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Bridging the Gap:
How PACOM and the Philippine Air Force can leverage
the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA)
to meet Strategic Needs in 21st Century Southeast Asia

Gary Marlowe

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

During the 2011-2012 period, the Philippines did not possess a military capability to respond to China's aggressive acts toward its ships within its Exclusive Economic Zone during China's overt incursion on the Scarborough Shoal. This was the result of decades of deliberate focus on counter-insurgency and internal defense by the Philippine military. The Philippine Air Force was forced to neglect and then eliminate existing external defense capabilities. Recognizing the need for credible external defense, the Philippines signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the United States in 2014. This paper examines how US Pacific Command, as the United States' lead military organization for the Philippines, can enhance cooperation with the Philippine Air Force towards three ends: strengthen an ally militarily, increase regional security, and provide the United States with basing opportunities for potential security challenges in Southeast Asia. It also examines counter-arguments to the enhanced US-Philippine security partnership and provides recommendations for future actions.

Introduction

On March 2, 2011, a Philippine commercial ship was harassed by two Chinese patrol boats in an area referred to as the South China Sea or the West Philippine Sea. The incident occurred well within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).¹ Multiple Chinese incursions into the Philippine EEZ subsequently ensued, culminating with China's sovereignty claims over the Scarborough Shoal in 2012. From April 9 to June 18, 2012, the situation developed into a tense standoff between the two nations as Philippine ships were harassed by Chinese commercial and civilian vessels.²

This followed an established pattern where China exerts influence over weaker neighbors through means just short of conflict, shifting the onus for any military response to the other party should they object to China's actions.³ As Manila considered a response, it understood that its military options were limited. Through deliberate decisions across more than two decades, the Philippines reduced its portfolio of military capabilities to the point that it could not provide for its own external defense or the defense of its economic interests. As Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario noted in May 2012, "It is terribly painful to hear the international media accurately describing the poor state of the Philippine armed forces. But more painful is the fact that it is true, and we only have ourselves to blame for it."⁴

The lack of external defense capabilities was the result of an exclusive focus by the government and military on internal defense and counter-insurgency beginning in the 1990s. A 2005 Department of National Defense document justified this thinking by stating there

¹ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA): The Philippines' Policy in Facilitating the Obama Administration's Strategic Pivot to Asia." *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 26, no 4 (2014): 427.

² *Ibid.*, 428.

³ Raul Pedrozo, "The Bull in the China Shop and Rising Tensions in the Asia Pacific Region," Naval War College, International Law Studies, 90 INT'L L, STUD 66 (2014), 67.

⁴ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 437.

were no “immediate external security threats.”⁵ This internal defense strategy diverted funding from existing external defense capabilities in the Philippine Air Force (PAF) towards land-centric, counter-insurgency platforms. As a result, the PAF could no longer sustain a full-spectrum defense capability, which was a remarkable state of affairs for an Air Force that had been considered the best in Southeast Asia in the 1960s.⁶ In 2005, the PAF retired its last fighter squadron of F-5s, decommissioned its air defense organization, and emphasized close air support platforms such as the OV-10 and UH-1H helicopter.⁷

By 2010 many government and military officials recognized this strategy’s significant risks and called for reform. The 2010 Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Internal Peace and Security Plan and its Long-Term Capability Development Plan both acknowledged the absence of external defense capability, called for an external maritime focus, requested urgent upgrading to military equipment, and set a development timeline for these capabilities.⁸ The PAF’s Flight Plan 2028 (FP28) called for 4th generation multi-role fighters and maritime situational awareness capabilities.⁹

By December 2012 following the Scarborough Shoal incident, the Philippine legislature increased military funding authorizations by USD 1.5 billion over five years to reclaim forfeited capability.¹⁰ Much more will be required in funding, training, and expertise for the AFP to regain an external defense credibility. The legislature’s action in 2012 revealed that while the nation has acknowledged the need for external defense, it does not possess the resources required to autonomously fund, generate, or sustain defense in the near

⁵ Renato Cruz De Castro and Walter Lohman, “Getting the Philippines Air Force Flying again: The Role of the U.S.-Philippines Alliance”: The Heritage Foundation (2012), 3-4.

