

JAPAN–PHILIPPINES MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION (2011–2024): SHAPING AN EMERGING MILITARY ALLIANCE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

HỢP TÁC AN NINH HÀNG HẢI NHẬT BẢN – PHILIPPINES (2011 – 2024):
ĐỊNH HÌNH LIÊN MINH QUÂN SỰ MỚI NỔI TẠI CHÂU Á – THÁI BÌNH DƯƠNG

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Abstract - Against the backdrop of intensifying strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific and the growing limitations of regional security mechanisms, maritime security cooperation between Japan and the Philippines from 2011 to 2024 has emerged as a strategic alignment that has attracted considerable attention across the region. Drawing on historical analysis, synthesis, and a review of relevant academic literature, this article elucidates the evolution, substantive dimensions, and strategic significance of Japan–Philippines relations. It argues that this relationship has increasingly approximated a quasi-alliance model, contributing to stronger deterrence and the consolidation of a rules-based maritime order, although it has not yet reached the level of a formal military alliance.

Key words - Maritime security; Japan–Philippines relations; quasi-alliance; Indo-Pacific; South China Sea

1. Introduction

Maritime security is a crucial pillar in the security architecture of the Asia-Pacific region, especially amid the rapid rise of China and the accompanying disputes in the South China Sea [1]. According to Japan’s 2023 National Defense Strategy Report, maritime security not only ensures regional stability but is also closely tied to the economic, commercial, and strategic interests of major powers [2].

Following the 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA), the Philippines has faced increasingly serious and multifaceted maritime security challenges, pushing Manila into a complex strategic dilemma [3]. Japan, as a regional power, is playing an increasingly vital role in security cooperation across the Asia-Pacific. Under the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy, Tokyo has actively promoted multilateral security ties, with the Philippines chosen as a key strategic partner [4]. This cooperation is not limited to economic aid but has expanded into the defense sector, including the provision of patrol vessels, surveillance radars, TC-90 patrol aircraft, and joint exercises between the two nations [5].

Over the past decade, Japan-Philippines security cooperation has developed robustly, from the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2011 and the Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology in 2016, to the ongoing negotiations over the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) in 2023. This

Tóm tắt – Trong bối cảnh cạnh tranh chiến lược tại Ấn Độ Dương - Thái Bình Dương không ngừng gia tăng, các cơ chế an ninh khu vực bộc lộ nhiều giới hạn, hợp tác an ninh hàng hải giữa Nhật Bản và Philippines giai đoạn 2011 - 2024 nổi lên như một cấu trúc liên minh chiến lược thu hút sự quan tâm và chú ý trong khu vực. Trên cơ sở phương pháp lịch sử, tổng hợp và phân tích tài liệu học thuật liên quan, bài viết làm rõ tiến trình phát triển, nội dung hợp tác và ý nghĩa chiến lược của quan hệ Nhật Bản – Philippines, khẳng định mối quan hệ này đã tiệm cận đến mô hình bán liên minh, góp phần tăng cường răn đe và củng cố trật tự hàng hải dựa trên luật lệ, dù chưa đạt tới cấp độ liên minh quân sự chính thức.

Từ khóa – An ninh hàng hải; Quan hệ Nhật Bản – Philippines; Ấn Độ Dương – Thái Bình Dương; Biển Đông

increase in cooperative activities raises a crucial question: Are Japan and the Philippines moving toward an informal military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region? [6].

To address this question, this study employs a qualitative research approach that combines analysis of official policy documents and defense reports from relevant government institutions - including Japan’s Ministry of Defense, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, the Philippine Department of National Defense, and ASEAN - with a review and comparison of academic studies and strategic reports produced by leading international research organizations such as CSIS, IISS, and the RAND Corporation.

The analysis shows that Japan–Philippines cooperation has gradually expanded from policy dialogue to practical collaboration in maritime security. While this cooperation has become more substantive and strategically meaningful, existing legal and political constraints mean that it has not yet developed into a formal military alliance. Instead, it reflects a flexible and evolving form of security partnership within the broader Asia-Pacific security landscape.

