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## Philippines-U.S. Alliance under the Duterte and Trump Administrations: State and System-Level Foreign Policy Considerations

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### Introduction

The beginning of President Rodrigo Duterte's political leadership coincides with dramatic changes in the geopolitical landscape of the Asia Pacific. His assumption into office has occurred against the backdrop of the great power rivalry between U.S. and China, the expansion of Japan's strategic horizon, and the increasingly unstable nuclear situation in the Korean Peninsula. Amidst these security concerns, his administration opted to adopt a more pragmatic approach to foreign relations. Meanwhile, just as the Philippines shifted its foreign policy approach from balancing to hedging, the United States witnessed a political milestone with the assumption of President Donald Trump. In vowing to "Make America Great Again," President Trump touted a foreign policy approach designed to serve "America First."

In view of the unconventional foreign policies of President Duterte and President Trump, it is essential to examine Philippines-U.S. security relations against the backdrop of an evolving Asia-Pacific regional security environment to determine prospects for enhancing bilateral security cooperation. In attempting to shed light on the subject, this policy brief shall address the following questions: 1) How can the foreign policies of President Duterte and President Trump amid an evolving regional security landscape be characterized?; 2) How do state and system-level foreign policy considerations influence the status of Philippines-U.S. security relations?; and 3) how can robust security relations be promoted under the Duterte-Trump Administrations? Guided by Cheng Chwee Kuik's Hedging Theory and Barry Buzan and Ole Waever's Regional Security Complex Theory, this policy brief mainly argues that the Philippines-U.S.

security cooperation shall remain stable under the Duterte and Trump administrations due to foreign policy considerations, on both the state and system levels, which situate the military alliance well within the strategic interests of both countries. It is argued, however, that in promoting a robust Alliance under the Duterte-Trump Administrations, the Philippines and the United States must enhance their diplomatic engagements, diversify platforms of bilateral security cooperation, and explore the viability of defense technology transfer.

### Philippines-U.S. foreign policies amid the evolving security landscape of the Asia Pacific

Central to the geopolitical changes in the Asia Pacific is China's meteoric rise, which signaled a forthcoming regional power shift. China's territorial and maritime expansionism and militarization of the South China Sea (SCS) disputes create profound anxieties over Washington and Beijing falling into the Thucydides Trap.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Japan has become utterly mindful of China's increasing assertiveness. Treading a path towards normalization, Japan has announced its commitment to make a "proactive contribution to peace" and reinterpreted its Constitution to incorporate the concept of "collective defense," thereby expanding its strategic horizon. Notably, the territorial and maritime dispute between Japan and China in the East China Sea (ECS)—over which the latter has declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ)—adds another layer of potential major power conflict in East Asia.

Meanwhile, the nuclear threat in the Korean Peninsula remains a security concern not only for the Republic of Korea (ROK) but for the rest of the region.

As had been recently observed, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK's) provocative missile tests widen the latitude for operational miscalculations and increase the risk of a full-blown nuclear war among the regional and great powers.

Amidst these security developments, the Duterte and Trump Administrations have taken foreign policies that emphasize the value of maximizing gains in international relations. On the one hand, President Duterte's independent foreign policy has displayed pragmatism in dealing with relevant powers. It has recognized the realpolitik in East Asia as well as the stark military capability gaps between China and the other claimant states in the SCS disputes. Hence, under President Duterte, the Philippines sought to assuage tensions in the SCS and promote amicable relations with all regional powers. Relatedly, recognizing U.S. strategic ambiguity on the West Philippine Sea (WPS) dispute as well as the absence of an international police to enforce the favorable arbitral ruling of 2016, President Duterte opted to re-open bilateral mechanisms—which may complement ASEAN-led mechanisms—in managing the WPS and SCS disputes.

