



The United States and the Republic of the Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines

On this Third Day of May in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-Three in Washington D.C., the Department of Defense (DOD) of the United States of America and the Department of National Defense (DND) of the Republic of the Philippines establish the Bilateral Defense Guidelines to modernize and strengthen the alliance consistent with the following goals:

- Reaffirm the 1951 United States-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty's (MDT's) continued relevance in addressing current and emerging threats;
- Foster a common understanding of roles, missions, and capabilities within the framework of the alliance to face emerging regional and global security challenges;
- Drive unity of effort across shared dialogue mechanisms and working groups and ensure all areas of bilateral security and defense cooperation are coordinated to address primary security concerns; and
- Guide priority areas of defense cooperation to address both conventional and non-conventional security challenges of shared concern to the United States and the Philippines.

ALLIANCE FOUNDATIONS:

The Bilateral Defense Guidelines are based on the following premises and mutual understanding between the United States and the Philippines:

1. The MDT remains a treaty in force between the two countries as regularly reaffirmed on several occasions, including the signing of the Manila Declaration in 2011;
2. The United States Senate provided its advice and consent to ratification of the treaty on 20 March 1952, and the Philippine Senate concurred with the MDT through Senate Resolution No. 84, dated 12 May 1952;
3. The U.S. President ratified the MDT on 15 April 1952, while the instrument of ratification was signed by the Philippine President on 27 August 1952. The MDT entered into force upon the exchange of ratification between the Parties on 27 August 1952;
4. Both countries acknowledge that the continued modernization of the U.S.-Philippines alliance is essential to advancing a free, open, secure, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region;
5. The following bilateral defense agreements form the foundations of cooperation between the United States and the Philippines and collectively further operationalize and advance the alliance as established by the MDT:
 - 1953 Agreement between the Government of the United States of America Government and the Republic of the Philippines on Military Assistance to the Philippines (MAA) as the basis of the United States' provision of military assistance to the Philippines,
 - 1998 Agreements between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines Regarding the Treatment of United States Armed Forces Visiting the Philippines (VFA) and the reciprocal Agreement Regarding the Treatment of the Republic of the Philippines Personnel Visiting the United States of America which govern visiting military and civilian personnel temporarily present in the United States and the Philippines, respectively,
 - 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which deepens defense cooperation in furtherance of the MDT by improving interoperability through addressing short-term capability gaps;

promoting long-term modernization; helping to maintain and develop additional maritime security, maritime domain awareness; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities; and authorizing access to Agreed Locations in the Philippines by U.S. forces on a rotational basis, as mutually determined.

- 2017 Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA), which establishes basic terms, conditions, and procedures to facilitate the reciprocal provision of logistic support, supplies, and services for approved activities between the two armed forces;
6. The establishment of the Mutual Defense Board (MDB) in 1958 to cooperate on conventional security concerns and the formation of the Security Engagement Board (SEB) in 2006 to address non-conventional security challenges further demonstrate the adaptability of the alliance to respond to the evolving security environment;
 7. The alliance has evolved from a military partnership to a comprehensive strategic defense alliance that institutionalized policy-level consultations through the inauguration of the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) in 2011 and the Two-Plus-Two (2+2) Ministerial Consultations in 2012;
 8. The following are the primary dialogue platforms for maintaining regular consultations to ensure strategic alignment and interoperability as well as to facilitate joint planning activities between the defense and military establishments of the United States and the Philippines together with other partner agencies:
 - a. Two-Plus-Two Ministerial Consultations, conducted at the Ministerial level
 - b. Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD), conducted at the Senior Officials' level
 - c. Defense and Security Working Group under the BSD, conducted at the working level
 - d. MDB-SEB and Service-to-Service Talks, conducted at various levels between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM)
 9. The two sides share the desire to expand cooperation toward addressing transnational security issues and to ensure the MDT's continued relevance amid new and emerging security challenges, as highlighted in the Joint Vision for a 21st Century United States-Philippines Partnership in 2021;
 10. Both Allies remain committed to developing and maintaining their individual and combined capacities to resist armed attack, through military modernization, materiel and non-materiel capability development, and bilateral planning;
 11. The two countries reaffirm their mutual obligations under international law to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state without prejudice to the inherent right of self-defense recognized in the United Nations Charter;
 12. The United States and the Philippines remain committed to settling disputes or differences by peaceful means, as well as maintaining regional and global peace and security through dialogue and practical cooperation leveraging bilateral, minilateral, and multilateral platforms;
 13. It is understood that both countries retain the ability to pursue, consistent with international law, their respective national interests and independent foreign policy goals, including developing relations or cooperation with other countries and other entities;
 14. An armed attack in the Pacific, to include anywhere in the South China Sea, on either Philippine or U.S. armed forces – which includes both nations' Coast Guards – aircraft, or public vessels, would invoke mutual defense commitments under Article IV and Article V of the MDT;

