

PHILIPPINE-AUSTRALIA DIALOGUE

SECURITY DIMENSIONS OF
THE COMPREHENSIVE PARTNERSHIP

MARK BRYAN MANANTAN



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APPFI Research Paper RSA-2019-02



Asia Pacific
Pathways to Progress
Foundation, Inc.



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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Manantan, Mark. 2019. "Philippine-Australia Dialogue: security dimensions of a comprehensive partnership". APPFI Research Paper RSA-2019-02. Quezon City: Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation Inc.

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Design by Ariel Manuel
Text set in 11 type Minion Pro

Printed by Rex Printing Company, Inc.

Published by Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc.
with the support of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Philippines.

Executive Summary

This policy paper provides an assessment of convergent security concerns and interests between the Philippines and Australia within the framework of the Philippine-Australia Comprehensive Partnership. The insights presented in this paper reflect the views and analyses of experts who participated in the Philippine-Australia Dialogue: Security Dimensions of the Comprehensive Partnership held in Manila last June 2018. Key areas of discussions focused on regional security architecture, maritime security and cooperation, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity. The overall findings conclude that continuous dialogue between Australia and the Philippines is essential. Moving forward, track 1.5 and track 2 interactions offer opportunities for Australia and the Philippines to continuously collaborate in the formulation and evaluation of policies to address common challenges and achieve shared goals and interests.

The Philippines and Australia must enhance their maritime security cooperation through regular sharing of strategic assessments and information-sharing. As a critical party in the emerging power dynamics in the South China Sea, the Philippines' geostrategic location situated between the Pacific and Indian ocean is a viable site for launching deterrence and offensive moves should potential conflict ensue. Australia can offer assistance to enhance the Philippines' territorial defense capabilities, such as air defense and anti-submarine warfare.

During the Marawi siege, Australia extended assistance by providing reconnaissance, and intelligence support, training assistance and joint maritime patrols. There must be increased public discussion to raise awareness and support for Australia's efforts in Marawi and its history of counterterrorism cooperation with the Philippines. This must not only

reflect the state of bilateral relations but also the engagement of Australia and ASEAN in fighting terrorism.

In the area of cybersecurity, the Philippines and Australia should work together on capacity-building and training opportunities. A dedicated Track 1.5 track dialogue may be conducted to boost the collaborative relationship on cyber issues that involve not only the government but also civil society groups. Also, the Philippines could participate in regional cyber security simulations. Australia has been working with Singapore in this area. Timely information sharing is also a key area of collaboration. Such shared information will be useful given the prominence of common actors involved in persistent cyber-attacks and espionage in the Indo Pacific region.

With the immense challenges that the international rules-based order is currently facing, the Philippine-Australia security dialogue is critical. Both countries are pivotal actors in protecting and promoting the set of norms and values that underpin the rules-based order, given the longstanding history of people-to-people relationships, institutional partnerships, and their common commitment to the rule of law and democracy. These common interests and shared values are further solidified in the Comprehensive Partnership signed by both states. The Comprehensive Partnership serves as a platform to explore research collaboration and continuous dialogue in addressing converging issues and interests. The success of liberating Marawi City from the ISIS-affiliated Maute group demonstrated the value of such partnership in streamlining technical and intelligence-gathering cooperation in counterterrorism.

Aside from counterterrorism, Australia and the Philippines must focus on the growing security threats in cyber space, maritime cooperation, natural disasters, and climate change. It is therefore crucial for both U.S. allies to include these issues in their succeeding Track 1.5 dialogue engagement. Furthermore, it is also worthwhile for both states to elevate their bilateral cooperation to a strategic level. Through strategic partnership, both states could become more flexible and agile in formulating common strategies and responding to converging security threats.