⁶ De Castro and Lohman, “Getting the Philippines Air Force Flying again,” 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ De Castro, “The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement,” 430-431.

⁹ Jon Grevatt, “ADAS 2016: Philippine Air Force Outlines Procurement Priorities.” *Jane's Defence Industry*, Nov 1, 2016.

¹⁰ De Castro, “The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement,” 431.

term. Thus, the Philippines must partner with other nation-states and utilize alliance frameworks to its advantage. Consequently, the Philippines strengthened its military alliance with the United States through the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).¹¹ EDCA provides a strategic opportunity for both nations. As the US military organization with responsibility for the Philippines and the Pacific region, US Pacific Command (PACOM) must leverage EDCA to assist the PAF develop a credible external defense capability. Enhanced cooperation with the PAF will strengthen an ally militarily, increase regional security, and provide the United States with basing opportunities for potential security challenges, including a revisionist China.

This paper explores how PACOM cooperation with the PAF through the EDCA framework can achieve the strategic objectives of both countries. It also examines counter-arguments to the enhanced US-Philippine military partnership and provides recommendations for future actions.

Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement

The United States and Philippines signed EDCA on April 28, 2014.¹² It builds on existing agreements between the two countries, primarily the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).¹³ The EDCA framework is a 10-year commitment between the countries that strengthens military relationships and allows for the rotational presence of US planes, ships and troops at designated bases. Significantly, it does not allow permanent US basing, which was codified in the Philippine Constitution after the United States departed Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Station twenty-five years ago.¹⁴ Instead, EDCA designates five mutually

¹¹ Aileen S. P. Baviera, "Implications of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement." *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, 262 (2014): 1.

¹² De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 440.

¹³ Baviera, "Implications of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 1.

¹⁴ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 428.

agreed-upon bases that house the US presence: Antonio Bautista Air Base (Palawan); Basa Air Base (Luzon); Fort Magsaysay (Luzon); Lumbia Air Base (Mindanao); and Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base (Cebu).¹⁵ The EDCA represents a significant US investment through pledged resources and infrastructure upgrades; it increases annual aid from USD 30 million to 50 million.¹⁶ PACOM's active involvement can help direct this funding to requirements that maximize PAF capabilities.

PACOM: Strengthen an Ally Militarily

By utilizing EDCA, PACOM can improve PAF's external defense capabilities and strengthen the Philippines militarily. Even as EDCA was being drafted, then-PACOM Commander, Admiral Locklear, stated PACOM's top priority was to "strengthen and advance alliances and partnerships."¹⁷ For PACOM to assist the PAF, it is necessary to understand its current state and future strategy. The PAF Roadmap and FP28 planning documents feature the objective of credible external defense.¹⁸ The strategy calls for the acquisition of enhanced early warning, increased situational awareness and command and control, and multi-role 4th generation fighter capabilities.¹⁹ FP28 establishes three phases of development or "horizons."²⁰ In the first phase, PAF acquired 12 FA-50 lead-in trainer/fighter aircraft from South Korea with the last deliveries in 2017.²¹ While PAF has expressed an interest in acquiring 36 more FA-50s, it is now focused on the Second Horizon

¹⁵ De Castro, "'Abstract of the Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA (Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement): Projecting American Airpower into the Dragon's Lair.'" *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 28, no. 4 (December 2016): 486.

¹⁶ Sheldon Simon, "US-Southeast Asia Relations: Philippines - an Exemplar of the US Rebalance," *Comparative Connections* 15 (2013): 51.

¹⁷ "Locklear: PACOM's Priorities Reflect New Strategic Guidance," *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, May 21, 2012.

¹⁸ Grevatt, "ADAS 2016," 1.

¹⁹ De Castro, "The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA," 491-492.

²⁰ "Philippines: Fine-Tuning of Equipment for Second Horizon Now Ongoing -- Lorenzana." *Asia News Monitor*, Mar 10, 2017.

²¹ Grevatt, "ADAS 2016," Nov 1, 2016.

