



**PHILIPPINE CIVIL
AND MARITIME SECURITY:**
TRANSFORMING FROM ARCHIPELAGIC
TO MARITIME POWER

CHESTER B. CABALZA, PH.D.

**BEYOND
THE
CRISIS:**

**A STRATEGIC AGENDA
FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT**

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ABSTRACT

The Philippine maritime security lacks a suitable anchoring policy on its defense cooperation agreement with like-minded nations that affects the securitization of the archipelagic nation's maritime domain. Such a policy can transform the country's civil and maritime security from archipelagic to a maritime power. The study aims to understand the challenges and gaps that hinder the civil and maritime sectors from attaining a stronger civil maritime framework and achieving a robust maritime security under the mantle of national security. It also tackles the importance of multilateralism amid the volatile regional security environment amidst power competition between China and the United States with the rise of the middle powers to maintain a maritime rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. The paper also discusses strategic approaches to China's grey zone strategy, the deterrence and fleet policies of the Philippines, the paradigm shift from land-based to maritime strategy, the relevance of joint maritime patrol, the acceleration of naval diplomacy, and the self-reliance development program. The study recommends a unified and stronger messaging for the next president in handling various maritime security challenges by accelerating the use of strategic communication in the defense and security sector to realize the value of whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approaches. The paper will discuss the role of the Philippines in the Indo-Pacific region as it paves a way to allow gains of what the emerging nation can redound from its engagements with major powers in the region. As the Philippines transforms from an archipelagic Southeast Asian nation to a maritime power, it has to invest heavily in naval and maritime assets to strengthen and establish achievable and effective national maritime security. Lastly, the country's vast maritime territory and jurisdiction offer many opportunities including an untapped blue water economy to drive the entire maritime industry services with wide-ranging economic activities.

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The Philippine maritime security lacks a suitable anchoring policy on its defense cooperation agreement with like-minded nations that affects the securitization of the archipelagic nation's maritime domain. While Manila completes the second horizon of its revised military modernization program and leapfrogs to the third phase this year, and with the election of the new Filipino president on May 9, there are still gaps and missed opportunities that the next administration should prioritize to achieve a robust defense posture and secured civil maritime sector on the country's volatile maritime domain despite drastic changes in regional geopolitics and threats to Philippines' national sovereignty.

Geographically, the Philippines is an archipelagic Southeast Asian state that does not share any land borders with neighboring countries; instead, it is encircled by the Pacific Ocean in the east, the South China Sea in the west, the Celebes Sea in the south, and the Bashi Channel up north. In 2012, the country's island territory has increased by 13 million hectares when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) approved its claim to Philippine Rise or Benham Rise; a seismically active region and volcanic ridge located 250 kilometers off the northern coastline of Dinapigue, Isabela. While the evolving South China Sea conundrum remains the major challenge that the Philippines has yet to temper on its foreign policy and external maritime security, the next Philippine president must prepare for a National Territorial Defense Framework

as a strategic option in the post-2022 period. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has undergone an overhaul in its modernization program--now placed at 51st among 140 countries in terms of military strength in 2022 and ranked 23rd in Asia,¹ and 26th out of 140 states in the Navy in the annual military strength ranking of Global Fire Power 2021 with 103 total assets overtaking Pakistan and the United Kingdom.² Apparently, there is still room for improvements as the AFP acquires more multi-role fighter assets, surface strikes, missiles, and warfighting frigates and corvettes.

The House of Representatives recently approved House Bill No. 9981 or the “Philippine Maritime Zones Act,” which aims to declare maritime zones in the country to establish the legal bases by which social, economic, commercial, and other activities may be conducted. This measure also provides for the sovereign rights over maritime zones by establishing the Philippines’ exclusive rights to explore and exploit living and nonliving resources found in these zones, in accordance with the UNCLOS and other treaties.³

These are colossal and considerable tasks to beef up the arsenals of the AFP and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) to achieve a respectable territorial defense strategy to save the archipelagic nation’s undefended features in the West Philippine Sea and other maritime domains from the Philippine Rise to the Sulu Sea. These are also central to the objectives of upgrading the country’s defense maritime technological necessities to meet a sizable deterrence on par with the region’s robust defense posture and spending.

The study aims to understand the challenges and gaps that hinder the civil and maritime sector from attaining a stronger civil maritime framework and achieving a robust maritime security under the mantle of national security as it gives importance to maritime environmental protection in the country’s vast marine resources. It also tackles the importance of multilateralism amid the volatile regional security environment of hegemonic rivalry between China and the United States with the rise of the middle powers to maintain a maritime rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

It also discusses strategic approaches to China’s grey zone strategy, Philippine deterrence and fleet policies, paradigm shift from land-based to maritime strategy, relevance of joint maritime patrol, the acceleration of naval diplomacy, and the self-reliance development program. The study also recommends a unified and stronger messaging for the next president in handling various maritime security

challenges by accelerating the use of strategic communication in the defense and security sector to realize the value of whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approaches. Lastly, it is expected that the paper will discuss the role of the Philippines in the newly-constructed free and open Indo-Pacific region as it paves a way to allow gains of what the emerging Southeast Asian archipelagic nation can redound from its engagements with like-minded states and major powers in the region.

Challenges for Attaining a Stronger Civil Maritime Framework

The Philippines, as an archipelago, is constantly faced with myriad forms of maritime threats. Although different kinds and levels of challenges are present at any angle, it still always has an adverse effect on the country's economy and national security. To secure the sovereignty, economy, and overall well-being of Filipinos, the PCG is geared to practice a whole-of-nation approach. In general, the Southeast Asian maritime nation should at all times be secured, and the government should be very proactive to safeguard the country's maritime jurisdiction from any incursions and intrusions by other foreign forces--free from illegal activities, free from any forms of maritime crimes, and free from any marine incidents. It must aspire to achieve abundance in marine resources and maintain a healthy marine ecosystem.