15. Both sides recognize that threats may arise in several domains—including land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace – and intend to work closely through a variety of initiatives and consultative mechanisms to build cooperation and interoperability in both conventional and non-conventional domains;
16. The United States and the Philippines reaffirm the importance of the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea;
17. The two countries have a common interest in maintaining freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as well as open sea lines of communication across the Indo-Pacific region;
18. Modernizing air defense capabilities and interoperability to defend Philippine and U.S. sovereign airspace and to ensure freedom of overflight in the Indo-Pacific region remains an alliance priority;
19. Both countries recognize the value of collaboration with like-minded partners that are committed to building a free, open, and inclusive regional security architecture while reaffirming the principle of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) centrality;
20. The Bilateral Defense Guidelines are not intended to create rights or obligations under international or domestic law and are meant to serve as a living document that the United States and the Philippines can modify as deemed necessary and upon mutual written decision of both countries.
21. The two defense establishments intend to update the Guidelines in a timely and appropriate manner should the security environment change in a way that affects the U.S.-Philippines alliance.

Based on the aforementioned mutually understood premises, the following priorities are the intended courses of action to attain the goals of the Bilateral Defense Guidelines:

1. ENHANCE ALLIANCE COORDINATION AND BILATERAL PLANNING:

- a. **STRIVE** toward a more deeply interoperable Alliance posture to address the most consequential challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, including through strengthening bilateral planning mechanisms; building synergy across the two Allies' national defense strategies; promoting whole-of-government coordination; and advancing cooperation with like-minded partners in service of regional peace, stability, and prosperity;
- b. **REAFFIRM** that consistent with the MDT, the countries intend to maintain close consultations when either the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of either of the Parties is threatened by an external armed attack in the Pacific.
- c. **CONFIRM** that either country may request support when it assesses that a threat is imminent or when indicators of an armed attack may arise;
- d. **MAINTAIN** regular consultations on matters of territorial integrity, political independence, or security that implicate either country;
- e. **CONSULT** closely on considerations that would be relevant to the existence of an armed attack.
- f. **ENDEAVOR** to build interoperability and cooperation in both conventional and non-conventional domains while taking into account asymmetric, hybrid, and irregular warfare and gray-zone tactics as well as artificial intelligence and other emerging technology areas;

- g. **SUSTAIN** dialogue on various aspects of mutual defense, including but not limited to conventional and unconventional warfare and archipelagic coastal defense using a whole-of-government approach, including through the MDB-SEB, and in conjunction with national security establishments to develop inter-agency capabilities and flexible and rapid response options;
- h. **SUPPORT** a whole-of-government approach to coordinate actions in the event of an anticipated or emergent crisis or contingency through increased information sharing and policy consultations, utilizing respective command and control and other appropriate elements of the defense sector, and pursuing all appropriate avenues to assess, address, and stabilize the situation;
- i. **REINVIGORATE** bilateral planning efforts through coordinated analysis, tabletop exercises, and training and exercises as well as dedicated bilateral coordination and planning mechanisms to assess bilateral requirements and advance common objectives and approaches;
- j. **DEVELOP** adaptable decision-making processes and effective communication procedures to support flexible, timely, and effective bilateral coordination and action tailored to each situation through interagency coordination.

2. **EXPAND INFORMATION-SHARING:**

- a. **BROADEN** information sharing on the principal threats and challenges confronting the alliance to identify at the earliest possible stage any indications of threats to the peace and security of the United States and the Philippines;
- b. **CONTINUE** to work toward real-time information sharing, in collaboration with other departments and agencies as necessary, to support deeper interoperability and operational coordination and develop new service-level information exchange initiatives, while continuing to convene the longstanding cross-service USINDOPACOM-AFP information exchange alongside Analyst-to-Analyst Exchanges and conferences to exchange views on issues of shared interest;
- c. **CONSULT** on policies, practices, and procedures related to the protection of defense and military classified information in support of the swift conclusion of a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA);
- d. **ENHANCE** collaboration on strategic messaging through appropriate channels on issues that could potentially affect their shared peace and security.

3. **MODERNIZE DEFENSE CAPABILITIES:**

- a. **COORDINATE** closely on the Philippines' defense budget planning, including through the development of a Security Sector Assistance Roadmap to identify priority defense platforms and force packages over the next five years to bolster our combined capabilities and capacity to resist coercion and deter aggression;
- b. **PRIORITIZE** the procurement of interoperable defense platforms in line with the MAA and sourced from various U.S. programs, including but not limited to Foreign Military Financing, Foreign Military Sales, and Excess Defense Articles in addition to the Philippines' national defense procurement and funding initiatives;
- c. **EXPAND** investments in non-materiel defense capacity building in the form of education and training exchanges, as well as through training, exercises, and other operational activities through the MDB-SEB process.