(2018-2022) to acquire increased fighter capabilities over the lead-in fighter/trainer platform that the FA-50 represents..²²

Because PAF's ambitions will likely be constrained by underfunding and limited resources, cost is a major consideration for platform acquisition and sustainment. Both the Chinese and Russians are eager to provide weapons sales to the PAF and have offered up to USD 500 million in soft loans..²³ Sweden is also offering Saab JAS-39 Gripen as an economical multi-role fighter..²⁴ Thus, the United States should not assume it is the preferred provider for future PAF weapons systems. PACOM can make an immediate impact on PAF capability planning as it helps to navigate the labyrinthine US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) process to secure US weapons platforms and equipment. Colonel Stephen Smith, PACOM regional operations director, stated the value of FMS to the US-Philippine alliance, which provides the PACOM commander "a means to build partner capacity and...establish enduring relationships through training on U.S. common equipment."²⁵ EDCA training rotations can be planned to support FMS acquisitions. As Col Smith further noted, "these FMS cases are long-term commitments, and our goal is not delivering equipment, but providing a capability and building relationships."²⁶

An FMS misnomer is that the purchase process must be a one-time order for specific equipment in what is termed a traditional defined order transaction. However, FMS may also utilize blanket orders, where a certain amount of money is apportioned to FMS activities. This "checking account" can extend beyond fiscal year timelines. The major advantage of

²² Ibid.

²³ "Philippines: Fine-Tuning of Equipment for Second Horizon," Mar 10, 2017.

²⁴ Grevatt, "ADAS 2016," Nov 1, 2016.

²⁵ Kim C. Gillespie, "Security Assistance Enterprise Engages Pacific Partners," *Lanham: Federal Information & News Dispatch, Inc*, Apr 2, 2013.

²⁶ Ibid.

blanket orders is flexibility. An FMS blanket order would provide the PAF and policy makers the ability to plan for and modify requests across future years. Equally important, FMS blanket orders can effectively allocate and protect sources of military funding.²⁷

PACOM should strengthen the PAF through US FMS funding in two ways. First, it should help secure PAF funding as a designated portion of increased US EDCA investments through the blanket order process. Second, PACOM's Security Assistance Center should serve as the office of primary responsibility to assist the PAF navigate the FMS process. There are a myriad of US agencies that have a role in FMS. The Department of State ultimately approves FMS sales.²⁸ Many other agencies contribute organizational expertise and require coordination. For the PAF, these include the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA)²⁹; the Office of International Affairs Pacific Division (IARP) of the Undersecretary of the Air Force for International Affairs (SAF/IA)³⁰; the US ambassador, defense attaché and country team; and the US-Philippine Mutual Defense Board and Security Engagement Board – consultant bodies that “oversee defense posture against external threats.”³¹

PACOM should assist PAF efforts by aligning future US rotations and training exercises to support those needs. PACOM can identify and request capabilities as it plans for the next five years within its Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) Plan. PACOM's active

²⁷ Bob Van Horn, "Using Foreign Military Sales to Support Military-to-Military Cooperation." *DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management* 29 (2007), 149.

²⁸ Gregory J. Dyekman, "Security Cooperation: A Key to the Challenges of the 21st Century." Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute (2007), 7.

²⁹ "DSCA – Who We Are," <http://www.dsca.mil/about-us/overview>

³⁰ William D. Anderson and Kenneth T. Cushing, "Security Cooperation with the Pacific," *The DISAM Journal*, 28, no 1 (Fall 2005), 33.

³¹ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 432.

partnering with the PAF in FMS activities and training exercises will be a catalyst that accelerates the PAF's development of credible external defense capabilities.

PACOM: Increase Regional Security

PACOM must also utilize EDCA to cooperate with the PAF and increase regional security in the near-term. PACOM's objective to strengthen an ally militarily yields future capabilities as suggested in the PAF FP28 timelines.³² PACOM can directly influence current regional security through EDCA's provisions for increased US presence. Existing PAF and Armed Forces Philippines (AFP) capabilities are dependent on the United States. The AFP Office of the Plans and Program (J-5) *Strategic Direction of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) International Military Affairs* states: "the alliance with the U.S. serves as the Philippines' principal deterrence against any external threats."³³ Such is the case for now and the foreseeable future. Even as PACOM helps the PAF develop a credible defense capability for the future, its current presence directly improves regional security.

