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NAVIGATING CHINA'S GRAY ZONE STRATEGY IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

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Executive Summary

"Gray zone" strategies are situations characterized by competitive interactions between and among state or non-state actors which exist short of a formal state of war. The coercive actions in a "gray zone" vary and fall below key thresholds of conflict that could prompt a conventional military response. These are situations that have the following features – aggressive, perspective-dependent, and ambiguous – and the following elements – revisionism, gradualism and unconventionality.

This article was an assessment of the challenges in the South China Sea from these "gray zone" strategies of China and its impact to Philippine national security. This paper attempts to situate "gray zone" strategy and other such operations within China's overall grand strategy and assess AFP's readiness to respond to these challenges.

In order to better understand "gray zone" challenges, an explanation of China's 'Grand Strategy' was also necessary. Also, several other factors were considered, which include the following: 1) political system under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); 2) sovereignty, security and territorial integrity; and 3) sustained economic advancement. Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), China's 24-Character Strategy, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Central Military Commission (CMC), and its maritime militia were seen to be additional elements by which China employs its three-pronged strategy in the Asia Pacific, which have purposive economic, military and foreign policy dimensions.

With more focus on the South China Sea (SCS) operational space, the following Chinese campaigns were employed as part of

its “gray zone” strategies: graduated pressure strategy, “cabbage strategy”, “charm offensive”, “three-warfares strategy”, and “mapfare”.

More concrete examples of “gray zone” strategies in the Philippine operational space showed different aspects and techniques of “gray zone” strategies, including military intimidation, paramilitary activities, manipulation of borders, information operations, lawfare and diplomacy, cyberwarfare, economic coercion and political influence.

AFP’s responses to Chinese “gray zone” strategies included purposive modernization of maritime assets, establishment of maritime paramilitary presence, strengthening of intelligence network, internationalization of issues, and military multilateralism. Recommendations of the study included weaponizing public opinion, further strengthening of intelligence network, establishment of coordinated inter-agency responses, continuity of development of occupied islands and the establishment of more multilateral mechanisms.

I. Introduction: Situating the “Gray Zone”

A. Background

Over the past few years, China has been conducting various activities in the South China Sea (SCS), the Yellow and East China Seas as part of its maritime strategy. Whether it be via sponsorship of fleets of fishing craft that attack other fishers and even Coast Guards of other countries, expansive patrols of the China Coast Guard threatening non-Chinese fishers, or terraforming to build full-fledged artificial islands with People’s Liberation Army (PLA) military installations; all these activities are aimed at altering the “facts on the ground” that would gradually and incrementally cement China’s military foothold in the region.

China’s activities are part of an observed trend of so-called “gray zone” strategies, aimed at conducting coercive and aggressive actions without escalating to general interstate war[1] and provoking major international reactions. Although still debated upon in international circles, “gray zone” challenges have the following

characteristics: 1) it rests somewhere between peacetime and wartime; 2) gray zone activities are mostly aggressive in intent, and frequently serve a broader strategic objective; 3) ambiguity is an essential element; and 4) gray zone actions utilize multiple forms of power, such as political, economic, and military, among others[2].

With this context in mind, this article was commissioned by the National Task Force-West Philippine Sea (NTFWPS) through the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, J5, AFP and executed by the Office for Strategic Studies and Strategy Management, AFP. The data gathering process and paper were completed in 2018 and was kept unpublished until this time, due to the inherent sensitivity of the topic and the restrictions imposed by the NTFWPS and the OJ5, AFP. Two years after the completion of the study, the OSSSM shares a version of said paper, to spur discussion and increase interest in future research related to this topic.

This study assessed the then-emerging challenges in the SCS emanating from the so-called "gray zone" strategy of China and its impact to the Philippine national security. The study also answered the following secondary research questions:

1. How is China's "gray zone" activities in the Philippine maritime domain characterized?
2. What are the critical elements needed to develop a Philippine counterstrategy to mitigate the impact of China's "gray zone" strategy in the SCS and Philippine Rise?

Particularly, this article aims:

a. To understand the concept of "gray zone" strategy and its use in current and future conflicts;
b. To situate "gray zone" strategy and other such operations within China's overall "grand" strategy;
c. To assess the AFP's readiness to respond to China's "gray zone" challenges; and
d. To investigate possible strategy and policy recommendations from the AFP to the national level, to counter the "gray zone" challenge.

B. Studying the "Gray Zone"

Understanding the challenge posed by "gray zone" strategies is important because they represent a fundamental departure from the logic of warfare and conflict as typically understood, not only by the AFP, but by the Philippine government and the public at large. "Gray zone" strategies in the West Philippine Sea and other seas involve an orchestrated use not only of the Chinese military, specifically the PLA Navy, but its civilian maritime law enforcement (MLE) agencies and paramilitary arms (Chinese Coast Guard, maritime militia and fishing fleets) as well. The study of the character of "gray zone" strategies especially the utilization of "civilian" types of assets and different coercive "warlike" instruments "other than military" is not only a challenging dilemma for the defense and security sector alone, but to the whole bureaucracy, simply because: 1) "gray zone" mechanisms are mostly "civilian" in nature and 2) a phenomenon or a concept like "gray zone" that is absent of a theoretical framework puts the Philippine government lacking in intervention and in (again) a purely reactive posture.

Furthermore, understanding "gray zones" is necessary to not only investigate what China is presently doing, but how the Philippines may also utilize such strategies in developing counterstrategies and formulate policies according to its national interests. "Gray zone" strategies may also be used as a tool for achievement of aims as it involves mechanisms other than the military, which may be more palatable for the Philippines and the public who may yet be apprehensive of appearing militaristic or relying too much on the Armed Forces. In general, this study assumes that the AFP modernization program budget in the medium term will not change and the joint force will rely on existing capabilities.

The researchers acknowledge that there are a number of literature that deals with the concept of "gray zone" challenges and strategies, and a number have focused on how China executes these strategies to further consolidate its position in the SCS. This study drew general themes and relationship from the existing related literature that are relevant to the Philippine context. These general themes and relationship were validated with the experiences of area commanders and encounters of naval operating forces in the WPS. This study, is thus, limited in comprehensiveness of the

other “gray zone” strategies which the other sectors of the society may be experiencing.

Qualitative methods were employed in the data gathering. Focus group discussions (FGDs) through the Office for Strategic Studies and Strategy Management’s (OSSSM) Strategic Studies Working Group Meetings (SSWGM) were conducted with key informants composed of commanders from the Unified Commands, specifically the Northern Luzon Command (NOLCOM) (April 17, 2018 and May 24, 2018), and the Western Command (WESCOM) and Naval Forces West (NAVFORWEST) on April 26 – 28, 2018 in order to provide a first-hand account of Chinese “gray zone” operations in action. An additional FGD facilitated by OJ5 was also conducted on June 5, 2018 to further gather and validate concepts and data. Finally, the findings of this research were presented to one of the meetings in the NTFWPS, chaired by the National Security Adviser (NSA), in November 2018.

II. China’s Strategic Presence in the South China Sea

Focusing on the South China Sea, since 1995, China has been strategically ‘placing its pieces’ on the ‘board’ that is the SCS. They have been aggressively establishing control over the area through a “creeping invasion” of the islands, especially those situated along choke points and sea lines of communication (SLOCs) where 85% of Chinese international trade passes. China’s policy in the South China Sea is reflective of their pursuit of their three core interests – maritime, foreign and defense policies – which are all mutually supporting.

By setting policy over the SCS, China can gauge the breadth and scope of other claimant states’ responses, tailoring its next moves to become more effective; a controlled escalation of tensions which would eventually lead to a misstep in policy declarations or military posturing by other claimant states, thereby providing China a moral justification to press on with its claims, or a good cause to justify military action.

A major gamechanger was China’s massive terraforming in the South China Sea, which started in 2014. This has resulted into the occupation of strategic locations in the area, where multi-use

structures which can project politico-economic power in the region have been built, both as forward operating bases and as logistics hubs. All this has been enabled not only with China's increasing clout in global affairs, but also with the modernization of its armed forces, particularly the PLA-Navy.

This section is a compilation of China's activities which falls on strategies below the threshold of war that were employed in the South China Sea operational space.