By looking at the government structure of the Philippines, particularly the civil maritime sector, various stakeholders are taking part to perform maritime security functions such as the Philippine National Police-Maritime Group, the Philippine Coast Guard, and the Philippine Navy, which are supported by many councils and committees. By bureaucratic structure alone, the Philippines should have no problems in its maritime security except for the major issues of good governance in the maritime security sector as a whole. There should be a strong maritime security framework that will enhance the monitoring and surveillance capabilities to attain a secured maritime jurisdiction.

Good governance in the joint civil and maritime security sector must coincide with effective legislation and execution of enforced maritime laws. These gaps are pronounced that individual efforts are fostered, but collaborative and comprehensive measures in government bureaucracies are disregarded,

which becomes the culprit for ideal whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approaches. The lack of collaborative culture, the silo behavioural norms, and limited interoperability are reasons for the cacophony of progressive measures in the civil and maritime sector, as seen largely in civil service.

The Philippine Coast Guard has been beefing up its resources. In the human resources department, PCG Commandant Admiral George Ursabia Jr. announced last year that the Command will hire 5,500 personnel. This is one of the Command's steps to address the gaps in an agency mandated with multi-faceted functions. In its Marine Environmental Protection (MEP) role, the PCG has to start by hiring the right people for the job. The human resource department has to hire personnel to fill in the Command's marine environmental function's gaps. While it is now recruiting personnel with multi-faceted expertise, the Command is in dire need of scientists like chemists to administer the laboratory of the Marine Environmental Protection Command (MEPCOM).

While lawyers are dedicated to policymaking, other fields of expertise, such as marine biologists, are crucial in the organization because of the focus to rate the performance of MEPCOM, while a large part of its law enforcement falls to the marine environment. Violators must be prosecuted, particularly those who committed an infraction of the law. Meanwhile, chemists are hired to man the PCG laboratory in collaboration with the Command's lawyers' skills on policymaking to holistically understand the complexity of the marine environment. At the same time, the next step is to make sure that PCG personnel is trained and developed to be specialists in their respective fields. Currently, PCG workers are being assigned to various assignments without specific expertise, which becomes problematic on their scorecard in the performance of their various mandates.

If managed properly, this right action will bridge the gap of PCG personnel becoming more generalists and not just professionals. The Coast Guard's mandate turns out to be more complicated now, and it seriously challenges the Command's expanding members to attain extensive proficiency in all of the Coast Guards' various functions. In 2018 alone, different fields of specialization were introduced in the civil maritime sector. While many questions are not yet resolved on how to execute the new call of duty, it must be carried out to concentrate on new fields of expertise where the Command can eventually hire various specialists.

In essence, to address the gaps of a stronger civil maritime framework and be on par with global standards by becoming the source of inspiration on marine

environmental protection in the region, the PCG needs to develop its large pool of personnel by recruiting qualified personnel workers for the right job. This will be followed by training them to be experts in Marine Environmental Protection. This could be achieved by not reassigning junior officers to a different Command the moment they decided to join the MEPCOM. In this way, they will be honed on the job by their seniors. The pertinent trainings are geared to becoming skilled members of the subject Command. Also, material equipment and hardware are essential in developing the MEPCOM. The Command should request for appropriate budget to develop laboratories in different PCG districts to ensure timely laboratory analyses. Lastly, the development of MEPCOM should be hastened to increase the balance between work and job for its personnel's morale and welfare.

Furthermore, the PCG is mandated to perform maritime search and rescue (SAR) operations, implement maritime law enforcement and maritime safety as protectors of the marine environment that should be knowledgeable of maritime security; and as guardian of the seas committed to saving lives by ensuring safe maritime transport, clearer seas, and secure maritime jurisdiction. The PCG is also tasked to conduct maritime patrol in the West Philippine Sea and Kalayaan Island Group with the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR). While the PCG and BFAR identify the improvement of government and law enforcement reach as key factors in addressing the domestic fishing crisis through protecting biodiversity and boosting tourism in the country, the two civilian maritime agencies still seek to address huge gaps by proposing the following solutions alongside with their assessment:

Initially, for improving government response through tourism and infrastructure, state development will be mainly focused on making areas with high biodiversity into tourism areas and constructing ports in local communities to improve access to government services through the construction of major ports. Regional tourism with high biodiversity will only be focused on improving the local sustainability of the area and will not mandate the urbanization of these areas. Expectedly, tourism may disrupt certain areas in the marine environment causing fishing communities to be apprehensive of their livelihood. Tourism may also provide alternatives to fishing communities against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. But with the help of the civil society and private sector, this chronic marine problem can be countered if people find alternative work in

boosting the country's tourism sector.

The shift towards sustainable tourism will encourage the government to designate areas with high biodiversity as protected areas for certain species of marine life, allowing Local Government Units (LGUs) to repopulate and refill fish stocks in the region just like the Verde Island Passage in Mindoro and sensitive areas around the West Philippine Sea including thousands of marine sanctuaries in the archipelago. Given this, the PCG can increase its operations in zones where the Philippine government will develop port areas to ensure maritime environmental protection by improving government capability to enforce fishing laws and provide livelihood programs while managing its primary role of maritime patrols in our maritime domains.

By improving the law enforcement agencies, PCG and BFAR should focus on three areas: 1) the protection of endangered species, 2) the implementation of fishing restrictions, and 3) the mitigation of IUU fishing and destructive fishing activities (DFPs) in delicate maritime domains. Various proposals should lead to more international cooperation, but domestic improvements must be constantly discussed. At the same time, increased cooperation among law enforcement agencies will threaten the informal livelihood of certain communities that rely on illegal marine wildlife trading. This is also a worthwhile trade-off to prevent the destruction of marine ecosystems and the depletion of fish stocks in the region. Besides, the existence of alternatives to compensate for the affected stakeholders should be proposed.

Improved maritime law enforcement in the country should build trust within the region to ensure that Southeast Asian states can manage their broad maritime security issues in their respective borders and may adopt best practices from other countries. Moreover, improved maritime law enforcement will prevent the degradation of the fishing environment by IUU fishing and DFPs by providing fishing communities with alternative livelihood and allowing civil maritime law enforcement agencies to respond faster to reported maritime criminal cases.