EDCA builds on the 1951 MDT. One of the MDT's stated purposes was to ensure that "no potential aggressor could be under the illusion that either [the U.S. or Philippines] stands alone."³⁴ When President Obama visited the Philippines shortly after EDCA was signed, he reinforced that US-Philippine defense commitments are "ironclad."³⁵ PACOM's presence influences the perception of regional players that it will not tolerate destabilizing actions towards the Philippines. This increases regional security as it reassures allies and deters potential adversaries. PACOM supports existing treaty language and diplomatic statements through presence and action. Whereas EDCA provides for immediate force

³² "Philippines: Fine-Tuning of Equipment for Second Horizon," Mar 10, 2017.

³³ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 438.

³⁴ Baviera, "Implications of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

rotations to the Philippines, PACOM must immediately and continuously take advantage of this opportunity. The presence of US naval and air forces in the Philippines serves as a counter-weight to Chinese aggression and signals that incursions into the Philippine EEZ such as occurred in 2011-2012 will have ramifications.

It was perhaps not mere coincidence that on April 19, 2016, the first mission of the first US Air Force EDCA rotation of 200 people and eight airplanes was a fly-by of four A-10C attack fighters over the Scarborough Shoal.³⁶ This mission sent an unmistakable signal to allies and potential adversaries and affirmed to the Philippines the deterrent value of US forces.³⁷ Political scientist Dr. Stephen Walt argues that this allowed the Philippines to follow a balancing strategy (aligning with the United States against Chinese aggression) rather than submit to a bandwagon strategy of acquiescence to Chinese incursions.³⁸

PACOM's Philippine presence through EDCA has effects well beyond strengthening the PAF. Effective PACOM engagement through EDCA bolsters its credibility as it engages with other Southeast Asia regional partners such as Singapore and Thailand to strengthen their own bilateral agreements to further increase regional security.³⁹ Visible, positive PACOM actions that strengthen host nation militaries may also incentivize other nations such as Vietnam and Malaysia to develop bilateral agreements with the United States as well.⁴⁰ As Admiral Locklear noted, the US presence in the Pacific is the infrastructure upon which the modern security environment has been built.⁴¹ It has allowed "emerging economies and

³⁶ De Castro, "The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA," 485.

³⁷ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 438.

³⁸ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press (1987), 17-20.

³⁹ Shannon Tow, "Southeast Asia in the Sino-U.S. Strategic Balance," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 26, no 3 (2004), 438.

⁴⁰ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 440.

⁴¹ "Locklear: PACOM's Priorities Reflect New Strategic Guidance," May 21, 2012.

emerging nations to thrive”⁴² to include the Philippines. PACOM’s enhanced cooperation with the PAF through EDCA has the immediate effect of increasing regional security.

PACOM: US Basing Opportunities for Security Challenges

One of the United States’ strategic objectives in signing EDCA is increased access to Philippine bases. Throughout World War II, the central location of the Philippines was of paramount strategic importance to both Axis and Allied powers. The United States maintained a strong presence at bases in the Philippines for the next 50 years. The permanent basing of the US military in the Philippines came to an end in 1992 when the Philippines refused to renew leases at Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Station.⁴³ From the US perspective, this departure occurred in the context of an expected peace dividend and reduced military requirements at the end of the Cold War. However, the geostrategic importance of Philippine basing for US troops within the region has re-asserted itself in the twenty-first century. In any potential Chinese conflict, the use of Philippine infrastructure for lines of operation and intermediate basing is a major advantage to the United States.⁴⁴

In 2011, the United States announced its Pacific pivot strategy with a renewed focus on and interest in East Asia.⁴⁵ The strategy requires increased regional access for PACOM. EDCA enables that access. To maximize benefits from EDCA’s access to Philippine bases, PACOM must plan for how to best utilize those bases. It must maintain a continuous dialogue with the host nation and the US country team as it considers infrastructure investments. PACOM must incorporate EDCA base access into TSC package branch plans and operational plans. Philippine basing offers many advantages to PACOM planners.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ De Castro, “The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA,” 488.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ David A. Beitelman, “America’s Pacific Pivot,” *International Journal* 67, no. 4 (2012), 1086.