2. Theoretical Basis and Practical Drivers for Japan–Philippines Maritime Security Cooperation

The security cooperation, generally, and the maritime security cooperation between Japan and the Philippines over the past decade, has been built upon certain foundations. From a regional structural perspective, Japan–

Philippines maritime security cooperation from 2011 to 2024 did not emerge in a strategic vacuum but was embedded in a transforming Asia-Pacific security architecture. During this period, the regional order shifted from a predominantly ASEAN-centered security framework toward a more fragmented and competitive structure characterized by intensified great-power rivalry and the proliferation of minilateral security arrangements. The growing gap between the severity of maritime security challenges, particularly in the South China Sea, and the limited capacity of ASEAN-led mechanisms to respond effectively created structural incentives for middle powers to seek supplementary bilateral partnerships. For Japan and the Philippines, shared exposure to maritime coercion, vulnerabilities along critical sea lines of communication, and uncertainty regarding the durability of the regional order converged to make bilateral maritime security cooperation a pragmatic and timely response rather than a revisionist choice. This regional context provides the structural foundation upon which subsequent bilateral agreements, policy adjustments, and practical cooperation were built. Against the backdrop of a deteriorating maritime security environment in the Asia-Pacific, particularly China's expanding military and law-enforcement activities in the South China Sea and adjacent waters, regional security dynamics have undergone profound shifts. These developments have directly threatened the Philippines' maritime rights and Japan's strategic sea lines of communication, while exposing the limited effectiveness of ASEAN-led mechanisms in addressing hard security challenges. As strategic competition between major powers has intensified, middle powers such as Japan and the Philippines have increasingly turned to bilateral and minilateral cooperation as more operational and flexible security arrangements. It is within this context that Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation has been constructed and progressively institutionalized over the past decade. Firstly, this cooperation process has been developed on a series of crucial bilateral agreements, reflecting the expansion of relations from a strategic partnership to a more in-depth defense cooperation model. These agreements not only help strengthen the maritime security capabilities of the Philippines but also mark a significant shift in Japan's defense policy toward the Southeast Asian region.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement, signed in 2011, is considered the foundational document for defense cooperation between the two nations. This agreement underscores the importance of protecting freedom of navigation, regional stability, and maintaining a rules-based international order [6]. This marked the first time Japan recognized the Philippines as a strategic security partner in the Indo-Pacific region. The Japanese Ministry of Defense asserted that "the agreement paved the way for cooperation in the areas of intelligence sharing, support for maritime law enforcement capacity building, and the promotion of defense cooperation," [2] thereby facilitating Japan's provision of non-lethal military equipment to the Philippines, particularly in the fields of coast guard and maritime surveillance. As a nation taking a leading role in

security cooperation, Japan has undertaken important shifts in its foreign and security strategies. In December 2013, less than a year after returning to power, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced Japan's first National Security Strategy since World War II [7]. This document replaced the "National Defense Program Guidelines" and became the most important document in Japan's security policy, signifying a major transformation in its post-war foreign and security policies. Regarding relations with the Philippines, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda affirmed: "Japan and the Philippines share fundamental values and strategic interests, and we hope the two sides will cooperate closely within the framework of regional cooperation". On the Philippine side, President Aquino emphasized: "We hope the two sides will strengthen comprehensive cooperation in the fields of ensuring maritime security and defense" [8].

Over the past decade, driven by the establishment of a "Strategic Partnership" at the highest level, the Japan-Philippines relationship has continuously developed. Leaders of the two countries have maintained close ties, and security cooperation has been increasingly consolidated. In the first two years after taking office in 2012, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Philippine President Benigno Aquino seven times. During his tenure, President Aquino visited Japan six times [9]. In January 2013, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida visited the Philippines, where security cooperation was a key agenda item in talks with the Philippine President and Foreign Secretary. This marked the beginning of a rapid development in Japan-Philippines security cooperation. In 2015, the Philippine Defense Minister and the President visited Japan, respectively. Notably, in June 2015, in the framework of a high-level dialogue, the two countries reached an agreement and signed the "Japan-Philippines Joint Statement on Strengthening Strategic Partnership towards Promoting Peace, Security, and Development in the Region and Beyond" along with the "Action Plan for Strengthening Strategic Partnership," reaffirming the growing importance of the Japan-Philippines relationship for regional peace and stability. During the talks, the two sides not only discussed pressing issues such as the situation in the South China Sea and the North Korean issue but also announced the commencement of negotiations to reach a bilateral agreement on arms trade [10].