The PCG under its mandates by virtue of RA 9993,⁴ Section 3, on Powers and Functions subpar (n) calls for the enforcement of laws and to promulgate and administer rules and regulations for the protection of marine environment and resources from offshore sources of pollution within the maritime jurisdiction of the Philippines; and subpar (o) to develop oil spill response, and containment and recovery capabilities against ship-based pollution. Following these provisions, the

Command vied to strengthen its laws in the domestic setting and had been quite successful so far as the environmental mandates are concerned.

As such, a well-equipped Coast Guard must not rest its laurels and should look forward towards and beyond the horizon. This should answer the question of how the PCG can meet global standards and become an inspiration in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region while the country's white fleet is still considered as the most challenged organization in civil maritime security. Despite being the first country in the continent to establish its coastguard, the PCG is lagging compared with regional counterparts on fleet assets and technological advancements, including robust policy and strategy development that would help the organization navigate through the challenges of times and to become responsive in the face of rapid geopolitical changes, maritime jurisdictional challenges, and marine environmental threats.

However, the PCG can identify areas where it can find equal footing with other coast guard agencies in the region. The white fleet had never been left out in the maritime strategy games, as it tries to carve out its own niche by creating its own Coast Guard Attaché Office in the International Maritime Organization in London. It has also seconded officers in the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) and International Fusion Center in Singapore. All of these may be small steps that would eventually become a full journey for the organization.

For the PCG to become a leader in environmental protection in terms of regional cooperation and adopting multilateralism, it must explore international conventions and instrumentalities against the economic clout and military might of powerful states to use its influence against them. Hence, it must explore civil maritime frameworks and recommendations:

1. Pursuant to fostering bilateral, unilateral, and multilateral cooperation among other coastguard agencies in the region and around the world, the PCG must initiate diplomatic and civil maritime programs to prevent miscalculations on the use of force and unnecessary armed conflicts in grey zone areas.

2. The PCG must actively engage in multilateral forums and abide by international law. It is recognized that the Philippines is a member of the

International Seabed Authority (ISA) that is tasked to organize, regulate, and control all mineral related activities in the international seabed areas of the world. The PCG has recently posted qualified officers to undergo policy development training to help the organization formulate policies to protect our vast maritime jurisdiction, including the continental shelf.

3. The PCG must thoroughly study the winning landmark case of the Philippines at the Permanent Court of Arbitration to consistently address policy gaps in maritime law enforcement. This will also help the Command formulate and establish regional fishing cooperation agreements with other claimant states within our grey zone areas. As long as the Philippine government determines a consistent and stouter narrative on our historical fishing rights in the contested West Philippine Sea and other legitimate maritime jurisdictions of the country, the civil maritime sector will have a stronger stance to protect our sovereignty rights and maritime interests.

4. The PCG must take the lead in crafting policies on maritime jurisdiction for the prevention, control, and penalization of would-be violators in terms of ship to sea pollution and other substances within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf.

5. As a lead maritime agency in the country tasked to perform blue water functions in our maritime territorial jurisdiction, the PCG should maintain a strong presence in our maritime domains by crafting its own asset deployment plan, identifying possible forward operating bases, and integrating the surveillance systems to strengthen the country's maritime domain awareness capabilities.

6. The PCG must delegate other domestic problems such as illegal fishing activities and management of the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to BFAR; maritime peace and order and local rescue operations to the Philippine National Police (PNP)-Maritime Group; while the coastal Local Government Units (LGUs) should strengthen its own search-and-rescue (SAR) capability given the allotted budget to LGUs on local risk reduction and response programs.

Robust Civil Maritime Security Towards the Attainment of National Security

The identification of security threats on the maritime territory becomes a primordial and patrimonial duty that is vital for achieving a robust national security. By safeguarding the country's national interest and security, it protects the external maritime defense from crimes, challenges, and threats that will jeopardize the safety of civilians and national security as a whole. Domestic and regional insecurities breed transnational crimes on waterways that disrupt the peace and development of the state. By contradiction, government intervention through effective governance and public service administration suppresses poverty, opening the flow of stability, growth, and development to the nation and the region.

As the Philippines transforms from an archipelagic nation to a maritime power, it has to invest heavily in naval and maritime assets to strengthen and establish achievable and effective national maritime security. The country's vast maritime territory and jurisdiction offer a lot of opportunities. The developing country has an untapped blue water economy to drive the entire maritime industry services with wide-ranging economic activities--from shipbuilding and ports to fisheries and aquaculture, to recreational activities and tourism, to offshore energy exploration and extraction, and a large number of related economic services while prioritizing patrimonial duty of sovereignty patrol.

By combining these gargantuan economic security activities, the Philippines can gain from renewed maritime industries, transforming it into an essential pillar for the national economy by creating jobs, attracting foreign direct investments, generating marine support industries, and strengthening of foreign direct investments of local purchasing power. By tapping this vast potential, the Philippines can carve its own position in the world economy to attain a future-proof national economy. This can bring a lot of opportunities for the nation, such as maritime technological advancements and naval development, to achieve a respectable defense posture on the road to a maritime power in the region.

In order to achieve this elusive dream, the Philippines must recognize the need for maritime governance strategy and the development of national maritime security policies. Policymaking and law enforcement are essential in attaining a sustainable blue water economy in the country. As long as the national government

and its human agencies can tap the full potential of exploration, exploitation, and management of natural resources at oceans, rivers, and seas, it will redound to the country's economic security. And more importantly, the Philippines must have to secure the nation's sovereignty.

Multilateralism and Strategic Communication for the Next President

Multilateralism is more welcomed than exclusive bilateralism in maritime security's extent and wide-ranging scope. While the Philippines' civil and naval maritime security sectors complement many high-mid-low levels of national, regional, and global security issues--its porous borders and strategic geographical location are relatively primordial in improving the country's maritime security. Given the number of maritime insecurities that the Philippines encounters, it is necessary to comprehend the context of its maritime insecurities.