Beyond the baseline deterrence value of an active presence before hostilities, it complicates China's Anti-Access/Area-Denial strategy with forward operating bases and enables the rapid flow of troops into the region if conflict occurs or appears likely.⁴⁶ PACOM's EDCA access aligns with one of five US Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) lines of operation for power projection in the Pacific.⁴⁷

To ensure maximum utility of Philippine basing, US investment must bring the infrastructure up to US standards for operational use. The shared use of PAF facilities and increased system compatibilities engender familiarity with the area for US forces. These advantages are significant when PACOM forces are required to respond to a security concern. One FMS focus is to ensure "mutually beneficial programs...including US and coalition capability to respond to contingencies and crises."⁴⁸ These crises can take many forms; the most dangerous and destabilizing would be a state-on-state conflict with China where US basing and access may be a deterministic operational factor. The value of Philippine basing cannot be overstated in any potential combat scenario between the United States and China. Yet beyond full scale armed conflict and with history as a guide, it is likely that regional security challenges will arise through a variety of other means such as internal conflict, displacement of peoples, or natural disasters. In any humanitarian and disaster response scenario, sufficient basing and access will be essential to the desired outcome, as evidenced in November 2013, when super-typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines and decimated the country.⁴⁹ The US response, Operation Damayan, was reliant

⁴⁶ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 441.

⁴⁷ David A. Williamson, "Pacific Air Forces' Power Projection: Sustaining Peace, Prosperity, and Freedom," *Air & Space Power Journal* 29 (2015): 48.

⁴⁸ Anderson and Cushing, *Security Cooperation with the Pacific*, 33.

⁴⁹ Williamson, "Pacific Air Forces' Power Projection: Sustaining Peace, Prosperity, and Freedom," 50.

on access to and compatibility with Philippine infrastructure.⁵⁰ Thus, increased US military access to the region enhances political and diplomatic options for future crises.

Proximity to potential conflict when it develops is another operational advantage of EDCA-based force rotations. If a security challenge emerges, it is likely that PACOM planners may find the required forces “pre-stationed” in the region through a rotational presence. This enhances PACOM responsiveness to dynamic situations. Such a situation occurred when China unexpectedly announced an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) overlapping existing Japanese and South Korean ADIZs in the East China Sea. Even without warning of China’s intentions, the United States was able to reinforce its diplomatic protests with a “non-compliant” flight of US bombers through the ADIZ the very next day. This was possible because bombers were already present in PACOM on a theater security package (TSP) rotation.⁵¹ The forward presence of military units projects US power in the region and increases their deterrent value. Through enhanced cooperation with the PAF and utilization of EDCA-designated bases, PACOM will provide the United States with improved basing opportunities that optimize US responses to Chinese aggression or other regional challenges.

Counter-arguments

Strengthening the US-Philippine military alliance through PACOM’s cooperation with the PAF is not a universally-accepted position. Opponents argue that PACOM should not leverage EDCA to increase cooperation with the PAF. The first argument is that such actions will subvert Philippine sovereignty. The second is that PACOM and PAF cooperation will not increase regional security. Instead, it will lead to a US conflict with

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 52.

China. A final argument is that such cooperation will levy additional requirements on a US military that is already overcommitted around the world.

For some, PACOM's increased participation with the PAF echoes the historical colonial relationship between the two nations and threatens Philippine sovereignty. To them, EDCA addresses PACOM objectives more than Philippine concerns. Additionally, increased PACOM presence threatens the Philippine-China relationship that is of ever-increasing economic importance.⁵² Opponents argue that the Philippines should maximize its sovereignty by rejecting the EDCA construct and leveraging the US-China rivalry to maximize its value to both sides.⁵³

A second argument is that as PACOM increases cooperation with the PAF through EDCA, it will produce a more visible US presence in the Philippines. China will unmistakably view this as a containment measure to which they would respond. Opponents suggest that an arms race will develop between China and the United States for regional hegemony. PACOM's posturing will generate a self-fulfilling prophecy that brings the United States and China closer to conflict.⁵⁴ PACOM's actions set the stage for a Thucydides Trap between the two dominant regional powers.⁵⁵ Ultimately, they argue that PACOM's increased presence will heighten tensions and destabilize the region rather than increase security.⁵⁶

A final argument is means-focused and challenges the value of PACOM efforts to develop a credible external defense capability with the PAF. It is highly unlikely that the

⁵² Baviera, "Implications of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 2.

