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## Beyond Strategic Ambiguity? Impact of the US Rebalance Strategy on the AFP's Defense Posture in the West Philippine Sea

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### Introduction

The Obama administration's policy of rebalance to the Asia-Pacific has met a multitude of responses and elicited varied interpretations. From the outset, the strategy faced strong criticism from China due to its well-pronounced military component.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, long-standing allies of the US, including Japan and South Korea, have expressed deep support for the reassuring policy pronouncement of the Obama administration. But, due to their economic interdependence with China, some states opted to employ hedging strategies in engaging both China and the US, while the Philippines has shifted its strategy from equibalancing to balancing China.<sup>2</sup>

The Philippines has welcomed the US Rebalance Strategy (US-RS) with optimism. Seeing an opportunity to enhance its security partnership with the US, which also complements the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) modernization process, the Philippines expressed strong support for greater US military presence in the region.<sup>3</sup> However, the politico-economic backdrop of US-China relations renders the impact of US-RS quite uncertain.<sup>4</sup> In particular, it is uncertain how the strategy can influence the Philippine defense and security outlook. In view of the recent developments in the SCS, one might ask how the US-RS and the enhanced Philippine-US alliance can contribute to a more credible Philippine defense posture in the West Philippine Sea (WPS). In attempting to determine the impact of the US-RS in this respect, it is imperative to examine the following: **(1)** what is the strategic nature—objectives, elements, and limitations—of the US-RS? **(2)** what is the significance of the Philippine-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in the former's

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security concerns in the WPS, and **(3)** given the limitations of the US-RS and EDCA, how can the AFP assume a credible defense posture in the WPS?

In analyzing the strategic implications of the US-RS and EDCA in the AFP's WPS defense posture, this policy study shall be guided by the Deterrence Theory (DT) in International Relations. As a form of strategic coercion, deterrence involves the threat of use of force to influence the political behavior of another state, preventing actions that are inimical to the defender's interests or to the interests of its allies.<sup>5</sup> DT emphasizes the value of credibility in the strategic use of force. In this light, it is essential for a deterrence strategy to be well-defined and clearly understood by the state to which it is being directed. Proceeding from this theory, this policy study mainly argues that the credibility and sustainability of US deterrence in the SCS may be constrained by the politico-economic, diplomatic, and institutional dynamics governing US-China relations. As such, the strength of the AFP's external defense posture must not be exclusively derived from the increased regional and/or rotational presence of the US military. Moreover, it is essential to fast-track AFP modernization for a credible WPS deterrence strategy that features a critical balance of traditional and alternative external defense approaches.

## The Nature of the US Rebalance Strategy

Critics argue that the US-RS is not an actual strategy to promote US interest in the Asia-Pacific, dismissing it as a mere diplomatic rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> Such observation is misinformed since the US-RS actually exists as a major policy initiative. In fact, its military component is officially encapsulated by the US Department of Defense (DoD) Strategic Guidance entitled, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*. The strategic guidance noted that China's emergence as a regional power presents economic and security implications, and as such, its strategic intentions must be clarified.<sup>7</sup> However, understanding the US-RS strictly in terms of China's territorial assertiveness is a one-dimensional interpretation of the policy.<sup>8</sup> The US-RS is a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to engage China and other Asia-Pacific countries. As the Obama administration's grand foreign policy strategy in the region, the US-RS is composed of several elements—political, economic, diplomatic, and military.<sup>9</sup>

The political and diplomatic elements of the US-RS can be understood hand in hand. On the political side, the US-RS seeks to preserve the role of the US as the leading 'pacific power'. As China strives to become a peer-competitor, the US must preserve the existing regional political structure in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>10</sup> For this purpose, it is necessary to consolidate US alliances and develop ties with potential security partners. It is noteworthy that China has implicitly challenged the resiliency of what some perceive as a "US-led" regional security architecture by introducing a new security concept characterized by multi-polarity.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the US resorts to diplomatic engagements at different levels of interaction. To secure its role as the primary security guarantor of the Asia-Pacific, the US provides strategic assurance to its allies and partners through revitalized security partnerships—especially with states that are involved in territorial disputes with China. Nonetheless, in an effort to balance the diverse interests in the region, the US constructively engages China to uphold internationally recognized norms as well as freedom of navigation and overflight in the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in the SCS. The Obama administration encourages China to become a responsible power that is well-integrated into the existing global systems and institutions. Alongside its bilateral engagements with Beijing, Washington seeks to maximize multilateral platforms that promote norms of peaceful regional co-existence (e.g. ARF,

APEC, & EAS). Taken together, these diplomatic engagements constitute a subtle counter-strategy characterized by increasing the costs involved in China's infringements of the existing body of international laws and norms.