Graduated Pressure Strategy

China has been employing graduated actions and responses in order to ensure a controlled escalation and crisis calculation in the South China Sea, referred to as a 'Graduated Pressure Strategy'[3]. This is done by measuring the reaction of potential adversaries and impressing on them the political and military cost of pursuing a policy inimical to China's interests. At the center of this graduated strategy is the combined and coordinated utilization of military and non-military maritime forces, which basically comprises their developing sea power capability. The use of non-military means prevents escalation while ensuring that disputes remain localized. Specifically, it creates a dilemma to a superpower like the United States on their rationale and policy justification to step in on behalf of their embattled ally in the region.

Bridging its military and civilian maritime forces at sea in a coordinated manner, China has been employing graduated actions in an 'aggressive' yet 'low-key' manner to control the escalation of conflict and for crisis calculation. Its extensive use of the "white" civilian law enforcement vessels patrolling in the disputed territories "eschews the kinds of escalation that warships would likely provoke while ensuring that disputes remain localized"[4]. By creating a commotion in the disputed area, China can calculate how the Philippines will respond through its current capability, and the will of its national leaders.

Furthermore, this 'Push and Probe' enabled China to change and set the status quo in the South China Sea. For example, the "White on White"[5] policy, which is ideally understood to help de-escalate tensions in the area, has been set up by China as

the status quo in the disputed areas. In line with this, they have strengthened and reinforced their law enforcement agencies to be better equipped against the fledgling maritime law enforcement agencies of the other claimants in the SCS. Furthermore, the asymmetry in the form of conflicts and tensions between China and the other claimant countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines has also been successfully set up by China. This includes their use of civilian fishing vessels in surveillance and provocations toward Vietnamese and Philippine vessels, and strategically deploying military and non-military assets through various structures in both the Paracels and the Spratlys.

"Cabbage Strategy"

From the Chinese perspective, the "cabbage strategy" aims to "reclaim" territories "illegally" occupied by the Philippines as it violates Chinese law. Its mechanism was vividly described as swarming a contested area with many fishing vessels, fishing administration ships, marine surveillance ships, and navy warships wrapping the islands by layers in a cabbage-like form[6]. This is "to starve Filipino detachments and prevent reinforcements from reaching them"[7]. Having this blockade, the stationed forces will be pressured to leave as their supplies cannot sustain their needs anymore. Hence, the exhaustion and subsequent withdrawal of Filipino forces is an opportunity for China to seize the area.

The interplay of military and non-military forces of China lends a strong strategic leverage that Beijing is utilizing to the hilt. China's PLA-N assets employ over the horizon strategy (OTH) of standing by at the periphery while its non-military forces take the forefront. The PLA-N serves as a backup whenever its civilian law enforcement assets fail in its role. This amplifies their coercion and intimidation factors towards the other party as crisis escalates (gunboat diplomacy)[8], and induces other claimants to back down and just pursue legal and/or diplomatic means in confronting aggressive actions of China as their capabilities will not match the PLA-N's firepower. Through this, China can still employ its strong and steadily-developing navy and shore-based strategic military assets as a strong backup to the civilian agencies. It serves as an additional deterrence against China's adversaries.

“Creeping Invasion”: Occupation and Reclamation

The ‘creeping invasion’ strategy, which is very familiar to the Philippines since the Mischief Reef incident of 1995, is still being used in full force by the Chinese. Now, they have also diversified their activities into occupation through reclaiming land and building permanent military and civilian structures over these features, and the pursuit of various economic activities such as oil drilling. China’s completion of its island-building, and its subsequent operationalization as forward operating bases allow it to mount extended patrols over the entirety of the South China Sea. Also, fighter aircraft based on the airstrip can interdict perceived intrusions into disputed airspace in the Paracels and further out to the Spratlys. Such moves can escalate tensions with overflights into sovereign airspace and interdictions in contested skies.

The reclamation is a major piece in order to achieve China’s long-term goal of establishing de facto control over the disputed area. Infrastructure development in the SCS is clearly a deliberate move by China to establish a more permanent and sustainable presence in the area, and to support its economic goals under the maritime dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative. Further, aside from the fact that developing islands is faster and cheaper than building aircraft carriers, their new islands provide an enduring and unsinkable platform for military operations in the South China Sea, as opposed to a carrier, which should periodically go back to port for resupply.

“Charm Offensive”

China’s “Charm Offensive” is the use of soft power to influence other states “by means of persuasion rather than coercion”. This could be conveyed in numerous forms of political, cultural and economic undertakings such as diplomacy, participation in multilateral organizations, businesses, and educational exchanges.

China has been extensively providing help to the several ASEAN governments in various forms as part of its fostering a closer bilateral relationship with them. One of the most high-profile examples of this is with Cambodia during the 2012 ASEAN Summit Meeting, wherein its bilateral relationship with China strongly

influenced its decision-making capacity. It was during this time that ASEAN failed for the first time in its 45 years of history to issue a Joint Communiqué due to Cambodia's protest not to include words pertaining to the West Philippine Sea dispute. This fallout is unprecedented in ASEAN's history and has exposed cracks among the solidarity of the member states. Cambodia's support appears to be rewarded by China's civil and military assistance.

"Three Warfares" Strategy

In line with Sun Tzu's 'winning without fighting' adage, one of China's major strategies in winning the South China Sea is the 'Three Warfares': media, psychological, and legal warfare, which are all interrelated and mutually supporting.

- Psychological warfare is the basis for media and legal warfare. It involves disrupting the enemy's decision-making capacity by sapping their will, arousing anti-war sentiments and causing an opponent to second-guess himself, all while defending against an opponent's attempts to conduct similar operations.[9]
- Media warfare is the struggle to gain dominance over the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare; it is perhaps best seen as a constant, ongoing activity, aimed at long-term influence of perceptions and attitudes through the use of news or other media.[10]
- Legal warfare is a key instrument in psychological and media warfare. It raises doubts among adversary and neutral military and civilian authorities, as well as the broader population, about the legality of adversary actions, thereby diminishing political will and support; this is conducted through a media warfare campaign.[11]

"Mapfare"

China's "mapfare", as what some international scholars refer to as China's production of maps containing their nine-dash line, is intended to reinforce China's claims in the South China Sea. Furthermore, this is also done in order to project a strong presence in the disputed territory to the Chinese public, ultimately to rationalize the actions of the PLA-Navy and allow the Chinese Communist Party to remain in power. Moreover, their maps of

the nine-dash line do not contain any coordinates, maintaining its strategic ambiguity. The dashes (significantly not a solid line) also represent China's intent of conquering critical areas that support its Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy, especially the First Island Chain.

III. China and its Overall Strategy

China's 'Grand Strategy'[12]

Despite the assumption that chess is the ultimate game of strategy, China's global gameplan is reminiscent of the board game go, which is mainly a contestation of space and position – a war of maneuver. Combat in go focuses on constructing territories and using these to overwhelm an enemy if a position is left open. Due to its nature, go enhances a tactician's ability to read ahead, see the bigger picture, and reduce complex maneuvers to simple equations. In this sense, it should also be noted that instead of directly attacking another country's policy actions, China seeks to decrease the strategic options of its 'adversary' until the other country is pushed to make mistakes due to lack of strategic flexibility.

Following this, China's actions are for positional advantage and accumulation of 'territories'. Since the ascension of Xi Jinping into power in 2012, it could be observed that China has been stepping up towards a greater role in global affairs, evident in the "China Dream" battlecry of the current administration. The change in leadership only intensified the pursuit of the three core interests of China: 1) China's political system under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; 2) sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and 3) sustained economic advancement. These core interests have a complex interplay with each other – the CCP's political legitimacy rests on its ability to sustain economic growth, and in turn, economic growth is strongly tied to China's ability to secure resources for itself. In order to secure these resources, China must either have control of the sources of these resources, or at least secure the trade routes where these resources transit. These are the driving forces of what could be construed as China's so-called 'grand strategy'.

China's actions are not the unintentional result of bureaucratic politics and poor coordination; in fact, these actions suggest exemplary interagency coordination, civil-military control and harmonization of its political, economic and military objectives under one leadership, one belief, and one set of goals[13]. China's strategies and activities are interrelated, and with their strict top-down decision-making process, emanating from a single source – President Xi Jinping – and two overarching national concepts: xuechi (雪恥)or "avenge humiliation" and tianxia (天下) or "all under heaven". Xuechi is the embodiment of their national sentiment of 'avenging' their humiliation from 1839-1849, and the main driver of their core interests. Tianxia is a worldview that transcends what Western thinkers call 'internationality' and 'international rules-based order', and envisions a world system characterized by harmony and cooperation without hegemony. All in all, these two concepts empower Chinese nationalism and the need to regain lost glory from their 'Century of Humiliation'. At the heart of operationalizing this all into China's political, economic, and foreign policy is China's paramount leader, Xi Jinping.

