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Combined U.S./Philippine Exercises in the Age of Duterte
Sean Patrick Dynan

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the United States Naval War College Newport, RI in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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Abstract

Combined U.S./Philippine Exercises in the Age of Duterte

In September of 2016, the President of the Republic of Philippines called for the end of all US-Philippine combined exercises. Over a year later, US-Philippine exercises continue. Ties between the US military and the Armed Forces of the Philippines remain strong and have weathered the political storm. The deep ties created through a transactional relationship have ensured continued security cooperation between the two militaries. However, the Philippines' policy to seek closer ties with other nations in the region and Chinese ability to challenge the transactional approach identify a need for a new paradigm. A transformation approach through multilateral exercises can achieve US regional aims and improve US-Philippine relations. This paper explores how the current approach has resulted in strained relations and offers a long-term solution through expanding multilateral exercises.

*"I will serve notice to you now, that this will be the last military exercise."*¹

-Republic of Philippine's President Rodrigo Duterte, 28 September 2016

Introduction

Republic of Philippine's President Rodrigo Duterte's unambiguous statement ostensibly, and abruptly, ended a key facet of the long-standing relationship between United States and Philippine military forces. The month of September 2016 was, at least in terms of rhetoric, an exhausting month for Duterte and seemingly disastrous with respect to US-Philippine relations. On 5 September, Duterte referred to US President Barack Obama as a "son of a bitch" while threatening to leave the United Nations (UN).² Later that same week Duterte called for the withdrawal of all US military advisers from the island of Mindanao. Finally, concerned that US-Philippine military interaction would antagonize China while he was actively courting closer ties between Manila and Beijing, Duterte unilaterally decided to publicly cut ties between US-Philippine militaries by canceling all future exercises and suspending routine joint naval patrols.³ Although he did reaffirm that the Philippines would continue to abide by the 1951 US-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty, Duterte's drastic policy shifts were startling. The United States, in less than thirty-days, had seemingly lost several key components of its security cooperation program with the Republic of the Philippines.

Since then, very little has actually changed. Despite the rhetoric, US-Philippine military relations remain as close as ever. Although Duterte continues to provide colorful commentary

¹ Cris Larano, "Philippines Leader to End Joint Military Exercises, Naval Patrols with US President Rodrigo Duterte Wants to Avoid Upsetting China, with which He Wants Stronger Trade and Investment Ties," *Wall Street Journal (Online)* (29 Sept 2016) accessed September 30, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1824235583?accountid=322>.

² Will Worley, *Rodrigo Duterte: Philippines President Calls Barack Obama a 'Son of a Bitch'*, *Independent Digital News & Media*, 2016, (5 September 2016) accessed September 30, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1816742601?accountid=322>.

³ Larano.

that is problematic for newspaper censors, the US and Philippine militaries executed 258 of 260 originally planned exercises in 2017. Of the two that were canceled, one was replaced with a new exercise.⁴ Duterte did, however, enact changes to the size and focus of the exercises. Exercise Balikatan, the largest-combined exercise between the two nations, was cut from 11,000 to 5,500 participants and live fire exercises were replaced with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief drills.⁵ Even with alterations to exercise design, from the perspective of US Pacific Command (PACOM), many key factors remain unchanged.

PACOM support of continued US-Philippine exercises remains a key component of the military relationship, because it ensures interoperability, demonstrates US resolve in mutual defense, and strengthens ties between the two militaries. In light of political uncertainty, US-Philippine military relations remain a stalwart of continuity amongst the confusing and forceful rhetoric. Both the US military and the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) ability to retain close relations demonstrates the value combined exercises provide to PACOM. Considering last year's political kerfuffle, the prestige of US-Philippine combined exercises has increased and a renewed emphasis and approach to US/AFP combined exercises must be considered. As a key component of sustained US-Philippines relations, PACOM should expand the multilateral exercise program to improve regional stability.

⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran, "US, Philippines Launch New Military Exercise." *The Diplomat* (2 October 2017) accessed October 7, 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1945180566?accountid=322>.