In addition to security-driven motivations, economic vulnerability and defense-industrial considerations further shape Japan's approach to maritime cooperation with the Philippines. Beyond political-security considerations, Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation is also driven by critical economic and industrial imperatives. The South China Sea constitutes a vital segment of Japan's sea lines of communication (SLOCs), through which approximately 90 percent of its trade and energy imports transit, making the protection of maritime routes an existential economic concern rather than a secondary strategic interest. Ensuring freedom of navigation thus directly underpins Japan's economic security. In parallel, Japan's relaxation of defense export restrictions since 2014 has introduced an industrial dimension to bilateral

cooperation. The transfer of patrol vessels, surveillance radar, and TC-90 aircraft to the Philippines reflects Tokyo's efforts to revitalize its defense industry, establish credibility as a security supplier, and cultivate export markets in Southeast Asia. As a result, Japan–Philippines maritime security cooperation exhibits an increasingly transactional character, intertwining strategic alignment with economic and industrial objectives [15].

In 2016, the Japanese Emperor made an official visit to the Philippines. By October of the same year, the newly elected Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, also visited Japan. During their summit, the leaders of the two countries agreed to strengthen their strategic partnership, with Prime Minister Abe committing to support the Philippines in developing its naval forces. In the same year, the two countries signed the “Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology,” marking a crucial milestone in bilateral military cooperation, allowing Japan to transfer maritime surveillance radar systems, TC-90 patrol aircraft, and Parola-class patrol vessels to the Philippines [11]. This was the first time Japan exported military equipment to a Southeast Asian nation, reflecting a shift in Tokyo's defense strategy aimed at addressing increasing security challenges in the region. Currently, Japan and the Philippines are negotiating the “Reciprocal Access Agreement” (RAA) [12] to create a significant legal basis for the presence of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in the Philippines [1]. According to a report by the Foreign Service Institute (Japan), if signed, the RAA would allow Japan to deploy troops, conduct joint exercises, and provide logistical support on Philippine territory, similar to the agreements Manila already has with the US and Australia [13]. Therefore, the RAA not only helps to enhance the tactical interoperability between the two countries but also solidifies the regional security architecture towards a multilateral alliance. In addition to bilateral visits, leaders from both countries have utilized multilateral mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit, “ASEAN+3,” and “ASEAN+1” to hold bilateral meetings, demonstrating mutual trust and a sound cooperative relationship between the two sides. While the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) constitutes a notable institutional advancement in Japan–Philippines security cooperation, it should be understood as an enabling rather than determinative mechanism. The agreement does not, in itself, signal an inevitable progression toward an informal military alliance. Its operationalization remains contingent upon Japan's domestic legal framework, shifting political consensus, and strict constitutional interpretations under Article 9. In this sense, the RAA functions as a conditional platform that expands the scope of cooperation without removing the structural barriers that prevent alliance-like commitments. Recognizing this conditionality is essential to avoid overstating the alliance implications of legal institutionalization.

In addition to the legal basis, China's military activities in the South China Sea and the East China Sea are a major factor driving Japan and the Philippines to strengthen their maritime security cooperation. According to the RAND

Corporation, China has illegally built artificial islands and deployed coast guard vessels and maritime militia forces to control disputed areas [14], posing severe challenges to the Philippines in defending its sovereignty in the South China Sea [4]. This also threatens Japan's maritime security and strategic interests in ensuring freedom of navigation and the security of trade routes [6]. This reality has increased the urgency of bilateral security cooperation to balance China's influence in the region.

Furthermore, changes in the defense policies of Japan and the Philippines play a vital role in promoting bilateral maritime security cooperation. Under Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, Japan has shifted from a policy of “passive defense” to “proactive security cooperation” through the 2022 National Defense Strategy, allowing Tokyo to expand its military role in the region to ensure stability and freedom of navigation [2]. Meanwhile, the Philippines, under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., has accelerated defense relations with the US, Japan, and Australia by expanding the “Visiting Forces Agreement” (VFA) and organizing large-scale joint exercises like Balikatan, aiming to enhance its maritime deterrence capabilities [15]. Besides these internal political-strategic drivers, Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation is also closely linked to regional security initiatives promoted by the US and its allies. These adjustments in the defense policies of Japan and the Philippines, combined with alignment with regional partners, not only foster bilateral security cooperation but also play a critical role in shaping a new regional security order. In this emerging order, Japan and the Philippines are increasingly becoming crucial strategic actors in maintaining stability and the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific.