Economically and militarily, this independent foreign policy approach has diversified Philippine foreign relations. In his foreign visits to “open alliances”<sup>2</sup> with China and Russia, President Duterte has secured major trade and infrastructure deals<sup>3</sup> with Beijing and a military cooperation agreement with Moscow<sup>4</sup> while maintaining “ties with America.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, President Duterte remained adamant in his commitment to the Philippines-Japan Strategic Partnership. Notably, while Philippines-China relations have improved considerably, bilateral cooperation between the Philippines and Japan remained robust as can be gleaned from the investment and development assistance pledges and naval and coast guard assets which Manila received from Tokyo.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in engaging the great powers of the Asia Pacific through an independent foreign policy, President Duterte was able to derive material gains essential in supporting the country's growing development and security requirements.

On the other hand, President Trump's America First Foreign Policy has been described as “protectionist” and “neo-mercantile.”<sup>7</sup> Under this foreign policy, President Trump has underscored that America's foreign relations shall be guided by a strong drive to boost its domestic economy and pursue foreign trade and investment deals to address the rising unemployment concern in the United States.

Relatedly, in addressing trade imbalances against the U.S., President Trump swore to always put America first in the same way he expects other leaders to put their own countries first.<sup>8</sup> Demonstrating a seemingly “transactional”<sup>9</sup> foreign policy, President Trump expressed on one occasion that Japan should purchase a lot of military equipment from the United States to protect itself from DPRK. In the same vein, President Trump had conveyed that the ROK must shoulder the cost of the THAAD missile system and subsequently noted the need for the U.S.-ROK Free Trade Agreement to be renegotiated. Indeed, contrary to the traditional positions held by his predecessors on how the U.S. should promote global interdependence to prevent potential inter-state conflicts, it appears that the main thrust of President Trump's America First Foreign Policy is maximizing economic gains in a zero-sum game of international relations.<sup>10</sup>

If the new U.S. foreign policy shall be pursued strictly along these lines, it shall have profound implications on how nation-states manage their economic and security relations with the United States. Countries that have traditionally benefitted from the U.S. security clout may see the need to deepen their economic relations with America to ensure their inclusion in the regional security priorities of the United States. Alternatively, they may see the need to promote closer security ties with other great powers in the Asia Pacific, such as China, Japan, and Russia. Aside from this paradigm shift in the U.S. foreign policy, President Trump's less aggressive stance against China's territorial and maritime assertiveness in East Asia as well as his message of “fire and fury” in response to DPRK's nuclear and ballistic missile tests have raised some concerns regarding his diplomatic ability to effectively manage tensions in the region.<sup>11</sup>

### **State and System-Level Foreign Policy Considerations vis-à-vis the PH-U.S. Alliance**

Notwithstanding the ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding the foreign policy approaches of President Duterte and President Trump, a closer examination of current bilateral security engagements between the two countries reveal, however, that continuing cooperation under a refocused agenda characterizes the status of Philippines-U.S. security relations. Notably, all existing platforms of communication and cooperation are being utilized under the Duterte-Trump Administrations. The Philippines-U.S. Alliance had been cemented by various agreements, including the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, the 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement,

and the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, among others. In implementing these agreements, the Philippines and the United States engage each other through joint platforms such as the Mutual Defense Board (MDB)-Security Engagement Board (SEB), Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD), Balikatan Exercises, and PHIBLEX. Notably, under the Duterte and Trump administrations, all these platforms are regularly utilized.