The Philippines' diplomatic and economic rapprochements with Beijing through bilateralism certainly missed out on the golden opportunity to spread a unified narrative to the international community and against its maritime rival in the South China Sea despite the strong support for its arbitral ruling awarded at The Hague. The soft pedal and meek policy in the West Philippine Sea saw the continuous incursions and expansions of China's coast guard and maritime militia. This brings out the flaws of inconsistency in foreign policy and spineless messaging of the government using a whole-of-government approach in preserving its national sovereignty and territorial integrity in the contested waterways to secure its maritime domains.

While operating in a very dynamic, fluid, and adaptable environment, the armed forces, like any other organization, should cope with the changing times. The Philippines' military must adjust to the fast-paced changing security environment and be ahead of the government's adversaries. The AFP must attune its actions and decisions to strategies and operational tactics that allow it to remain focused to sustain victory in the delivery of its respective mandates. More so, as today's public are composed of varying stakeholders with interests, needs, and expectations that are increasingly demanding while gaining the trust and support that becomes a challenge itself. This is why there is a strong need to gain influence through the power of Strategic Communication (StratCom).

The AFP continues to face such challenges, and these can be significantly addressed through its problem on Strategic Communications. By integrating the various StratCom strategies of the major services into a Joint AFP Strategic Communication Strategy, the goal of institutionalization of StratCom lies not only as a policy pronouncement but as advocacy with supporting structures or identification of organizational and leadership StratCom advocates that are measurably supportive of the general headquarters and major services levels in hierarchic organizations such as the armed forces, civil maritime sector, and the executive branch of the government.

In this manner, the influence becomes essential and fundamental in engaging social interactions that are exerted through communication, reception, comprehension, and acceptance of delivered messages. To influence a divisive nation, leaders including the next Philippine president, should have a strong ability to deliver and manage communications that can be visibly seen as the act of sharing, sending, and receiving messages. It is also anything that can be interpreted as a symbol of actions, words, and images. It affects the behaviors and perceptions of people while retaining the freedom of action, which is incredibly challenging, especially if the nation is predisposed with different distorted values and maritime rules-based norms.

Therefore, StratCom is not just about the level of communication. The use of the keyword “strategic” is a word that implies communicating with a strategy in the pursuit of the purpose that will affect the perceptions and analyzing target audiences through the use of themes and messages (DND, StratCom Trainers Training Manual, 2013). In modern warfare, the battle of opinion became the new way of spreading ideologies and belief systems due to the expanding information environment and technology’s revolution (DND, StratCom Information Management Systems Report, 2013). Thus, this strategy is described as knowing and using one’s strengths and exploiting other enemy’s weaknesses (DND, StratCom Information Management Systems Report, 2013).

Strategic communications became the Department of Defense’s (DND) primary mechanism in coordination with and among bureaus and their civilian counterparts. This includes the following operations such as: liaising with government agencies, LGUs, LGAs, NGOs and international organizations, and other stakeholders; conducting joint planning at the strategic and operational level; providing continuous area and environmental assessment at the local or tactical

view; overseeing the conduct of civil related activities by defense and security units; ensuring the cooperative operation of the community and their leaders in all aspects; ensuring a timely and smooth transition of civilian responsibilities to the stakeholders; and providing advice to the Campaign Commander (DND, StratCom Trainers Training Manual, 2013) that further supports the National Security Strategy.

For the defense and security sector, strategic communication, although being loosely adopted and used by the armed forces, is not well-grounded. At the national level, there is no document grounding a unified strategic communication plan or document by which subsequent agencies of the government can ground their respective StratCom. The government's acknowledgment of the importance of StratCom can be seen through the establishment of the Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office, which, apart from serving as the President's chief message-crafting body, is also mandated to provide strategic communication leadership and support to the executive branch, and to lead the strategic communication of government through the formulation and enforcement of a National Communications Policy.

The Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) under the Office of the President released Memorandum Circular No. 001 series of 2018 with the subject: Establishing a National Communications Policy that Streamlines the Communications Process of the Executive Branch and Creating the Comprehensive Communications Committee, which includes a directive for all departments and agencies to coordinate with the PCOO in adopting a national strategic communications plan that would ensure that all activities, conduct, and actions of the departments are consistent and well-coordinated.

Accordingly, various government departments responded to the said directive, while other departments have long started their strategic communication even prior to the issuance of the directive from the PCOO. For one, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) emplaced its Strategic Communications Toolkit, which guides both its employees and officers on the processes and strategies of planning and implementing communication programs. At the same time, the toolkit is an instrument for the defense department to effectively and strategically communicate the right messages to its different stakeholders and influence them to join in the drive for transparency, accountability, performance, and citizen participation.

Other government agencies have also taken active cognizance of the guidance from the President's Office and ensured their abidance through the development of various forms to establish and ground their respective StratCom strategies. For the Department of National Defense, the publication in 2014 of the Strategic Communication Handbook sets an overarching basis for analyzing, planning, integrating, implementing and assessing strategic communication and defines the organization through which StratCom is operationalized at the DND Proper and its bureaus, among others.

As one of the bureaus of the DND, the AFP can anchor its internal StratCom from the guidance set by higher authorities. Only the Philippine Navy has a Strategic Communications Plan Handbook and recently published its second edition among the major services. The handbook sought to provide all naval personnel a clear, straightforward, and shared knowledge on the aspect of strategic communication in terms of its role and functions within the Navy as an organization. It also discussed the StratCom concept and the processes involved in creating a sound StratCom Plan. The Philippine Navy Strategic Communication Plan 1 was released in 2010.

The second edition was subsequently published acknowledging the various changes in the security landscape from the national to the internal AFP development efforts, which includes the following: publication of the PN Active Archipelagic Defense Strategy in 2013; the publication of the National Military Strategy in 2014; the 2016 culmination of the Internal, Peace and Security Plan Bayanihan and the consequent implementation of Development Support and Security Plan Kapayapaan and the National Security Policy 2017-2022; the development of the PN Naval Operating Concept that is relative to the PN Sail Plan 2020 and its alignment to the "AFP Transformation Roadmap 2028" in 2014; the development of the PN Sail Plan Strategic Communication Plan last 2015, and the launching of the PN Sail Plan Book 2 during the last quarter of 2016.