3. The Progress of Maritime Security Cooperation between Japan and the Philippines (2011–2024): Shaping a New Military Alliance in the Asia-Pacific

Maritime security cooperation between Japan and the Philippines officially entered a strategic phase following the signing of the Japan-Philippines Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2011. This agreement not only reflected the commitment of both parties to regional security but also paved the way for military cooperative initiatives, including intelligence sharing, military training, and defense equipment assistance [5]. Kicking off these strategic diplomatic activities, in September 2011, the two nations held their first Vice-Ministerial Consultations between the Vice-Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense on Asian maritime security issues, marking a significant step in upgrading the bilateral security cooperation mechanism. Simultaneously, Japan and the Philippines established regular policy dialogues between their Defense Ministers and Vice-Ministers, as well as expert-level dialogues on maritime security and ocean issues, placing maritime and naval security cooperation on the agenda. Analytically, the establishment of multi-layered dialogue mechanisms reflects a shift from ad hoc cooperation toward an institutionalized security framework, indicating that maritime security has become a sustained and structured pillar of Japan–Philippines

relations rather than a temporary response to specific incidents. In their joint statement on the Strategic Partnership, Japan and the Philippines expressed shared concern over the South China Sea issue, affirming that “peace and stability in the South China Sea are vital, and adherence to international norms regarding freedom of navigation and the peaceful settlement of disputes will benefit the entire region”. Following the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012, the dispute situation in the South China Sea became more complex, and Japan clearly demonstrated its support for the Philippines in international forums. In his speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed three principles on the “Rule of Law at Sea,” emphasizing the importance of maintaining order and law along international sea lanes [17]. Subsequently, at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in July 2016, the leaders of Japan and the Philippines agreed to coordinate efforts to enhance maritime law enforcement capacity. A crucial turning point occurred in 2016 when Japan and the Philippines signed the “Agreement Concerning the Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology,” allowing Japan to provide TC-90 patrol aircraft, maritime surveillance radar systems, and patrol vessels to the Philippines. This helped Manila enhance its maritime surveillance capacity and defense of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) against Chinese military activities [4]. From a capacity-building perspective, these transfers significantly improved the Philippines’ maritime domain awareness by expanding patrol range and surveillance coverage. However, the effectiveness of these assets remains conditioned by constraints in system integration, real-time data sharing, and the sustainability of maintenance and training, suggesting that Japan’s assistance enhances baseline capacity rather than producing a fully autonomous deterrent capability. Accordingly, Japan provided security equipment free of charge, including TC-90 trainer aircraft, 10 small patrol vessels, and 2 large patrol vessels, to the Philippines [18]. Tokyo also actively supported Manila in developing its radar-based maritime surveillance system, thereby boosting the Philippines’ Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities [19]. Japan proceeded to dispatch Coast Guard patrol vessels to the South China Sea to perform freedom of navigation missions alongside the US and the Philippines, aiming to increase its influence in the region [9]. Another important factor during this period is Japan’s role in multilateral security structures. Through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative, Japan has actively promoted security cooperation with nations sharing common interests in the region, with the Philippines designated as a key partner [6]. Operationally, these activities have improved procedural familiarity and basic interoperability, particularly in communication and coordination. Nevertheless, the scope of joint exercises remains limited in complexity, indicating that Japan–Philippines cooperation functions more as a confidence-building and signaling mechanism than as evidence of deep operational integration comparable to formal military alliances.