⁵ "Military Exercises Downgraded to Pouring Concrete." 2017. *The Press*, B.3. (10 May 2017) accessed on 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1896550936?accountid=322>

Transactional vs Transformational Approach

A November 2016 report published by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) noted an on-going debate “whether US security assistance programs are primarily intended to be transformational – to improve a country’s self-defense capability – or rather primarily to be transactional – to improve US regional access by way of that country.”⁶ Evidence suggests that the US investment in the Philippines has been for transactional benefits, culminating in the mutually beneficial Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The EDCA significantly improves US access to the region through the use of five Philippine military installations. The transactional approach has resulted in AFP reliance on US support through security cooperation and assistance that ensures, in the short term, a continuation of US influence and interaction with the AFP. However, evolving threats to the Philippines and region require a shift to the transformational approach for long term assurance of regional stability. Comments made by senior US officials, objectives outlined in official documents, and actions taken by several US military commands demonstrate a minor shift toward a transformational approach. The US/AFP combined exercise program is a crucial enabler in the transactional approach and has an even larger role in implementing the transformational approach.

The Old Paradigm: The Transactional Approach

The transactional approach answers the question: Why have US/AFP combined exercises continued after Duterte’s comments in 2016? The annual exercise program is vast and only one part of a large security cooperation apparatus between the two nations. The significant US resources allocated to support the Philippines are designed to accomplish the first goal of the US

⁶ Mira Rapp-Hooper, Patrick M. Cronin, Harry Krejsa, and Hannah Suh, *Counterbalance: Red Teaming the Rebalance in the Asia-Pacific*. (Washington, Washington: Center for a New American Security, Nov 14, 2016): 27.

Department of State (DOS) East Asia and the Pacific Joint Regional Strategy, which reads:

“America has credibility as the primary security guarantor and partner of choice in the region.”⁷

Duterte’s inability to immediately cancel US/AFP exercises is a demonstration of US success in achieving this goal. Duterte found that within the Philippine government the United States was not only the partner of choice but also a partner with significant internal influence. Abruptly ending US/AFP exercises outright was fraught with political risk. Immediately following Duterte’s comments in September 2016, the Philippine envoy to China, former Philippine President Fidel Ramos, resigned in protest. Rumors of AFP leadership concerns simultaneously reached Philippine newspapers. Although Duterte’s approval ratings remained high, open disagreement with AFP leadership would have endangered his young administration.⁸ The AFP holds significant influence in the government and, through security cooperation, the US retains significant influence in the AFP.

The benefit of combined exercises extends beyond military-to-military cooperation. The ‘strengthening ties’ bumper sticker that accompanies exercise press releases does not capture the full impact of US/AFP interaction. On average, US/AFP forces conduct over 200 combined exercises a year. The scope and scale of combined exercises ranges from small efforts to large multinational exercises. Smaller venues, like those conducted by the US National Guard in support of the State Partnership Program, are typically Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) exercises that focus on niche capabilities. Of the seventeen State Partnership Program events that occurred in 2015, only one exceeded 100 participants, with topics ranging from

⁷ US Department of State, *East Asia and the Pacific Joint Regional Strategy*, by State Department Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and USAID – Bureau for Asia, approved May 24, 2016.

⁸ Emily Rauhala, “Philippines’ Duterte Discovered this Week that His Actions have Consequences.” The Washington Post – Blogs (2 Nov 2016) accessed on 1 October 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1835257883?accountid=322>.

Humanitarian Assistance to Air Traffic Control.⁹ Larger combined exercises tend to impact thousands of AFP members, cover the range of military operations, and refine skills in multiple warfighting functions. Bilateral exercises, such as Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) and Amphibious Landing Exercises (PHIBLEX), occur on a routine basis and may occur multiple times a year. Exercise Balikatan, South East Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT), and the recently established Exercise Kamandag occur annually and include multiple nations. Exercise Balikatan has included upwards of 11,000 US/AFP members and incorporated contingents from Australia and Japan.