Complementing the PN StratCom Handbook is the PN's StratCom Plan 2021-2023, recently approved by the Philippine Navy's Flag Officer in Command, Vice Admiral Adeluis Bordado, on 10 January 2021, which further gives short-term guidance on the PN's StratCom, an indication of the Navy's acknowledgment of the role of StratCom in the furtherance of PN's success in the achievement of its mandate. However, despite the lack of StratCom handbooks from the Philippine Army and Philippine Air Force, similar to what the Philippine Navy has, these

major services still adhere to and adopt StratCom that are grounded to their respective roadmaps, including the Army Transformation Roadmap and the Philippine Air Force Flight Plan 2028.

The Philippines' Strategic Role in the Indo-Pacific Region

Amid the intensified hegemonic rivalry between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific geographical space, the Philippines is dwarfed by superpowers but rises as a middle power in this volatile regional security environment. It is therefore advised that Manila must craft a proactive policy if it aspires to maximize a relevant position in this regional security complex by continuously diversifying its alliances and strategic partnerships. Although the American-led Indo-Pacific region has been gaining significant traction in international affairs lately, the concept has largely captivated the fulcrum of the balance of power in a rough transition, seen in the current theatrical stage of global geopolitics, as the Philippines strives to show high potential in advancing its national interest in this vast geographical domain.

As the world leans towards multipolarity, geopolitical actors have played the game conscientiously, creating the multiplexity of the contentious region. Apparently, the Indo-Pacific is one of the world's sea lines of communications, possessing one-third flow of trade and energy passing through the region that spans from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Merging the natural resource flows and global supply chains from the continents of Asia to Australia, Oceania to America, thus, the Indo-Pacific region is considerably critical while hosting maritime grey zones and power competition of great powers.

Naval powers swarm in the Indo-Pacific region due to its strategic importance and wide network. Given the Indo-Pacific region's novelty as a conceptual idea which can be classified as an old and new geographical space, the Indo-Pacific rises from the remnants of the Asia-Pacific, giving prominence to emerging major powers like India and ASEAN and traditional American partners like Japan and Australia to expand its geopolitical clout. Formerly, the British Empire had envisioned this maritime territory to become one singular strategic region, and now with the US as the heir of the Anglo-Saxon powers, it has maintained to achieve that unilinear vision and mission. Big population and landmass

recreate hegemony of naval powers in the contested Indo-Pacific region, making it an 'Asian maritime super-region.' American rivals can view the expansion of the regional complex as a conceptual region to contain China and Russia in the theatrical stage of global politics in naval strategy. The US has outwitted the two great powers a supreme aerial-naval power in the last world war. Although, China and India-Asia's two competing giants-will remain continental powers within the geographical space of the Indo-Pacific, despite their accelerated and increasing maritime assets.

Varied interpretations on the significant presence of the Indo-Pacific region remain idealistic and realistic as key states and policy elites dwell on the epistemological and ontological importance of the region in world affairs. As Washington cements its presents in the newly-concocted Indo-Pacific rim and stages a well-rehearsed command by renaming the US Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command, the world's leading naval power is adamant about pursuing a maritime rules-based order under a free and open region. Although it was former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who inducted the porous region into an 'open and free' and inclusive Indo-Pacific, his clever proposition called for a zone of seas of prosperity that will redound Tokyo's interest its allies. As the third largest economy in the world, Japan preferably favors open trade governed by the rule of law and the free-market economy reflected in the confluence of two seas.

While India supports the foundation of the Indo-Pacific, it also coincides with its aspirations under the renamed Act East Policy, being a rival of China in many developmental projects and military aid in South Asia and Southeast Asia. India's inclusion in the Quadrilateral Dialogue (QUAD) with like-minded states-the US, Japan, and Australia-illustrated its affirmative show of support for the universal principle of freedom of navigation and overflight to counter China's massive reclamation and militarization in the contested South China Sea.

The ASEAN will play a crucial role in the Indo-Pacific as it becomes the heart of the region with rising middle powers in the offing and its backyard to become the battleground for apparent hegemonic rivalry. Member states of the ASEAN, like the Philippines, have been the recipient of power competition between the US and China that apparently affects the region's maritime cooperation, arms race, sustainable development, and economy. While Manila is a founding member of

the ASEAN, it does have major stakes in the maritime and territorial dispute with Beijing in the South China Sea but has won a legitimate arbitral award; it favors the international community's support. Furthermore, Manila remains to be the longest treaty ally of Washington regardless of who wins in the May 9 presidential elections despite decoupling incidents from the US. Economically, Tokyo becomes the top investor in the Philippines' infrastructure program despite the failure of Beijing to consolidate its promise to support the government's 'Build, Build, Build' program, while Manila sets a complex juncture of its geographical importance in the Indo-pacific region.

The Philippines' unique strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region forms the outer edge of maritime Southeast Asia and serves as a gateway between the Pacific and the rest of Asia. The archipelagic state's proximity to Sinitic powers like China and Japan can provide access to vital sea routes for commerce. This is seen in the economic trajectory of Manila with Beijing that expanded bilateral trade relations of the two countries in 2019, affecting the economic interdependence given China's influence on the Philippines' foreign policy that compromised Manila's national interest. And while the Philippines is a key claimant in the South China Sea, Beijing has the upper hand in the contested waterways as China controls the militarized artificial islands in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone.

The Philippines, as a rising middle power, gives weight to its special role in the Indo-Pacific region. As a former 'sick man' of Asia and by recently becoming one of the most resilient economies in the region, Manila can use this security opportunity to engage in multilateralism and foster its national economic interest in the booming region. Manila can play a critical role in forwarding US strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific while robustly engaging in trade with China. Both the US and China see the importance and relevance of the Philippines from their own respective national interests. Therefore, it is necessary for the Philippines to engage wisely with the two competing powers in the world.

Recommendations

While Manila recuperates from failed diplomatic and economic rapprochements with Beijing, the next administration must consider the following recommendations to strengthen the civil and maritime security of the Philippines.

