gathering, which brought together the defense ministers of Washington and its major allies in the Indo-Pacific, embodies the evolution of the U.S. alliance network in the region into a lattice-like architecture.³⁵ This sort of multilateral cooperation involving both Japan and the Philippines will likely continue to gather momentum.

The fifth factor is Japan's readiness to cope with indeterminacy regarding future U.S. involvement in the region. Although the Biden administration has taken an active approach toward engagement in the Indo-Pacific,³⁶ some countries in the region remain wary because of lingering doubts about U.S. commitment, a concern that surfaced during the previous Trump administration.³⁷ Isolationism driven by an inward-looking impulse prevails within the United States, a social atmosphere that will likely define the extent of the country's future engagement with other countries, including in the Indo-Pacific region.³⁸ Needless to say, while cooperation between Japan and the Philippines would not be able to compensate for the absence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, it is indispensable for Tokyo to prepare for the possibility of U.S. disengagement by strengthening ties with like-minded countries such as the Philippines. This strategic imperative is an impetus shaping Japan's policy toward the Philippines.³⁹

The PRC has also been watchfully monitoring Japan-Philippines relations. An article on Japan-Philippines relations published in 2022 in the Japanese edition of the website of the *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, identifies the following three strategic motivations behind Tokyo's push for cooperation with Manila: (i) expansion of the export market for Japan's defense equipment and technology, (ii) strengthening of Japan's influence in Southeast Asia, and (iii) formation of an Asia-Pacific analog of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The article underscores space as a new dimension of Japan-Philippines

of Japan, the U.S. and the Philippines (Summary of Results) ~Joint Exercises and MCT Activities~], Kaijo Hoancho [Japan Coast Guard], June 7, 2023, <https://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/info/kouhou/r5/k230607/k230607.pdf>.

³⁴ "Nichi Bei Gou Hi Kan ni yoru Boeishou Kaidan ni tsuite [Japan-Australia-Philippines-Republic of Korea-United States Defense Ministers' Meeting]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], November 21, 2024, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/anpo/2024/1121a_usa_au_phl_kor-j.html.

³⁵ Some senior officials of the Biden administration have stated that the U.S.-centered alliance structure in the Indo-Pacific is transforming from a hub-and-spokes system into a lattice arrangement. Richard Fontaine and Kurt Campbell, "AUKUS: Securing the Indo-Pacific, A Conversation with Kurt Campbell," *Center for a New American Security*, April 3, 2024, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/transcript/aukus-securing-the-indo-pacific-a-conversation-with-kurt-campbell>.

³⁶ *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* (Washington D. C.: The White House, 2022).

³⁷ Nakayama Toshihiro, "Amerika ga Ushiromuki ni Natta Toki ni Do Suru no ka?: Domei ni Kawaru 'Puran B' wo Meguru Giron [What Should Be Done If the United States Disengages? A Discussion on a 'Plan B' to Take the Place of the Alliance]," Sasakawa Heiwa Zaidan [Sasakawa Peace Foundation], April 19, 2019, https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-america-monitor/spf-america-monitor-document-detail_23.html.

³⁸ Charles A. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

³⁹ One of the factors driving Japan's pursuit of security cooperation with Australia and India since the 2000s has been the need to adjust to a potential reduction in U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific. A similar logic can also be observed in Japan's relations with the Philippines. Thomas S. Wilkins, "Japan's Alliance Diversification: A Comparative Analysis of the Indian and Australian Strategic Partnerships," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2011), pp. 115–155.

collaboration, reflecting Beijing's scrutiny of Tokyo's maneuvers in this partnership.⁴⁰ Elsewhere, the *PLA Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), cited Japan's sale of warning and control radars to the Philippines in 2020 as a notable example. The piece indicated that, despite Japan consciously pursuing arms exports to other countries following the easing of its Three Principles on Arms Exports, the Japanese government has not yet achieved the desired effect.⁴¹ Subsequent to Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's visit to the Philippines in November 2023, the *PLA Daily* published an article containing a detailed analysis of Japan's defense policy toward the Philippines. The commentary reviews the background of the two nations' growing partnership, highlighting Japan's engagement in defense cooperation with the Philippines, especially concerning the South China Sea and associated policies. Furthermore, the article claims that if a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) were to be concluded between Japan and the Philippines, it could lay the groundwork for a military alliance among Japan, the United States, and the Philippines under the framework of the RAA. On the other hand, it also added that there are limits to cooperation between Japan and the Philippines. Concluding that their military cooperation is dangerous as it risks heightening tensions in the region, the Chinese analysis warns that the international community and neighboring countries should remain watchful and vigilant regarding these developments.⁴² China's wary reaction toward Japan-Philippines relations, as described above, implies that Japan's actions have become increasingly difficult to ignore. It also suggests that Beijing is becoming more sensitive to the overall bilateral relationship between Tokyo and Manila, and especially to their defense cooperation.⁴³

The ensuing section will delve deeper into the evolution of defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines.

3. Evolution of Japan-Philippines Defense Cooperation: The FOIP Initiative and Vientiane Vision since 2016

This section inspects the trajectory of defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines starting from 2016, when Japan launched the FOIP initiative. It begins by outlining the Vientiane Vision, a framework particularly pertinent to their bilateral relations, before exploring the various areas and aspects of collaboration in greater detail.

⁴⁰ "Firipin to no Boei Kyoryoku o Kyokashi Tsuzukeru Nihon no Senryakuteki Ito wa? [What Is Japan's Strategic Intent in Continuing to Strengthen Defense Cooperation with the Philippines?]," 人民網日本語版 [People's Daily Online, Japanese Edition], July 4, 2022, <http://j.people.com.cn/n3/2022/0704/c94474-10118677.html>.

⁴¹ 张文文 [Zhang Wenwen], "日本防卫产业动向引发高度警惕 [Developments in Japan's Defense Industry Are Raising the Alarm]," 解放军报 [PLA Daily], February 20, 2023, p. 4.

⁴² 华丹 [Hua Dan], 汪泽焱 [Wang Zeyan], and 杨静 [Yang Jing], "日本妄图拉拢菲律宾搅动地区局势 [Japan Is Trying to Draw In the Philippines to Stir Up Trouble in the Region]," 解放军报 [PLA Daily], November 16, 2023, p. 11.