The US-RS is likewise cognizant of the crucial role that the SCS plays in regional and global trade. As with other facets of the US-RS, the Obama administration seeks to balance the economic relations of US with China and other states in the region. Notably, the Obama administration seeks to develop cooperative trade relations with China. And because China and US are economically interdependent, the latter rejects armed confrontation as a means to support its allies and partners embroiled in the SCS dispute.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, the US does not remain silent on the SCS dispute since its escalation can significantly strain the regional and global economy.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the bustling economies of Southeast Asian nations motivate the Obama administration to actively pursue the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which entails a comprehensive set of free trade agreements focused on trade intensification and job creation.<sup>14</sup> Given the vast marine and hydrocarbon resources in the SCS, the economic overtone of the dispute is undeniably strong, and the US indeed faces the difficult task of promoting economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

Looking into the military component of the US-RS, it is noteworthy that the US has always recognized the Asia-Pacific as one of the major theaters of security affairs. As such, the US is predisposed to increase its military presence and engagements in the region. Notably, the repositioning of US Naval assets from the Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific is projected to reach a ratio of 40/60 by 2020.<sup>15</sup> This provides profound reasons for China's own sense of insecurity.<sup>16</sup> In some occasions, China has expressed that the repositioning of the US military to the Asia-Pacific can exacerbate the tension in the SCS.<sup>17</sup> As a response, the Obama administration exerted significant effort to allay China's suspicion and clarify that the US-RS is not a move to contain China. Greater US military presence has been largely explained in terms of the need to establish dynamic and responsive relations with allies and partners to address an array of human and maritime security concerns. Further, the US interest in global trade and freedom of navigation and overflight in the SLOCs has been highlighted as a neutral and legitimate premise for the actions of the US government. In line with this argument, some scholars explain that US seeks to "constrain" China's

territorial assertiveness by promoting international law and peaceful dispute settlement as well as employing a calibrated response to China's power projections, rather than "contain" its peaceful rise as a pacific power by putting primacy on deterrence and other military strategies.<sup>18</sup>

However, even if the Obama administration initiated a comprehensive approach to constructively engage China, the multi-faceted nature of this strategy becomes the very source of its limitations. It must be understood that the success of the US-RS can be viewed, among other parameters, as dependent on how it can influence China's assertive behavior and prevent activities that incense other claimant states. Essentially—although not admittedly—the US-RS presents a deterrence strategy against China's territorial assertiveness. Notably, an ideal US deterrence strategy should be characterized by a juxtaposition of the potential costs China might endure as a result of its increasing assertiveness and the benefits it can gain from the observance of the principle of peaceful regional co-existence. Further, the projection of the threat of use of force should be specifically designed to frustrate what is perceived as China's intention to control the SCS. Unfortunately for those pushing for a stronger US position, the Obama administration softened the military component of the US-RS to prevent antagonism between US and China, diminishing the credibility of US deterrence in the SCS.<sup>19</sup> Relatedly, the seeming neutrality of the Obama administration in the SCS dispute in view of preserving good diplomatic relations with China abates its political leverage as the leader of the Asia-Pacific security architecture. On the other hand, the highly pronounced economic component of the US-RS accentuates the indispensable economic interdependence between US and China, a condition that serves as the latter's leverage for unimpeded territorial assertiveness.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Obama administration is adamant in explaining that an armed conflict with China is not in the interest of US, it should continue to elaborate the relevance of the increased presence of the US military in promoting regional security and stability. Otherwise, China would view US passiveness as a lack of commitment to its alliances in the region. Ideally, a credible US deterrence strategy against China should involve an explicit statement that highlights the heightened probability of US intervention in a potential armed conflict resulting from any state's aggressiveness in the SCS. Such statement may serve as an effective form of strategic assurance for regional allies and partners.

