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21st Century Philippine Maritime Security Policy: From Balancing to Appeasement

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Abstract

This article examines the Duterte Administration's appeasement policy on China, its implications for the Philippine-U.S. alliance, and the 2016 United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea's (UNCLOS) decision on the dispute between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea. Unlike the Aquino Administration that challenged China's maritime expansion, the Duterte Administration is appeasing China's maritime expansion in exchange for trade concessions and investments. President Duterte's goals are to foster closer economic and diplomatic relations with China, while distancing the Philippines from the U.S. President Duterte has degraded the previous administration's close security ties with the U.S. as he terminated joint Philippine-U.S. naval patrols in the South China Sea, and reduced the number and scope of U.S. military interactions with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The Duterte Administration has also shelved the 2016 UNCLOS ruling, arguing that enforcing it has a minimal chance of success. In conclusion, the article warns that the Duterte Administration will realize that trading a country's long-term security interests for short-term economic gains will have adverse consequences not only on the Filipino nation but on the region's long-term security and stability.

Introduction

When confronted by an expansionist power, a state may either balance by allying itself with other states against this threat or it may get on the bandwagon by aligning itself with this power. States balance the emergent power to preserve their security and defend the status quo. Others jump on the bandwagon to secure economic gains from the threatening state and thus expand their influence. On the one hand, balancing refers to efforts by a state to prevent an expanding state from upsetting the status quo—from increasing its share of power at the expense of a status power. A policy of appeasement, on the other hand, involves efforts by a leader of a status quo power to conciliate or “buy off” a potential revisionist power by making unilateral diplomatic and strategic concessions.

On 12 January 2018, a member of the Philippine Congress' House of Representatives, Gary Alejano, revealed that the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) had granted the request of a Chinese research organization to conduct scientific research over the Benham Rise. The Benham Rise is a 13-million-hectare undersea plateau approximately 160 nautical miles east of the main island of Luzon, just off the north-eastern provinces of Isabela and Aurora. In late 2017, the Philippine government discovered that a Chinese vessel was surveying the area. The Philippine government immediately sent a *note verbale* to Beijing seeking clarification regarding the presence of a Chinese survey vessel east of the Philippines. The Philippine Navy (PN) and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) quickly deployed their respective air and sea assets to Benham Rise in an effort to assert the country's territorial rights over the area.

Surprisingly, however, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano said that there should be no

cause for concern over its decision to allow a Chinese survey ship to explore the area. According to him, "there's nothing suspicious about approval or disapproval of scientific research whether they're Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Mongolians, etc." Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque confirmed on 15 January that no less than Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte himself had authorized China to work directly with the University of the Philippines (UP) to conduct unspecified research at Benham Rise. Dismayed by the decision to allow a Chinese think-tank to conduct scientific research over the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Congressman Alejano asked this rhetorical question: "What is really the intention of the Duterte Administration in allowing such activity at the expense of our national security?" President Duterte's decision to allow the Chinese exploration of the Benham Rise is a clear indication of his current policy of appeasing China.

This article examines the Duterte Administration's current maritime security strategy of appeasing China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea. It addresses this main question: "How is President Duterte pursuing a policy of appeasement on China relative to the South China Sea dispute?" It also addresses these corollary questions: 1) "What was the policy of his predecessor?"; 2) "What is President Duterte's objective in his appeasement policy on China?"; and 3) "What are the consequences of this appeasement policy?"

The Aquino Administration's Balancing Policy on China

From 2011 to 2016, the Aquino Administration adopted a balancing policy on China's maritime expansion. This could be traced back to 2011 when former President Benigno Aquino III stood up to China's expansive claim and heavy-handed behavior in the South China Sea. He redirected the focus of the AFP from domestic security to territorial defense, bolstered deeper Philippine-U.S. security arrangements, requisitioned American military equipment, and sought from Washington an unequivocal security guarantee under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). The most salient component of this foreign policy is the signing of the 2014 Enhance Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which planned to provide American forward-deployed forces with strategic rotational presence in Philippine territory, as well as broad access to Philippine military facilities. Clearly, the updated security agreement has been designed to strategically constrain China, which has stepped up its territorial foothold in the South China Sea.