In addition to cooperation activities involving the transfer of weapons, maritime security equipment, and financial aid through Official Development Assistance (ODA), Japan has continuously increased the promotion of “strategic port calls” for its warships, along with joint military exercises between the two sides. The 2011 Japan–Philippines Joint Statement on Strategic Partnership proposed an agreement to “promote exchanges and cooperation between the defense agencies of the two countries,” including visits by high-ranking naval officers and naval port calls [8]. Since then, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) and the Philippine Navy have increasingly focused on military interaction activities. A key event demonstrating this activity was the port call of two Japanese destroyers and a submarine at the Subic Bay Naval Base, Philippines, in 2016. In June 2017 and September 2018, Japan’s helicopter carriers Izumo and Kaga made consecutive strategic port calls to Subic Port. During these visits, President Rodrigo Duterte underscored the Philippines’ high regard for Japan as a reliable and supportive partner, while also expressing Manila’s intention to further deepen bilateral security cooperation in the years ahead.

Japan and the Philippines have also expanded their cooperation activities towards greater practicality through joint naval exercises. Following the “Memorandum on Cooperation 2015” signed by the Japanese Ministry of Defense and the Philippine Department of National Defense on May 6, 2015, the Philippine Coast Guard and the Japan Coast Guard conducted a joint anti-piracy drill in Manila Bay, marking the first joint exercise between Japan and the Philippines since the signing of the strategic partnership agreement in 2011. Just a few days later, on May 12, the JSDF and the Philippine Navy conducted their first joint naval exercise near the disputed area of the South China Sea, involving a Philippine patrol vessel and two Japanese destroyers, the JS Harusame and JS Amagiri, along with a P-3C anti-submarine warfare patrol aircraft. From 2015 until now, Japan and the Philippines have conducted nearly 10 joint military exercises and over 10 combat training sessions to protect maritime security. Notably, in May 2019, six warships from four countries - the US, India, Japan, and the Philippines conducted a joint exercise in the South China Sea, performing maneuvers such as formation movements, communication checks, and personnel exchanges between the vessels. This is considered a crucial milestone, indicating that Japan–Philippines security cooperation is gradually expanding from a bilateral to a multilateral format.

Most recently, Japan and the Philippines have been conducting negotiations on a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA). If signed, this agreement would allow the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to deploy troops and carry out military activities on Philippine territory, similar to the agreements Manila has signed with the United States and Australia [1]. This agreement may serve as an important stepping stone toward an informal military alliance between the two countries. Japan’s ability to deploy personnel and provide military training assistance

would help the Philippines strengthen its defense capabilities while simultaneously enhancing Japan's military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the extent to which the RAA can deepen bilateral security ties remains conditional upon Japan's domestic legal interpretations and political consensus, underscoring that the agreement enables cooperation rather than guaranteeing alliance transformation. Moreover, the development of Japan-Philippines security cooperation is taking place in the broader context of the United States promoting trilateral cooperation among Washington, Tokyo, and Manila. The Japan-U.S.-Philippines Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD) has been held to synchronize military strategies, share intelligence, and enhancing collective defense capabilities [19]. This cooperation not only strengthens deterrence against China but also helps shape a regional security architecture that contributes to balancing power in the Asia-Pacific, where Japan and the Philippines play key roles.

Overall, Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation has evolved from institutionalization to capacity-building and limited operational coordination. While expanded agreements, equipment transfers, and joint activities have strengthened the Philippines' maritime security baseline and enhanced Japan's strategic presence in Southeast Asia, the depth and effectiveness of cooperation remain constrained. Limited interoperability, weak integration of surveillance systems, and continued reliance on external support prevent the relationship from becoming a fully operational alliance. Accordingly, the cooperation is best characterized as a quasi-alliance - sufficient to bolster deterrence and uphold a rules-based order, but insufficient to independently reshape the regional balance of power. In this article, the notion of a "quasi-alliance" is employed not as a rhetorical label, but as an analytical category that captures intensified cooperation short of collective defense. Specifically, Japan-Philippines cooperation exhibits convergence at the strategic and capacity-building levels, while deliberately stopping short of operational integration. There are no mutual defense clauses, no standing joint command structures, and no automatic crisis-response obligations. This calibrated form of cooperation underscores the fundamental distinction between quasi-alliance dynamics and a traditional alliance, which is defined by binding commitments and integrated warfighting capabilities.