Last October 2016, the Philippine Marines and the U.S. Marines conducted the 33rd PHIBLEX, a joint training that combines amphibious capabilities and live fire exercises with humanitarian and civic assistance projects.<sup>12</sup> Last May 2017, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Armed Forces of the United States (AFUS) also conducted the 33rd Balikatan Exercises which focused on counterterrorism and humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR).<sup>13</sup> Noting the success of the 33rd Balikatan, Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana described the exercise as a perfect demonstration of collaboration and noted that both countries will become stronger if they work together.<sup>14</sup> In the same manner, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim noted that as both countries face an increasingly complex and volatile security environment, now more than ever, they must work closely together.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, last September 2017, U.S. PACOM Commander Admiral Harry Harris Jr and then AFP Chief-of-Staff General Eduardo Año met in Hawaii for the Philippines-U.S. MDB-SEB. The meeting focused on counterterrorism and violent extremism and included discussions on the WPS and up-scaled bilateral exercises. Furthermore, during the 7th BSD between the Philippines and the U.S. held last 29 November – 1 December 2017, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to the Alliance. Specifically, the Philippines and the U.S. expressed their joint commitment to the following: 1) deepening collaboration in areas including maritime security, HADR, cybersecurity, and countering terrorism, among others; 2) upholding freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea in the SCS; and 3) peacefully resolving disputes in accordance with international law, as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention (LOSC).<sup>16</sup>

On top of these engagements, two new bilateral exercises were held under Duterte and Trump. Last September 2017, Exercise Tempest Wind was inaugurated. The counterterrorism exercise facilitated a more comprehensive set of exchanges between

the two countries to improve their ability to plan, coordinate, and conduct counterterrorism and security operations.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the KAMANDAG (Cooperation of the Warriors of the Sea) Exercises were held last October 2017. This Philippine-led exercise focused on promoting operational readiness in addressing terrorist threats as well as various humanitarian and maritime contingencies.<sup>18</sup>

Aside from the sharing of knowledge and expertise facilitated by these mechanisms for defense and security dialogue and military exchanges, the Philippines has likewise substantially benefitted from this sustained bilateral security cooperation in terms of military hardware. As can be gleaned from the table below, as of this writing, the AFP has received several military assets and materiel from the United States since February 2017.

<b>U.S. Military Hardware received by the AFP under the Duterte-Trump Administrations<sup>19</sup></b>	
<b>Date Transferred</b>	<b>Military Hardware</b>
1 FEB 2017	400 M203 grenade launchers, 85 M40A5 sniper rifles, and 1 RQ-11B Raven Unmanned Aerial Vehicle system consisting of 3 drones
18 MAY 2017	300 M4 carbines, 200 Glock 21 pistols, 4 M134D Gatling-style machine guns, and 100 M203 grenade launchers
30 MAY 2017	25 Combat Rubber Raiding Crafts with outboard motors
28 JUNE 2017	12 Ford F-550 Trucks
27 JULY 2017	2 Cessna 208B aircrafts
23 AUG 2017	1 Tethered Aerostat Radar System (28M Class)

Together with the successful Bilateral Meeting between President Duterte and President Trump in Manila last 13 November 2017 at the sidelines of the 31<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Summit in Manila, these engagements accentuate the “great relationship” between the Allies.<sup>20</sup>

In understanding why both countries remain committed to the Alliance notwithstanding their foreign policy shifts, an analysis of state and system (regional and global)-level considerations may provide meaningful insights. In analyzing the state level considerations that guide President Duterte’s independent foreign policy, it must be essentially construed as a hedging approach. Dr Cheng Chwee-Kuik has defined hedging as “an insurance-seeking behavior under high-stakes and high-uncertainty situations, where a sovereign actor pursues a bundle of

opposite and deliberately ambiguous policies vis-à-vis competing powers to prepare a fallback position should circumstances change.”<sup>21</sup> Dr Kuik further theorized that the objective of hedging is to “acquire as many returns from different powers when relations are positive, while simultaneously seeking to offset long-term risks that may arise in worst-case scenarios.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, President Duterte’s varying policy pronouncements on Philippine relations with the U.S. and China and on the WPS and SCS disputes emulate the policy of deliberate ambiguity in dealing with competing powers in the Asia Pacific. Relatedly, the country’s deepening economic relations with China, nascent security cooperation with Russia, and robust strategic partnership with Japan represent the policy of preserving economic gains in adopting counteracting measures. Notwithstanding these foreign policy initiatives, however, it is noteworthy that the Philippines-U.S. Alliance remains central to the country’s defense and security posture. The United States continues to be the primary security guarantor of the Philippines; and certainly, its fallback position should circumstances change (e.g., Chinese armed attack on Philippine vessels in the SCS or China’s construction of military facilities in the Scarborough Shoal).