The US-Philippine exercise continuum is only one part of a security cooperation apparatus that includes: mentorship in counterinsurgency operations, freedom of navigation operations that support Philippine interests in the South China Sea (SCS), assistance in maritime domain awareness, military sales, forward basing of US equipment and forces, intelligence/information sharing, and US military aid. Currently, the Philippines is the third largest recipient of US military aid and the largest recipient in South East Asia.¹⁰ Of the multiple elements in security cooperation, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) is the most impactful development in recent decades. EDCA allows US forces to base on Philippine military installations. In return, the United States will upgrade base infrastructure and increase US integration and training with AFP partners.¹¹

EDCA, and other aspects of the security cooperation construct, are especially important as the AFP endeavors to modernize. The Philippine Secretary of Defense, Delfin Lorenzana,

⁹ US Department of Defense, The State Partnership Program, FY 2015 Annual Report to Congress: 45-46.

¹⁰ Sheldon Simon and Carl Baker. 2017. "Philippine Follies." *Comparative Connections* 18 (3): 41.

¹¹ Ibid, 127.

stated in July 2017 that the goal of modernization is “having credible deterrence to secure our territory.”¹² He also asserted that, contrary to Duterte’s statements, the “15-year modernization program of the AFP will continue as scheduled.”¹³ The program is currently completing the first of a three-phase modernization plan. The 2017 defense budget was 3.75 billion US dollars (USD) and is projected to increase by 5.5% annually for at least the next five years. The United States significantly enhances the Philippine defense budget and is a key benefactor of the modernization plan; it, and its allies, provided the majority of AFP equipment modernization during the first phase. Roughly 45% of Philippine defense imports are US products, with South Korea providing an additional 24%.¹⁴ The majority of equipment provided by the United States is through the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program and the Foreign Military Financing program, which provide equipment at reduced cost with US-provided funds. During Phase I, the Philippines received roughly 40 million USD annually to purchase US equipment.¹⁵ The US Embassy in Manila reports that, in the last ten years, “Joint US Military Advisory Group – Philippines (JUSMAG-PI) delivered and programmed \$147 million USD of military equipment to the AFP to enhance counterterrorism capabilities...and the US government has allocated \$300 million USD of grant funding to provide the AFP with equipment, including corresponding upgrades and training.”¹⁶ As the United States continues to provide equipment for modernization, the need for combined exercises increases. These exercises provide the necessary venue to assess and refine AFP capability in employing new equipment. Frequency,

¹² *Philippines Defence & Security Report - 2017*. 2017. London, United Kingdom, London: Business Monitor International (September 2017): 19.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John Grevatt, "Turning Point Philippine Country Briefing," *Jane's Online* (Dec 13, 2016) accessed on 30 September 2017: 6. <http://janes.ihs.com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/jdw64037-jdw-2017>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Prashanth Parameswaran, "US Terror Aid to Philippines Signals Enduring Defense Ties Under Duterte." *The Diplomat* (June 7, 2016) accessed on 1 October 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1938520351?accountid=322>.

quality, and consistency of engagements are paramount to ensure the AFP is capable of operating and maintaining its modernized capability.

Although effective, the transactional approach comes at a cost. Disruption or degradation of US support would result in a complete failure of the approach. Once the United States commits to specific monetary aid or military support, the Philippines expects payments to continue as a part of the transactional agreement. Last December, the US Millennium Challenge Corporation announced that it would defer a vote to renew a 434 million USD grant for developmental assistance due to concerns of human rights violations. Duterte's response to the possible loss of US aid was in-line with a transactional view: "prepare to leave the Philippines, prepare for the eventual repeal or the abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement."¹⁷ Should the United States seek to maintain close ties with the AFP, US assistance must remain constant as part of the transactional approach. The price is steep and will only increase with time.

The New Paradigm: Transformational Approach

Shifting to a transformational approach is a long-term solution to maintaining regional stability. Influencing an expansion of combined exercises to become multilateral will increase AFP engagement with other regional partners. Increased engagement among regional partners is a cost-effective method that ties them together and translates to multilateral operations that tackle regional issues. The result is increased interoperability in the region and less reliance on the current transactional relationship. The United States would maintain its supporting role, but in the long term, the Philippines gains Duterte's sought-after perception of political independence from the United States without having to rely on China.

¹⁷ "Philippine Follies": 130.