⁴³ According to news sources, the day after Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Koshikawa Kazuhiko published a post on Twitter (now X) regarding the Japanese government's position on the South China Sea issue in March 2021, the Chinese Embassy in Manila implicitly condemned his comments, also via social media. This occurrence indicates China's wariness toward Japan's involvement in the South China Sea disputes and Japan-Philippines relations. "Firipin no Chugoku Taishikan, Minamishinakai Meguri Nihon wo An ni Hihan [China Embassy Takes Swipe at 'Fusty' Japan over South China Sea]," *Reuters*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/philippines-china-southchinasea-japan-idJPKBN2BH01V>.

(1) Vientiane Vision

Integral to the discussion on Japan's defense cooperation in Southeast Asia is the Vientiane Vision that was unveiled in 2016,⁴⁴ the same year as the FOIP concept. The Vientiane Vision is a set of guidelines for defense cooperation with ASEAN announced by then Minister of Defense Inada Tomomi at the 2nd ASEAN-Japan Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, in November 2016. The main purpose of these guidelines was not only to continue pursuing existing initiatives in areas such as practical cooperation between Japan and ASEAN, participation in the ADMM-Plus, and capacity-building assistance, but also to synthesize new pillars. These included promoting the rule of law, bolstering maritime security cooperation, and advancing capacity-building initiatives to help ASEAN adapt to the evolving international landscape.⁴⁵

On the occasion of the 5th ASEAN-Japan Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting held in Thailand in November 2019, then Minister of Defense Kono Taro announced the Vientiane Vision 2.0 to update the guidelines and further deepen defense cooperation with ASEAN. In particular, the inclusion of new language on respecting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) issued in 2019 reflected Japan's eagerness to harmonize its FOIP with ASEAN's fresh vision. The Vientiane Vision 2.0 signified an inclusive approach to defense cooperation that sought to encompass the entire Indo-Pacific region, reinforcing Japan's commitment to regional stability and its role as a trusted security partner.⁴⁶

The second Abe administration, which took office in 2012, valued maritime security and defense cooperation with the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries proposing the Vientiane Vision in 2016. The defense outlook between Japan and ASEAN had set forth a novel direction for the policies of the Ministry of Defense, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), and the Abe administration toward Southeast Asia. In the same year, the JSDF destroyer *JS Ise* was deployed to the South China Sea and other waters, together with making a port call in the Philippines, to conduct various activities. These activities exemplified Japan's commitment under the Vientiane Vision to not only engage in multilateral cooperation with countries such as the United States and Australia, but also to further augment capacity-building efforts for Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines.⁴⁷ The Japanese government's proposal of the Vientiane Vision represented a milestone, heralding a potential shift toward a new stage of defense cooperation between Japan and Southeast Asia.⁴⁸

The Vientiane Vision provides a strategic basis for Japan to countervail China's naval expansion by integrating its FOIP policy into defense partnerships with ASEAN. This conception is congruent with Tokyo's dedication to counter Beijing's assertive behavior. The Vientiane Vision

⁴⁴ For the background to the Japanese government's proposal of the Vientiane Vision to ASEAN in 2016, see Nishida Ippeta, "Nihon no Tai-ASEAN Boei Gaiko: Bienchan Bijon to wa Nani ka? [Japan's Defense Diplomacy toward ASEAN: What Is the Vientiane Vision?]," Sasakawa Heiwa Zaidan [Sasakawa Peace Foundation], August 24, 2018, <https://www.spf.org/iina/articles/nishida-asean-economy.html>.

⁴⁵ "Dai 2-Kai Nichi-ASEAN Boei Tanto Daijin Kaigo (Gaiyo) [Second ASEAN-Japan Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting (Summary)]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], November 16, 2016, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/j-asean/admm_02.html.

⁴⁶ "Bienchan Bijon: Nichi-ASEAN Boei Kyoryoku Inishiateibu no Appudeto [Vientiane Vision: Japan's Defense Cooperation Initiative with ASEAN - Update]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], n.d., https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/dialogue/j-asean/pdf/vv2_jp.pdf.

⁴⁷ Bradford, "Japanese Naval Activities in Southeast Asian Waters," pp. 94–95.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 97–98.

also reflects Japan's enthusiasm to cultivate stronger maritime security ties with ASEAN by echoing the coherence between the FOIP and AOIP. Among the countries in Southeast Asia, Tokyo has forged robust defense ties with the Philippines that has been embroiled in antagonisms with the PRC over the South China Sea disputes.⁴⁹

It is a curious coincidence that both the FOIP idea and the Vientiane Vision were put forward one after another in the same year, thereafter the arbitral tribunal's ruling on the South China Sea problem in July 2016. This timing implicates Japan's determination to achieve stability in the Indo-Pacific maritime order, particularly in the South China Sea, through more proactive efforts than before. These policies include diplomacy and defense cooperation with the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries. This progression unmistakably indicates that collaboration between Tokyo and Manila is set to advance further in the future.

(2) Summit Meetings and Ministerial-Level Meetings

Japan and the Philippines regularly conduct summit meetings and other high-level visits, complemented by vibrant ministerial-level exchanges aimed at strengthening defense cooperation.

During his second term, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo cherished summit meetings with the Philippines, holding 12 face-to-face summit meetings with then leaders of the Philippines President Benigno Aquino III⁵⁰ and President Duterte during the period between 2012, when the Japanese leader took office, and 2020, when he stepped down. Although only a single telephone conference was held between Prime Minister Abe and President Duterte in 2020, due in part to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two leaders had discussions on primary subjects such as the situation in the South China Sea and maritime security cooperation during those summit meetings. The building of trust between Abe and the Philippine leaders during this period played a key role in facilitating the development of bilateral relations, covering the area of defense cooperation. Abe's personal diplomacy paved the way for mutual understanding, enabling Japan and the Philippines to tackle shared challenges and enrich cooperation in advancing regional security and maritime stability.⁵¹

During the Suga Yoshihide administration from 2020 to 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted in-person summit visits between Japan and the Philippines.⁵² However, a total of two telephone summit conferences were held between the leaders during this period.⁵³

⁴⁹ Shoji Tomotaka, "Nihon no Tai-ASEAN Anzen Hosho Seisaku: Yuko Kyoryoku 50-Shunen no Fushime ni [Japan's Security Policy on ASEAN — On the 50th Anniversary of Friendship and Cooperation]," Sasakawa Heiwa Zaidan [Sasakawa Peace Foundation], June 26, 2023, https://www.spf.org/iina/articles/shoji_22.html.