Similarly, the Aquino Administration forged closer security relations with Japan, another U.S. ally and China's rival in East Asia. On the one hand, Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe has committed to providing 10 patrol boats to enable the PCG to safeguard the Philippines' maritime territory. On the other hand, President Aquino has endorsed PM Abe's move to reinterpret the 1947 Japanese Constitution allowing the Japanese Self-Defence Forces to assist allies such as the U.S. and, possibly, the Philippines in case of an armed confrontation with China in the South China Sea. The Philippines has also challenged China to bring the dispute for arbitration by the UNCLOS. China flatly rejected Manila's plan to resolve the issue before the arbitral tribunal of the UNCLOS and insisted that the dispute be settled through diplomacy and bilateral negotiations. In filing the claim against China, the Philippines was seeking a multilateral and legal solution to the maritime dispute in which the

interests of the international community are at stake.

In January 2013, the Philippines directly confronted Chinese expansive claim in the South China Sea by filing a statement of claim against China in the Arbitral Tribunal of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In its Notification and Statement of Claim, the Philippines asked the arbitral tribunal to determine the country's legal entitlements under the UNCLOS to the Spratly Islands, Scarborough Shoal, Mischief Reef, and other land features within its 200-mile EEZ. These entitlements are based on the provisions of the UNCLOS specifically to its rights to a Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone under Part II, to an Exclusive Economic Zone under Part V, and to a Continental Shelf under Part VI. The Philippines also petitioned the Arbitral Tribunal to declare that the Philippines is entitled to a 12-mile Territorial Sea, a 200-mile EEZ, and a Continental Shelf under Parts II, V, and VI of UNCLOS and that China has unlawfully prevented the Philippines from exercising its rights to exploit resources in its EEZ and to navigation within and beyond the 200-mile of the Philippines' archipelagic baselines.ⁱ

The Duterte Administration: From Balancing to Appeasement

Mr. Duterte won the 2016 presidential election because of the Aquino Administration's failings. Despite its predecessor's promise to improve infrastructure, public-private partnership projects languished, public transportation was neglected, and the traffic in the urban centers worsened. In the face of the previous administration's failure to implement a substantial reform agenda, he called for a "real change" (*tunay na pagbabago*). Interestingly, his economic agenda stresses the neo-liberal agenda of macroeconomic stability, fiscal restraint, market-oriented reforms, easing restriction on foreign investments and, most importantly, infrastructure development to promote agricultural productivity and industrialization. Investments for several infrastructure projects all over the Philippines would come from China if President Duterte could improve the country's diplomatic relations with this economic powerhouse, which were greatly strained during the Aquino Administration over the South China Sea dispute. Despite the Permanent Court of Arbitration's (PCA) favorable ruling for the Philippines in its claims against China in the South China Sea, the Duterte Administration (made up of President Duterte and cabinet members chosen from his inner circle of trusted friends and aides) declared that it wants to change Manila's confrontation policy toward Beijing.ⁱⁱ

President Duterte's appeasement agenda on China became apparent after the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) came out with its decision on the claim filed by the Philippines against China. After a three-year wait, the PCA at The Hague in the Netherlands decided on the maritime dispute between the Philippines and China on 12 July 2016. The five-judge PCA unanimously ruled in favor of the Philippines on almost all of its claims against China. It determined that China's claim to historic rights through its nine-dash line in the South China Sea is contrary to international law. The court noted that none of the Spratlys are legally islands because they cannot sustain a stable human community or independent economic life. Finally, it found China guilty of damaging the marine environment by building artificial islands, and of illegally preventing Filipinos from fishing and

conducting oil explorations in the Philippines' EEZ.ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite its overwhelming legal triumph, the Duterte Administration met the eagerly anticipated decision with sober, cautious, and even muted reaction. Its response was ultra-low key as it neither flaunted the victory nor taunted China with the favorable ruling. Although the domestic reaction was overwhelmingly positive and jubilant, then Foreign Secretary Yasay merely said that he welcomes the ruling and called on the Filipinos to exercise restraint and sobriety. During the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in Laos, Secretary Yasay withdrew the country's motion to include the PCA decision in the ASEAN Joint Communiqué after Cambodia objected to its inclusion. Designated as the country's special envoy to China, former President Fidel Ramos suggested that the PCA award be set aside as the Duterte Administration pursues bilateral negotiations with China.