A capable, independent, and regionally-engaged AFP supports US interests. A modernized AFP capable of managing internal threats and that is interoperable with regional partners would improve regional stability. Current events in the Philippines demonstrate the requirement for a regionally integrated AFP. Two current and critical security issues have implications that extend beyond Philippine borders. The possible consequences of its on-going counter insurgency campaign on Mindanao and the country's ability to protect its maritime rights could shape future of the region.

Recent Islamic State activity on Mindanao has gained the attention of nations throughout the region. In May 2017, Philippine Solicitor-General Jose Calida stated that, "What's happening in Mindanao is no longer a rebellion of Filipino citizens. It has transmogrified into an invasion by foreign terrorists who heeded the clarion call of the Islamic State to go to the Philippines..."¹⁸ Admiral Harris, PACOM Commander, stated that this is a regional issue, calling Marawi "a wake-up call for every nation in the Indo-Asia Pacific."¹⁹ Countries throughout the region have heeded Calida and Harris' warnings and have responded with support to counter-insurgency efforts and calls for closer coordination throughout the region.²⁰

In July of 2016, the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favor of the Philippines' challenge to People's Republic of China (PRC) claims in the SCS. Seeking to establish control over the SCS, the PRC claims the area within its "nine-dash line" as sovereign territory, to

¹⁸ Lindsay Murdoch, "Bodies of Foreign Fighters Fuel Islamic State Fears," *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 May 2017) accessed on 7 October 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1903101141?accountid=322>.

¹⁹ Rob Taylor, "Jihadists are Seeking Beachheads in Asia, US Admiral Warns; Adm. Harry Harris Says Philippines' Battle with Islamic State-Linked Insurgents should be Wake-Up Call for Region," *Wall Street Journal (Online)* (28 June 2017) accessed on 7 October 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1914090202?accountid=322>.

²⁰ Rob Taylor and Rachel Pannett, "Australia Joins Philippines' Fight Against Islamic State-Linked Militants; Two Patrol Planes Will Back Philippine Troops Fighting Muslim Extremists on the Southern Island of Mindanao," *Wall Street Journal (Online)* (23 June 2017) accessed on 7 October 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1912562192?accountid=322>.

include the contested Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoals. Several of these islands fall within the Philippine Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ). These excessive claims impact the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Vietnam.²¹ Although legal legitimacy officially lies with the Philippines, the AFP is unable to militarily enforce the ruling. Since the decision, the region, and larger global community, has observed with keen interest both the PRC and Philippine response. Continued PRC enforcement of claims and further expansion of artificial islands is a repudiation of international law and the system of rules that govern the interaction between states. Philippine acquiescence to PRC claims would upset the status quo and shape the actions of other nations impacted by PRC ambitions. Alternatively, resistance to PRC activity could significantly increase tension in the region, leading to limited or possible regional conflict.

US Secretary of Defense James Mattis has provided a clear US position on both threats and the need for regional cooperation to counter them. On 3 June 2017, Mattis stated, “We oppose countries militarizing artificial islands and enforcing excessive maritime claims unsupported by international law. We cannot and will not accept unilateral coercive changes to the status quo.”²² At the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) Defense Minister Meeting-Plus on 23 October 2017, Mattis called for increased regional cooperation on countering both Islamic State activity in Southeast Asia and common maritime security challenges. Secretary Mattis’ comments specifically cited US desire to increase the scope and complexity of combined exercises and are a direct reflection of changing US objectives associated with US/AFP combined exercises and security cooperation.²³

²¹ *Philippines Defence & Security Report - 2017*: 19.

²² "Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis Remarks at Shangri-La Dialogue." *Political Transcript Wire*. June 2017.