As regards the regional and global considerations, the predisposition of the United States as a superpower with a vital interest in the Asia Pacific, especially in East Asia, unravels the impetus in ensuring that the Alliance continues. Specifically, the behavior of the U.S. towards the externally transformed regional security complex (RSC) of East Asia will be largely influenced by its interests as a superpower. According to the theory of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, an RSC is defined by the following variables: 1) boundary differentiating it from its neighbors, 2) anarchic structure (i.e., RSC as being composed of two or more units); 3) polarity or the distribution of power across units; and 4) social constructions covering patterns of amity and enmity (i.e., influence of history in foreign relations).<sup>23</sup> Buzan and Waever explained that an RSC may evolve in three ways: 1) maintenance of the status quo; 2) internal transformation (i.e., changes in the number of constituent units, distribution of power, or patterns of amity and enmity); and external transformation (i.e., expansion or contraction of the RSC boundary through changes in its constituent units).<sup>24</sup>

Based on these conceptualizations, Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia both qualify as RSCs.

The Northeast Asian regional powers include China, Japan, ROK, DPRK, Mongolia, and Taiwan. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, the regional powers include the 10 ASEAN-Member States (AMS). As RSCs, Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia have their respective systems of power distribution and patterns of amity and enmity that have been shaped by their respective politico-economic and military histories. However, unlike the Southeast Asian RSC, the Northeast Asian RSC may be specifically categorized as a great power RSC in view of the relative capabilities of the nation-states comprising this region. Based on the theory of Buzan and Waever, as a great power RSC, it has two distinct features: 1) its power distribution affects the global balance of power; and 2) it presupposes the higher probability of security threats spilling-over to adjacent regions.<sup>25</sup>

Proceeding from this theory, two recurring and increasingly provocative regional security concerns have externally transformed and combined the Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian RSCs into a wider and interconnected, East Asian RSC, to wit: 1) China’s territorial and maritime assertiveness; and 2) DPRK’s nuclear missile threat. Tensions arising from China’s island-chain strategy which covers both the ECS and SCS have connected the two RSCs under one security concern: Chinese expansionism. On the other hand, considering DPRK’s recent series of ballistic missile tests, the threat in the Korean Peninsula has expanded to cover Southeast Asia and other countries within Pyongyang’s nuclear reach (e.g., Guam). As security threats situated within a great power RSC, China’s expansionism and DPRK’s nuclear provocations may spill-over to RSCs beyond Southeast Asia such as South Asia thru China’s string of pearl strategy and Oceania thru DPRK’s nuclear missile tests. If left unchecked, these security threats may thus influence the global distribution of power.

In view of these developments in the RSCs within the Asia Pacific, the strategic interests of the U.S. as a superpower may shed light on the future of its security engagements in the region. In Buzan and Waever’s Theory on RSC, a superpower is defined by the following characteristics: 1) a first-class military-political capability and an economy to support such capability; 2) global reach and exercise of such military-political capability; and 3) acceptance—in rhetoric and behavior—by others of its rank as a superpower. Buzan and Waever further noted that superpowers “must be active players in processes of securitisation and desecuritisation in all, or nearly all, of the regions in the system, whether as threats, guarantors, allies, or interveners.”<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, as a superpower the U.S. has exercised a combination of hard and soft powers to influence securitization (i.e., identifying existential threats to a valued referent object) and de-securitization (i.e., downgrading an existential threat to a valued referent object) in the East Asian RSC. Under the Trump Administration, the U.S. has been actively involved in the securitization of the nuclear crisis in the Korean Peninsula by conducting joint military exercises with Japan and ROK to deter DPRK from using its nuclear weapons. Additionally, President Trump has elevated DPRK's nuclear provocations as an international issue by sponsoring various U.N. Security Council Resolutions that impose stricter sanctions to pressure Pyongyang into irreversibly abandoning its nuclear weapons development program.