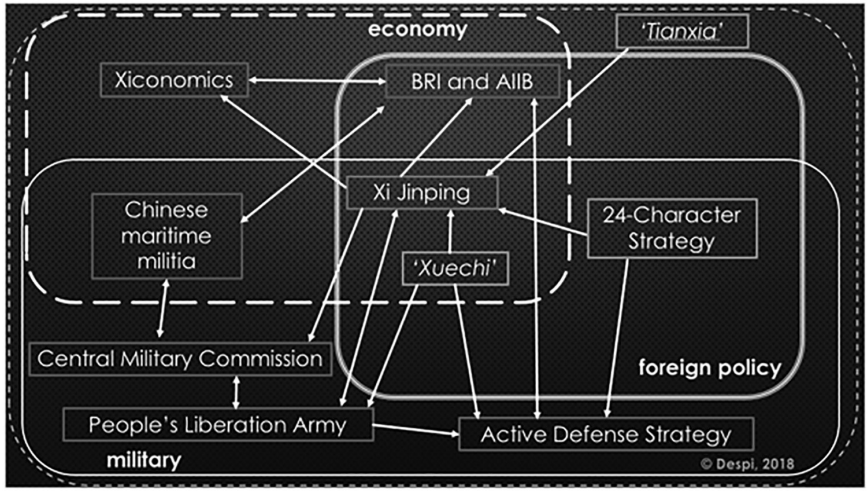

Diagram 1.0. The linkages in China's grand strategy

With this, the diagram above tries to summarize China's strategic calculus through the links between concepts, institutions, and tools which direct and rationalize China's deliberate, systematic behavior. It highlights China's three-pronged strategy in the Asia-Pacific, with particular and purposive economic, military,

and foreign policy dimensions[14]. Some of the most important elements, and how they are interrelated, will be briefly discussed and summarized in this section of the paper.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB)

The Chinese economy is largely export-driven and dependent on sea trade, with a small but changing domestic consumer base. The twin prongs of the BRI and the AIIB are China's main tools to create an opportunity to access and establish what can be considered the "biggest market in the world, with unparalleled potential". As part of China's grand strategy in the Asia-Pacific, the BRI is, in actuality, a way for China to pursue their core interest of sustained economic advancement through expanding and ensuring access to its external markets, and reinforce the subtle revisions to the international economic order.

China's adaptive mechanisms to its globalizing economy are centered on identifying countries that could play a vital role in protecting its global interests and establishing partnerships with them. The overall approach of China is to diversify its diplomatic relations, to invest in states with high economic potential but low development and to use their armed forces to secure and protect its assets overseas. In this sense, the BRI is not only an economic tool; it is a major part of their foreign policy as their diversified economic interests have been strategically positioned around the globe to serve a politico-military purpose as these are used as leverage for negotiation, intelligence gathering, and facilitators of military activity.

24-Character Strategy

Foreign affairs is a key area wherein the paramount leader holds the ultimate decision-making power. Deng Xiaoping had put forward the '24 Characters of Change' as the basis for China's foreign policy for the past three decades, and Xi Jinping is now in a vital position to change China's foreign policy outlook in order to assume a more assertive approach. Deng's foreign policy guidance (particularly 'taoguang yanghui', literally translated as "hide brightness, cherish obscurity", and often interpreted as "biding

time while strengthening capability") was more focused on keeping a low profile, avoiding engaging in controversial issues, developing good-neighborly relationships and focusing on nurturing strength through trade and foreign investment. This allowed for a period of strategic opportunity where China's rise was unhampered, seeing record developments in both the economic and the military modernization activities. Further, this allowed for the development of military strategies which currently direct China's activities in the Asia-Pacific.

With China's unprecedented rise in global affairs in this period, China is jumping off from the gains of this strategy to assume a leadership position in the world. The hailing of Xi as the paramount leader signals a new era for Chinese foreign policy as the country establishes itself as an economic and military power, further cementing the 'Chinese Dream' of restoring national vitality and international significance.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Central Military Commission

The PRC has the largest standing army in the world. The leadership of the Chinese military in general is exercised through the CCP's Central Military Commission, of which the head is the paramount leader of China[15], Xi Jinping. This commission has the same rank in the bureaucracy as the State Council, thus, the rest of the government has technically no control over it, and that it constitutes "a state within a state"[16].

Directly under the supervision of the Central Military Commission is the People's Liberation Army (PLA), China's armed forces, under which are the PLA-Navy, and the PLA-Air Force. China's domestic, foreign and defense policies related to maritime issues are mutually supporting in the sense that each move orchestrated by the PLA is precisely calculated and rationalized by their foreign and domestic policy. In the 1990s, China had shifted focus from developing its army to increasing attention to the navy, air force and rocket forces to develop force projection capability[17].

In order to maximize their current period of strategic opportunity, the modernization of the PLA, particularly of the Navy, and the rate

in which they expand their reach in the SCS and the Pacific are both alarmingly too fast for the comfort of the surrounding countries. This is operationalized by their 'Active Defense Strategy', characterized by the concept of "informationized local wars", and the pivotal shift from "offshore waters defense" to "open seas protection"[18]. Further, this is because the PLA is projected to be the guarantor of the 'alternative' framework that China is espousing in the Asia-Pacific region.

China's Maritime Militia

The main reason for the rise of China's maritime militia is primarily due to the neglect of the PLA before to improve its Navy's capability[19]. Thus, this motivated different agencies to create and maintain paramilitary units in order to fill in the gaps in response to the growing challenges of maritime security.[20] A great force multiplier, they provide more stamina and greater force to efficiently conduct operations on the protection of China's maritime rights and politico-economic interests in the disputed waters.

The maritime militia consists of civilian law enforcement agencies, and a fleet of fishing vessels which can execute military action plans in WPS under the guise of being civilian-operated vessels. It is even said that most individuals manning these vessels are PLA-trained, if not former or covert military personnel.Their acts, although belligerent and dangerous, cannot be considered a form of aggression by virtue of their civilian and economic nature; thereby this poses difficulty justifying that the Philippines is experiencing harassments and aggressiveness in order for the Navy to step in.

IV. China's Gray Zone Activities in the Philippines

This section will provide instances of China's consistent, persistent and escalatory tactics particularly in the WPS and the Philippine Rise. Before giving the examples, shown below is a table providing a short summary of the significant events since the Mischief Reef incident in 1995 to underscore the slow, measured but effective Chinese activities in the SCS through the years.

Year	Event
1995	Mischief Reef Occupation
2002	Signing of the Declaration of Conduct in the South China Sea
2012	Scarborough Shoal Standoff
2013	Philippines files a case against China
2014	China starts island-building in the Spratlys
2016	Completion of islands and Arbitration ruling (July)
2017	Start of militarization of islands
2018	Placing of missile-capable systems; China Coast Guard placed under People's Armed Police, which is also under the Central Military Commission

Table 1.0 Timeline of Significant Developments in the SCS

A. Examples of Gray Zone Activities in the Philippine Maritime Domains (West Philippine Sea and Philippine Rise)

To better contextualize the ways in which China employs "gray zone" strategies in the Philippines, this study adapted Lyle Morris' (senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation)types of activities that China is using in East and Southeast Asia (Table 4) and Michael Mazarr's table on "gray zone" campaigns which include the range of tools and technique that can be used to assemble "gray zone" strategies (Table 5)[22]:

Type of "Gray Zone" Strategy	Description	Examples	Examples in the Philippine Context
1. Military Intimidation	-the use of military assets to convey the threat of a potential military attack or a risk of military escalation	-massing troops at the border -large-scale exercises -use of military assets to support "Cabbage" strategy -provocative actions against military assets operating in China's exclusive economic zone	- Placement of nuclear-capable bombers in their occupied features in May 2018 - Harassment of PN Navy vessels in late May 2018 - Massive PLA Navy exercises in the South China Sea in March 2018 -Consistent flying H-6 bombers over the SCS since 2014 - PLA Navy always backing MLE, MM and fishing vessels when operating in the SCS

