

Philippines and US Begin Cope Thunder 2025 Air Drills

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The skies over Northern Luzon are once again alive with the roar of fighter jets as the Philippines and the United States officially launched the Cope Thunder Philippines 2025 air exercise. The opening ceremony was held yesterday at Clark Air Base in Pampanga, marking the start of two weeks of intensive training and cooperation between the two long-time defense allies.

Leading the ceremony were Lieutenant General Arthur Cordura, Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force (PAF), and Lieutenant Colonel Bryan Mussler, commander of the 421st

Fighter Squadron of the United States Pacific Air Forces (PACAF).

Running from July 7 to 18, this exercise, known formally as CT PH 25-2, will be conducted across multiple training locations in Northern Luzon. The goal is to strengthen the ability of both forces to operate together effectively and to support the ongoing modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The scale of this year's exercise highlights the growing importance of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The Philippine Air Force has deployed over 2,300 personnel along with a diverse fleet of aircraft, including FA-50PH fighter jets, A-29B Super Tucanos, AW109 helicopters, and S-70i Black Hawk helicopters. For its part, PACAF sent 225 personnel and its advanced F-35 fighter aircraft to take part in the training.

Colonel Ma. Consuelo Castillo, spokesperson for the Philippine Air Force, called the exercise a “significant milestone” in improving joint readiness and strengthening mutual defense commitments. She emphasized that working closely with the United States helps the Philippines build up its capabilities to secure peace and stability in the region.

Cope Thunder has a long history. It was first held in the Philippines in 1976 and later moved to Alaska in 1992, where it became known as Red Flag Alaska. The exercise returned to Philippine soil in 2023, signaling a renewed focus on regional cooperation.

Meanwhile, the Armed Forces of the Philippines also welcomed Major General Robert Krushka, commander of Joint Forces New Zealand, at Camp Aguinaldo. During his courtesy call, he met with AFP Deputy Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Rommel Roldan. Both sides discussed strengthening defense ties, sharing strategies to address regional security challenges, and exploring opportunities for joint training and humanitarian missions.

As these exercises and partnerships continue to grow, the Philippines reaffirms its commitment to working with allies to maintain a secure and stable Indo-Pacific.

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