

United States and Philippines Pursue Broader Defense Ties in Indo-Pacific

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The United States and the Philippines are strengthening their military partnership through expanded defense cooperation and enhanced regional engagement, with both countries committed to supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific. This includes wider military exercises, intelligence-sharing, and infrastructure development as part of a shared strategy to counter growing regional threats.

To facilitate deeper cooperation, both sides are moving forward with the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), signed in late 2024. The pact allows for secure exchanges of classified intelligence and supports operational planning. A new Combined Coordination Center at Camp Aguinaldo is also underway, designed to support joint command functions.

Additionally, the Philippines–Security Sector Assistance Roadmap (P–SSAR), completed in mid-2024, outlines long-term defense priorities over the next decade. It aims to modernize Philippine military capabilities with targeted U.S. support, including infrastructure upgrades and logistical enhancements at Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites.

Joint exercises, particularly Exercise Balikatan 2025, are set to grow in complexity. The drills will feature multilateral components, with Japan joining fully for the first time. Activities will include maritime operations, missile defense simulations, and large-scale field exercises using advanced platforms such as the Navy–Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS), the Typhon missile system, and unmanned surface vessels.

The United States has pledged approximately \$500 million in Foreign Military Financing to assist the Philippines in acquiring modern defense equipment. This funding will also support infrastructure improvements across Philippine military bases identified under EDCA (Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement).

Earlier, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth reaffirmed the enduring alliance under the 1951

Mutual Defense Treaty during a recent high-level meeting in Washington. Their joint statement emphasized a shared responsibility to uphold peace and stability in the South China Sea and surrounding areas.

In parallel, India has formally established a Strategic Partnership with the Philippines. This includes the delivery of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and the two countries' first joint naval sail through the South China Sea, a significant gesture amid rising tensions in contested waters.