On the other hand, notwithstanding his less confrontational stance on China's expansionism, President Trump has securitized the SCS dispute by underscoring the value of sovereignty and "respect for borders" in the SCS before the United Nations General Assembly and intensifying the conduct of U.S. Navy Freedom of Navigation Operations in the disputed waters.<sup>27</sup> Corrolarily, as indicated in his National Security Strategy (NSS), President Trump has rebranded the Asia Pacific as the "Indo-Pacific" to acknowledge the crucial role of India in promoting security and stability in the region. Although principally focused on confronting DPRK, the "quadrilateral cooperation" of the U.S. with other democratic powers (i.e., Japan, Australia, and India) may be also be viewed as a form of balancing against China in defense of the rules-based international order which the latter seeks to alter.<sup>28</sup>

Notwithstanding its involvement in the securitization process of East Asia, however, the U.S. superpower function of being a regional security guarantor has experienced military and political challenges. Militarily, while the U.S. has unparalleled global force projection capabilities and cutting-edge military technology that may secure its operational advantage in the near future (e.g., electromagnetic railgun, hypersonic missile, and free electron laser weapons),<sup>29</sup> China's military modernization; Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Island Chains; and offshore military bases and gray-zone coercion tactics in the SCS pose a regional military security threat for the United States. Aside from this, DPRK's nuclear weapons development program continues to challenge the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence to its allies in East Asia, as had been

observed last September 2017 when DPRK tested a ballistic missile which flew over Japan's territorial airspace in Hokkaido Island before landing in the Pacific Ocean. Aside from its provocative ballistic missile tests, Pyongyang's allegedly successful hydrogen bomb test purports that it shall remain a military security threat against the U.S. and its allies in East Asia.

Politically, the function of U.S. as a security guarantor is likewise marred with a China challenge. In presenting an alternative arrangement for global and regional security and development—thru various regional initiatives such as the One Belt, One Road, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, Xiangshan Forum, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and prospective Chinese Maritime Courts—China aims to significantly diminish if not completely erode the political influence of America in East Asia. Presented with an alternative (Chinese) vision of the future in which the U.S. no longer stands as the preeminent Pacific power, the East Asian acceptance and recognition of America's superpower status and function as a security guarantor may likewise vary depending on the level of security commitment which East Asian countries receive from the United States.

Aside from addressing these military and political challenges, the U.S. must ensure its military influence in the East Asian RSC if it ought to secure its status as a superpower. According to Buzan and Waever, "what links the overarching pattern of distribution of power among the global powers to the regional dynamics of RSCs is the mechanism of penetration. Penetration occurs when outside powers make security alignments within an RSC."<sup>30</sup> Through the establishment of a system of alliances and security partnerships in East Asia and the wider Asia Pacific region before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. has maintained the alignment of its security interests and that of East Asian countries (e.g., Japan, ROK, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Taiwan). This forged the U.S.-led regional security architecture in the Asia Pacific and significantly enhanced the global force projection capabilities of the United States by paving the way for the establishment of offshore American military bases as well as military access to strategic locations under the sovereignty of its allies and security partners. Highlighting the geopolitical and military relevance of the strategic spaces provided by East Asian countries, President Donald Trump noted that the Philippines may be considered as a "prime piece of real estate from a military standpoint."<sup>31</sup>

Suffice it to say, the security alignment of East Asian countries with the U.S. has been a precondition in maximizing America's military presence in East Asia and the wider Asia Pacific. Such security alignment remains essential in maintaining its role as a regional security guarantor. In this light, promoting an enduring system of alliances and security partnerships in East Asia is imperative in preserving the U.S.-led regional security architecture, preventing security threats within the East Asian RSC from spilling over to other regions, and maintaining the regional and global balance of power. In view of these state and system-level foreign policy considerations, the continuation of the Philippines-U.S. security relations under the Duterte-Trump Administrations is expected.