⁵³ Tow, "Southeast Asia in the Sino-U.S. Strategic Balance," 454.

⁵⁴ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 427.

⁵⁵ Chen Yue Mo Shengkai, "The U.S.-China 'Thucydides Trap': A View from Beijing," *The National Interest*, July 10, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-us-china-thucydides-trap-view-beijing-16903>.

⁵⁶ De Castro, "The 21st Century Philippine-U.S. Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 427.

PAF will ever be able to independently counter the large and advanced Chinese Air Force..⁵⁷ Modern air force capabilities are expensive, and the Philippines will always be reliant on US air power to balance the ledgers of any potential high-end, state-level warfare..⁵⁸ In that case, why should PACOM invest time and resources in developing a capability that would yield little in terms of absolute value to US core interests? Opponents argue that the required PACOM resources could be used elsewhere to greater effect.

Each of these arguments is invalidated when considered against the strategic objectives of the United States and Philippines within the context of EDCA. For PACOM to not cooperate with the PAF runs counter to the US objectives in the region. The United States is the provider of regional security in the Pacific..⁵⁹ PACOM must engage Pacific countries through alliances, partnerships and agreements like EDCA..⁶⁰ These relationships support US efforts to gain and sustain regional acceptance, influence, and legitimacy in a “rules-based order.”⁶¹

PACOM’s cooperation with the PAF will not threaten Philippine sovereignty. Once EDCA was signed, it was immediately challenged in the Philippine courts. In 2016, the Philippine Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of EDCA, stating that it did not violate the constitutional principle of sovereignty or its prohibition against permanent basing of foreign troops..⁶² In September 2016, President Duterte unilaterally announced that US Special Forces would leave the country..⁶³ While this was a backward step for the US-

⁵⁷ De Castro, “The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA,” 491-493.

⁵⁸ Tow, “Southeast Asia in the Sino-U.S. Strategic Balance,” 435.

⁵⁹ “Locklear: PACOM’s Priorities Reflect New Strategic Guidance,” May 21, 2012.

⁶⁰ Renato Cruz De Castro, “Linking Spokes Together: The Philippines’ Gambit of Harnessing the United States’ Alliances in its External Balancing Policy Against an Emergent China: Philippines’ Balancing Policy Against China.” *Pacific Focus* 29 (1: 2014), 140-166.

⁶¹ Jacqueline Espenilla, “The Rise of Defense Diplomacy in the South China Sea,” Washington: East-West Center (2016), 2.

⁶² De Castro, “The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA,” 497.

⁶³ Ibid, 502.

Philippine alliance, it should counter any fears of a US imperial posture or a Philippine loss of sovereignty. This sovereignty has been further evidenced by continued pursuit of economic interests with China even as the Philippines seeks US security assurances.⁶⁴ Because the Philippines' principal external security concern is an opportunistic China, it has chosen to align with the opposing great power.⁶⁵ EDCA is largely in response to an aggressive China and should rightly be seen as a product of sovereign Philippine decisions. Philippine and PACOM cooperation through EDCA secures the benefits of the US security umbrella and develops PAF capabilities to counter Chinese maritime incursions.

The PACOM and PAF relationship also increases regional security. PACOM provides the counterweight to aggressive regional players like China that threaten to disrupt the status quo. That the United States and China will be competitors is a combination of realpolitik, geography, and national cultures. This is generally accepted in the region.⁶⁶ Yet competition does not equate to conflict, and technological superiority (an arms race) may serve to keep the peace rather than lead to war. PACOM's support for EDCA and developing the PAF's external defense credibility do not equate to predestined conflict with China. The deterrent value of PACOM's support should be properly viewed as increasing regional security.⁶⁷

EDCA does not bind the US-Philippine alliance in such a way that either party is locked into an unalterable sequence of events on a pathway to war. When questioned if the United States would generate an automatic response to any China-Philippine crisis, the Department of State replied that because of the treaty alliance, "China cannot simply assert

⁶⁴ Tow, "Southeast Asia in the Sino-U.S. Strategic Balance," 448.