²³ US Department of Defense, *Readout of Secretary Mattis' Meeting with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte Press Operations*, Release No: NR-368-17 (Oct. 25, 2017)

Per the Country Security Cooperation Plan (CSCP) established by JUSMAG, all combined exercises support four lines of effort focused on increased AFP capability. In priority order, they are: “develop and enhance sustainable maritime security/maritime domain awareness and territorial defense capability; sustain and enhance counterterrorism capabilities to keep pace with counter security challenges; enhance ability to conduct all hazards response and develop regional response capability; and support to global peace keeping operations.”²⁴ JUSMAG’s lines of effort support DOS guidance in the 2016 Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), specifically Mission Goal One which calls for “improved territorial defense capability... peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes...reduced threat of terrorism, and improved internal peace and stability in conflict affected areas.”²⁵ As a subset of this goal, the ICS calls for a “25% increase in the number of military-to-military engagements with non-US partners (excluding Russia and the People’s Republic of China) and increased Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) capability demonstrated during major exercises such as Exercise Balikatan.”²⁶ Both the CSCP and ICS integrate military exercises as a key component in the larger security cooperation apparatus shared between the two nations.

In comparison to regional intergovernmental organizations like ASEAN, PACOM has the necessary experience and regional ties to conduct exercise coordination. PACOM is the ideal organization to influence and implement a multilateral approach to exercises across the region. US security relations in the Asia-Pacific have historically followed a “hub-and-spoke” methodology, with the United States acting as the hub through a mutual defense treaty and each with an individual nation creating the spoke. With the United States as their only defense treaty

²⁴ US Department of Defense, *Philippines: Country Security Cooperation Plan* powerpoint brief. Colonel Ernest Lee, SDO/DATT and Chief JUSMAG Philippines (03 November 2016)

²⁵ US Department of State, 2016 Integrated Country Strategy, Philippines (10 January 2017): 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

ally, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Thailand share the same ‘spoke’ relationship with the United States as the Philippines.²⁷ Multilateral combined exercises can alter this hub-and-spoke relationship and create a more effective and efficient web of interoperable regional militaries to support common interests. As the architect of this web, PACOM maintains regional influence and gains efficiencies with regional partners who can operate together and act in defense of the status quo, with or without US support.

The reshaping of bilateral exercises into multilateral ones has already begun. Balikatan 2013, with roughly 5,500 participants, witnessed its change from bilateral to multilateral with the inclusion of Australian forces.²⁸ Following initial expansion, participant numbers rapidly ballooned to 11,000 in 2015 and 2016 and incorporated Japanese forces.²⁹ Duterte’s policy shift curtailed the size of the exercise to 5,500 participants in 2017, but it remained multilateral.³⁰ In addition to Balikatan, Seventh Fleet has taken significant steps to expand other exercises and shift historically bilateral engagements to multilateral exercises. In 2016, SEACAT included “the navies of Bangladesh, Cambodia, and the coast guards of the Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia for the first time.”³¹ The bilateral CARAT exercise recently changed to a Targeted Multilateral CARAT that seeks to integrate multiple navies in each iteration. Seventh Fleet emphasis on multilateral engagements is designed to “advance US maritime security cooperation

²⁷ *Counterbalance: Red Teaming the Rebalance in the Asia-Pacific*: 27.

²⁸ Johnny C. Nunez, "Albay Hosts Balikatan 2014," *The Philippines News Agency* (3 April 2014), accessed on 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1515602613?accountid=322>.

²⁹ "Philippines/United States/China: Philippine, US Open Joint Military Exercises Amid China Concerns." *Asia News Monitor* (23 April 2015), accessed on 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1674713944?accountid=322>

³⁰ Amanda Hodge, *Duterte Winds Back US, Allies Military Exercise*, *The Australian* (9 May 2017), accessed on 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1896080089?accountid=322>

³¹ John F. Bradford, USN and Greg R. Adams USN. *Beyond Bilateralism: Exercising a Maritime Security Network in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu, United States, Honolulu: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Vol. 16, Iss. 11, (Jun 2016), accessed on 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1814345213?accountid=322>

from its outdated hubs-and-spokes legacy to a model of networked cooperation...(that) solidify the foundations of a principled maritime security community in Southeast Asia.”³²