4. **DEEPEN INTEROPERABILITY AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE TIES:**

- a. **ORIENT** bilateral exercises and activities around improving the United States' and the Philippines' combined ability to deter and counter armed attacks by ground, air, maritime, or amphibious forces on either country in the Pacific Area – to include the South China Sea – as well as threats in space and cyberspace, while expanding the scope, scale, and complexity of such exercises and training;
- b. **DEEPEN** cooperation under the EDCA, which will continue to serve as a mutually beneficial agreement that further strengthens interoperability and improves the flexibility and resiliency of the two countries' armed forces—including through timely and substantial infrastructure improvements, enhanced joint use of facilities, and pre-positioning of materiel and supplies, consistent with the terms of the EDCA, to include Articles I, III, and IV.
- c. **CONTINUE** to provide mutual logistics support including but not limited to sustainment, acquisition, supply prepositioning, maintenance, transportation, and medical services, as appropriate, through the MLSA, with the intent of enhancing the training, exercise, and operational capability of both sides;
- d. **EXPAND** cooperation on maritime security and maritime domain awareness through the implementation of bilateral maritime security frameworks. Priority areas of collaboration include, deepening interoperability between the navies and maritime law enforcement agencies; support for the National Coast Watch System (NCWS); and continued conduct of bilateral exercises and training and combined maritime activities, including but not limited to joint patrols.
- e. **DEVELOP** air defense capability by advancing Air Force-to-Air Force cooperation through information exchanges, development of command and control and radar capability, exercises and training, Airman-to-Airman Talks, as well as critical improvements to Philippine air defense capabilities to identify, track, target, and if necessary, prosecute hostile air threats in the vicinity of Philippine sovereign airspace;
- f. **PROMOTE** personnel exchanges and liaison relationships, pursue additional subject matter expert exchanges, and improve integrated coordinated command and control mechanisms;
- g. **CONTINUE** to invest in opportunities for officers and senior non-commissioned officers to pursue training through the International Military Education and Training Program (IMETP), among others, and promote student exchanges between military academies, universities, think tanks, and other institutions, building upon rich people-to-people ties;
- h. **MAINTAIN** the conduct of civic action programs as part of U.S.-Philippines exercises, such as Exercise BALIKATAN, to enable both armed forces to learn from shared experiences on civil-military operations while benefiting the communities that hosted the exercises or activities;
- i. **EXPLORE** greater cooperation between the United States and the Philippines under the auspices of the State Partnership Program (SPP) to enable the capacity building of reserve forces in areas beyond humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), including but not limited to territorial defense;
- h. **PROMOTE** welfare of veterans through continued collaboration between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) as well as the commemoration of key historical events involving U.S. and Philippine armed forces; through collaboration with the Department of Defense, sustain ongoing efforts to recover the remains of World War II U.S. servicemembers who served in the Philippines.

5. COMBAT TRANSNATIONAL AND NON-CONVENTIONAL THREATS:

- a. IMPROVE** cyber defense and cyber security cooperation to secure critical infrastructure and build protection against attacks emanating from state and non-state actors by strengthening interoperability between USINDOPACOM and the AFP as well as fostering collaboration with other relevant departments and agencies;
- b. SUSTAIN** U.S.-Philippines capacity-building efforts for counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism through the provision of advice, assistance, and training guided by existing frameworks, improved information and intelligence fusion efforts, and whole-of-government coordination across military, civilian law enforcement, and justice institutions, to deter and address the root causes of radicalization and resort to violence;
- c. IDENTIFY** opportunities to develop the armed forces' capacity to support civilian-led responses to natural disasters and other humanitarian crises, such as through exercises and training, prepositioning HADR equipment at agreed EDCA locations, and supporting national efforts for disaster preparedness as well as search and rescue based on assessed needs;
- d. PURSUE** capacity-building activities to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear-related (CBRN) attacks as well as counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through information sharing and exchanging lessons learned on industrial, technological, personnel, and physical security to prevent unauthorized transfer of dual-use equipment and technology with WMD applications or military weapons;
- e. EXPAND** consultations on roles and responsibilities for defense establishments in supporting national efforts to respond to pandemic diseases through military and health personnel exchanges as well as enhanced engagements on military medicine and biosafety, among other activities;
- f. IDENTIFY** opportunities for civilian-military cooperation on combatting transnational crime to complement existing efforts between U.S. and Philippine civilian departments and agencies and supporting capacity-building efforts of law enforcement agencies, including through training and the construction of facilities, to empower these agencies to disrupt transnational crime networks of shared concern, particularly as it relates to illicit drug trafficking.

6. CONTRIBUTE TO GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY:

- a. BOLSTER** peacekeeping capacity through training and activities for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations under the auspices of the Department of Peace Operations and in support of the Global Peace Operations Initiative toward shared goals, such as supporting future mission areas to meet United Nations Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System pledges;
- b. SUSTAIN** participation in multilateral fora, particularly under the auspices of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – namely the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) defense-related meetings.
- c. PRIORITIZE** trilateral and other forms of multilateral cooperation based on common issues of shared concern and interest; and
- d. IDENTIFY** appropriate opportunities for third-party participation and observation from other nations' armed forces to bilateral U.S.-Philippines defense activities consistent with the national laws, regulations, and policies of the host state and subject to the consent of participants.