Despite the expansion of Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation, its evolution toward a formal military alliance remains structurally constrained by Japan's constitutional and political framework. Article 9 of Japan's Constitution continues to impose strict limitations on the use of force and collective self-defense. Although the 2015 Security Legislation allows a limited exercise of collective self-defense, its application is conditional, politically contested, and subject to restrictive interpretations. In the Southeast Asian context, these constraints also generate strategic flexibility by allowing Japan to engage as a security partner without the political symbolism of a formal military alliance. Given ASEAN's historical sensitivity

toward alliance politics, Japan's restrained security posture helps mitigate regional concerns while still enabling meaningful capacity-building cooperation. For the Philippines, this framework offers a means to enhance deterrence and maritime security capabilities without undermining its broader diplomatic balancing strategy or provoking regional backlash.

The ongoing negotiations on a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) would facilitate troop deployment, joint exercises, and logistical support, but do not entail mutual defense obligations comparable to a Mutual Defense Treaty. Consequently, Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation is best understood as a quasi-alliance, characterized by strategic alignment and capacity-building rather than binding collective defense.

4. The Impact of Japan-Philippines Maritime Security Cooperation on the Security of the Asia-Pacific Region

Since the establishment of their strategic partnership, Japan-Philippines relations, particularly in the field of defense and security cooperation, have continued to grow, gradually shaping what can be described as a "quasi-alliance". The driving forces behind Japan's efforts to strengthen maritime security cooperation with the Philippines can be understood through four main dimensions: (1) Developing security cooperation with ASEAN has been a consistent policy of the Japanese government, reflecting Tokyo's strategic emphasis on Southeast Asia; (2) Japan's foreign and security policy multilateralization strategy has been shaped by China's rise and the shifting power dynamics in East Asia; (3) Security cooperation with the Philippines also forms part of Japan's broader strategy to ensure stability and balance within the U.S.-Japan alliance; and (4) As an island nation with limited natural resources, Japan's survival and development depend heavily on the sea. Hence, Tokyo has long aspired to become a major maritime power.

Based on research and assessment of Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation within the current Asia-Pacific context, we argue that this relationship is not merely a bilateral arrangement aimed at protecting the interests of both countries, but also exerts far-reaching influence on the regional security order. From strengthening international law and shaping the regional security architecture to influencing the balance of power, this cooperation has played a vital role in reshaping the region's maritime strategic landscape. Specifically:

(i) Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation contributes to protecting and strengthening the rules-based international order in the South China Sea, particularly amid China's growing military activities and expanding control in the area. According to Panda (2024), China's military presence on disputed features and the construction of bases in the South China Sea have posed serious challenges to the sovereignty of ASEAN member states, including the Philippines [20]. Japan's support through maritime surveillance technology transfers, provision of patrol vessels, and naval training has enhanced the Philippines' maritime patrol and law enforcement

capabilities, helping to curb incursions by China's maritime militia now and in the future [11]. Furthermore, Japan has played a key role in supporting the Philippines' implementation of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling, which invalidated China's unlawful sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. Japan's commitment to upholding this ruling not only strengthens Manila's position but also encourages other regional states to coordinate efforts in defending their maritime rights [19].

(ii) Japan–Philippines maritime security cooperation, within multilateral security frameworks such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), the Japan-U.S.–Philippines Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD), and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, contributes to reshaping the regional security architecture of the Asia–Pacific. Through these multilateral links, Japan has acted as a strategic bridge between ASEAN and the QUAD, ensuring that regional security initiatives reflect not only great-power interests but also protect the sovereignty of Southeast Asian nations [21]. At the same time, Japan's cooperation with the Philippines has enabled Tokyo and the QUAD to expand their influence in Southeast Asia, creating a network of maritime partners that help maintain regional stability [3]. Notably, under the TSD framework, Japan has engaged in intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and support for the modernization of the Philippine Navy. This trilateral cooperation has strengthened collective defense capabilities and improved Manila's maritime interdiction capacity - an essential factor in maintaining stability in the South China Sea [4].

(iii) Japan–Philippines maritime security cooperation is also altering the regional balance of power, particularly amid U.S.-China rivalry. According to Shoji, Japan's growing role in maritime security has helped deter China's militarization efforts while providing a strategic counterbalance to maintain equilibrium in the region [19]. Moreover, the rapid development of Japan–Philippines cooperation could affect traditional alliances such as U.S.–Japan and U.S.–South Korea, creating a multilayered defense network in which Japan plays a central role in ensuring regional security [16]. This cooperation also poses new challenges to China, which now faces Japan's expanding security influence in Southeast Asia, further intensifying the region's security tensions.