Networking the AFP to regional partners through combined exercises is the transformative approach. Inviting all, or most, regional partners to combined exercises would yield benefits. However, by prioritizing specific partners to operate with the AFP, the United States can achieve targeted aims. Influencing regional partners that share US interests to participate in or in some cases lead, combined exercises ensures that US interests are represented even when US forces do not participate. In *Networking Asian Security*, CNAS provides a compelling argument for Japan and Australia to be the cornerstone of such arrangements. Identifying the need for “nodes around which a security network may converge,” CNAS argues that their regional influence, geographic position, military capability, and highly functional democratic systems make them ideal candidates to act as Asia Pacific nodes.³³ The CNAS’ logic is further bolstered when placed in the Philippine context. Considering the relationship already established through Exercise Balikatan and Duterte’s desire to increase cooperation with both nations, PACOM may seek to further influence Japanese and Australian interaction with the AFP. Regardless of which nation is targeted by PACOM to establish a security node, the significant step is to recognize the requirement and establish a process to create the nodes.

Counterarguments

Duterte has stated on numerous occasions that he does not desire to maintain close ties with the United States. He has clearly articulated that US/AFP combined exercises are to end,

³² Ibid.

³³ Richard Fontaine, Patrick M. Cronin, and Mira Rapp-Hooper and Harry Krejsa. *Networking Asian Security*. (Washington, United States, Washington: Center for a New American Security, 19 June 2017): 2.

not expand. Operational costs of the ongoing insurgency on Mindanao, the requirement for military modernization, the need for a partner to help deter PRC actions in the SCS, and the AFP's sunk cost in US military equipment and training make a wholesale shift away from the United States unfeasible. The Philippines has one of the smallest defense budgets in the region and is only through one phase of its three-phase military modernization, of which the United States is the key supplier. It requires a patron who will support its security needs and, for the near future, that patron is the United States. Nevertheless, Duterte can curtail the frequency, scope, and scale of exercises as he slowly severs the link between the United States and the AFP. A US shift to a multilateral exercise program mitigates Duterte's desire to reduce the number of major US/AFP exercises. By incorporating other regional militaries, US/AFP interaction becomes more politically feasible to Duterte by meeting his administration's stated aim of increasing cooperation with other partners. This idea was proven in early 2017 when Duterte sought to cancel Exercise Balikatan but decided to retain the exercise based on its multilateral character.³⁴

Increased cooperation among regional partners risks loss of US influence in the region. In the case of the Philippines, increased multilateral exercises and the associated involvement of other regional actors results in less reliance on the United States in the long term and may lessen US influence within the AFP, which provides an opportunity for actors with an agenda at odds with the United States to gain a foothold. Plainly stated, the concern is that increased multilateral opportunities with regional partners may lead to PRC/AFP exercise engagement and greater PRC influence. Based on Duterte's past actions and rhetoric, PRC and AFP combined exercises are an eventuality, regardless of US influence. The idea that PRC interaction with the

³⁴ Hodge.

AFP negatively impacts regional stability is flawed. It is important to view interaction between these two countries as simply a weaker country seeking interaction to resolve territorial disputes with a more powerful neighbor. Increased cooperation between two states involved in territorial disputes is not unheard of and should be considered favorable in maintaining the status quo.³⁵ Given the choice between increased cooperation between the PRC and Philippines or conflict over claims in the SCS; increased cooperation between two regional partners is more in-line with US goals.

It is possible that increased regional multilateral exercises, led by the United States, may heighten regional tensions; the PRC will continue to challenge the status quo established under US leadership. Recognizing the value of combined exercises, the PRC seeks to expand interaction between its military and the militaries of other countries in the region. As a metric of influence, combined exercises have become a regional contest between the United States and PRC. The cancellation of the US/Cambodia bilateral exercise, Angkor Sentinel, in January 2017, was blamed on PRC influence. The media reported that Singapore's recent announcement of support for joint China-ASEAN naval exercises as the equivalent of giving the US "the cold shoulder."³⁶ With respect to military interaction, the perception of "us or them" is counter to US aims in the region. Expanding the US/AFP multilateral exercise program should not be done as part of a containment narrative, but instead as a method to deter undesirable behavior on the part

³⁵ Wiegand, Krista E. and Emilia Justynia Powell. 2011. "Unexpected Companions: Bilateral Cooperation between States Involved in Territorial Disputes." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28 (3): 209-229. The article states "the Sino-Russian border dispute, resolved in 2008, the border dispute between Ecuador and Peru, resolved in 1998 and the Croatian-Slovenian border dispute which is very close to settlement—and ongoing bilateral exercises between Argentina-UK demonstrate that it is not unique (for nations to conduct exercises) and that cooperation on other bilateral issues plays a critical role in influencing territorial dispute settlement attempts."