The Duterte Administration's appeasement policy on China stems from its calculation that the U.S. will not support the Philippines in case of an armed confrontation with China in the South China Sea, and that geography dictates that the country has no choice but to co-exist and even cooperate with this emergent power in its backyard. On 12 September 2016, President Duterte suddenly announced that U.S. Special Operations Forces in Mindanao must leave the country. He argued that there could be no peace in this southern Philippine island as long as American troops are operating there. He also warned that U.S. troops are prime targets of Abu Sayyaf bandits who could kidnap them for ransom or outright kill them, thus complicating the prevailing problem of peace and order in Mindanao.^{iv} The following day, he announced that the PN would stop joint patrols with the U.S. Navy in the Philippines' EEZ to avoid upsetting China.^v

Foreign Secretary Yasay explained that "the inadequately armed Philippine military cannot fight China in any battle, thus, President Duterte ordered the Navy not to conduct joint patrols in the South China Sea with the U.S. Navy." He commented that Philippine-U.S. patrols in the South China Sea could be perceived by China as a provocative act, making it more difficult to peacefully resolve the two countries' territorial dispute.^{vi} Accordingly, rather "than worry over a possible war in the South China Sea," President Duterte admonished the military "to focus on domestic security challenges such as fighting drug lords and traffickers, and insurgents."^{vii}

During his two-day official visit in Vietnam in late September 2016, President Duterte announced that the Philippine-U.S. Amphibious Landing Exercise (PHIBLEX) 2016, taking place from 4-12 October 2016, would be the last military exercise between the two allies during his six-year term. Though he promised to honor the long-standing defense treaty with the U.S., he said that China opposes joint military drills in the Philippines. This left him no choice but to serve notice to the U.S.^{viii} President Duterte's announcement on the termination of the joint Philippine-U.S. military exercise was considered to be the strongest indication of a slow but definite break-down in the alliance that the Obama Administration was trying to shore up in the light of the U.S. strategic rebalancing to Asia.

While creating a wide diplomatic and strategic gulf separating the Philippines and the U.S., President Duterte conducts a calibrated foreign policy characterized by gravitating toward to China. He declared that he is open to direct bilateral negotiations with China. In contrast, former President Aquino brought the South China Sea dispute for international arbitration at the PCA. In an effort to win China's confidence, President Duterte declared that the PCA award to the Philippines is purely a bilateral issue between the Philippines and China, and not a concern of the ASEAN, echoing the Chinese position on the matter.^{ix} Then Foreign Secretary Yasay even declared "that the relationship between the two countries (China and the Philippines) was not limited to the maritime dispute. There were other areas of concern in such fields as investment, trade, and tourism and discussing them could open the doors for talks on the maritime issues."^x

In late September 2016, President Duterte announced that he would forge "new alliances" with China and Russia to cushion the impact of the possible withdrawal of the U.S. from the Philippines in 2017. Speaking in Pampanga, he urged the Filipinos to make a small sacrifice for his plan of proverbially crossing the Rubicon in his ties with the U.S. as he pursues partnerships with rival countries (China and Russia) or the countries on the other side of the ideological barrier.^{xi} He also announced his visits to Russia and China to chart an independent foreign policy and "open (new) alliances" with these two major powers that have historic rivalries with the U.S. Intentionally, President Duterte is creating a diplomatic/strategic cleavage between the Philippines and the U.S.; while pivoting towards the U.S.'s geo-strategic rivals—China and Russia.^{xii} President Duterte's diplomatic gambit involves developing and maintaining an independent and proactive posture so he can adroitly balance the major powers in East Asia. This is to create a more positive and conducive atmosphere in Philippine-China bilateral relations that can allow both sides to embark on major infrastructure and investment projects, as well as other forms of cooperation to restore mutual trust and confidence.^{xiii}

Accompanied by 250 Filipino businessmen, he visited China on 20-21 October to seek a new partnership at a time when tension between the Philippines and the U.S. was mounting. During their first meeting, President Xi Jinping advised President Duterte about the need to promote practical bilateral cooperation between the two disputing countries. He advised his Filipino-counterpart that the Philippines and China must thoroughly coordinate their development strategies and cooperate with each other within the framework of the One Belt, One Road Initiative.^{xiv} After their meeting, President Duterte and President Xi issued a joint communique that laid down areas for comprehensive cooperation and signed memorandums of cooperation in thirteen areas including economics and trade, investment, financing, and construction of infrastructure. Accordingly, the total amount of money committed by China to boost economic cooperation between the two countries amounted to US\$13.5 billion, of which US\$9 billion was allocated for infrastructure development in the Philippines.^{xv}

Appeasement and Implications for the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

Ironically, despite President Duterte's efforts to win China's confidence and gravitate toward its orbit,