1. Strategic approaches to China's grey zone strategy

China considers Asia as its home base and the contested region within the gamut of its historic sphere of influence in spite of the widening US-led conceptual and geopolitical clout in the Indo-Pacific region. Under President Xi Jinping's leadership mantle, regaining supremacy in the world's largest continent is the foremost component of his grand vision and confidence-building measures in Asia, as well as by strengthening its global strategic multilateral partnerships with emerging powers even with the impending global security threat of the three-year-old coronavirus pandemic to date.

It could also be perceived that Xi Jinping is the center of gravity of China's complex grey zone strategy, which significantly becomes Beijing's core interest, and declaring the South China Sea as a core interest is a prerogative of the Communist Party of China (CPC). The centrality of the party as a key element in attaining the Chinese Dream is where all crucial policies and strategies of China emanate from. Overall, Beijing has received a mixed reaction from the international community as it founded an alternative international financial and lending institution that grants large-scale loans in its contentious Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) mounted by its flagship program cascaded through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI), dubbed as an economic grey zone by its rivals.

For China's strategic competitor, when the United States commemorated the decade-old September 11 terrorist attack in 2021, it restored its glance on homeland security. Moreover, the challenged superpower once again caught the world's attention when President Joe Biden co-founded a trilateral security pact with Australia and the United Kingdom, known as the AUKUS to protect its external defense and regional interest in the Indo-Pacific region. The 15 September 2021 AUKUS agreement gives Canberra preferential treatment to acquire nuclear-powered submarines from its Anglo-Saxon allies. Nine days after, Washington extended its arms with allies from Australia, India, and Japan as it hosted the QUAD aimed at ensuring commitment to safeguarding maritime rules-based norms in the Indo-Pacific region to pacify China's aggressive militarization.

Meanwhile, the Philippines acknowledges that China's intentions in the South China Sea are not benign. To effectively counter it, the Philippine Navy must maintain a naval operational base order to continue naval operations across the archipelago, notably in the West Philippine Sea and the Philippine Rise, where a naval presence is required regularly. The integrated requirements for logistics,

maintenance and repair, basing and human resource production, and doctrines are significant as they become a centrifugal force in naval operations. While warships may be deployed for extended periods, it still requires resupply of gasoline, lubricants, explosive ordnance, rations, replacement parts for equipment, and other supplies regularly as required in establishing forward operating bases for naval operations.

2. Philippine deterrence and fleet policies

The drive of the armed forces of a small state is not to wage war but to avert it. There is a noteworthy difference even if the task of war prevention infers a credible ability to fight, for small states cannot hope to achieve victory in war in a strictly military sense. Instead, the tenacity of the war is to end it on acceptable terms. Middle powers' armed forces contribute to averting war first by maintaining the state's sovereignty and by enforcing national jurisdiction in peacetime in an efficient and credible manner. The military is an instrument of the state in crisis management and during the peacetime-wartime spectrum, not least for their deterrent effect on the opposition. Deterrence works when it outlays armed aggression in the mind of a potential aggressor and becomes larger than the benefits of going to war, and in the end, peace may prevail.

In enhancing transparency and accountability while pursuing opportunities for stable security structures, the AFP should improve its human, organizational, and information capital. It shall build a culture of jointness and establish integrated secure communications and information system to institutionalize integrated joint logistics support systems and develop a professional and highly motivated regular and reserve force. Highly competent and motivated professionals should spearhead the crafting of sound and appropriate maritime doctrines leading to the responsive naval reserve forces; and the same professionals who should be building the corps of the same force.

Near-sighted, a naval strategy that aims to fight an asymmetric conflict is the object of naval warfare where competition to control the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) seems apparent, including an adversary's commercial and economic interests. It strategically includes the control of maritime communications, whether for commercial or military purposes. The primordial object of the fleet is to secure these SLOCs and put the enemy fleet out of action. More so, the size of one's fleet is not much of a factor.

A small naval force is unlikely to win a major fleet engagement, but it still could achieve significant results through minor naval actions, such as attacks on sea lanes and coastal raids. Victory at sea is dependent on the relative strength of one's own fleet and the exploitation of one's positions such as naval bases, commercial, and zone areas where maritime trade routes converge. The Navy acts as the guardian of our seas by providing naval defense and maritime security for the archipelagic nation in relation to the other major services of the AFP. While the Navy's mission as a force provider to the Unified Commands is to organize, train, equip, maintain, develop, and deploy naval forces for rapid and sustained naval and maritime operations in support of the AFP mission.

A large modern navy may include an array of naval assets such as ships, submarines, aircraft, and various types of support, supply, and repair ships as well as maintain naval bases and ports, and an enormous organization for the management and maintenance of these assets. The nation's primary sources of military power across the seas are the navy ships claiming two chief functions: sea control and area denial. Naval power includes a nation's entire organization for sea warfare that may comprise vessels, personnel, and shore facilities.

3. Paradigm shift from inward-looking to outward-looking military strategy

AFP's mentality of an inward-looking protection of the state depended on external defense from former colonizers. The absence of the National Security Policy (NSP) that outlines the country's national vision and National Security Strategy (NSS) that imprints the president's dent on security and development came out only in 2018. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) maps the defense's plans, and the National Military Strategy (NMS) that aims at achieving a robust mission of protecting the nation was published when Duterte came into power.

From 2000-2011, the Philippines' armed forces relied only upon the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) for its security programming and other executive pronouncements that lacked higher and strategic concepts, making the Philippines' national security very military-centric. The presence and issuance of the 2011 NSP aimed at providing for the strategic direction of the country's national security that lost essential elements to achieving the wholeness of the NSP in terms of strategic operability (Flores, 2021).

The constructed texts of the NSP, NSS, NDS, and NMS within the timeframe of 2016 to 2020 improved the country's strategic culture that has been revitalized

in conduit to providing the necessary compass in the country's security trajectory, armed with a realistic vision that would take an intergenerational time before the desired results can be realized.

