

US, Japan, and Philippines Forge Stronger Military Alliance in Indo-Pacific

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A renewed trilateral partnership among the United States (US), Japan, and the Philippines (PH) is rapidly evolving to confront increasing maritime challenges in the Indo-Pacific. The alliances are building substantive defense coordination to deter Chinese assertiveness and preserve regional stability.

At a historic summit in Washington on April 11, 2024, US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. formalized the first-ever trilateral summit, issuing a Joint Vision Statement committing to a “free and open Indo-Pacific” and a rules-based order. They pledged closer coordination across economic, maritime, and security domains. This momentum was followed by the July 8 security agreement between Japan and the Philippines, the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which legally enables Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to conduct joint operations, disaster relief, and capacity building in each other’s territories.

These developments support the broader US–Japan–Philippines trilateral framework, institutionalizing deterrence mechanisms and expanding operational readiness. The RAA complements the Philippines’ existing Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the US and similar arrangements with Australia, enabling seamless joint drills and posture adjustments. Since its ratification by the Philippine Senate in December 2024, the RAA has enhanced intelligence sharing, technology transfers, and interoperability between AFP and JSDF units.

In January 2025, Philippine, US, and Japanese defense officials met during the 5th Trilateral Joint Staff Talks (TJST) and 2nd Multilateral Staff Talks in Honolulu. They focused on boosting maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR) efforts, and coordinated exercises under the Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity (MMCA) framework.

Naval drills further reinforced the alliance’s presence in contested waters. In March 2025, the three nations conducted joint naval maneuvers near

Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. Philippine forces successfully deterred a Chinese frigate from approaching, while AFP Chief of Staff General Romeo Brawner Jr. said the drills improved tactical coordination and maritime situational awareness. US Navy Lieutenant Alexander Horvath highlighted the countries' shared commitment to a stable Indo-Pacific.

On June 20, 2025, coast guard forces from the US, Japan, and the Philippines conducted a joint exercise off Kagoshima, Japan. The drills simulated real-world scenarios including vessel collisions and onboard fires, involving 350 personnel and underscoring the growing coordination among the three nations.

This trilateral effort reflects a center-right strategic posture, assertive yet pragmatic. Philippine leaders increasingly view both Japan and the US as indispensable partners in defense modernization and maritime security. Through the RAA, joint staff talks, and multilateral exercises, the three nations are building a durable security alliance grounded in shared values and collective resolve to uphold peace and sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific region.