2. Paramilitary	-the use of assets whose character blurs distinction between civilian and military; or whose operators and tactics blur the distinction	-Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE), -Maritime Militia (MM)	-Chinese Coast Guard – a nominally "civilian agency" but recently placed under the China Military Commission (Armed Force) – to protect claimed territory in the SCS
		-the use of state or state-affiliated bodies other than MLE, MM and military assets -the potential to use scientific research and exploration to advance claims in disputed regions	-PLA Navy currently operates a network of 200,000 fishing vessels as a de facto maritime militia or naval auxiliary under PLAN control -employment of Naval Militia on commercial shipping industries - Chinese MM forcibly taking catches/fishes from Filipino fishermen on a recent incident at the Scarborough Shoal in early June 2018
3. Manipulation of Borders	-covert or overt actions undertaken to alter the status quo or delineation of territorial or maritime disputes	-island building -issuing of passports with China's nine-dash line	-construction at the claimed island features (Johnson, Fiery Cross, Subi, Mischief Reefs, etc.) -China issued a new passport design which included disputed features as part of China in November 2012
4. Information Operations	- the use of media and propaganda to justify one's claims to sovereignty or to uphold the moral authority of one's actions in international	-discrediting other countries' sovereignty over islands and maritime spaces in the ECS and SCS through international and domestic spheres -disrupting other countries' communications	-getting support from non-aligned countries; discrediting the credibility and applicability of the tribunal's July 2016 decision re maritime disputes in the SCS (international sphere) - strengthening China's claims in the disputed territories through textbooks, public education and daily articles and op-eds in Chinese local media (domestic sphere) - PH naval installation lost communication signals prior to March 2014 mission to conduct resupply mission at the Second Thomas Shoal

5. Lawfare and Diplomacy	- the use of legal scholarship, norms or political rhetoric to legitimize one's stance on territorial disputes	- taking advantage of existing norms to advance or protect its interests	-abandoning nine-dash line for the 'Four Sha's" to adapt to UNCLOS terminologies -claiming "historic rights" or "traditional fishing grounds" or "normal PLA Navy operations" to normalize activities in the SCS -the use PRC domestic law as justification for use of military, paramilitary and non-military means of coercion or to assert international claims -promotion of Chinese interpretation of UNCLOS -passing blame to US, Vietnam, PH and Japan for incidents that occur "within China's peripheral seas" -Xiang Yang Hong 3's "scientific expedition" in the Philippine Rise in December 2017 "as a freedom of navigation activity" -unilateral fishing ban in December 2013 to strengthen administrative control over the disputed maritime areas
6. Cyberwarfare	-overt or covert execution of (or at least ignoring) offensive cyber intrusions	- cyber intrusions against Japan and the Philippines during the Scarborough Shoal stand-off and after the 2016 Tribunal ruling	- hacking/cyber intrusions in the DND and DFA when July 2016 Tribunal decision was publicized
7. Economic Coercion	-imposing economic costs through the use of trade, aid, investments, and threats of sanctions to influence state behavior in contested regions.	-travel bans and imposing visa limitations for the purposes of affecting remittances.	-2013 Philippine banana embargo after the Scarborough Shoal stand-off -issuing of travel advisory against the Philippines which affected tourism industry in 2014

Table 2.0 Types of Chinese Gray Zone Actions

On the other hand,the table below shows China's "gray zone" tools and techniques according to the degree of gravity of interference, with those in bold font as examples in the Philippine context.

	Economic	Military/ Clandestine	Informational	Political	Other
High End	General Example: 1.Blockade 2.Severe sanctions 3.Energy coercion **(Possibility on Energy Coercion with National Grid Corporation under Chinese leadership)**	General Example: 1.Nuclear posturing 2. Movements of troops, threats 3.Creation of fait accompli situations 4. Large-scale covert actions to weaken regime 5. Discrete acts of violence at key moments 6. Use of UW forces (SOF, covert operators) in direct action with deniability 7. Sponsoring large scale proxy violence **1. Placement of nuclear-capable bombers at Fiery Cross Reef in May 2018** **2. Use of UW forces (MLE, MM, Chinese Coast Guard) to deny entry (i.e. disallow fishing activities of local fishermen) within contested areas** **3.Consistent flying H-6 bombers over the SCS since 2014**	General Example: 1. Major propaganda campaigns 2.Large-scale deception and denial to conceal revisionist intent	General Example: 1.Support for domestic opposition, exiles, guerillas, militias 2.Major claims in global forums to support revisionist intent; urgent efforts to change rules, distribution of goods 3. Conclude formal alliances 4. Sign treaties	General Example: 1.Large-scale cyber-attacks 2. Use of nonmilitary assets (CG, Fishing Fleets) to create de facto presence **1.Presence of CG and "swarm of fishing fleets" in the SCS features, backed by PLA Navy** **2. Smuggling warfare – China is biggest source of illegal drugs in the Philippines**

		4. China's effective sea control in specific areas/ achievement of deniability of passage **5. PLA Navy in Ayungin Shoal** **6. Philippine Navy operating in an environment where there is a "new normal"**			
Middle Ground	1.Target sectoral denial 2. Limited sanctions **1. 2013 Philippine banana embargo**	1. Large-scale exercises 2. Signaling 3. Moderate covert actions for leverage or specific goals 4. Sponsoring moderate proxy activities 5. Expand/revise military presence in regions/state **1.Massive PLA Navy exercises in the South China Sea in March 2018** **2.Expansion of PLAN presence in the SCS**	1. Develop and publicize historical narrative 2. Moderate propaganda campaign **1. Abandoning nine-dash line for the 'Four Sha's" to adapt to UNCLOS terminologies** **2.Claiming "historic rights" or "traditional fishing grounds" or "normal PLA Navy operations" to normalize activities in the SCS** **3.Unilateral fishing ban in December 2013 to strengthen administrative control over the disputed maritime areas**	1.Dialogues with adversary political opposition 2. Moderate efforts in international forums to revise rules 3. Establish regional concerts **1. Dialogue and "friendly stance" towards the Duterte administration who has publicly expressed dislike against China's rival in the region (US)** **2.AIIB and BRI vs Western-lead cooperations/ initiatives**	1. Cyber-harassing, targeted cyberaction **1. Vast mining companies owned by Chinese are illegally operating, almost under the radar in the Philippines**

Low End	1. Trade policies 2. Implied economic coercion **1. Palawan as a sister-city of Hainan, China (more people-to-people exchanges but also possibility of manipulation of business sector in Palawan)** **2. Economic aid warfare – ZTE/North Rail Transit Project/ dam and rehabilitation centers projects/ Laoag International Airport**	1. Small scale covert actions for modest goals 2. Low-level backing for proxy attacks **1. Island building as a "normal activity for civilian purposes"**	1. General information diplomacy **General Activities in Palawan to watch-out on:** **1. Chinese "cultural missions" and LGU exchange (Palawan and Hainan Province)** **2. Direct flights from China to Palawan** **3. Palawan governor is also a businessman and is generally more concerned about entrepreneurial engagements for the province, than defense and security** **4. Increase in purchase of land assets/ lots in Palawan by Chinese businessmen/ citizens**	1.Use of global forums to assert goals on persistent basis 2. Networks, Track 2 efforts **1. Zambales fishermen being sponsored by China to study aquaphonics as alternative to fishing in order to (possibly) reject the claim about Scarborough Shoal being a "traditional fishing ground" for Filipino fishermen**	

Table 3.0 Types of Chinese Gray Zone Actions according to Gravity of Interference

The significant number of these "gray zone" strategies reflect a phenomenon which employs mechanisms other than military means of coercion. These activities were experienced and observed by the area commanders in NOLCOM, WESCOM and NAVFORWEST while some of the other aspects of "gray zone" (i.e. economic, political, informational, etc.) were from the literature.