The Defense Program Guidance (DPG) 2022-2027 recommends the resource directions for developing the 2022 budget proposal for the term 2022-2027. Accordingly, resource planning should consider new priority programs and proposals, one of which is the method of life cycle costing for all programs. The DPG stated that "the method of life cycle costing shall be required from all programs and shall identify systematic assessment to include cost estimates from inception to disposal of current and new equipment and projects to provide a basis for sound decision-making and optimize operational cost."

The emerging maritime threats from domestic, foreign, and natural milieus have been in the country. Self-resiliency in developing our defense capability may be the solution to the recurring deficiency for our aging surface assets, which were experienced by other ASEAN navies. Replacing current assets that were used for more than 20 years is a huge challenge constrained by the defense budget. (Haliza Zahari & Mustakim, 2016).

4. Relevance of joint maritime patrol

The Sulu and Sulawesi Seas link the Pacific and Indian Oceans and are importantly considered as Se Lines of Communications (SLOCs). This is where the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia share sea boundaries which are well-known for their economic and sociological importance. The maritime security of the Sulu Sea is of great importance for the international seafaring community and has raised some concerns over the safety and security in the waterways. As a result, the Joint Maritime Patrol in the form of Trilateral Maritime Patrol (TMP) was organized under the goodwill of all coastal states' cooperation following multiple meetings and discussions or multilateralism.

The complexity of the maritime security concerns and huge prospects of the Sulu Sea for multilateral collaboration and coordination are the main points that cannot be matched by any sea region. The Sulu Sea was seen to be a domain to allow cross-border movement of millions of people as well as international shipping. Every year, it is believed that more than 100,000 boats sail through the Sulu Sea with more than 55 million metric tons of goods and 18 million people.

Also known as the Tri-border Sea Area (TBSA), the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas play

a key role in the global economy despite being overlooked by most government entities. It is because, one way or another, all coastal states will eventually have to deal with issues of sovereignty and administration of the TBSA. At a glance, criminal activities at sea have turned out to be more complicated, which implies that maritime security concerns might endanger every coastal state and its territorial waters, often classified as maritime piracy.

Though it encompasses a large amount of territory, the Sulu Sea is particularly challenging for the region. As a result of porous borders and the lack of maritime governance over the area, TBSA has served as a base for transnational crimes and terrorist threats, all of which compound the social, economic, and ethnic turmoil plaguing the whole region.

The 1982 UNCLOS article, entitled “The International Code of Sea Laws,” provided a definition that lists various acts of violence illegal, such as capping, arresting, or destroying a private crew or passenger boats at high seas in a place outside the jurisdiction of the United Nations, in relation to the hijacking of the crew of a ship to raise money is concentrated in this case.

5. Acceleration of naval diplomacy

Philippine maritime security is widely pronounced in the country’s coded National Security Policy and National Security Strategy. As a matter of policy, the Philippines renounces war as an instrument of national policy (Section II 1987 Philippine Constitution, 1987). This does not mean that the military will not engage in actions to ensure the country’s territorial defense. In order to maintain its operational readiness to meet this objective, the AFP, through its major services, participates in military exercises with allies.

Acquisition of warships and navies is frequently referred to as symbols of a state’s sovereignty and power that provide a defensive function. It effectively serves as symbolic for supportive and coercive functions. In response, continued use of diplomacy not only achieves diplomatic and political interests but is equally important for averting losses in furtherance of an international dispute that has consequently perpetuated the concept of naval diplomacy and gunboat diplomacy (Ghosh, 2001).

On the operational level, naval exercises enable the operating forces an opportunity to have seamless integration with other naval forces during combined operations, not just in preparation for wartime operations but particularly during

such contingencies involving humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Despite disputes, nations still come together to achieve collective goals and assist neighbors in times of catastrophes and crises, even transnational threats like pandemic and human-induced terrorism.

As part of the country's naval diplomacy, the Philippine Navy annually participates in a number of multilateral naval exercises. Annually, the PN spends considerable resources to support its participation in various local and foreign naval exercises. These include man-hours spent in planning conferences and logistics and monetary resources to cover training expenses, port services, mobility, medical, subsistence allowances, communications, ammunition, and other operational requirements.

6. Self-Reliant defense posture

The establishment of the Philippine defense self-reliance policy in the Philippines started with the signing of Presidential Decree (PD) No. 415 on 19 March 1974, creating the Self-Reliant Defense Posture (SRDP) Program. This is in response to the growing Muslim secessionist movement in Mindanao and the US' unwillingness to help in the country's internal problems. The SRDP Program aimed to develop the country's capability and self-sufficiency in the production of defense materials to sustain the requirements of the armed forces in partnership with the private sector. Its main thrust is to achieve greater flexibility and success in pursuing independent foreign policy, reduce if not eliminate chronic dependency on foreign sources for basic defense needs, boost scientific and technological capabilities, spur commercial and industrial activities, conserve and generate foreign exchange, and provide gainful employment to the people.

In the case of South Korea, the defense self-reliance policy started when the Republic of Korea (ROK) learned about the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean peninsula following the Nixon Doctrine in 1969. As a result, the former ROK President Park Chung-hee ordered the military to create an independent military strategy to include force development to achieve an independent defense posture. The Korean military came up with a plan similar to the SRDP of the Philippines. The difference is that the approach is more holistic and self-imposed.

The ROK's self-reliant defense policy embeds three elements. First, it entails independently establishing defense-related policy and strategy in terms of will. This also includes conceptualizing and concretizing various visions pertaining

to a nation's defense's objective, policy, and strategy. Second, the concept implies having the ability to protect one's nation with its own military power. This extends to procuring manpower, equipment, and funds for defense with its own power. Third, it incorporates the ability to manage and exert military capabilities based on one's own will. The ROK concept of defense self-reliance involved three critical factors at the onset of the program – political will, defense strategy, and funding.

Generally, the countries' experiences of the ill effects of foreign and natural intervention increased their need for a self-reliant defense capability, especially maritime assets. It is hoped to be achieved by limiting the nation's dependence on allies and outside support for the defense requirements. This self-reliant defense capability relies primarily on developing in-country manufacturing capabilities and utilizing to the fullest its natural resources as the source of the country's defense needs in the SRDP Program.