⁶⁵ Ross, "The Geography of Peace," 84-86.

⁶⁶ Ross, "The Geography of Peace," 101-108.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

that events in the disputed South China Sea are not any of Washington's business."⁶⁸

Similarly, in 2014, President Obama was careful to highlight the relationship as "ironclad" while being nonspecific about distinct territorial disputes.⁶⁹ PACOM support for EDCA does not generate pre-determined red lines or obligatory US responses.⁷⁰

PACOM cannot help the PAF develop its external defense without devoting resources to the effort. However, the value gained supports both parties' strategic objectives. The objective of PAF external defense capabilities is credibility, not autonomy. When the PAF can be aware of, investigate, and respond to territorial incursions, it will gain a greater degree of credibility. By focusing its efforts on the PAF, PACOM has identified the organization that can best rapidly transform itself from counter-insurgency to external defense. The PAF FP28 envisions an air force that can effectively provide broad area maritime surveillance, situational awareness, and rapid responsiveness.⁷¹

PACOM support to the PAF will occur through EDCA bi-lateral engagements within existing TSP rotations. EDCA support does not require a constant rotation of troops and equipment to provide continuous US presence. Instead, US forces can rotate for distinct, tailored, focused engagements as a part of larger theater rotations. The additional costs incurred by PACOM in supporting the PAF are well worth the achievable objectives.

PACOM support for the PAF is aligned with US national strategy and supports US engagement in the region. Arguments against PACOM support for EDCA misunderstand US and Philippine strategic objectives and are not supported by the observable realities of 21st Century Southeast Asia.

⁶⁸ De Castro, "The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA," 494.

⁶⁹ Baviera, "Implications of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 2.

⁷⁰ De Castro, "The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA," 487.

⁷¹ De Castro and Lohman, "Getting the Philippines Air Force Flying again," 7-8.

Conclusions and Recommendations

EDCA provides a strategic opportunity for the Philippines and the United States. As the military organization responsible for the Pacific region, PACOM must leverage the EDCA to assist the PAF develop a credible external defense capability. Enhanced cooperation with the PAF will militarily strengthen the Philippines, increase regional security, and provide the United States with basing opportunities for potential security challenges.

PACOM must implement EDCA by turning strategic intent into measurable progress. To do so, PACOM must help the PAF rapidly develop enhanced early warning, increased situational awareness, command and control, and multi-role 4th generation fighter capabilities..⁷² PACOM can best facilitate this by pursuing three lines of effort.

First, PACOM must serve as the PAF's US FMS conduit and argue for US investment to be directed toward a more capable PAF. PACOM must assist the PAF develop an effective acquisition strategy by leading coordination across the US FMS enterprise, including leveraging the maximum flexibility inherent in blanket orders and securing the actual platforms and systems necessary for external defense.

Second, PACOM must align training opportunities with future rotations to maximize PAF learning. PACOM can ensure that the PAF receives the maximum value from any FMS sales by scheduling focused training events in EDCA rotations. This will result in PAF capability gains vice simply hardware acquisitions. As the PAF acquires 4th generation fighters, PACOM should adopt the US Air Force's successful Checkered Flag training

⁷² De Castro, "The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA," 492.

approach. This program rotates tactical aviation units through host nation air bases. It increases familiarization for both sides and has proven effective in the European theater.⁷³

Finally, PACOM's EDCA rotations should be continual without being continuous. The present need does not require constant US military presence. Intervals between rotations of major weapons systems would allow PACOM to balance priorities and assuage host nation concerns. Periodic intervals support the Philippine Constitution's ban on permanent foreign troops and prepare for EDCA's future after its current ten-year term. In short, rotations should be scheduled with a duration and frequency that advances the agendas of both countries. By so doing, PACOM's actions will bring twenty-first century relevance to the PAF and strengthen the United States' relationship with its oldest ally in the Pacific.⁷⁴

⁷³ De Castro, "The Geopolitics of the Philippine-U.S. 2014 EDCA," 498.

⁷⁴ Baviera, "Implications of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," 2.

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