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He is the founder and strategic director of Bryman media, a social impact communications firm based in the Philippines. Bryman has implemented various projects in collaboration with the European Commission in the Philippines, Commission on Human Rights, Ateneo School of Government, Civil Service Commission, Australian Aid (AusAid), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Philippine-Australia Dialogue: Security Dimensions of the Comprehensive Partnership

Mark Bryan Manantan

Introduction

The recent reconfiguration of the United States of “Asia Pacific” into the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) region” strongly reflects the growing unpredictability of the regional security environment amidst the escalating power competition between U.S., as the incumbent superpower, and a rising China. Although the Indo-Pacific is not considered a newly coined term, its recent reemergence into the forefront of the debate on international politics signals the entry of new regional players in the looming power competition in Asia.

It could be argued that the FOIP is a revitalized strategy by the U.S. to constrain, contain, or hedge against China, depending on how one sees the picture. With its own massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China seeks to connect Europe and Asia into a seamless trading route under the banner of its economic development model via an integrated infrastructure and trade pipeline. Meanwhile, FOIP according to its advocates, is intended to uphold the existing rules-based order founded on shared democratic values and commitment to the rule of law. Fundamentally, FOIP aims to counter revisionist powers seen as rewriting the status quo. It seeks to extend ‘Asia’ up to South Asia in the Indian Ocean by including India as a possible counterweight against China’s perceived domination in the region.

As great power competition continues to shape the regional security architecture, other states within the region must adapt to current uncertainties by harnessing their unique resources and leveraging on existing alliances and partnerships with other states. This is the case for Australia and the Philippines. The two countries, which signed a Comprehensive Partnership Agreement in 2015, seek to promote a stable, prosperous, and enduring relationship that will advance cooperation in areas of trade, development assistance, defense, education, people to people linkages, counter-terrorism, and countering transnational crime.

This policy paper summarizes the views and analysis shared by Australian and Philippine experts in exploring new avenues of security cooperation within the existing comprehensive partnership, against the backdrop of the evolving geopolitical landscape. It draws from a dialogue on the bilateral relations of Australia and the Philippines, jointly organized by Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress—a Philippine-based foreign policy think tank, and Griffith Asia Institute—one of Australia’s premier research centers focused on Asian affairs. The dialogue centered on four thematic issues: (1) Regional Security Environment, (2) Maritime Security and Cooperation, (3) Counterterrorism and (4) Cybersecurity.

Regional Security Environment

The looming power competition between U.S. and China continues to put pressure on the existing institutions and regional order that are bound to shape regional security outcomes. The U.S. commitment to Asia under the Trump administration is depicted as partial, incoherent, or lacking in engagement, whereas China continues to advance its own strategic, economic, and political interests in various theatres of power projection—from its militarization of the South China Sea to the massive rollout of its Belt and Road Initiative. As Trump puts “America First”, the void left by the previous Obama Administration’s Pivot to Asia is now gradually being filled by China. Beijing is now positioning itself as an alternative provider of international public goods.

Despite the goal of the U.S.-led liberal order to socialize China within standards of Western behavior, domestic practice, and international law, China seems to want the reverse—it aims to provide its own alternative model to the Western liberal order. Thus, the convergence thesis has been proven false. China has instead consolidated state power over its economic and political system, and to some extent has been actively challenging existing models in institutional and normative spaces.

But China's increasing influence in the region could also be partly attributed to the current Trump administration. With signs of tentative or reluctant engagement towards Asia, the Trump administration is facilitating China's ambitions for a highly centralized order concentrated around Beijing that provides a whole new range of arrangements marked by debt diplomacy, connectivity, and growing hegemony in the area of cyberspace.

Although unclear, Trump's inward-looking policy also shows signs of possible American abandonment of its allies that may leave small and middle power states scrambling on how to manage Chinese power. Given Trump's transactional view of the allies "doing more" within the dynamics of the alliance system, American allies in the region are challenged to rethink new approaches to existing institutions and partnerships.

Amidst fears of U.S. abrogation of its commitments to Asia, developments in the US- North Korea summit of June 12, 2018 demonstrate signs of favorable outcomes, but these are still uncertain. The high-level summit presents a significant step in bringing peace and disarmament as well as potential unification in the Korean peninsula. After the summit, U.S.-South Korea military exercises were suspended, confidence building mechanisms were put in place, and nuclear sites are now in the process of being dismantled. Although both states mentioned "complete denuclearization" in their joint statement, some critics prefer specific commitments that ensure a complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization process.

The revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the "Quad" composed of the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India is an initiative worth

exploring. But the depth and promise of the Quad as an economic or security grouping remains unclear. For the Quad to concretely take off, U.S., Japan, Australia and India must align their interests with respect to China. And given Trump's "America First" posture, Japan, Australia, and India may want to rethink the viability and their approach of using the Quad to keep the U.S. engaged in the Indo Pacific region.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) suffered a significant decline in terms of its influence especially in its ability to convene great powers to discuss geopolitical uncertainties. It is also facing immense challenges in addressing climate change, cyber security, counter-terrorism, and transnational crimes. Given the increasing uncertainty arising from China's assertiveness and doubts about U.S. leadership, ASEAN—along with the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus—needs to innovate and be more inclusive in its approach to managing rising US-China geopolitical tensions. It is suggested that there should be a mix of multilateral, minilateral, and other types of partnerships as solutions to address current security threats.

The ongoing reconfiguration of the regional order is symptomatic of multipolarity, characterized by an increased number of internationally significant actors with varying preferences. Existing multilateral forums are giving birth to smaller groupings of states, known as "minilateralism", intended to address diverse concerns and interests of actors.

It is incumbent for the Philippines and Australia to work coherently and consistently to uphold their convergent interests: the shared commitment to security, democracy, and the rule of law at the regional level. Both countries must consider not just shared values but also work towards shared interests. To arrive at a "win-win" cooperation, each state must consider setting aside differences. This holds true especially in the context of the Duterte administration's sensitivities regarding criticism of human rights violations in its anti-drug campaign.

Maritime Security and Cooperation

China's expansion in the maritime domain is well under way, most recently marked by its militarization of reefs, installation of sophisticated docks and runways, and conduct of naval drills. While expressing aversion against the 2016 Philippines v. China arbitral ruling on the South China Sea, it continues to challenge the transit of foreign military aircraft and vessels through its Exclusive Economic Zones and security alert zones. Chinese fishermen also engage in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities and the harassment of Filipino, Vietnamese and Taiwanese fishermen.

The slow progress of negotiations on the ASEAN-China Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea is seen by some as a manifestation of the failings of multilateralism. ASEAN may need to seek other, possibly less inclusive mechanisms (e.g. minilateralism) to achieve concrete progress in the discussion of the COC. Given that the geopolitical landscape and issues have dramatically changed, the current COC might no longer be relevant compared to its original purposes in the 1990s. The resurgence of major power rivalry may mean that the COC should not only involve China and the ASEAN member states but also the United States.

ASEAN must accept that the South China Sea dispute is not just related to China-ASEAN relations, but a significant part of the broader U.S.-China competition. China's actions in the South China Sea are a direct response to its perception of the U.S.' (in)actions in the region. Yet despite little progress, the COC negotiations continue due to path dependence and the inability of ASEAN to confront the irrelevance of the COC in the current geopolitical climate.

The idea of a "legally binding" COC between China and ASEAN must be examined in light of the parties' perceptions of their national interests and willingness to abide by their commitments. If all parties indicate their commitment to make the agreement absolutely binding among themselves even without a third-party dispute mechanism, the COC becomes binding and enforceable. This is under the assumption that all parties that enter into the agreement will abide by it in good faith.

The Philippines is a critical party in the emerging power dynamics in the South China Sea with its alliance with the U.S. through its Mutual Defense Treaty and Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Its geostrategic location situated between the Pacific and Indian Oceans is a viable site for the deployment of deterrent assets and offensive moves should potential conflict ensue.

In addition to the U.S., the Philippines can also use its security agreements with Australia and Japan to develop its deterrence capabilities through information-sharing and transfer of equipment. Australia can offer assistance to promote the Philippines's territorial defense capabilities, such as air defense and anti-submarine warfare as well as regular sharing of strategic assessments and information about the disposition of naval and coast guard assets and fishing vessels. Meanwhile, Japan has donated patrol vessels and five TC-90 planes as part of its Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology which hopes to bolster the latter's surveillance capacity in the maritime territories.