Relatedly, defense self-reliance development auspiciously brings economic development and success, unlike other nations which have initiated projects of their own SRDP versions that resulted in successful undertakings. Sweden is one of the countries which ventured into this different scheme. Its items, especially aircraft, have earned a reputation as it attempts to move on to manufacturing civilian aircraft. Brazil is slowly carving its niche in the growing missile industry. Other capable states like Argentina, India, Israel, Pakistan, South Africa, and Taiwan are into the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Small countries have now slowly ventured into this field formerly dominated by superpowers.

The SRDP program must be responsive in its main objective, which is to develop a local defense industry. However, the current status of SRDP related projects displays a slow development in local defense industries. The Government Arsenal still uses its obsolete technology in the production of small arms ammunition and is not able to produce small arms for the AFP and PNP. In 2019, the Philippine Aerospace Development Corporation almost reached its toll when it was assessed to have failed in its objectives. As a result, it was transferred under the Department of National Defense in October 2019. The need for AFP Modernization indicates that the Philippines' local defense industry is not yet developed. In the past five decades, it has been a failure in the SRDP implementation of the defense and security sector.

If not properly addressed, the SRDP program will remain futile in its objective, resulting in "overdependence" from major powers that would restrict the

Philippines from pursuing robust foreign policies. Over-dependence provides the opportunity for the exporting country to control the importing country. This could adversely affect the integrity of the importing country by projecting an image of a weak state that suggests economic and military instability. As a result, the country's peace and order will stagnate, thereby discouraging foreign investors.

Countries that venture into the defense industry greatly appreciate the local production of defense materials. This allows them to develop solutions to address their defense capability shortfalls and improve their economy by engaging in defense-related businesses with allied countries. The Philippines is among the first countries in Southeast Asia to develop its local defense industry. The approval of Commonwealth Act 138, also known as the Flag Law by President Manuel L Quezon in 1938, paved the way for the approval of the Self-Reliant Defense Posture (SRDP) program in 1954. This gave birth to the development of the Government Arsenal and other local defense industries to cater to the needs of the AFP and the Philippine National Police.

In 1974, Presidential Decree 415 was approved by transferring the Implementation of the SRDP program under the DND. In 1987, the new constitution provisions for the legal basis of the SRDP program. An attempt to revitalize the SRDP was made in 2001 to augment the AFP Modernization Program. Proposed bills were made in 2010 and 2018. After almost 50 years, the Philippines still rely on other countries when it comes to defense capability development.

Data show that from the 145 projects in the first and second horizons of the AFP Modernization Program, 137 are on Capability, Materiel, and Technology Development (CMTD). Moreover, some of the projects are related to the acquisition of small arms, which should have been a well-developed local industry by now. Following this trend and realizing the necessity of Integrated Logistics support on the items acquired from abroad, The AFP still seeks help from other countries, thereby missing the essence of buying sophisticated equipment in the first place that would align with its defense strategies.

A study made on the Defense Acquisition System of the AFP Modernization Program that found out there is a need to enhance the SRDP to acquire defense capability. The importance of SRDP recommends solutions for improvement by citing best practices of other countries. However, the need to enhance and how

other countries enhance their programs must be properly examined. Although these are equally important studies, it is also critical to know the factors affecting the implementation of the SRDP program by the DND in its local setting. This could give us a better perspective on how to improve the SRDP program implementation by the DND towards a developed local defense industry that affects the civil and maritime security of the country.

Conclusion

Shaping the potential of the Philippine external defense architecture can provide a clearer and long-term maritime deterrent plan for the country's civil and maritime security. As the coast guard and the military build mobile coastal defense batteries, armed with long-range anti-ship missiles and covered by an integrated air defense shield, it brings confidence for the Philippines that have experienced maritime insecurities for centuries. This is also one of the main reasons why the AFP recently bought the Brahmos missiles from India and planned to invest in submarines—having known that the South China Sea has proven oil reserves of seven billion barrels and an estimated 900 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. With a potentially huge bounty at hand, the risk of conflict in the contested waterways may significantly occur. As long as the civil and maritime security sector recognizes the importance of freedom of navigation operations in the region, maritime-rules based norms will prevail.

The security challenges of the Philippines are faced with ever-growing new and emerging technologies. In support of national interests, the Navy and Coast Guard maintain sovereignty patrols on the country's maritime domains, ensuring a surface force to meet the current missions and long-term obligations, including the safeguard of sea control and denial, projecting power, maintaining maritime security, and also performing functions to support mission other than war. This means that capability development has been an essential issue as it indicates the readiness of the country is facing threats—a critical instrument in the survival of a nation in times of uncertainty. Currently, the Philippine Fleet has 117 surface vessels consisting of Frigates, Corvettes, Offshore Patrol Vessels, Coastal Patrol Craft, Landing Platform Dock, Landing Ship Vessel, and Landing Ship Tank.

In the process of developing a credible posture for the Navy, the commissioning

and decommissioning of ships is a customary practice, with the gradual introduction of new assets to the active service and the banishment of outdated assets in its serviceable life. As a practice, the service life is the lifecycle of a product (infrastructure, buildings, industrial equipment, and vehicles) from manufacturing to end-of-life processing, including reuse and recycling. It has been a practice in the Navy to prolong the service life of ships to sustain the required number of surface assets on the ground to comply with the requirements of the armed forces. The increasing complexity of capital assets is a factor that affects the maintenance management of the Philippine Fleet for its surface assets.

¹ Global Firepower Report (GFP) 2022. World's most powerful militaries. See the ranking at https://www.globalfirepower.com/#google_vignette

² Ibid.

³ Neil Arwin Mercado. House approves bill declaring PH maritime zones. Philippine Daily Inquirer. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1524516/house-approves-bill-declaring-ph-maritime-zones>.

⁴ An Act Establishing the Philippines Coast Guard as an Armed and Uniformed Service Attaches to the Department of Transportation and Communications, thereby replacing Republic Act No. 5173, as amended, for other purposes at https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2010/ra_9993_2010.html.

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