⁵⁰ Prime Minister Abe met with President Aquino a total of seven times during the two years following Abe's return to office in 2012, demonstrating Japan's firm support for the Philippines with respect to the latter's problems with China over the South China Sea issue. Grønning, "Japan's Security Cooperation with the Philippines and Vietnam," pp. 536–537.

⁵¹ For summit meetings between Japan and the Philippines, see "Firipin Kyowakoku: Kako no Yojin Orai/Kaidan [Republic of the Philippines: Past High-Level Visits/Meetings]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], April 16, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/philippines/visit/index.html>.

⁵² Potential visits by Prime Minister Suga to the Philippines and India between late April and May 2021 had been under consideration; however, both visits were canceled, partly due to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Reiwa 3-nen 4-gatsu 21-nichi (Sui) Gogo [Afternoon of April 21 (Wednesday), 2021]," Shusho Kantei [Prime Minister's Office of Japan], April 21, 2021, https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/tyoukanpress/202104/21_p.html.

⁵³ "Firipin Kyowakoku: Kako no Yojin Orai/Kaidan [Republic of the Philippines: Past High-Level Visits/Meetings]."

Under the Kishida Fumio administration inaugurated in 2021, Japan-Philippines summit meetings (with both President Duterte and President Marcos) have taken place a total of eight times, including informal meetings and telephone conferences, as of the time of updating this paper (November 27, 2024).⁵⁴

A remarkable summit meeting under the Kishida administration was President Marcos's visit to Japan in February 2023. The agenda for intensifying defense cooperation through Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meetings ("2+2") and the "Terms of Reference (TOR) between the Ministry of Defense of Japan and the Department of National Defense of the Republic of the Philippines concerning the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Activities of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in the Republic of the Philippines"⁵⁵ signed by the defense authorities of the two countries on the same day was addressed during the session. This head-of-state conference also raised as a subject of the establishment of additional frameworks for joint exercises involving organizations from both countries, coordination in the sector of defense equipment and technology, and Japan-U.S.-Philippines cooperation.⁵⁶ In September 2023, Prime Minister Kishida, during his visit to Indonesia to attend ASEAN-related summit meetings, met briefly with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and President Marcos. The three reaffirmed their commitment to boosting cooperation between Tokyo, Washington, and Manila, exchanging views on the South China Sea disputes.⁵⁷

Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the Philippines in November 2023⁵⁸ connotes a pivotal moment in bilateral relations. This marked Kishida's first visit to the Philippines since assuming office and featured a summit meeting with President Marcos, as well as the historic first speech by a Japanese prime minister to the Philippine Congress. The joint press statement issued after the meeting with President Marcos stated that the two governments will initiate negotiations on an RAA while also touching on a range of topics that signal the strengthening of Japan-Philippines relations, including the Official Security Assistance (OSA) mentioned below; the continuation of Japan-U.S.-Philippines diplomatic and defense cooperation; and the East and South China Seas

⁵⁴ Ibid. The total number of Japan-Philippines summit meetings under the Kishida administration is nine if the telephone conference held between Prime Minister Kishida and President-elect Marcos in May 2022 prior to the latter taking office is counted. "Kishida Sori Daijin to Marukosu Firipin Jiki Daitoryo to no Denwa Kaidan [Prime Minister Kishida's Telephone Talk with President-elect Marcos of the Philippines]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], May 20, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/page1_001178.html.

⁵⁵ "Boeisho to Firipin Kokuboshō to no Aida no Firipin ni Okeru Jieitai no Jindo Shien/Saigai Kyuen Katsudo ni Kansuru Torikime e no Shomei ni tsuite [Signing of Terms of Reference between the Ministry of Defense of Japan and the Department of National Defense of the Republic of the Philippines concerning the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Activities of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in the Republic of the Philippines]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], February 9, 2023, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2023/20230209_phl-j.html. The Terms of Reference (TOR) are an arrangement for simplifying the procedures for the JSDF to visit the Philippines for the purpose of engaging in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) activities.

⁵⁶ "Nichi-Firipin Shuno Kaidan [Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], February 9, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea2/ph/page1_001505.html.

⁵⁷ "Kishida Sori Daijin, Marukosu Hi Daitoryo Oyobi Harisu Bei Fukudaitoryo ni Yoru Kondan [Informal Talks among Prime Minister Kishida, President Marcos and Vice President Harris]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], September 6, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea2/page1_001804.html.

⁵⁸ Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the Philippines was followed by a trip to Malaysia, where the agenda centered on maritime security and defense cooperation. "Kishida Sori Daijin no Mareshia Homon (11-gatsu 4-ka/5-ka) [Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's Visit to Malaysia (November 4 and 5)]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], November 5, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/s_sa/sea2/my/page1_001893.html.

issues. The statement also referred to Prime Minister Kishida's invitation of President Marcos to the Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, which Japan was scheduled to host in December 2023.⁵⁹ In his speech at the Joint Session of the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives, Prime Minister Kishida alluded to Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo's 1977 speech in Manila on Japan's policy toward Southeast Asia and remarked that 2023 will stand as the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Japan-ASEAN cooperation while showcasing the resonance between the FOIP and the AOIP. After citing security and defense cooperation as an area of cooperation in Japan-Philippines relations, he expressed that "Japan intends to further deepen strategic cooperation with the Philippines" following the strengthening of bilateral cooperation in the maritime and air domains, the OSA agreement reached between the two leaders, and the commencement of the RAA negotiations.⁶⁰

On the sidelines of the ASEAN Summits in Laos in October 2024, Japan's new Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru who had taken office in the same month held an unofficial talk with President Marcos. Affirming the significance of the bilateral partnership and trilateral cooperation with Washington, they also indicated a willingness to complete the procedures for the swift entry into force of the RAA which was signed between the two governments in July 2024. This marked the Japanese leader's first opportunity since taking office to communicate with his Philippine counterpart.⁶¹

Excluding the year 2016, defense ministerial meetings between Tokyo and Manila have been held annually since 2017, with a total of 10 opportunities to date, including telephone and web conferences and in multilateral formats (Japan-U.S.-Australia-Philippines).⁶²

The first "2+2" meeting between Japan and the Philippines was held in Tokyo in April 2022. Both sides reached a concurrence on considering the conclusion of an RAA to facilitate reciprocal visits and joint exercises between the JSDF and the AFP. They also agreed to explore an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) to enable the exchange of supplies and services between the two countries' defense forces.⁶³ The "2+2" joint statement had China in mind as it "expressed serious concern about the situation in the East and South China Seas and strongly opposed actions that may increase tensions," while also stating that "in light of the contribution of a strong U.S. presence to regional stability, the Ministers underscored the importance of each country's respective treaty alliance with the United States and that of enhancing cooperation with regional partner countries."⁶⁴ Tokyo and Manila validated the upgrade of multifaceted cooperation

⁵⁹ "Nichi-Firipin Kyodo Puresu Sutetomento [Joint Press Statement on the Outcome of the Visit of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio to the Philippines]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], November 3, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100575960.pdf>.