V. The Character of a "Gray Zone"

The characterization of "gray zone" strategies from the literature describes these strategies as competitive interactions between and

among state or non-state actors which occur between the peace and war duality.[23] These are situations that have the following three distinct features: aggressive, perspective-dependent, and ambiguous.[24]

These are situations which exist short of a formal state of war because the coercive actions vary and they fall below key thresholds of conflict that could prompt a conventional military response. Even conventional military responses is deemed to be an impractical or an inappropriate approach because gray zone challenges employ non-military or civilian applications and/or actors [i.e. use of maritime law enforcement (MLE) vessels or maritime militia which are civilian in nature but have military guidance and are essentially, state-controlled].[25]

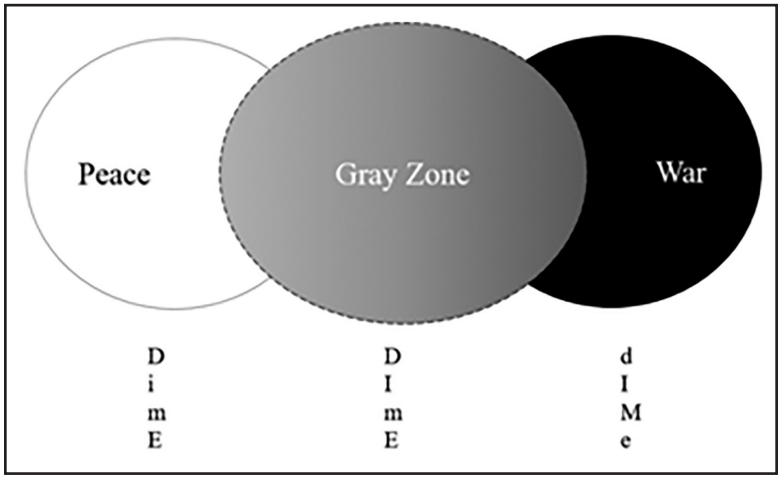

Diagram 2.0. Gray Zone Challenges

Common related notions of gray zone strategies are military concepts including irregular warfare, hybrid warfare, unconventional warfare, unrestricted warfare, low-intensity conflict, 4th generation warfare, proxy wars, Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), Small Wars, asymmetric warfare and others.[26] Since gray zones strategies and the above-mentioned concepts have overlapping characteristics, the table below summarizes what RAND Corporation's senior policy analyst Michael Mazarr describes as elements or components of gray zone strategies, in order to clarify and distinguish gray zone from the rest of the concepts.[27]

Elements

Elements	Objective
Revisionist	To change the order/system
Gradual	To change theoperational landscape
Unconventional	To change the approach and tools of warfare

Table 4.0 Elements of Gray Zone Strategies

A. Revisionism – Dissatisfied powers or revisionist states are highly motivated (due to identity-fueled grievances and wide array and types of frustrations) to alter the existing international system or the status quo, in order to tilt the distribution of goods and power (including, but not limited to territories) and improve their position in the international system relative to others. Revisionists also seek to gain respect, recognition and advantage from the global community via membership/participation in norm-building activities and international fora (Track II engagements). They are generally "responsible stakeholders" in the global community but rigorously works to refine the system and introduce alternative norms and institutions which better reflect their interests, influence, and leadership (i.e. Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank vs World Bank, Belt and Road Initiative vs Trans-Pacific Partnership, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) vs G7 Summit).

Passive Status Quo ("Lambs")	Active Status Quo ("Lions")	Targeted Revisionist	Measured Revisionist	Opportunistic Predator ("Jackals")	Reckless Predator ("Wolves")
Sweden	**United Kingdom**	**United States**	**China**	**North Korea**	**Nazi Germany**
No motive to overturn system or gain relative advantage; limited investment in current – patterns. Security through appeasement and bandwagoning.	Powerful defense of existing status, supports rules-based order, little motive for aggressive relative gains acquisition. Self-defense, balancing.	Satisfied power with no motive to harm system, but revisionist and risk-accepting on a few issues; little ethno-nationalist motivation; sensitive to relative power, violent in defense of order.	Primary goal is preserving power; favors many elements of global order, but dissatisfied with current status, power relations and rule sets; strong nationalist narratives and motivation; determined to enhance relative power.	Seek change in power balance, but risk-averse and self-protective; values security of regime more than change in status; will ally with lions and wolves.	Values relative gains more than security. Highly risk-tolerant and aggressive. Doctrinal or ideological requirement to spread territory. Determined to upset system. Unlimited aims.

Table 5.0 Four categories of Revisionists and their characteristics[28]

B. Gradualism – Strategic gradualists work with the "time factor" in mind and are, thus, long-term thinkers. They work towards their strategic ambitions in small, slow, accumulative and patient steps, striving to remain below the threshold of conflict. While the early intrusions are piecemeal at the start, if these were added up together over time, it would reflect a substantial change in the system. Gradualists' end goal is geared towards dramatically changing the operational landscape in a slow but steady manner. Gradualist approaches range from unconventional war strategies, covert use of military forces, cyber-attacks, proxy wars, wide array and severe economic sanctions, to far less elaborate, but piecemeal activities.

C. Unconventionality – Gray zone strategies use unconventional tools and techniques as a general approach. Different states have utilized various covert tools of statecraft or instruments of power in order to create constraints to any state or non-state actors which undermines the status quo. Strategies such as political warfare, propaganda, covert operations - including the support to local guerrilla fighters against a certain government, information warfare, and cyber activities. For example, Greek city-states, millennia ago, employed fifth columnists, proxy militias and early forms of information warfare against the Romans.[29] US did different covert operations through its support to Afghan rebels, Contras of Nicaragua, Libyan rebels while Russia armed the Taliban rebels and Turkey backed the Free Syrian army. Similarly, Iran used a wide array of networks of quasi-military forces and covert operatives (i.e. Hezbollah) to put itself in a relatively more influential position among Middle East powers.[30]

VI. Assessment: AFP Responses to Chinese Gray Zone Strategies

Purposive modernization of maritime assets

One of the foremost responses of the AFP is the continued and purposive modernization of its maritime assets. Some of the most recent and significant acquisitions include the BRP Gregorio Velasquez, a scientific research ship, which could be used to support marine scientific research initiatives by the Department of Science and Technology and other initiatives by Filipino marine scientists.

Another is the TC-90 Aircraft from Japan, which is instrumental in surveillance patrols, particularly in Scarborough Shoal.

"Philippine Maritime Militia"

As of writing, the AFP is developing plans to utilize Filipino fishermen for swarming tactics in the West Philippine Sea. This plan should be developed closely with maritime agencies such as the Philippine Coast Guard, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Strengthening the intelligence network

Another of the AFP's responses – best practices, even – is to utilize fishermen to gather information with regard to operational realities in the disputed waters. The reporting system is still currently being improved to further refine the gathering and dissemination process.

Internationalization of issues

The AFP has been internationalizing issues in the West Philippine Sea in order to increase the pressure on the Chinese government, both from internal and external sources. A good example of this is the use of media to expose the harassments being done by the Chinese maritime militia towards Filipino fishermen. However, this should also be used prudently so as to avoid overhype and backfiring of issues against the Philippines.

Military multilateralism

The AFP maintains a wide variety of military-to-military relationships with different countries around the world through its international defense and security engagements (IDSE). This mechanism allows the AFP to engage particular countries for general and specific defense and security matters. This military diplomacy has been helpful in gathering different kinds of assistance (i.e. joint exercises, military trainings, equipment, officer exchanges, etc.) to augment AFP's capabilities while still modernizing.

VI. Recommendations

The 'gray zone' opens doors for the Philippines to employ other strategies as the weaker nation against China. There is a need to employ unconventional, asymmetric tactics in order to achieve the strategic objective of defending Philippine sovereignty and territory and to ensure the unfettered and unhampered access to our exclusive economic zone by the Filipinos.

'Weaponizing' public opinion

The Chinese public's opinion matters very much to their government. This is the reason why propaganda, both for an internal and external audience, is an important facet of Chinese governance, and that stirring nationalism remains at the top of their list. It is a known fact that between international pressure and domestic issues, China will always have to prioritize the domestic sphere in order for them to uphold the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party, and to maintain Xi Jinping's power base. As many scholars note, the CCP's fear of domestic uproar and implosion – a possible repeat of the Tiananmen Square Incident of 1989, perhaps – is a constant preoccupation that Chinese leaders have to deal with.

This opens a door for the Philippines and move to utilize social media and other mediums of communication (personal, people-to-people communication; publications, discussion groups, etc.) to incite democratic thoughts and ideas of discontent and resentment amongst the Chinese people against their government. Hong Kong is a good area to start with when it comes to such ideas, considering the significant Filipino population there, and the relative openness towards democratic ideas. However, this should be used prudently and carefully as this may backfire on the Overseas Filipino Workers currently in China.

Further, the utilization of think tanks should be boosted, especially in international publications. It could be remembered that China used their think tanks during the arbitration case to find ways on how to 1) find loopholes in the provisions of the UNCLOS in order to circumvent these in case the Philippines win; 2) understand the socio-political climate of the Philippines; and 3)

gather international audience through holding various conferences, academic exchanges, and educational visits to various countries in the ASEAN, particularly the Philippines. It is advisable for the Philippines to use the current boom of think tanks in order to internationalize issues, gather opinion, and put forward more ideas from the academe with regard to the WPS issue.