Counterterrorism

Marawi demonstrated the capacity of the Philippine government to respond to terrorist attacks; however, despite the Armed Forces of the Philippines' decades of fighting in jungle warfare, there is a global element in the Marawi siege. International cooperation in countering terrorism has become even more critical as ISIS seeks to establish itself outside of Iraq.

During the Marawi siege, Australia extended assistance by providing reconnaissance and intelligence support, leading to assistance in training and joint maritime patrols. There must be increased public discussion to raise awareness and support for Australia's efforts in Marawi, and its history of counterterrorism cooperation with the Philippines. This must not only reflect the state of bilateral relations but also the engagement of Australia and ASEAN in fighting terrorism. The two partners can explore possible cooperative activities with Malaysia and Indonesia to include discussions on information sharing and fusion.

Countering radicalization is ultimately the longer-term strategy to deny terrorists or insurgents their abilities to claim territory, to have legitimacy, and to gain supporters, physically and financially. The Philippines and Australia must continue their cooperation in combatting radicalization that breeds political violence and terrorism. Some Australian research institutes offer expertise and in-depth knowledge in combatting radicalization that the Philippines could tap.

Long-term intervention in counterterrorism requires a whole-of-government approach, and not just that of the military and the police. Counterterrorism efforts must be led by civil society groups and the police. A state may have the strongest capability in responding to terrorist attacks, but it is also a great challenge how to bring back normalcy as quickly as possible. There must be openness and accountability between the Philippines and Australia in promoting a positive narrative about their bilateral cooperation. Telling a positive story will help counter terrorists and insurgents' efforts to lie or twist facts to recruit and gain public support.

Cybersecurity

The Philippine government, through the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) launched the National Cybersecurity Plan 2022 with four primary goals: (1) ensure continuous operation for national critical information infrastructure; (2) secure government information environment through proactive measures, effective monitoring, and reliable response mechanism; (3) ensure Filipinos maximize opportunities of the digital economy through a safe environment to conduct business in cyber space; and (4) raise awareness among Filipinos on how to mitigate and protect themselves from cyber risks.

Australia and the Philippines can work together in developing or adopting common cyber norms. Both countries should advocate disclosure of vulnerabilities and increasing awareness on cyber risks especially among the public.

In the Philippines, it is critical to have robust technical control as well as a credible workforce capable of distinguishing legitimate communications and highly sophisticated social engineering attacks. The Philippines and Australia should share timely and actionable threat intelligence-sharing through their respective agencies. There must be a robust intelligence sharing scheme in place.

The Philippines and Australia should work together on training opportunities. A dedicated Track 1.5 track dialogue may be conducted to boost the collaborative relationship on cyber issues that involve not only the government but also civil society groups.

Also, the Philippines could participate in regional cyber security simulations. Australia has been working with Singapore in this area. Timely information sharing is also a key area of collaboration. Such shared information will be useful given the prominence of common actors involved in persistent cyber-attacks and espionage in the Indo Pacific region.

The Philippines and Australia should also cooperate in protecting both Filipino and Australian businesses. With a significant portion of its Gross Domestic Product derived from the Business Processing Outsourcing industry, the Philippines must ensure the safety of multinational corporations from potential attacks and breaches. Austrade is a vital arm of the Australian government that offers opportunities for collaboration in the digital trade space among the industries.

Conclusion

Continued Philippine-Australia security dialogue is critical given the challenges that the international rules-based order is currently facing. Given the longstanding history of people-to-people relationships, institutional partnerships, and their common commitment to rule of law and democracy, the Philippines and Australia are pivotal actors in protecting and promoting sets of norms and values that underpin the rules-based order.

