ESTABLISHING A STRONG AND CREDIBLE CYBER DEFENSE POSTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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The steady expansion of the digital sector has facilitated the growth and development of states in the Indo-Pacific. It has furthered the **interconnectedness of states in the geopolitical and economic spheres, and heightened the connectivity of the global community**.

However, the rise of security vulnerabilities in cyberspace has also been facilitated by growing digitization. **The cybersecurity capabilities of a state are still being tested by cyberattacks, cyberespionage, and other illegal digital operations.** The Indo-Pacific states are faced with the problem of reducing and countering such threats through the **realignment of strategic interests and the formation of alliances to bolster their cyber capabilities**.

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One of the region's blueprints for addressing risks and opportunities brought about by increased cyber activity is the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).** The framework **prioritizes the "connected economy,"** with the goal of promoting sustainable growth by building stronger, fairer, and more resilient economies. This emphasis on the "connected economy" is meant to **encourage comprehensive engagements of like-minded states in pursuing opportunities and addressing pressing issues** in the digital economy, including enacting standards on cross-border data flows and localization. **By taking part in the IPEF, developed and developing countries—including the Philippines—can close the digital divide and promote effective coordination on cybersecurity and capacity-building initiatives.**

In the case of the Philippines, **President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has repeatedly declared his support for digital transformation.** During his speech at the 77th United Nations General Assembly, the President stated that **the country is preparing for the future by employing a governance framework that pursues digital solutions,** especially as the country recovers from the pandemic.

The President's directive on digitally transforming the country and the implementation of the National Cyber Security Plan 2022 are key steps toward building the country's digital infrastructure. These innovations will attract local and foreign investments and contribute to the country's national security framework, particularly its cyber defense capabilities.

As the Philippines moves to establish a strong and credible cyber defense posture, the Marcos Jr administration must explore opportunities to **engage in bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral initiatives such as capacity-building and expertise-sharing activities with like-minded partners such as the United States**.

In the age of multipolarity and increased uncertainties, the threat of cyber-attacks against the government is a serious security concern. In line with this, **the Stratbase ADR Institute emphasizes that cybersecurity must be treated as a matter of national security**. The country's digital infrastructure needs to be strengthened as a result of the ongoing exposure to cyber threats, thus policies and initiatives must be developed and put into action.

Recognizing that building a state's cyber capabilities is a regional concern, **the Institute stresses the need for collaboration to enhance defensive and offensive cyber capacities, increase state interoperability, and ensure collective security**. Cooperation in both the national and regional levels will make it possible for the nation to create and sustain a secure online community.

More importantly, the Institute advocates for the responsible utilization and behavior of states and other actors in cyberspace and urges all to recognize that **international law governs both online and offline spaces.**

As the country builds its cyber capabilities against these vulnerabilities, the Institute believes that the need for cybersecurity is an opportunity for cooperation among states in the region. **Only by creating a strong and credible cyber defense posture will the Philippines and the Indo-Pacific be able to achieve a secure and trustworthy digital community.**