Strengthening intelligence networks

The Chinese strongly believe in guanxi, or 'relationship networks'. With this, they invest heavily in people-to-people relations, particularly with those they believe are instrumental to their objectives, such as businesspeople, influential pillars of society, think tanks, members of the academe, and government officials. They have a comprehensive system of intelligence-gathering and propaganda dissemination through their established channels.

In this case, there is a need to strengthen further the intelligence networks of Filipinos closely working with China. This may also include the utilization of Filipino students pursuing higher studies in China, particularly those taking intensive Chinese classes, and graduate and post-graduate degrees. A robust reporting system, particularly on public opinion and social weather, by these individuals may be developed.

Further, an unexplored dimension is strengthening the intelligence network with choice individuals and organizations in Taiwan. Considering that Taiwan is the closest country with top-notch information about the mainland, it is prudent for the Philippines to continue good, low-key relations with this country, albeit, with caution, due to the One China Policy.

Coordinated inter-agency responses

"Gray zone" strategies have "war-like objectives" but are conducted through different mechanisms "other than military." It is best to address the "gray zone" strategy dilemma in a whole-of-nation approach, primarily because most of the "gray zone" strategies are civilian in nature. The AFP remains vigilant against "gray zone" strategies that are under the "military/clandestine"

category of “gray zone” tools and techniques. However, other “gray zone” techniques lie well beyond what the AFP can intervene on (i.e. economic, political, informational). Research-based recommendations from other government think tanks (i.e. National Defense College of the Philippines, Foreign Service Institute, etc.) and the academe is also another mechanism towards consolidating a comprehensive government counterstrategy against China’s “gray zone” strategies.

Furthermore, the whole-of-nation approach should include the creation of a working protocol guiding all activities of Philippine vessels in the West Philippine Sea, and the development of a tight and secure reporting network system. This will facilitate better coordination and open secure lines within the national agencies concerned with the WPS.

One other recommendation is to explore the involvement of the private sector, particularly the information technology (IT) sector, in the development of secure IT systems for the use of the NTF-WPS agencies.

Continuous development of occupied islands

Decision-makers should also very well consider the continuously-rising tempo of China’s operations in the West Philippine Sea, and push for the development of the country’s occupied islands. It would be best to rehabilitate the Philippine-occupied islands soonest in order to strengthen our claims and foothold on the said features. Considering that China’s focus perpetually shifts between dealing with its international commitments and its domestic issues, the Philippines should weigh the options of fortifying islands in the KIG, such as that of Pag-asa Island, most especially to sustain the inhabitants.

One of the major considerations in this case is to let all activity remain low-key and not publicized in the media, as this may complicate current situations with China and the rest of the claimant countries in the South China Sea.

Multilateral mechanisms

It is very important for the Philippines to diversify international engagements and partnerships and for the decision-makers to extensively review Chinese investments/loans in relation to the economic aspect of "gray zone" strategies so as to prevent high debt-incurrence (i.e. Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Bangladesh, etc.) and the possibility of severe economic sanctions.

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THE NORTH BORNEO/SABAH DISPUTE: WAYS FORWARD FOR PHILIPPINE STRATEGIC INTERESTS

ERICK NIELSON JAVIER AND JOSHUA BERNARD B. ESPEÑA

BACKGROUND

The recent remarks by Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin III have sparked renewed interest in the North Borneo/ Sabah dispute. A complex dispute with a long history going back to the days of the Sultanate of Sulu's dealings with colonial powers, it has proven to cast a shadow over Philippine and Malaysian relations. It is therefore timely and relevant to revisit the issues surrounding the claim, in order that the AFP and the Philippines as a whole be better prepared to settle the issue at the right time. To assist in this endeavor, as part of its office objectives, the Office for Strategic Studies and Strategy Management (OSSSM, AFP) conducted the second Strategic Fora on the North Borneo/Sabah Dispute: Ways Forward for Philippine Strategic Interests.

NARRATIVE

C, OSSSM recognized the presence of the forum's esteemed speakers and participants for giving their time to attend the webinar.

C, OSSSM highlighted that the North Borneo/Sabah dispute is one of the present geopolitical issues that has relevance to Philippine defense and security. He pointed out that the root cause of the dispute is the linguistic interpretation whether North Borneo/ Sabah was a deed of lease or cession, where on the one hand, the Philippines refers to the deed as a form of lease between the Sultanate of Sulu and European explorers dated back in the 19th Century; and on the other hand, Malaysia considers the deed as form of cession between the Sultanate of Sulu and the European explorers, and ultimately joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 based on self-determination.

As a pressing issue, the dispute remains as a geopolitical timebomb which the Philippines must resolve as part of its external

and internal security challenges it face. Since the country has limited state resources, the Philippines faces difficulties to engage the dispute with other security issues. And it is where the Philippines must see a clear picture to clarify what the stake is for the country.

C, OSSSM hoped that after the speakers' presentations and discussions as a whole, people would be inspired to address the dispute and move forward in upholding Philippine strategic interests.

SESSION 1: ***Understanding North Borneo/Sabah and its importance to Philippine Interests***

Speaker: HON AMINA RASUL-BERNARDO
President, Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy

Hon Amina Rasul-Bernardo pressed the validity of the Philippines' claim to North Borneo/Sabah, first starting off with an exhaustive timeline that began with the familial ties between the Sultanates of Brunei and Sulu. North Borneo was granted to the Sultan of Sulu as a reward for aiding Brunei against one of its rebellions.

In 1763, Sultan of Sulu Azimuddin concluded a treaty withthe British East Indies Company to exploit resources in Sabah and other territories. Although Britain and the Sultan of Sulu would later agree that there be no cession of territory without British permission,the Sultan signed a treaty with Spain in 1851 incorporating the Sultanate to the Spanish crown. By 1877, Spain, Germany, and Britain signed a Protocol of Sulu providing free movement of commercial ships in the Sulu archipelago, which implied recognition of Spanish claims over Sulu.

Alfred von Overbeck and Alfred Dent of the British North Borneo Company signed a deed with the Sulu Sultan in 1878, obtaining a lease over North Borneo for five thousand three hundred ringgit or five thousand dollars in 1878 prices. In 1881, the company obtained a royal charter, which granted them effective control over the territory. Although Spain initially protested that Sulu had no right to make such an agreement,Spain was forced to concede North Borneo to Britain in exchange forde jure recognition ofSpanish sovereignty over the Sulu archipelago.

In 1898, while Spain ceded the Philippine islands to the US in the Treaty of Paris, but had not included North Borneo. When the first Philippine Republic was established, President Emilio Aguinaldo invited the Sulu Sultanate to join the republic. Instead, the Sultan of Sulu opted to sign the Kiram-Bates treaty which recognized US sovereignty over Jolo and its dependencies.

Fast forward to 1950, the Philippine House of Representatives approved a Resolution stating that sovereignty over North Borneo belongs to the Philippines, and authorized President Quirino to pursue negotiations to restore ownership and jurisdiction, however it did not pass the Senate. Nonetheless, the Philippine government advised its British counterpart that a dispute between them and the nascent Federation of Malaya existed over North Borneo. A month later, Sultan Muhammad Esmail Kiram of Sulu issued a proclamation declaring the termination of the deed of lease signed by von Overbeck and Dent. The government of President Diosdado Macapagal officially filed the Philippine claim over North Borneo in 1961 with the UN. Despite meeting with President Macapagal, the UK included North Borneo, now called Sabah,with the territory of the Federation of Malaysia. In 1962, the Sulu Sultan's attorneys wrote to the Department of Foreign Affairs desiring to include North Borneo in the national territory and had effectively ceded sovereignty rights to the Philippine republic while retaining property rights. The same year, former Vice President Emmanuel Pelaez addressed the United Nations General Assembly stating that the Philippines would pursue its valid and legal claim over North Borneo via peaceful means, based on justice and self-determination of the people of North Borneo under UN auspices. More recently, although the Republic Act 9522, or the Archipelagic Baseline Law, signed in 2009 did not mention North Borneo,APhilippine Supreme Court decision in 2011 upholds that RA 9522 did not repeal RA 5546, and thus the Philippines retains claim over North Borneo.

In closing, it was recommended that the Philippines should pursue the claim, and proposed the following measures to solidify the claim: unite the many heirs of the Sultanate of Sulu; provide support of the unification of the Sultanate under one sultan, and the creation of adevelopment corporation that would receive funds should the claim be settled between Manila and Kuala Lumpur

SESSION 2: ***The North Borneo/Sabah Dispute and its Implications for National, Regional, International Security Environment***

Speaker: ASEC TEODORO CIRILO T TORRALBA III
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Assessments and International Affairs, Department of National Defense

Asec. Torralba III presented how the North Borneo/Sabah Dispute provides implications for national, regional, and international security environment. He referred to Memorandum Circular (MC) No. 162 of 2008 or the Guidelines on Matters pertaining to North Borneo/Sabah, highlighting Section 1 that no Philippine government agency shall make any direct or indirect act or statement which expresses or implies any repudiation of Philippine title or historical and legal rights to North Borneo/Sabah.