### **Promoting an Enduring Alliance under the Duterte-Trump Administrations**

Although the Philippines-U.S. security relations is expected to continue under the Duterte-Trump Administrations, an analysis of the current security concerns of both countries would, nonetheless, reveal political and military challenges to the Alliance. Politically, the relations of both countries with China may constrain the conduct of large scale joint military exercises. On the part of the Philippines, the hedging approach of President Duterte may place any military activity that relates to the SCS and WPS in policy backburner.

For instance, aside from ordering the halt of the sandbar construction near Pag-asa Island, it had earlier been reported that President Duterte expressed that he will not declare war with China over a Sandbar.<sup>32</sup> As noted above, the improvement of Philippines-China relations is predicated upon the economic and development considerations of the Duterte Administration. Historically, however, the use of economic statecraft has been a major element in China's foreign policy in the Asia Pacific. Hence, it is possible that China's trade, investment, and infrastructure initiatives in the Philippines may be used in the future as a political leverage in the SCS and WPS disputes. Citing the WPS sandbar construction as an example, it must be understood that more than the threat of an actual war with China—an imprudent medium-term policy for Beijing in view of the notable gap in U.S. and China military capabilities—the risk of straining Philippines-China (economic) relations might have prompted President Duterte to order the halt of the sandbar construction.

On the other hand, it must be noted that China is central to the Trump Administration's Asia Policy. This policy, which is primarily focused on addressing the nuclear threat posed by DPRK, recognizes the role of China as a regional player in East Asia as well as its vital links with DPRK. As part of this Asia Policy, President Trump has called upon President Xi's cooperation in cutting off the supply chain that supports the survival of the Kim Regime and DPRK's economy. Using trade as an "incentive," President Trump called upon President Xi to impose stricter sanctions upon DPRK.<sup>33</sup> Given these signs of a transactional U.S. foreign policy in dealing with China, it may be prudent to assume the possibility of short-term deals between the two great powers to secure China's support in addressing the DPRK threat on the one hand and secure U.S. disengagement or ambiguity in the SCS dispute on the other.

Militarily, the resurgence of terrorism and violent extremism in Southeast Asia has revealed the vulnerabilities of small powers, such as the Philippines, to ISIS-sponsored acts of terror. Likewise, it has demonstrated how a highly urgent anti-terror military campaign such as the military response to the Siege of Marawi may shape the security agenda of the Alliance and side-line other equally important security initiatives such as external defense and maritime security cooperation. For instance, it had been reported that even before the Marawi Siege had been concluded, the AFP and AFUS have already begun their joint training on urban warfare. This urban warfare training became part of the Maritime Training Activity 2017: Sama Sama which, as its name suggests, is primarily dedicated to developing joint maritime security capabilities (e.g., anti-piracy, maritime HADR, and maritime domain awareness).<sup>34</sup> Should another major terrorist incident akin to a Marawi Siege occur, there is a possibility that Philippine-U.S. security cooperation may continue its reorientation from traditional to non-traditional security threats notwithstanding the Philippines-U.S. joint statement that notes their shared commitment to maritime security cooperation. In addressing these challenges, the Philippine Government may consider the following policy recommendations:

***Enhance Diplomatic Engagements.*** In order for the Alliance to remain robust, it must be recognized by all relevant regional actors as such, including China. It is therefore essential for both parties to project their shared commitment to the Alliance in such a way that it may be regarded as a key element of regional security. In this regard, mechanisms for defense and security

policy dialogue and military exchanges between the Allies must be maximized to highlight their shared view on the relevance of the Alliance in promoting peace, security, and stability in East Asia. As in the recent joint statement following the 7th Philippines-U.S. BSD, the shared commitment of the Allies in preserving a rules-based international order must be effectively communicated in other joint statements and unilateral policy pronouncements. Interestingly, more than underscoring a shared recognition of the freedom of navigation and overflight in the SCS under the Law of the Sea Convention, from a realist perspective, joint statements and unilateral policy pronouncements imply the shared interest of the allies in checking against China's territorial and maritime expansionism and limiting its options in seeking to alter the regional security architecture, which had been largely influenced by U.S. naval presence in the Asia Pacific.

***Diversify Platforms for Defense and Security Cooperation.*** In ensuring that military exchanges between the Philippines and the United States underscore the relevance of the Alliance in promoting security and stability in East Asia and the Asia Pacific, it must continue to facilitate a wide-range of military engagements relevant in addressing traditional and non-traditional security concerns. In this regard, the regular conduct of existing joint military exercises such as the Balikatan Exercises and PHIBLEX and recently inaugurated military exercises such as the Exercise Tempest Wind, Kamandag Exercises, and Maritime Training Activity Sama Sama must be sustained under the Duterte and Trump Administrations. To emphasize their geostrategic significance, however, the Balikatan Exercises and PHIBLEX must continue to focus on promoting interoperability between the AFP and AFUS in the areas of external defense and maritime security. Meanwhile, the new military exercises may be maximized to develop essential joint capabilities in addressing non-traditional security threats (e.g., counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, and HADR). Relatedly, the emerging need for the conduct of joint training on urban warfare may be addressed through a specialized joint exercise to further diversify military exchanges between the Allies. Furthermore, the Philippine Government may widen the area of Philippines-U.S. security cooperation by proposing new initiatives such as the institutionalization of Coast Guard-to-Coast Guard Cooperation as well as the establishment Joint Centers for Maritime Security and Cyber Security.

***Explore Viability of Defense Technology Transfer.*** Although the geostrategic value of the Philippines cannot be overstated, it must be borne in

mind that an alliance is a two-way military partnership. As effective partners, allies must be able to share military resources and complement capabilities. In promoting an enduring Philippines-U.S. Alliance, both countries must, therefore, focus on determining means by which the Alliance can provide a more substantial contribution to the modernization program of the AFP, especially with respect to the development of capabilities relevant to addressing security issues of mutual concern (e.g., maritime domain awareness). One way how the Alliance can have a more significant and long-term impact on the AFP modernization process is transferring defense technology from the AFUS to the AFP thru joint development initiatives. Although the defense industry in the U.S. is primarily led by the private sector, the AFP can nonetheless immensely benefit from the transfer of operational knowledge and technical expertise which the AFUS, specifically the U.S. Navy Office of Naval Research, has acquired thru its years of military Research and Development experience. Although such a joint initiative may take years before it can take off in view of the tedious process of negotiating its scope and terms of implementation, it shall stir the Alliance into a more sustainable direction. Through this initiative, the AFP may reach its fullest potential as an effective partner, something that is difficult to achieve by the mere transfer of excess defense articles. Moreover, the growing interest in developing the Philippine defense industry, as evidenced by the future establishment of the Philippine Government Arsenal Defense Industrial Estate, creates opportunities for exploring the viability of defense technology transfer.

## **Conclusion**

Guided by Kuik's hedging theory and Buzan and Waever's regional security complex theory, this policy brief argued that state and system-level foreign policy considerations situate the military alliance well-within the strategic interests of the Philippines and the United States. Hence, the continuation of security relations under the President Duterte and President Trump may be expected. Based on identified political and military challenges to their bilateral security cooperation, this policy brief has likewise argued that the Allies must enhance their diplomatic engagements, diversify platforms of defense and security cooperation, and explore the viability of transferring defense technology to ensure that the Alliance remains robust.

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## Notes

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