However, the US still pursues a hedging strategy towards China, leaving countries such as the Philippines relatively vulnerable to China's irredentist posture in the SCS.<sup>21</sup>

### **Implications of the US-RS and EDCA on Philippine Defense and Security**

The defense and security posture of the Philippines is closely intertwined with the strategic interest of US in the Asia-Pacific. The Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) of 1951 and Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) of 1998 serve as the general framework for Philippine-US defense and security cooperation. A significant development which gave more substance to this cooperative arrangement is the conclusion of the EDCA. The agreement features the increased rotational presence of the US military and its privilege to construct defense facilities at agreed locations within the Philippine territory.<sup>22</sup> The EDCA seeks to promote greater AFP-US Forces interoperability and enhance the AFP's capabilities for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR), maritime security and maritime domain awareness, and external defense.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, with an increasingly tense regional environment, it is imperative for the Philippines to revitalize its security relations with the US. Notably, the Philippines figures prominently in the US-RS as can be gleaned from the EDCA.<sup>24</sup> Mindful of the agreement's timing, China has criticized the Philippines for internationalizing the SCS dispute and enhancing Philippine-US security relations for this perceived purpose.<sup>25</sup> Amidst these criticisms, the Philippine Government affirmed the presence of the US Forces in the Asia-Pacific as an essential element of regional security and stability.<sup>26</sup>

Given its limited external defense capabilities, the AFP faces the difficult challenge of protecting the country's territorial integrity, promoting the government's territorial claim and maritime claims, and deterring China from imposing its own. To a significant degree, the Aquino administration's decision to further step-up Philippine-US defense relations was shaped by the aforementioned rationale.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the Aquino administration aims to maximize the opportunity offered by the US-RS to effectively address China's irredentism.<sup>28</sup> As such, one major objective of EDCA is to complement the AFP's external defense capability development.<sup>29</sup> Relatedly, the agreement reaffirms the preferential treatment of the AFP vis-à-vis the transfer of excess US Forces defense articles, a critical opportunity for the modernization

of the AFP.<sup>30</sup> Further, congruent with the objectives of EDCA, a reorientation of the “Balikatan Exercises” from counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations to simulated maritime security and territorial defense operations became observable.<sup>31</sup> From these features, it can be inferred that aside from addressing a vast array of maritime and human security challenges, the EDCA can influence China’s stratagem in the SCS through its thrust on AFP-US Forces interoperability and increased rotational presence of the US military.

However, despite an agreement on enhanced defense cooperation, the Philippines has not yet received an unequivocal guarantee that the US Forces will come to its defense once an armed conflict erupts in the WPS. As discussed, the US-RS reveals some limitations that the Philippine Government must recognize in addressing its defense and security needs. Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge the host of factors that can constrain EDCA’s intended advantages. Looking into the financial aspect of the agreement, the number of naval troops and assets to be deployed, the range of defense facilities to be constructed, and the amount and grade of excess defense articles to be transferred by the US Forces are yet to be fully determined. These will vary depending on the US Congress’ cost-benefit analysis of the US-RS’ military component and consequently, on the future budget of the US Forces.

From a policy angle, it is noteworthy that EDCA entails shared responsibilities. It reaffirms the mutual commitment of both parties to settle international disputes by “peaceful means” and to refrain from the “the use of force or threat of use of force”.<sup>32</sup> This is consistent with the objectives of the US-RS as a foreign policy initiative—developing the economic and military capabilities of its allies and partners for their responsible participation in maintaining regional peace and stability. Given such premise, EDCA features interoperability and AFP capacity-building instead of a US-led security strategy.

The legal facet of the agreement presents another interesting point of discussion. As a supplementary agreement, EDCA adheres to the provisions of the MDT of 1951 that relate to US military intervention. Under the MDT of 1951, interventions can only be performed legally if the foreign act of aggression involves an armed attack on “the metropolitan territory of either of the Parties, or on the island territories under its jurisdiction in the Pacific or on its armed forces,

public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific.”<sup>33</sup> Although the US Government has expressed in two instances—in 1979, through a diplomatic letter sent by then US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and in 1999, through a diplomatic letter sent by then US Ambassador to the Philippines Thomas Hubbard—that the SCS is part of the “Pacific” area referred to in the MDT of 1951, the language of the treaty allows flexibility in statutory interpretation, which may vary across US administrations.<sup>34</sup> Notably, since the Chinese Government mobilizes its civilian assets to enforce its territorial claim, an assault coming from such vessels might not qualify as an armed attack that warrants American intervention and direct military support. Given these circumstances, the form of US military assistance to the Philippines may vary depending on the existing regional political conditions. Ultimately, the sustainability of the US-RS across US administrations will influence the advantages that the Philippines can derive from the EDCA. These issues highlight the great need for the Philippine Government to fast-track the modernization of the AFP’s external defense capabilities for a more self-reliant defense posture in the WPS.