He highlighted four key implications to national security that are impacted by the North Borneo/Sabah dispute:1)Philippine territorial integrity; 2) maritime security and efforts on counterterrorism and combatting illicit activities, such as the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement between the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia;3) the peace efforts in Mindanao in particular the possible collusions between breakaway insurgents in Mindanao and criminal elements in Sabah;4) issue of cross-border movements, whereby there could be difficulties of extending assistance while avoiding tacit recognition of another country's sovereign jurisdiction.

Regional security would also be impacted due to the shared borders with Malaysia. ASAIA shared concerns that the dispute would risk ASEAN bodies such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC), which he considers necessary to maintain ASEAN Centrality.Sabah as regional flashpoint would also have major international implications due to its centrality as a major sea route.

ASAIA stated that ADMM and ADMM-Plus is not a proper forum for discussion on the dispute, as they since they are platforms for practical cooperation, and not for political issues. Moreover, the dispute might hinderthe TCA planning and execution of joint activities as heightening political tensions can disrupt defense and military guidance.

ASAIA emphasized the DND position that there should be continued compliance of the MC No. 162 while an in-depth examination of the exact extent of the Philippine claim should be pursued. Nevertheless, an end goal of fulfilling its mandate and contributing to attainment of national security interests must be upheld through enhancing international defense and security engagements.

SESSION 3: ***Assessing Philippine Strategic Options on the North Borneo/Sabah Dispute***

Speaker: MR RICHARD JAVAD HEYDARIAN
Columnist, Philippine Daily Inquirer

Mr Heydarian argued that the Sabah claim should be pursued. He noted that the there were several developing trends that would complicate any attempt to pursue the claim. Due to current socio-economic turmoil in Sabah, including perceived neglect by the Malaysian authorities,there are increasing separatist tendencies in Sabah.While the political loyalty of Sabahans with respect to Kuala Lumpur is now in question, uncertainty lingers whether the Sabahans would actually desire incorporation into the Philippines.

In this regard, he stressed that this was one more reason why the Bangsamoro peace process and the BARMM project needed to be done right by the Philippines. He believed that if the Philippines cannot get BARMM right, then it would be even more difficult to press a claim on Sabah.

He compared the North Borneo/Sabah dispute with the Philippines' dispute with China (and Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei) in the West Philippine Sea. While that maritime entitlements are now resolved through legal options given the Philippines' victory via the Arbitral Tribunal Ruling in 2016, however, it would be a different picture on Sabah because the question is precisely directed sovereignty over land territories. Ultimately, it is the say of the Sabahans whether or not they would want to be part of the Philippines. He is of the opinion that given the larger resource stakes in the West Philippine Sea as well as the lack of a large population that may not want to be incorporated in the Philippines, it would be more practical to prioritize the West Philippine Sea disputes.

OPEN FORUM

The open forum brought out questions and discussions on ASEAN centrality. As ASAIA mentioned, not losing ASEAN Centrality via these disputes is important, but there would seem to be no willingness on the part of the body to adjudicate on behalf of the disputants, as it is seen as bilateral/internal matters. The requirement for consensus when making decisions or stances is also an impediment to a united ASEAN stance on the matter. A countervailing opinion though states that the experience of Thailand and Cambodia shows that ASEAN could show some dynamism in providing a platform for dispute management at least.

There were also questions on the legal issues due to the lack of unity even amongst the heirs of the Sultan of Sulu. Without a united front from the heirs of the Sultan, it would be difficult to present a coherent case before juridical bodies such as the International Court of Justice. On the contentious definition of the word padjak which Sulu claims to mean “lease” and the Malaysians claim to mean “cession”, it was suggested that since the treaty was written in the language of Sulu for the Sultanate, its meaning should take precedence. Apart from ICJ adjudication, it may also be prudent to explore back-channel negotiations.

There was further discussion of the security implications should the Philippines be able to get Sabah. While the Philippines may not initially need to worry about major reorganizations of forces due to the existing archipelagic baselines already considering Sabah as under the Philippines, there would be issues due to the sudden creation of two land borders with Indonesia and Malaysia. Getting Sabah could potentially be a positive factor in protecting the Philippines from foreign terrorist fighters, since Sabah is considered one of the main entry points by such terrorists.

A related discussion pertains to Malaysia’s possible roles in the peace process and its alleged support for ASG and separatists in Mindanao. It was noted that such actions may prove counterproductive now, given the fact that Daesh/ISIS terrorists and the Jemmah Islamiyah before them threaten Malaysia and the Philippines equally, as well as Indonesia. It is also unlikely that Malaysia may support the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), given that Nur Misuari is considered an heir to the Sultanate via marriage with two of its princesses, and that the MNLF has been vocal about Sabah issue in the past.

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ASEAN REGIONAL COOPERATION AS A WAY FORWARD ON THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA DISPUTE

KRIS VALMORIA

Introduction

The South China Sea has become a controversial issue both inside and outside the country. This was driven by the escalation in conflict between rival claimants, especially after the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff between China and the Philippines. Since then, possible policy actions over the waters, particularly those on how to combat increasing Chinese aggression in the region, has become a hot topic for pundits, academics, and politicians alike. In this article, I argue that the Philippines should push for an ASEAN security agreement that would be centered on securing the disputed waters against Chinese aggression, along with the demilitarization of the area.

A Brief History

The issue regarding Asian countries' competing claims over the South China Sea has been around for a long time. Rival claims have existed since before World War II, and much of the region's early history is peppered with periods of island occupation followed by silence as countries focused their attention elsewhere. Claimants only moved to assert their claims over the waters when oil and gas reserves were discovered in the area in the 1970s, which was then followed by a period of calm. This period was broken in 1988, when a skirmish erupted between China and Vietnam(Mirski 2015).

The Philippines was the first state to formalize its claim. It sent troops to occupy parts of the Spratly Islands in 1973. Afterwards, it published Presidential Decree No. 1596, s. 1978, which claimed the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) as part of its own territory. Apart from the KIG, the Philippines also lays historical claims to the Scarbarough Shoal (Baviera and Batongbacal 2013). Together, the area containing these maritime features is referred to as the West Philippine Sea.

The Philippines' attempt to secure the West Philippine Sea hit a roadblock in the 1980s. During this period, the Philippine government was beset by a political conflict with the United States, its long-time ally, over the lease extension for US military bases in the country. The end result was the permanent removal of US bases in the Philippines. Security experts, along with US defense officials, were troubled by this development as no other alternative location provided the same strategic access to the South China Sea (Sanger 1991). The decision also worsened the Philippines' foothold in the disputed waters. When the American bases in Subic and Clark were still in operation, the Philippines was firmly within the US's security umbrella which deterred antagonistic actions by rival states (Storey 2015, 102).

The removal of these bases proved detrimental to the country's maritime claims. This is especially evident in 1995, when the Philippines discovered China's construction of an observation post in the Mischief Reef. While the structures marked the beginning of increased tensions within the disputed waters, it also signaled US disinterest in helping an ally as the Americans had known of the structure months before it decidedto alert the Philippines' (Storey 2015, 98-110).Relations over the waters only calmed again in 2002, when China and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed on the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (Mirski 2015).

The Hague Ruling and the Code of Conduct

This calm did not last long. The late 2000s saw the conflict move towards another battlefield: politics. In 2009, Brunei submitted its preliminary submission regarding the Outer Limits of its continental shelf, while Malaysia and Vietnam presented to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf a joint submission to fortifytheir claims. This triggered other claimants into submitting their own note verbales. It was this event that led China to submit its infamous "nine-dash line" map, which claimed the majority of the waters as its own including most countries' Exclusive Economic Zones (Mirski 2015; Mollman 2016).

China's ostentatious claim over the waters was only the beginning. In 2012, China and the Philippines began a two-month long standoff after the latter attempted to arrest Chinese fishermen poaching in the Scarborough Shoal. The row resulted in the Philippines losing control over the shoal and Filipino fishermen

being barred from fishing in the waters (Green et al. 2017).This blatant escalation of the conflict led the Philippines to a file a case with the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. In its 2016 ruling, the PCA rejected the Chinese's "nine-dash line" claim over the South China Sea, but China called the ruling void and refused to honor it (Panda 2016).