⁶⁰ "Firipin Gikai ni Okeru Seisaku Supichi 'Jisedai ni Tsunagu Kokoro to Kokoro no Kizuna [Policy Speech by Prime Minister KISHIDA Fumio at the Joint Session of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives (Heart-to-Heart Ties for the Next Generation)]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], November 4, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100576086.pdf>.

⁶¹ "Nichi Firipin Syuno Tachi Banashi [Japan-Philippines Prime Minister's Informal Talks]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], October 10, 2024, https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea2/ph/pageite_000001_00609.html.

⁶² "Firipin Hai Reberu Koryu [High-Level Exchanges with the Philippines]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], n.d., https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/s_e_asia/philippines.html.

⁶³ "Dai-1-kai Nichi-Firipin Gaimu-Boei Kakuryo Kaigo ("2+2") [First Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ("2+2")]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], April 9, 2022, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2022/20220409_phl-j_b.html.

⁶⁴ "Dai-1-kai Nichi-Firipin Gaimu-Boei Kakuryo Kaigo ("2+2") Kyodo Seimei (Kariyaku) [Joint Statement of

between Japan and the Philippines, alongside the Japan-U.S. and U.S.-Philippines alliances in countering the PRC.

(3) Defense Equipment and Technology Transfer Cooperation

Comprehensive cooperation in defense equipment and technology transfer between Tokyo and Manila began after the entry into force of the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology in April 2016. At the Japan-Philippines Summit Meeting in September 2016, a formal agreement was reached to transfer five TC-90 training aircraft from the JMSDF to the PN. Of these, two aircraft were delivered in March 2017, and the remaining three in March 2018. To support the operation of the TC-90s, flight training for the PN pilots was conducted at the JSDF's Tokushima Air Base from November 2016 to March 2018. In November 2018, a transfer agreement was signed between the defense authorities of Japan and the Philippines concerning the free provision of unused UH-1H utility helicopter parts from the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) to the Philippine Air Force (PAF), following discussions at the Japan-Philippines Defense Ministers' Meeting in June of the same year. The delivery of some of these parts to the Philippines commenced in March 2019 and concluded in September of the same year.⁶⁵

The export of warning and control radars to the Philippines was groundbreaking, as it represented Japan's first overseas transfer of finished equipment in their next phase of defense collaboration.⁶⁶ This agreement was carried out as a component of plans to facilitate the overseas transfer of finished defense equipment manufactured in Japan after the formulation of the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology in 2014. When the PAF began procuring radars in 2018, Mitsubishi Electric proposed a proprietary radar with the support of the Ministry of Defense of Japan. As a result, the company signed a contract worth \$100 million with the Department of National Defense of the Philippines in August 2020 for the supply of radars. This was the first-ever instance of the transfer of ready-to-deploy defense equipment from Japan to another country.⁶⁷ Japan also provided education and training in operating the radars for the PAF.⁶⁸ On November 2, 2023, the day before Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the Philippines, it was announced that the first of four warning and control radars under this contract had been transferred

the Inaugural Japan-Philippines Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting ("2+2") (Provisional Translation)]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], April 9, 2022, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2022/20220409_phl-j_a.html.

⁶⁵ "Boei Sobi/Gijutsu Kyoryoku ni tsuite [Defense Equipment and Technology Cooperation]," Boei Sobi-cho [Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency], n.d., <https://www.mod.go.jp/atla/soubiseisakugijutu.html>.

⁶⁶ These warning and control radars transferred to the Philippines have been credited for strengthening the country's surveillance capabilities in surrounding airspaces. They also enable the sharing of information related to China's air activities in the South China Sea with other relevant countries. Takei Tomohisa, Tokuchi Hideshi, Matsumura Goro, and Araki Junichi, "Boeisho/Jieitai ga Okonau Boei Gaiko [The Defense Diplomacy of the Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces]," in *Boei Gaiko to wa Nani ka* [What Is Defense Diplomacy?], ed. Watanabe and Nishida, p. 97.

⁶⁷ "Boei Sobi/Gijutsu Kyoryoku ni tsuite [Defense Equipment and Technology Cooperation]," Boei Sobi-cho [Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency].

⁶⁸ Training on warning and control radars for Philippine Air Force personnel was conducted in Japan from October 2022 to June 2023. "Keikai Kansei Reda no Iten ni Tomonau Kyoiku Shien [Training Support Following the Transfer of Warning and Control Radars]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], n.d., https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/2023/20230428_phl-j.html.

to the PAF in the previous month.⁶⁹

The OSA,⁷⁰ the broad principles of which incorporated into the new *National Security Strategy of Japan* approved by the Cabinet in December 2022,⁷¹ centers on Southeast Asian countries among its priorities, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs unveiling its policy of selecting the Philippines as one of the four countries (the other three being Malaysia, Bangladesh, and Fiji) as candidates for the Japanese security institution in FY2023.⁷² Subsequently, during Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the Philippines in November 2023, the two governments signed and exchanged a memorandum for the OSA, and it was decided that coastal radar systems would be provided to the PN for the purpose of improving its maritime surveillance and MDA, denoting the first case of the application of the OSA.⁷³

Negotiations for the delivery of five additional large-scale patrol vessels proceeded after Japan handed over two such vessels to the Philippines in 2022. Ronnie Gil Gavan, who was newly appointed as Commandant of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in October 2023, was interviewed by reporters after the change of command ceremony and mentioned the prospect of these five vessels being provided.⁷⁴ Immediately after Prime Minister Kishida's visit to the Philippines in November 2023, the Philippine Department of Transportation revealed that the PCG would receive an additional five large-scale patrol vessels from Japan and embraced this advancement.⁷⁵ After the signing of the Exchange of Notes for the Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project for the Philippine Coast Guard in May 2024, it was officially confirmed that Japan will provide the Philippines with the patrol vessels through yen loans.⁷⁶

(4) Joint Exercises, Defense Exchanges, and Capacity-Building Assistance

Bilateral and multilateral joint exercises between Japan and the Philippines have become increasingly frequent, with defense exchanges also gaining momentum since the late 2010s.