## External Defense and Deterrence in the WPS

The modernization of the AFP must be geared towards the development of a credible defense force that can maintain strategic presence in the country’s territorial waters, aerial domain, and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Likewise, its capability upgrade must be cognizant of the modernization of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) since China seems to pose the most significant threat to Philippine territorial integrity. As such, a look into China’s modernization trend is necessary in crafting a strategy to effectively deter its territorial incursions in the WPS.

With the aim of projecting military capabilities well-beyond national borders, China’s rapid military modernization process has been characterized by an ever-increasing defense budget, development of next-generation jet fighters and highly advanced naval ships equipped with smart weapon systems, and investment in asymmetrical warfare capabilities.<sup>35</sup> Since the beginning of the new millennium, China has quintupled its defense budget. In fact, in 2012, China’s military spending accounted for more than thirty percent of the total defense spending in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>36</sup> Notably, throughout the years, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has intensified its research and

development projects to test prototypes that can rival the US F-16 and F-22 jet fighter variants. China has begun the mass production of the Shenyang J-15 and continuously develops the Chengdu J-20, with potential operability in 2017.<sup>37</sup> Given this modernization trend, as of 2013, China has acquired 603 combat-capable aircrafts.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, the PLA Navy (PLAN) has long started the process of transforming itself into a blue-water navy, capable of more dispersed and resilient naval operations. To this end, the PLAN began the development of Type-052D destroyers, equipped with land-attack, anti-aircraft, anti-ship cruise, and anti-submarine missiles.<sup>39</sup> PLAN is also developing the Type-056 corvette to achieve greater control over coastal waters and enclosed seas—a development trend that signals intense preparations for the SCS dispute. Given this naval upgrade trend, as of 2013, China has acquired 77 principal surface combatants—62 frigates, 14 destroyers and 1 aircraft carrier—and more than 211 patrol and coastal combatants.<sup>40</sup> As an ancillary capability upgrade, PLAN has also increased the production of Z-8 gunship helicopters, equipped with 3D radar systems and anti-submarine rocket launchers. Further, PLAN focuses on the development of high-precision missile systems to complement its naval ship modernization. Notably, the perfection of the DH-10 Land-Attack Cruise Missile system can potentially impose another security challenge to coastal states enclosing the SCS.<sup>41</sup>

More than the development of advanced capabilities for conventional warfare, China is also making great strides in asymmetrical warfare. For instance, the development of the DF-21D prototypes will lead to a new type of Chinese intercontinental ballistic missile with Maneuverable Re-entry Vehicle (MaRV) characteristics—allowing high-precision attacks on moving naval targets such as a US aircraft carrier.<sup>42</sup> Coupled with its burgeoning cyber warfare capabilities that can be employed for cyber espionage and attacks on military communication satellites, China has indeed raised the ante in the SCS dispute. Given China's perceived commitment to its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy against the US, the Philippines cannot rely solely on the long-term effectiveness of the US military reassurance.

Amidst China's military development plan, AFP must assume a minimum credible defense posture in a timely fashion to fill-in military capability gaps. Based on the 2013 Military Balance Report, the Philippine Air Force (PAF) has 23

combat-capable aircrafts—which include twelve S-211s and eleven OV-10A Broncos—and 23 multi-role helicopters—including four W-3 Sokols, three AUH-76s, three Bell 412EP Twin Hueys, two Bell 412HP Twin Hueys, and eleven MD-520MGs. Meanwhile, having been published before the Philippine Navy (PN) acquired BRP Ramon Alcaraz, the same report noted that PN has one 1 surface combatant—BRP Rajah Humabon frigate with three 76 mm guns—and 56 patrol and coastal combatants—including two Gregorio Del Pilar (Hamilton) class frigates with 76 mm guns; one Mariano Alvarez Class (Cyclone) class ship; three Emilio Jacinto (Peacock) class corvettes with 76 mm guns; six Miguel Malvar (PCE(R)-852) class corvettes with 76 mm guns; and two Rizal class corvettes with 76mm guns.<sup>43</sup>