³⁶ Erin Cook, *Mattis Front and Centre at ASEAN Defence Talks*, Real Clear Defense (26 October 2017) accessed on 26 October 2017.
https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/10/26/mattis_front_and_centre_at_asean_defence_talks_112538.html

of a regional actor.³⁷ Empowering other actors, such as the Philippines, to coordinate action and diplomacy through familiar ties built during multilateral exercises enables regional stability.

Conclusion and recommendations

Events, and political necessity, have forced Duterte to recognize that the United States and Philippines are inextricably linked. His rhetoric has softened as a result. In April of 2017, Duterte publicly reaffirmed that the United States is “the Philippines’ only defense treaty ally” and spoke of improving relations between the two countries.³⁸ Following the Battle of Marawi in July, Duterte recognized and thanked US support during the operation.³⁹ It should be noted that Duterte’s inflammatory rhetoric is in-line with behavior associated with a transactional relationship. PACOM should expect outlandish remarks in the future when Duterte perceives the US is not providing monetary, military, or political support.

PACOM’s future objectives for the US/AFP exercise continuum should be two-fold. First, PACOM needs to sustain the number of US-Philippine interactions to retain support for EDCA and provide support for the AFP modernization and counter-insurgency efforts. The transactional method must continue until the transformational approach gains momentum. Second, the United States needs to support and shape an increase in AFP interaction with the other Asia Pacific militaries across the region. By influencing and enabling designated countries to interact with the Philippines through combined exercises, the United States establishes nodes

³⁷ *Networking Asian Security*: 2.

³⁸ Seth Robson. "US-Philippines Relations on an Uptick Ahead of Annual Balikatan Drills." TCA Regional News, (24 April 2017) accessed 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1891498548?accountid=322>.

³⁹ "Philippines: Duterte Acknowledges US, China Aid in Marawi Siege." *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, (16 July 2017) accessed 7 October 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1919205719?accountid=322>.

of interoperability that support its interests for the long term. The next iteration of the US Joint Regional Strategy, the CSCP and ICP Guidance should focus on the transformational approach and prioritize multilateral exercises. The first goal of the Joint Regional Strategy should change to reflect how US desires to network regional actors through multilateral engagements.

Duterte's words and diplomatic actions require reframing the US approach to US/AFP interaction. A transactional approach only assures influence if monetary support continues and remains unchallenged by a more charitable patron. In an area of growing PRC influence and economic power, the US transactional approach is a critical vulnerability that the PRC has sought to exploit in order to degrade US influence. The PRC invalidated the continuation of a US transactional approach with the Philippines in October 2016 when they offered 24 Billion USD in aid and increased economic interaction.⁴⁰

PACOM's shift to multilateral exercises and a transformational approach will enable continued US access to the Philippines and support regional stability. Unlike the PRC, conditions are still favorable to the United States in the region as it is not engaged in territorial disputes with the Philippines or its neighbors. The United States maintains mutual defense treaties with the Philippines and four other regional allies. Shaping interaction and interoperability through multilateral exercises provides a venue for PACOM to move beyond the "hub-and-spoke" methodology of influence. Creating "spoke-to-spoke" interoperability and engagement creates efficiencies, increases the influence of regional actors that share US interests, and is in-line with Duterte's stated goals. Although the original transactional approach of the United States allowed for this favorable relationship to exist, it is clear that moving toward

⁴⁰ "South-East Asia/US: Post-Manila Pivot may be Coming." 2016c. *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service*, 1. (4 November 2016), Accessed on 30 September 2017. <https://search-proquest-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/docview/1836003469?accountid=322>

a more transformational approach will allow favored US status to continue into an uncertain future. The route to best maintain the regional status quo, and ensure US continued influence in the region, is for PACOM to immediately shift and expand its US/AFP combined exercise plan to a transformational approach through increased multilateral exercises.

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