(iv) Japan–Philippines maritime security cooperation has generated diverse responses from regional countries, depending on their respective security interests, power dynamics, and diplomatic relations. Specifically: (1) Malaysia and Indonesia strongly support the Japan–Philippines partnership, viewing it as a significant step toward strengthening the rules-based order and ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea [21]. Vietnam has proactively expanded defense cooperation with Japan, particularly in intelligence sharing and maritime patrols; (2) The United States and Australia have welcomed and actively promoted this cooperation, seeing it as part of the broader FOIP strategy to counter China's influence. Washington has supported Japan's transfer of

military technology to the Philippines and the expansion of the Japan-U.S.–Philippines TSD. Australia has also participated in joint military training activities to enhance the Philippines' maritime defense capacity, thereby contributing to a broader regional security network; (3) China has strongly opposed and increased countermeasures, viewing Japan–Philippines cooperation as part of a U.S.-led containment strategy [15]. Beijing has criticized Japan for providing patrol vessels, surveillance aircraft, and maritime radar systems to the Philippines, while increasing its own military activities near Philippine waters and deploying coast guard and maritime militia forces to challenge Manila's patrols [16]. China has also strengthened security ties with Russia and Cambodia to offset Japan's growing influence in Southeast Asia; and (4) India and South Korea have maintained neutral positions but are closely monitoring developments. Divergent regional responses to Japan–Philippines maritime security cooperation indicate that this partnership has evolved into a significant factor shaping the Asia–Pacific security environment. Support from the United States, Australia, and several Southeast Asian states has reinforced a growing maritime security network centered on freedom of navigation and international law. In contrast, China's opposition has intensified strategic competition and the securitization of maritime spaces, particularly in the South China Sea. Consequently, regional security dynamics are increasingly marked by alignment polarization, strengthening deterrence for participating states while simultaneously increasing risks of strategic tension and miscalculation. Overall, Japan–Philippines cooperation contributes to a more networked yet contested regional security architecture. At the regional level, Japan–Philippines quasi-alliance cooperation enhances deterrence primarily through capacity-building, presence, and signaling, rather than through formal collective defense commitments. By improving the Philippines' maritime surveillance, patrol reach, and operational confidence, the cooperation raises the cost of coercive actions without introducing a rigid alliance structure. Importantly, this arrangement does not replace ASEAN-centered mechanisms but functions as a complementary layer, operating below the threshold of a formal military bloc. Its strategic significance lies in providing practical deterrence and strategic reassurance while preserving ASEAN's preference for flexibility, non-alignment, and avoidance of overt polarization in the Asia–Pacific security order.

However, the strategic gains generated by this cooperation are accompanied by high political and strategic costs for both parties. Beyond strategic benefits, Japan–Philippines maritime security cooperation also entails non-trivial costs for both sides. For the Philippines, closer alignment with Japan within a U.S.-centered security framework increases the risk of *entrapment* in broader regional contingencies - most notably a potential Taiwan Strait crisis - while further exacerbating tensions with China. For Japan, costs extend beyond the financial burden of ODA, equipment transfers, and capacity-building assistance to include political and strategic risks associated with deeper involvement in third-party

territorial disputes. Managing this trade-off between strategic gains and exposure will shape the sustainability of bilateral security cooperation.

5. Conclusion

Although anti-globalization trends have risen in the short term, interdependence among nations remains an undeniable reality. Amid shifting power dynamics, partnerships have become an essential mechanism in international relations. Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation is not only driven by their strategic partnership but also by shared concerns over China's rise in East Asia. Given Japan's territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands and the Philippines' dispute with China in the South China Sea, these overlapping concerns have drawn Tokyo and Manila closer in defense collaboration. While Japan-Philippines maritime security cooperation remains asymmetric due to differences in military and economic capacities, it has the potential to expand in the future and directly influence the regional security architecture. This cooperation contributes to maintaining power equilibrium in the Asia-Pacific and could eventually lead to the emergence of a new security alliance system, depending on the degree of commitment among stakeholders to sustaining regional stability.

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