Apparently, these air and naval assets are inadequate. A stocktaking of the traditional capabilities required in establishing effective command and control over the WPS suggests that the PAF would need at least four squadrons of 4<sup>th</sup> generation jet fighters, anti-aircraft weapon systems, ground-based and airborne long-range radars, more Surface Attack Aircrafts/Lead-in-Fighter-Trainers, and more maritime patrol aircrafts.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, at a minimum, the PN must acquire more highly armed frigates, smaller corvette-size combatants and minesweepers, and at least three mini-submarines.<sup>45</sup> However, the fulfillment of all of these requirements will far exceed the budget of the AFP Modernization Program. More problematic, despite the potential acquisition of these defense articles, the military assets of China's PLAAF and PLAN will maintain statistical superiority in the years to come.

## Some Policy Considerations

From an examination of the US-RS as a foreign policy and deterrence strategy, this policy study argues that although in the short-term, the US-RS may provide some degree of deterrence in the WPS under the cooperative platforms of MDT, VFA, and EDCA, its long-term impact on China's territorial assertiveness should not be overstated. The Philippine Government must fast-track the AFP modernization process and enable the AFP to assume a more self-reliant external defense posture. Further, the country's external defense must be guided by a strategy that can maximize the opportunities provided by the EDCA and exploit the limitations of China's cabbage strategy and salami-slicing tactics in the WPS. Given the stark military

hardware disparities between the AFP and the PLA, the nature of the guiding strategy must not be fully-g geared towards the projection of retaliatory threats in the WPS. Instead, the Philippines must concentrate on raising the risks and costs of conflict for China through the intelligent positioning of Philippine military assets in the WPS. The AFP must maintain an effective defensive stance through the employment of tactics that can effectively frustrate China's operations in the WPS in the event of an armed confrontation. In this manner, the strategy can remain faithful to the concept of deterrence, which necessitates the calculated projection of force to attain political objectives while avoiding the escalation of a conflict into a full-scale armed confrontation.

A credible deterrence in the WPS will require a general framework of principles for minimizing the probability of operational miscalculations. The DND and the AFP must craft a National Military Strategy (NMS) specifically-designed to address existing security threats in the WPS. The NMS must observe the internationally recognized principles on maritime rules of engagement enshrined in the UNCLOS, Geneva and Hague Conventions—with their complementary protocols—and the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Conventions. The NMS should likewise put great emphasis on the development of appropriate doctrines, force structures, training, and facilities for the operational synergy of the PAF, PN, and the Philippine Army (PA)—especially its anti-aircraft artillery unit—in the WPS. To this end, the Active Archipelagic Defense Strategy (AADS) of the PN and the emerging defense strategies of the PA and the PAF must be harmonized with one another, thereby complementing the prospective reactivation of the Philippine Air Defense System (PADS) and establishment of the Philippine Air Defense Identification Zone (PADIZ). More importantly, the NMS must underscore a no-first strike policy in all WPS-related military operations to prevent any form of retaliation from China and preserve the international image of the Philippines as a champion of peaceful dispute settlement.

The DND and the AFP must likewise explore the most plausible arrangement in establishing the strategic presence of air and naval assets in the WPS for the protection of the land and sea features within the Philippine EEZ and other claimed territories. Increased rotational presence in the WPS chokepoints (e.g. Second Thomas Shoal, Commodore Reef, and Reed Bank) can enhance the effectiveness of air and maritime surveillance operations in

monitoring Chinese activities in the WPS. Notably, the PN's constabulary role in the WPS has an underlying value because it can exert influence on China's strategic calculus. Since Philippine naval assets are covered by the MDT of 1951, armed attacks against them would be a valid pretext for US military intervention. Although the nature of the force employed by China will still be a factor in the merits of an intervention, such strategy can still induce China to observe some degree of caution in the WPS. Further, the strategy can be enhanced by utilizing the EDCA to establish joint-surveillance arrangements between the AFP and the US Forces. Joint-surveillance operations between the PN and the US Navy may serve the dual-purpose of demonstrating the commitment of both parties to their alliance and restraining China's assertiveness in the WPS.