These common interests and shared values are further solidified in the Comprehensive Partnership signed by both states. The Comprehensive Partnership serves as a platform to explore research collaboration and continuous dialogue in addressing common issues and interests between the two countries. The success of liberating Marawi City from the ISIS-affiliated Maute group demonstrated the value of such partnership in streamlining technical and intelligence-gathering cooperation in counterterrorism.

But aside from counterterrorism, Australia and the Philippines must focus on growing security threats in cyber space, maritime cooperation, disaster risk management, and climate change. It is therefore crucial for Australia and the Philippines to include these issues in their Track 1.5 dialogue engagement.

Furthermore, it is also worthwhile for both states to elevate their bilateral cooperation to a strategic level. Through strategic partnership, both states could become more flexible and agile in formulating common strategies and responding to converging security threats.



Established in 2014, Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Inc. (APPF) is an independent policy think tank that aims to promote peace, development, and cultural understanding for peoples of the Philippines and the Asia Pacific through research, international dialogue, and cooperation. It is the Philippine member of the regional network ASEAN Institutes for Strategic and International Studies.

The organization's work focuses on the implications of international and regional developments for the Philippines and its foreign relations. It has dedicated programs which cover international security developments, maritime affairs, connectivity and integration, and China.

Principally, APPFI undertakes three major activities. First, it conducts and publishes policy-oriented research, disseminates the same to relevant stakeholders, and provides quarterly analyses of regional developments. Second, it organizes roundtable discussions and national as well as international conferences, solely or in partnership with other institutions. Third, it hosts exchanges and develops issue-based partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector in the Philippines and the Asia Pacific.

RESEARCH PROGRAMS

- CHINA PROGRAM

APPF's original flagship program focuses on China and Philippines-China relations. The China Program stands on two pillars: (1) promoting better understanding among Philippine stakeholders of the implications of China's emerging role in East Asia and the world, and (2) strengthening linkages and engaging in Track Two diplomacy between these two neighboring countries.

- MARITIME DEVELOPMENT & SECURITY PROGRAM (MDSP)

This multidisciplinary program explores how the Philippines can enhance advantages and minimize threats and risks arising from its maritime strategic environment, looking toward both the internal and external dimensions. MDSP aims to generate timely discussions and appropriate recommendations regarding the strategic implications of Philippine maritime security, marine economic resources, and coastal development.

- REGIONAL INTEGRATION & CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (RICP)

The RICP promotes a critical understanding of the political economy of regional development, and of economic trends and issues that affect Philippine national and regional interests. It seeks to generate insights and research that will enable the Philippines to strategically navigate through its international economic engagements, and interact beneficially with regional states and multilateral institutions.

- REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM (RSAP)

The RSAP examines the evolving security environment, the role of multilateral and other forms of security associations, and institutional developments that affect Philippine and regional security. RSAP will be a hub producing research, intelligent commentary, and policy briefs from leading experts and specialists in the Philippines and the wider Asia-Pacific region.





Closely linked to, but independent from the Christian Democratic Union of Germany, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Philippines is a German political foundation. Established in 1964, KAS Philippines was the first ever KAS office in Asia. Ever since its inception, KAS has been actively working in the Philippines under the principles of freedom, justice, and solidarity.

With the main purpose of developing programs that boost the country's democratic institutions and processes, KAS strongly believes that human dignity and human rights are at the very heart of their work. Thus, KAS regards people as the starting point of its initiatives towards social justice, democratic freedom, and sustainable economic activity. KAS Philippines creates, develops, and sustains networks within the political and economic arenas by bringing people together who take their mandates seriously in society.

Given that KAS provides, not just research, but also robust and dynamic activities, the foundation considers itself not just as a think tank, but a think-and-do tank that works along socially equitable, economically efficient, and ecologically sustainable lines. KAS Philippines' country foci are institutional and political reform, the social market economy, and peace and development in Mindanao. The foundation works with civil society organizations, the academe, governmental institutions, political parties, think-tanks, the media, and decision-makers, creating strong partnerships along the way. Particularly, KAS Philippines aims to increase political cooperation in development cooperation at the national and international levels.

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