Regarding Japan-Philippines naval relations directly relevant to the South China Sea issue,

⁶⁹ "Firipin e no Keikai Kansei Reda no Iten ni tsuite [The Transfer of the Air Surveillance Radar Systems to the Philippines]," Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], November 2, 2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/news/2023/11/02d.html>.

⁷⁰ "Seifu Anzen Hoshō Noryoku Kyōka Shien (OSA: Official Security Assistance) [Official Security Assistance (OSA)]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], July 4, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/fp/ipc/page4_005828.html.

⁷¹ *Kokka Anzen Hoshō Senryaku* [National Security Strategy of Japan] (Naikaku Kambo [Cabinet Secretariat of Japan], 2022), pp. 13, 16.

⁷² "Hayashi Gaimu Daijin Kaiken Kiroku [Press Conference by Foreign Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], August 8, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/kaiken/kaiken24_000199.html.

⁷³ "Firipin Kyōwakoku ni Taisuru Engan Kanshi Reda Shisutemu Kyōyo ("Seifu Anzen Hoshō Noryoku Kyōka Shien (OSA)") ni Kansuru Shokan no Shomei/Kokan [Signing and Exchange of Notes for Official Security Assistance (OSA) to the Republic of the Philippines]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], November 3, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_009835.html.

⁷⁴ "Hi ni Ogata Junshisen 5-seki Tsuika e: Chugoku Iatsu-ka, Nihon ga Kyōyo [Japan to Provide Five Additional Large-Scale Patrol Vessels to the Philippines amid Chinese Intimidation]," *47 NEWS*, October 19, 2023, <https://www.47news.jp/10013920.html>.

⁷⁵ "Japan to Fund 5 More Ships for PCG Use," The Department of Transportation, November 5, 2023, <https://dotr.gov.ph/55-dotrnews/4908-japan-to-fund-5-more-ships-for-pcg-use.html>.

⁷⁶ "Signing of the Exchange of Notes for the Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project for the Philippine Coast Guard (Phase III)," Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, May 17, 2024, https://www.ph.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_01483.html.

the JMSDF and the PN have conducted bilateral exercises, starting with their first joint exercise in the maritime area in May 2015.⁷⁷ It was also publicly announced for the first time that the JMSDF carried out training for anti-submarine operations in the South China Sea in September 2018.⁷⁸ This practice signaled Tokyo's intention to restrain Beijing while expressing support for Manila with respect to the South China Sea problem, a dispute to which the Philippine government is a party.⁷⁹

From May to July 2017, the JMSDF destroyers JS *Izumo* and JS *Sazanami* were deployed to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and other waters. When the destroyers made a port call at Subic in the Philippines on June 4 during this period, Philippine President Duterte boarded JS *Izumo* and the two countries' navies conducted goodwill exercises, which even featured flights by the TC-90s provided to the Philippines.⁸⁰ From August to October 2018, JMSDF vessels were sent to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and other waters as part of the Indo Southeast Asia Deployment 2018 (ISEAD18) for the very first time. During ISEAD18, Duterte visited the destroyer JS *Kaga* when it docked at Subic as he had done in the previous year while joint naval exercises and other goodwill activities were being conducted.⁸¹ JMSDF ships have continued to navigate the South China Sea and held joint exercises with the Philippines during the span of the Indo Southeast Asia Deployment (ISEAD), which was renamed the Indo-Pacific Deployment (IPD) in 2019.

As for the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), the first bilateral training on humanitarian

⁷⁷ "Dai-2-setsu: Kokusai Shakai no Kadai e no Torikumi [Chapter 2: Issues in the International Community]," in *Heisei 27-nen-ban Boei Hakusho* [Defense of Japan 2015], Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], n.d., http://www.clearing.mod.go.jp/hakusho_data/2015/html/n3321000.html.

⁷⁸ "Taisensen Kunren no Jisshi ni tsuite [Conduct of Anti-submarine Warfare Training]," Kaijo Jieitai [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force], September 17, 2018, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/release/201809/20180917-2.pdf>.

⁷⁹ In July 2023, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement in the name of the Minister for Foreign Affairs titled "Seven Years since the Issuance of the Arbitral Tribunal's Award as to the Disputes between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China regarding the South China Sea." The statement noted that both the Philippines and China had expressed their respective positions regarding compliance with the arbitral award, while also stating: "Japan highly appreciates the Government of the Philippines for having consistently complied with the award, and shown its commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea." "Minamishinakai ni Kansuru Hichu Chusai Handan Hasshutsu kara 7-nen wo Mukaete (Gaimu Daijin Danwa) [Seven Years since the Issuance of the Arbitral Tribunal's Award as to the Disputes between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China regarding the South China Sea (Statement by Foreign Minister HAYASHI Yoshimasa)]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], July 12, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/danwa/page1_001746.html. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs disclosed concern regarding the situation surrounding the collision between the vessels of Philippine and Chinese authorities in the South China Sea in October 2023. The Japanese governmental body released a press statement, articulating, "As stated in the Japan-Philippines Joint Statement in February 2023, the Government of Japan concurs with the Philippines' long-standing objections to unlawful maritime claims, militarization, coercive activities and threat or use of force in the South China Sea," implying Tokyo's diplomatic support for the Philippines amid the latter's frictions with China. "Saikin no Minamishinakai ni Okeru Kincho no Takamari ni tsuite [Recent Surge in Tensions in the South China Sea]," Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], October 23, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/press4_009817.html.

⁸⁰ "Goeikan *Izumo Sazanami* no Choki Kodo (2017-nen) [Long-term Activities of the Destroyers JS *Izumo* and JS *Sazanami* (2017)]," Kaijo Jieitai [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force], n.d., <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/operation/cooperate/izumo-sazanami/>.