Beijing initially did not trust him. This was because China was skeptical that it could persuade the Philippines to cut its ties with the U.S. and Japan and totally side with China the way Laos and Cambodia consistently do when forced to choose between the two great powers.^{xvi} Many Chinese analysts clearly saw that what President Duterte was doing was playing the U.S. off against China and vice-versa, to hopefully achieve the greatest benefit for the Philippines. They suspiciously viewed President Duterte's proposals to buy arms from China and pronouncements about distancing the Philippines from the U.S. as mere posturing to please Beijing, which was infuriated by the Hague ruling on the South China Sea, rather than a realistic plan.^{xvii} To dispel China's doubt about his appeasement policy and gain Chinese trust and confidence, President Duterte initiated several efforts to accommodate Beijing's security interests at the expense of its security cooperation with Washington.

He decided to continue the conducting of joint Philippine-U.S. military exercises. Nevertheless, he ordered the reduction in the numbers of joint military exercises from 28 to about 13. He also redirected the focus of these military exercises from territorial defense and maritime security to non-traditional security concerns such as humanitarian assistance and risk reduction (HADR), cybersecurity, anti-terrorism, and anti-narcotics operations.^{xviii} Most significantly, he cancelled the holding of joint naval exercises such as PHIBLEX and Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT). On 11 November, President Duterte admitted that he is actually against the implementation of EDCA as he hinted that he might eventually decide to scrap the agreement that allows the American forces access to Philippine air bases. He revealed that he gave his approval for its implementation because the defense department has already firmed up its implementation, and he does not want to embarrass the country by reneging on the Philippine government's legal obligation under an international agreement.^{xix} President Duterte also revoked an arms deal with the U.S. for the purchase of 26,000 assault rifles after the U.S. Senate stated its opposition to the arms deal with the Philippine National Police (PN) because of allegations of large-scale extra-judicial killings linked with his administration's war on drugs. President Duterte then turned to China, which offered US\$14 million worth of small arms and patrol boats along with another US\$500 million in soft loans for the Philippine military's acquisition of Chinese military equipment.^{xx}

In December 2016, Defense Secretary Lorenzana announced that it is unlikely that the Philippines would allow the U.S. military to use the Philippines as a base for carrying out freedom of navigation patrols in the South China Sea. Later, President Duterte responded to reports that China is installing weapons on islands deep inside the Philippines' EEZ by signifying that he would not protest these Chinese actions.^{xxi} President Duterte's position was supported by then Foreign Secretary Yasay when he admitted that the Philippines is helpless in stopping China's maritime expansion and militarization activities on the disputed island in the South China Sea. He declared that it is wiser to let other countries with special concerns on China's activities take action (themselves), citing the U.S. and Japan which have raised concerns over freedom of navigation and overflight operations. He added that in any case, "the Philippines has its own bilateral engagement with China to ensure no further actions."^{xxii}

Later in December 2016, Mr. Yasay announced that it will be beneficial for the Philippines and the U.S. to reassess their relationship in the light of the current geopolitical realities. He was clearly referring to President Duterte's earlier pronouncement "that China now is the power (in East Asia), and they (the Chinese) have military superiority in the region." Echoing China's position on the South China Sea dispute, he argued that "the present circumstances, such as the South China Sea (dispute), may no longer require strategy based on the old concept of the Cold War." He then announced that the Duterte Administration intends to utilize EDCA to give more emphasis to "coming up with a rapid response during natural calamities, to address terrorism, and to enhance Philippine law-enforcement capabilities." He added that "joint military exercises will not be given focus or just down-graded, at least."^{xxiii} Clearly, the Duterte Administration is conveying a direct message to the U.S. that the continued existence of the alliance will depend on its domestic agenda of focusing on its war on drugs, HADR, and counter-terrorism operations against Islamic militants in Mindanao. This has essentially rendered the alliances useless in constraining and deterring China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea.

The following year, President Duterte warned the U.S. that he would unilaterally abrogate the EDCA because he has received information that the American forces are building permanent arms depots in violation of the agreement and the Philippine Constitution. President Duterte's warning was followed by Defense Secretary Lorenzana's statement "that absent a U.S. guarantee of support to its ally, the Philippines would consider scrapping the EDCA to avoid becoming entangled with the U.S. just in case war breaks out in the South China Sea." In late March 2017, President Duterte continued his rant against the U.S. by focusing on the 7th Fleet's freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) as he argued that they (the FONOPs) risked a "miscalculation" that could trigger a conflict in the South China Sea. He also accused the Obama Administration of pushing the Philippines to provoke China without any guarantee of American support.^{xxiv} Eventually, the Duterte Administration began shifting away from a tactical or short-term rapprochement to an outright long-term or strategic appeasement of China. Instead of simply rectifying the perceived imbalance in the Philippines' relations with the two major powers, President Duterte began replacing the U.S. with China as the Philippines' most important bilateral partner.