The DND and the AFP must likewise consider the viability of alternative approaches in preventing territorial incursions. Given the Philippine-China disparity in defense budget and modernization pace, the concentration of the AFP's budget on the large acquisition of next-generation jet fighters and advanced naval ships may not be the most viable option for the short and medium-term WPS defense strategies since it would drain the limited financial resources of the AFP in procurement, refurbishment, and operational costs. Alternatively, the development of land-based anti-ship ballistic missile and anti-aircraft missile systems can complement the limited air and naval assets of the AFP for a more credible deterrence in the WPS. For the anti-ship ballistic missile system, one proposal from the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) is to develop a moving battery system concealed in the forests of Palawan for tactical advantage.<sup>46</sup> Similar to Russia's K-300 Bastion-P system, a single battery's configuration can be composed of 4 launchers, each equipped with 2 missiles, mounted on a command-and-control truck, and supported by transportation and security alert vehicles.<sup>47</sup> For the target data-collection and battery-communication system, naval helicopters equipped with long-range radar technology—preferably AN/APS airborne surveillance radar variants—can serve as a cost-effective alternative to airborne early warning aircrafts.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, the ground-based anti-aircraft missile system can provide additional air cover to the airborne surveillance radar component of the anti-ship missile system, diminishing the number of required jet fighters for an effective air cover.<sup>49</sup> Similar to the anti-ship ballistic missile system's configuration, surface-to-air missiles (SAMS) can likewise be

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mounted on command-and-control trucks. Notably, a combination of different SAMS can be explored for more effective attacks on higher altitude targets.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, as a feature of their built-in radars, anti-aircraft missile systems can function without the aid of early warning aircrafts—a characteristic that renders the system more manageable and cost-efficient.

These are some alternative approaches that can complement traditional air and naval defense systems. So long as the long-term external defense modernization plan of the AFP will involve the acquisition of aircrafts with 4<sup>th</sup> generation jet fighter capabilities and naval ships equipped with smart weapon systems, the DND and the AFP can—for the short-term—explore and calculate the most viable balance between traditional and alternative defense systems for a cost-efficient deterrence strategy that maximizes the unique geographical characteristics of the Philippines as an archipelagic state.

## Conclusion

As the first ally of the US in the Asia-Pacific, the Philippines has been an active supporter of the US-RS, intensifying its existing defense and security relations with the US through the EDCA. However, similar to other US security partners in the Asia-Pacific, the Philippines is vulnerable to a limited interpretation of the US-RS both in terms of strategic intent and sustainability. Embroiled in a territorial dispute with China over the WPS, the Philippines is in great need of a credible external defense posture. Often, this is pursued on the assumption that the US

military presence can constantly function as an effective deterrent force in the Asia-Pacific. However, through an examination of the politico-economic and military factors that may constrain the US-RS, this policy study argues that the long-term effectiveness of US deterrence in the Asia-Pacific is not absolutely certain. As such, the strength of Philippine external defense capabilities should not be exclusively derived from the increased military presence of the US in the region. Instead, the Philippines must also fast-track the AFP modernization process and employ a deterrence strategy in the WPS that increases the risks and costs in China's strategic calculus through the balanced employment of traditional and alternative external defense approaches.

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- <sup>41</sup> Ibid <35>
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid <35>
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid <36>. The BRP Ramon Alcaraz has one 76-mm Oto Melara which can be loaded with specialized ammunitions to defend against anti-ship missiles.
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- <sup>47</sup> Depending on the modernization budget of the Philippine Navy, it can explore a number of available ground-based anti-ship missiles including the RGM 84 L Harpoon, RGM 109 B Tomahawk, PJ - 10 Brahmos, P-800 Yakhont, and Exocet MM40 Block 3. However, in terms of range, only the RGM 109 B Tomahawk can reach a distance of 200 nautical miles (nm) from Palawan.
- <sup>48</sup> Depending on the modernization budget of the Philippine Navy, it can explore a number of available naval helicopters equipped with long-range surveillance capabilities to provide target data and coordinate battery salvos such as the Sikorsky MH-60R SEAHAWK, Kamov KA-31 Helix Airborne Early Warning (AEW) Helicopter, and Augusta Westland Sea King MK2, among others.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid <47>
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid <47>. For instance, the range of MIM-120 NASAMS has an altitude of 5,000 meters while the MIM-104 PAC-2 Patriot has an altitude of 36,000 meters.