⁸¹ "Heisei 30-nendo Indotaiheiyo Homen Haken Kunren Butai (ISEAD18) [Attendant Units for the Indo-Southeast Asia Deployment 2018 (ISEAD18)]," Kaijo Jieitai [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force], n.d., <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/operation/cooperate/kaga-inazuma-suzutsuki/>.

assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) between the JASDF and the PAF was delivered at Clark Air Base in the Philippines in July 2021.⁸² In December 2022, two F-15 fighter jets of the JASDF were dispatched to the Philippines for the first time as part of unit-to-unit exchanges, thereby activating exchanges between the two air forces.⁸³

Multilateral joint exercises involving the JSDF, the AFP, and other military forces are also on the rise, and in particular, there have been numerous opportunities for the JSDF to participate in military exercises between the United States and the Philippines. The Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade that was newly established by the JGSDF in 2018 joined the U.S.-Philippines joint exercise “Kamandag” in October 2018 and operated the amphibious vehicle AAV-7 for the first time on overseas soil,⁸⁴ an example of the Japan-U.S.-Philippines exercises that have been conducted in Philippine territory and the South China Sea. With regard to capacity-building assistance, two JGSDF officers were dispatched to a medical program for the first time with the purpose of improving the medical capabilities of the AFP at a U.S.-Philippines joint exercise called “Balikatan” in May 2017.⁸⁵

Multilateral joint exercises involving Japan, the United States, the Philippines, and others are also increasing. In May 2019, the navies of Japan, the United States, the Philippines, and India held a joint sail-through in the South China Sea and other waters.⁸⁶ In October 2022, South Korea's Marine Corps participated for the very first time in “Kamandag,” which took the form of a joint exercise between Japan, the United States, South Korea, and the Philippines.⁸⁷ Concurrent with the first port call to Manila by the JMSDF destroyer JS *Izumo*, which was in transit as part of an IPD23 unit, it joined a joint exercise conducted with the U.S., Australian, and Philippine navies and the Royal Australian Air Force on August 24, 2023, in the airspace and waters surrounding Manila,⁸⁸ attesting to the fact that defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines has developed beyond a bilateral format.

As demonstrated in this section, defense cooperation between Tokyo and Manila has grown

⁸² “Nichihi Jindo Shien/Saigai Kyuen Kyodo Kunren no Jisshi ni tsuite [Japan-Philippines Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Joint Exercise],” Koku Jieitai [Japan Air Self-Defense Force], July 8, 2021, <https://www.mod.go.jp/asdf/news/release/2021/0708/>.

⁸³ “Firipin Kugun to no Butaikan Koryu ni tsuite [Unit-to-Unit Exchange with the Philippine Air Force],” Koku Jieitai [Japan Air Self-Defense Force], December 8, 2022, <https://www.mod.go.jp/asdf/news/release/2022/1208/>.

⁸⁴ Gidget Fuentes, “Japanese Amphibious Soldiers Hit the Beach in the Philippines with U.S. Marines, 7th Fleet,” *USNI News*, October 15, 2018, <https://news.usni.org/2018/10/15/japanese-amphibious-soldiers-hit-beach-philippines-u-s-marines-7th-fleet>. During Kamandag 18, one JGSDF member of the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade was killed in a traffic accident, and one member of the Central Transportation Command was injured. “Kaigai Kunren ni Okeru Sharyo Jiko ni Tomonau Taiin no Shibo ni tsuite [Death of Personnel Following a Vehicle Accident during Overseas Training],” Rikujo Jieitai [Japan Ground Self-Defense Force], October 7, 2018, <https://www.mod.go.jp/gsdf/news/press/2018/pdf/20181007.pdf>.

⁸⁵ “Eisei ‘Barikatan 2017’ [Medical Program of ‘Balikatan 2017’],” Boeisho/Jieitai [Ministry of Defense/Japan Self-Defense Forces], n.d., https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/cap_build/2017/20170501_phl.html.

⁸⁶ “Nichibeihinhi Kyodo Junko Kunren no Jisshi ni tsuite [Regarding Japan-U.S.-India-Philippines Joint Sail-Through],” Kaijo Jieitai [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force], May 9, 2019, <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/release/201905/20190509.pdf>.

⁸⁷ “U.S. Security Cooperation with the Philippines,” U.S. Department of State, October 7, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-philippines/>.

⁸⁸ “Nichibeigohi Kyodo Kunren ni tsuite [Japan-US-Australia-Philippine Quadrilateral Exercise],” Kaijo Jieitai [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force], August 25, 2023, https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/release/202308/20230825_02.pdf.

increasingly comprehensive in scope, with this relationship currently being elevated to a whole new level.

4. The Emergence of a Quasi-Alliance between Japan and the Philippines: Prospects for the Future of Bilateral Relations

This article has targeted defense cooperation between Japan and the Philippines. Section 4 explains that a quasi-alliance is taking shape between the two countries, and this trajectory is anticipated to continue. Macro-level dynamics, consisting of the U.S.-China rivalry, the war in Ukraine, and the South China Sea dispute, will lead to deeper relations between Japan and the Philippines.

Victor D. Cha is renowned for his research on Cold War-era relations between Japan and South Korea, particularly his emphasis on the concept of “abandonment”⁸⁹ within alliance theory as a foundational element for the formation of quasi-alliances among states.⁹⁰ He claims that under circumstances in which countries A and B, who are both allied with country C, share the concern of being “abandoned” by C, a cooperative relationship can develop between A and B even if the level of threat from an adversarial third country is low. Amid concerns over a potential decline in engagement within their respective alliances with their shared ally C, A and B are likely to feel a heightened incentive to collaborate in the wake of the risk of their security environment deteriorating in C’s absence. Clearly, if the fear of being “abandoned” by C and the threat posed by adversaries both escalate, the quasi-alliance between A and B will strengthen. Conversely, if the threat from adversaries and the risk of “abandonment” by C remain low, A and B will have limited motivation to cooperate. This theoretical account underpins the essence of Cha’s alliance theory.⁹¹

Building on Cha’s theoretical premise, a quasi-alliance can be understood as a *de facto* alliance between states with a shared ally that emerges when concerns about being “abandoned” by that ally intensify.⁹² However, in light of the post-Cold War history of Japan-Australia and Japan-South Korea relations—both sharing the United States as a common ally and perceiving China and North Korea, respectively, as serious threats—it is also manifest that the anxiety of “abandonment” has not necessarily shaped these bilateral interactions.⁹³