Appeasement and the Sidelining of the 2016 UNCLOS Ruling

During the ASEAN summit meeting in Laos, President Rodrigo Duterte digressed from his prepared speech on the PCA ruling on the South China Sea, and instead, narrated accounts of American atrocities against the Moros of Mindanao in the early 20th century. Before the summit, President Duterte claimed that the PCA ruling is purely a bilateral issue between the Philippines and China, and not a matter for the ASEAN, echoing both Cambodia's and China's positions on the matter. On 20 December 2016, Chief Presidential Legal Counsel, Salvador B. Panelo, stated to set aside temporarily the PCA ruling favoring the Philippines "since the country cannot enforce it against China." According to him, "the ruling is a mere paper judgement." Accordingly, "instead of trying to enforce it against China with minimal chances for success, the Philippines should take advantage of economic benefits

resulting from better relations with China.” He went on to say that instead of trying to enforce it against China with a minimal chance of success, the Philippines should take advantage of economic benefits resulting from better relations with China.^{xxv}

On 22 December 2016, President Duterte himself declared his readiness to set aside the PCA ruling amidst reports that the People’s Liberation Army Navy has installed weapon systems in the seven land features which China occupies in the disputed waters.^{xxvi} Succinctly, he said the changing nature of international politics in Southeast Asia prompted his decision. This standpoint obviously and radically differs from President Aquino’s position of standing up to China. Since early 2017, President Duterte has made several statements and undertaken several measures that could be construed as an appeasement policy on China. In March 2017, he publicly admitted that the Philippines cannot stop China’s reported plan to construct an environmental monitoring station on the disputed Scarborough Shoal.^{xxvii} Questioned by a journalist about his view on the prospect of China building a radar station on the shoal, President Duterte revealed his appeasement agenda when he replied: “We cannot stop China from doing this thing. So what do you want me to do… declare war on China? I can, but we’ll all lose our military and policemen tomorrow.”^{xxviii} He even announced that he wants Chinese ships “to pass or come and dock” in the Philippines as long as “they will not do anything to the Philippine Coast Guard as it patrols the country’s maritime waters.”^{xxix}

President Duterte’s announcements that he would not do anything to stop China from building on the disputed shoal was based on the calculation that appeasing this emergent power has its rewards in the form of US\$6 billion dollars in deals including agreement for agricultural exports to China, and loans for infrastructure projects. In March 2017, Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang visited Davao City and witnessed the exchange of letters between Philippine and Chinese officials on the feasibility studies on infrastructure projects that China will bankroll. Mr. Wang visited portions of the proposed Davao Coastline and Portland Development Project. He was also briefed on the Davao City Expressway and the Mindanao Railway. In the aftermath of this trip in Mindanao, Vice Premier Wang expressed China’s interest in funding the various infrastructure projects presented to him while he was in Davao City.^{xxx} Also during Vice Premier Wang’s visit, the Philippines and China signed a six-year economic cooperation agreement. It commits China to finance 15 big-ticket infrastructure projects such as the US\$53.6 million Chico River Pump Irrigation Project, the US\$374 million New Centennial Water Source – Kaliwa Dam Project, and the South Line of the North-South Railway.^{xxxi}

Not surprisingly, President Duterte is resigned to heightened Chinese island-building activities in the South China Sea. Clearly, he has been lured by the Chinese promise of trade concessions, grants, loans, and investment. Consequently, his administration has subscribed to Beijing’s official mantra “that after several years of disruption caused mainly by “non-regional countries (Japan and the U.S.), the South China Sea has calmed with China and Southeast Asian countries agreeing to peacefully resolve [their] disputes.”^{xxxii} He put this mantra into practice during the 30th ASEAN Summit that was held in Manila in late April 2017. Even before the summit began President Duterte

announced that he would not raise the PCA rulings on the South China Sea during the ASEAN summit on 27 April.^{xxxiii} During a press conference held in the presidential palace two days before the event, he emphatically declared “We [ASEAN] will skip, I will skip the arbitral ruling. It is not an issue here in the ASEAN.”^{xxxiv} By accepting Chinese economic largess and rejecting former President Aquino’s confrontational stance on the South China Sea dispute, President Duterte dismissed the idea that any benefits could come from the PCA ruling. Responding to his domestic critics, President Duterte deridingly pointed out: “What would be the purpose of discussing it? Who will dare pressure China?”^{xxxv}