For this reason, this study defines a quasi-alliance as a “*de facto* alliance characterized by substantive and symbolic defense cooperation between nations that share a common ally and perceive common threats.” In other words, rather than being driven by concerns of “abandonment” or “entrapment,” a quasi-alliance is determined by a shared ally, mutual threat perception, and

⁸⁹ The concern of “abandonment” refers to a state’s fear that its ally may not fulfill its commitments during wartime, despite the existence of formal arrangements based on their alliance treaty. In contrast, the concept of “entrapment” refers to a nation’s anxiety about being drawn into a war in which its ally is engaged, even though the party involved has no intention of becoming entangled. With regard to an explanation of these two concepts, see Tsuchiyama Jitsuo, *Anzen Hoshō no Kokusai Seijigaku: Aseri to Ogori* [International Politics of Security: Anxiety and Hubris], 2nd ed. (Tokyo: Yuhikaku [Yuhikaku Publishing Co., Ltd.], 2014), pp. 295–299.

⁹⁰ The term “giji-domei” is used in the Japanese translation of Cha’s work instead of “jun-domei.” Yet, because recent translations in Japanese more frequently refer to “jun-domei” rather than “giji-domei,” the author adopts the former in the Japanese edition of the article. Victor D. Cha, *Beinikkan Hanmoku wo Koeta Teikei* [Alignment despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle], trans. Kurata Hideya (Tokyo: Yuhikaku [Yuhikaku Publishing Co., Ltd.], 2003).

⁹¹ Cha, *Beinikkan Hanmoku wo Koeta Teikei* (Alignment despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle), chap. 2.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Satake, *Nichigo no Anzen Hoshō Kyoryoku* [Japan-Australia Security Cooperation], pp. 9–11.

close defense collaboration. Even without a formal alliance treaty, member states facing similar threats tend to prioritize defense-oriented foreign policies under the umbrella of their shared ally. The relationship between Japan and the Philippines exemplifies this type of quasi-alliance.

It has been pointed out that Japan has already created a quasi-alliance with Australia,⁹⁴ as well as with the United Kingdom,⁹⁵ and a comparable dynamic seems to be unfolding in its relationship with the Philippines.⁹⁶ The external environment in which Japan and the Philippines share a common ally (the United States) and are under pressure from the common threat of China, is a systemic factor that has prompted Tokyo and Manila to fortify their mutual partnership,⁹⁷ and it would not be an exaggeration to depict their bilateral relationship as one nearing a quasi-alliance.⁹⁸

In the Philippines, high expectations exist for Japan, and the Marcos administration will persist in fostering enhanced cooperation between the two governments. During his visit to Japan in February 2023, President Marcos stated in an exclusive interview with Kyodo News that the signing of a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with Japan, which would allow the JSDF to partake in more joint exercises in the Philippines, “certainly deserves a good deal of thought.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, during a visit by a Philippine delegation to Japan in April 2023, Philippine Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri met with Moriyama Hiroshi, chairman of the Japan-Philippines Parliamentarians Friendship League (JPPFL), and expressed his willingness to expedite defense cooperation and conduct dialogues to contemplate a VFA or RAA as Tokyo sealed those deals with Canberra and London.¹⁰⁰ There are mixed feelings within the Philippines regarding an RAA with Japan,¹⁰¹ for which an agreement had been reached to start negotiations during Prime Minister

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Philip Shetler-Jones, “UK-Japan Relations and the Indo-Pacific Tilt: The Cornerstone,” *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 167 (2023), pp. 44–52.

⁹⁶ In Japan, there has been growing discourse in the media suggesting that Japan-Philippines relations are reaching a level that could be characterized as a quasi-alliance. See, for instance, “Nichih, ‘Jun-domei’ e Ippo: Tai-chugoku de Kyodo Hocho [Japan and the Philippines Take a Step toward a ‘Quasi-alliance’: Partnering Up against China],” *Jiji Tsushin* [Jiji Press], November 4, 2023, <https://www.jiji.com/jc/article?k=2023110300468&g=int>.

⁹⁷ The Japan-Philippines Joint Statement issued in February 2023 remarked without naming any country that “the leaders expressed serious concerns about the situation in the East and South China Seas and strongly opposed the actions including force or coercion that may increase tensions,” pointing to the shared recognition that both Japan and the Philippines are under threat from China in different waters. “Nichi-Firipin Kyodo Seimei [Japan-Philippines Joint Statement],” Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], February 9, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100457146.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Xiang Haoyu of the China Institute of International Studies has mentioned that the Japanese government is moving toward the conclusion of an RAA with the Philippines while pointing out that Tokyo’s similar agreements with the United Kingdom and Australia have the character of a “quasi-military alliance.” 项昊宇 [Xiang Haoyu], “警惕日本进一步放宽武器出口 [Guarding against Japan’s Further Relaxation of Arms Exports],” 环球网 [Huanqiu.com], November 13, 2023, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/4FKhEt2tIAQ>. As can be seen, concerns about quasi-alliances between Japan and other countries are growing in China. For an example of an analysis of Japanese diplomacy related to quasi-alliances, see 吕耀东 [Lu Yaodong], “2020年日本外交：后安倍时期的承接与发展 [Japan’s Diplomacy in 2020: Taking Over and Development in the Post-Abe Period],” in 日本研究报告（2021）：新冠疫情剧烈冲击下的日本 [Annual Report on Research of Japan (2021): Japan under the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic], ed. 杨伯江 [Yang Bojiang] (Beijing: 社会科学文献出版社 [Social Sciences Academic Press (China)], 2021), pp. 60–73.

⁹⁹ Maricar Cinco and Ken Sasaki, “Subic, Clark Bases not Included in Pact with U.S.: Philippine Pres.,” *Kyodo News*, February 11, 2023, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2023/02/8242fabf0841-subic-clark-bases-not-included-in-pact-with-us-philippine-pres.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Wilnard Bacelonia, “Zubiri Urges Japanese Lawmakers to Pursue RAA, VFA with PH,” *Philippine News Agency*, April 4, 2023, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1198896>.

¹⁰¹ “A Quick Look at PH’s Defense Cooperation Deal with Japan,” *ABS-CBN*, November 5, 2023, <https://news.>

Kishida's visit to the Philippines. Nonetheless, opposition is unlikely to gain traction, given the increasing anticipation in the Philippines for enhanced collaboration with its strategic partner.

Japan-Philippines bilateral ties will be influenced by both mutual aspirations and global determinants, such as shifts in the international landscape and the changing dynamics of the Indo-Pacific regional order. Against the backdrop of intensifying Japan-China and U.S.-China rivalries and persistent tensions in the South China Sea, Japan is set to hasten its engagement with the Philippines. Hence, defense cooperation between the two countries is projected to advance at a steady pace, further solidifying the quasi-alliance and underscoring its increasing importance.

Conclusion

This inquiry scrutinized Japan's defense cooperation with the Philippines within the framework of the Japanese FOIP initiative, stressing that a quasi-alliance is in the process of inception between Tokyo and Manila, and that the bilateral pattern is expected to remain firm in the future.

This study holds academic significance as it offered an in-depth analysis of the recent bilateral relationship between Japan and the Philippines, a topic that has been underexplored in previous research. By specifically selecting defense cooperation between the two states, it demystified a critical facet of their partnership. Furthermore, the author provided the conceptual underpinning of a quasi-alliance, citing a theoretical framework to understand the evolving nature of Japan-Philippines relations. On the other hand, although this article has focused on the defense field, additional research should incorporate Japan-Philippines relations in diplomacy and other domains.

Japan's relations with the Philippines bear valuable implications for its defense policy, particularly in the context of regional security challenges and Tokyo's strategic posture.

As noted in the *Diplomatic Bluebook 2023*, "the security environment surrounding Japan is the most severe since the end of World War II,"¹⁰² and the Japanese government finds itself in an increasingly tense situation. Under these severe circumstances, Japan is not only cementing the Japan-U.S. alliance by positioning strategic assets as the cornerstone of its external strategy but also forming quasi-alliances with Australia and the United Kingdom. A sturdy connection is arising between Japan, the United States, Australia, and India through the framework of the QUAD.¹⁰³ Moreover, Japan-South Korea relations have been on the mend since 2022, and the recovery of the bilateral relationship mirrors clear signs of the revitalization of Japan-South Korea and Japan-U.S.-South Korea cooperation.¹⁰⁴

Notwithstanding these positive undercurrents, Japan cannot afford to adopt a passive role in its relationship with the Philippines. By taking a leading position—diligently supporting the

abs-cbn.com/spotlight/11/05/23/a-quick-look-at-phs-defense-cooperation-deal-with-japan.

¹⁰² *Gaiko Seisho 2023* [Diplomatic Bluebook 2023] (Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 2023), p. 5.

¹⁰³ Kikuchi Tsutomu, "Quad: Indotaiheiyo no Rijonarū Akitekucha no Kakushin [Quad: Innovation of the Indo-Pacific Regional Architecture]," *Aoyama Kokusai Seikei Ronshu* [The Aoyama Journal of International Politics, Economics and Communication], no. 108 (2022), pp. 1–32.

¹⁰⁴ Sakata Yasuyo, "Indotaiheiyo Jidai no Nichibeikan Anzen Hosho Kyoryoku: Punompen 'Sankakoku Patonashippu' Seimei to Kongo no Kadai [Japan-U.S.-South Korea Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Era: The Phnom Penh 'Tripartite Partnership' Statement and Future Challenges]," in "*Taikokukan Kyoso no Jidai*" no Chosen Hanto to Chitsujo no Yukue [The Korean Peninsula and the Future of the Peninsular Order in an "Era of Great Power Competition"] (Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Mondai Kenkyusho [The Japan Institute of International Affairs], 2023), pp. 155–166.

Philippines and fostering deeper cooperation—Japan is required to amplify the bilateral ties and achieve its broader regional security goals.¹⁰⁵

The weight of Japan's quasi-alliance with the Philippines lies in its potential to operate as a model for how Japan can manage relations with nations that possess inadequate self-defense capabilities in the future. This reciprocal nexus between Tokyo and Manila imparts lessons for the Japanese government.¹⁰⁶ Japan's support for the AFP through the transfer of defense equipment and military training meets pressing security requirements while granting Japan crucial experience that informs future defense collaborations. The establishment of formal agreements such as an ACSA, VFA, or General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)¹⁰⁷ would further institutionalize and elevate bilateral defense ties, enhancing regional stability and Japan's role as a key security partner in the Indo-Pacific. These binational arrangements would allow the JSDF to play a more prominent role in the region, facilitating patrols, logistical exchanges, and intelligence sharing. By viewing these initiatives as rare and valuable opportunities, the JSDF can gain crucial knowledge and insight in overseas operations, furthering Japan's strategic engagement in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan should therefore refine its strategy to fostering defense collaborations with other states amidst the mounting unpredictability of the international and Indo-Pacific regional orders by managing its successful defense cooperation with the Philippines.

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¹⁰⁵ Japan should avoid exhibiting a condescending attitude toward the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries. It is desirable for Japan to stand alongside its counterparts and carefully calibrate how to cooperate with them amid the ongoing U.S.-China rivalry. In this regard, see Kiba Saya, "Tonan Ajia ni Okeru Taibei, Taichu, Tainichi Yoron Chosa no Kadai to Nihon Gaiko e no Shisa: 'Sentaku wo Semaru' kara 'Tomo ni Sentakushi wo Kangaeru' Kankei e [Public Acknowledgment of Security Assistance from the US, the PRC, and Japan: A Comparative Study of Southeast Asia]," *Shakai Kagaku* [Social Sciences], vol. 52, no. 4 (2023), pp. 401–422.

¹⁰⁶ Alliances are more likely to form when there is an asymmetry in national power between two aligned members, and such an asymmetric pact tends to be more enduring than a symmetrical one. James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1991), pp. 904–933. From this theoretical perspective, it can be suggested that Japan-Philippines relations will advance in the future.

¹⁰⁷ In November 2024, the United States and the Philippines formally signed a GSOMIA. "Joint Press Release on the Visit of U.S. Secretary of Defense Austin to the Philippines," U.S. Department of Defense, November 19, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3970660/joint-press-release-on-the-visit-of-us-secretary-of-defense-austin-to-the-phili/>. It is thus not impossible that a GSOMIA will be concluded between Japan and the Philippines in the near future.