True to his word, the chairperson’s communique for the 30th ASEAN Summit avoided any adversarial statements directed at China. It did not include any references to China’s island building and weapons deployment on the reclaimed land features nor did it touch on the PCA ruling that declared China’s excessive claim in the South China Sea as a violation of international law. ASEAN diplomats reported that there were some efforts exerted by the Chinese government to pressure the Philippines to keep the South China Sea issue totally off the ASEAN agenda. The statement, however, retained the phrase “the need to demonstrate ‘full respect for legal and diplomatic process’ in resolving the dispute.” This was a very subtle reference to the PCA ruling and to the regional negotiations for the COC.^{xxxvi} Nevertheless, the statement also welcomed China’s cooperation with ASEAN on the drafting of a framework for a Code of Conduct for the Parties in the South China Sea.

A few ASEAN leaders tried to include the phrase “such reclamation and militarization (in the South China islands) that may further complicate the situations.” However, as the current chair of ASEAN, President Duterte determined it was pointless to discuss China’s island reclamations in the South China Sea and the PCA ruling, calling both a non-issue.^{xxxvii} Pleased by the Philippine president’s moves to soften the chairman’s statement, the Chinese foreign ministry announced that “it had noted “Mr. Duterte’s remarks and would continue to deal with the Philippines to create a sound environment for stable development of bilateral relations.”^{xxxviii} The following month, the Duterte Administration made sure that its relations with China would indeed further develop. He attended the opening ceremony of China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative in Beijing; the Philippine and Chinese coast guards formed a commission on maritime security cooperation; and the two countries’ foreign ministries began conducting bilateral talks on the South China Sea dispute.^{xxxix}

Why Appeasement?

From 2011 to 2016, the Aquino Administration pursued a balancing policy on China as it promoted closer security cooperation with the U.S. This policy can be traced back to 2011 when President Aquino stood up to China’s expansive claim and heavy-handed behavior in the South China Sea. He redirected the AFP’s focus from domestic security to territorial defense, fostered deeper Philippine-U.S. security arrangements, acquired American military equipment, and sought from Washington an unequivocal security guarantee under the 1951 MDT. The most salient component of this foreign policy is the signing of the EDCA, which provides American forward-deployed forces with strategic rotational presence in Philippine territory, as well as extensive access to Philippine military facilities.

The agreement has been forged to strategically constrain China, which has stepped up its territorial foothold in the South China Sea. The Aquino Administration also filed a claim against China on the PCA.

President Duterte's pronouncements and actions are undoing President Aquino's geopolitical agenda of balancing China's expansive claim in the South China Sea. He distances his country from its long-standing treaty ally, while moving closer to a regional power bent on effecting a territorial revision in the East Asia. He has also set aside the 2016 UNCLOS decision on the South China Sea dispute. His maritime security policy is aimed at appeasing China, in contrast to then President Aquino's balancing strategy. The Duterte Administration believes that its appeasement policy on China is worth pursuing because it makes the country a beneficiary of the latter's emergence as a global economic power.

However, by appeasing an expansionist power, the Duterte Administration is becoming complicit to China's long-term strategy to push the U.S. out of East Asia as it builds a maritime great wall in the South and East China Seas. This will surely upset the current balance of power in the region. Furthermore, by facilitating China's efforts to project its maritime power in the Western Pacific, the current administration is oblivious to the fact that if China gains control of the regional maritime commons, this will adversely affect the Philippines' territorial and long-term strategic and economic interests as an archipelagic state.

The current administration owes the Filipino nation and its traditional allies and friends an explanation on why it is appeasing an expansionist power bent on altering East Asia's territorial status quo. It should enlighten the nation and its security partners on why it is trading the country's sovereign rights and strategic advantages as an island-nation, and putting its alliance with the U.S. and its ties with its traditional security partners at risk in exchange for trade concessions, investments, grants, and loans from an emergent power bent on expanding into the region's maritime domain. This is necessary because, in the near future, the Duterte Administration will realize that trading a country's long-term security interests with short-term economic gains will have adverse consequences not only on the Filipino nation but on the country's traditional security partners and friends.

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