The Scarborough Shoal standoff marked the beginning of China's escalated aggression within the South China Sea. Before the PCA tribunal even reached a decision, China had already begun a massive land reclamation campaign within the disputed waters. The move was heavily criticized as a blatant attempt to expand China's claims in the area and to undermine the Philippines' claims (Batongbacal 2015; Poling 2015). Aside from that, China's reclamation projects, along with its illegal fishing operations, inflict considerable harm to the environment. Its confrontational attempts to monopolize the waters are destroying the "most fragile and sensitive marine resource" in the region, which would result in the decline of fish catch in the future (Batongbacal 2015).

Now, concerns over China's land reclamation activities have morphed into greater worry over its militarization of the area as it continues to construct ports, military installations and airstrips in the disputed islands (CFR 2020; Glaser 2015).The growing cause of concern for the future of the region has pushed claimants to implement a Code of Conduct (COC) that would regulate actions in the South China Sea. Yet despite years of effort after the 2002 Declaration, a COC that every party could agree to seem to be a distant prospect.Additionally, tensions over the disputed waters have increased as the US and China become increasingly at odds with each other, fueling fears of the region becoming a battleground for major powers.

The Military's Part

In the midst of this, the Philippines has remained committed to pursuing diplomatic talks over its claims in the South China Sea. In a legislative hearing, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff General Gilbert Gapay stated that the military is adhering to a "diplomatic, peaceful, and rules-based approach" in the West Philippine Sea (Ramos 2020). Gapay reiterated the spirit of this statement in the 17th ASEAN Chiefs of Defense Forces Meeting, where he expressed support for the passage of a COC (Casilao 2020).

Apart from supporting diplomatic routes, the AFP has also maintained its presence in the waters through routine patrols and increased presence in the area (CNN Philippines 2020). The Philippine Navy, in particular, maintains an active patrol over the Philippines' maritime waters on top of maintaining the BRP Sierra Madre, a beached vessel that serves as the country's permanent outpost in the KIG (Acosta 2020). The Philippines has also been upgrading its infrastructure in its islands in the West Philippine Sea. Just last June, defense and military officials recently celebrated the launch of a beaching ramp that would help facilitate more construction projects in the area (Petty 2020).

However, routine patrols and construction of installations will not be enough to secure the West Philippine Sea. To date, the Philippines remains the weakest in terms of military power among key ASEAN actors in the South China Sea, which include Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia (Burgess 2020). Much of this is due to the Philippines' historical dependence on the US for its external defense as well as the Philippine Army's dominance the funding and attention of military modernization efforts (Storey 1999, 10; Burgess 2020). Regardless of the reason, the fact of the matter is that the Philippines lacks the power projection capability to support its claims in the South China Sea (Grossman 2020).Thus, in order to increase the country's security, the Philippines will need to improve the capabilities of its Air Force and Navy to protect its access over the waters and deter further aggression by rival claimants.

Efforts to do so are well underway. The Philippines is currently modernizing its Coast Guard and implementing the Strategic Sail Plan 2020 and Flight Plan 2028 in recognition of the threat to its maritime claims (Grossman 2020; Burgess 2020). The Army is also expected to procure the BrahMos cruise missile this year, which would boost its external defense capabilities (Nepomuceno 2019) and enable the military to strike at targets in the West Philippine Sea at supersonic speed. It is worth noting that the BrahMos missile is the same weapon system that India deployed last 2016 in the disputed region of Arunachal Pradesh, which raised China's hackles (NewsIn Asia 2016).

However, modernizing the military should not be the core of the Philippine's strategy. Despite its approved modernization programs, efforts to implement it are a challenge both financially and politically. Additionally, if military procurement were its primary tactic, the Philippines would be partaking in a losing game of catch-

up. China's power projection in the disputed waters are increasing at a rate that the Philippines would be hard-pressed to counteract. Considering these factors, the Philippines should push for regional cooperation in the disputed waters to counter Chinese expansion.

Regional Cooperation for All

Despite the Philippine government's efforts to increase regional ties, Filipinos have a low consciousness over the possibility of an ASEAN partnership in the South China Sea (Garcia 2020). This pessimistic outlook can be attributed to the absence of strong military ties with its neighboring states and the fact that some ASEAN countries are also rival claimants in the South China Sea. Nonetheless, when it comes to matters of regional security, the Philippines can find no better ally than in ASEAN.While the US has recently become more firm in its willingness to get involved in the dispute, its response will be hindered by the fact that the closest base that can deploy US forces is located in Okinawa, Japan (Poling 2020). As such, it should pursue regional security agreements with ASEAN nations in order to mitigate China's actions in the disputed waters.

China is fully aware of the threat a united ASEAN would pose to its expansion efforts. As such, it has launched trade, foreign aid and cultural initiatives among Southeast Asian countries in order to place the region within its sphere of influence (Diokno, Hsiao, and Yang 2019). This is especially evident in the case of Cambodia, who, in 2016, blocked the mention of the UNCLOS ruling in an ASEAN communique (Mogato, Michaela, and Blanchard 2016).

But countries'opinions over China's influence are no longer uniform, and China's attempts to divide the region may meet its end soon. Already, some consider China as a threat, while other view them as a country that desires power but with no desire to export its ideology (Diokno, Hsiao, and Yang 2019). In his new book, Hiebert states that mainland southeast Asia, in particular, may not be as enthusiastic about China's involvement in the region as some claim (cited in Marston 2020).

This decline is rooted in China's reckless disregard over the environment and natural resources within the Indochinese region. To date, China has constructed 11 dams in the Mekong river, which limits the supply available to downstream states like Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. It has also continued to

pursue hydropower projects at the lower Mekong, which have led to environmental degradation (Hiebert as cited in Marston 2020). Aside from these efforts, China also has its Belt and Road Initiative, a soft power tool that has left most of its recipient countries in deep debt (Becker 2020).

In light of these growing sentiments, the Philippines should push for greater ASEAN cooperation, especially against Chinese expansion in the disputed islands. It can use its hard won 2016 UNCLOS ruling to promote a rules-based approach in the waters, deescalate the ongoing militarization of the islands and promote cooperation amongst all actors.

In response to criticisms against its reclamation activities, China has stated that its construction projects in the South China Sea are "mainly for civilian purposes," which include marine scientific research, weather observation, fishery production services, and environmental protection (Glaser 2015). Rather than disparage the statement as an excuse, the Philippines, along with other claimants, should encourage China to put their words into action.

Apart from being a major crude oil trade route, the South China Sea is home to one of the top five most productive fishing zones in the world (South China Sea Expert Working Group 2017). Unless actions are taken immediately, that will no longer hold true. Already, total fish stocks have been depleted by 70% to 95% since the 1950s and catch rates have also been in decline (South China Sea Expert Working Group 2017). These numbers will continue to worsen as China pushes for its unfettered access and exploitation of the waters. In order to stop this, states should also pursue solutions outside of military options by pushing for joint marine research projects and academic exchanges, among others.

Conclusion

The South China Sea has a long history of rival claimants competing against each other to assert their claims over the waters. This history has been marked by long periods of silence, followed by conflict. Currently, the disputed waters are experiencing another period of increased tensions. However, unlike in previous years, a calm interval does not seem forthcoming. Aside from increased animosity between rival claimants, the South China Sea is becoming a battleground for major power conflict between the US and China.

In order to prevent further escalation, the Philippines should take the proverbial reins and rally ASEAN against further Chinese aggression. Using the 2016 UNCLOS ruling to support its claims, the Philippines should push for a rules-based approach of the waters and for China to abandon its militarization of the area. Apart from joint efforts with ASEAN, the Philippines should also encourage states to pursue scientific cooperation over marine projects in the South China Sea.

However, the Philippines should also keep in mind that these may just be stop-gap measures at best. China has shown no willingness to back down or pursue a true peaceful resolution over the disputed waters. The Philippines will do well to remember that China has only ever shown hesitation in the face of military deterrence. As such, the Philippines should intensify its efforts to modernize the military along with increasing its partnerships with traditional allies like the ASEAN and the US.

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TRACK TWO OBSERVER (TTO): DISCUSSION FORUM ON INTERNATIONAL DEFENSE ANDSECURITY ENGAGEMENTS

ROWENA S. TATAD AND ERICK NIELSON C JAVIER

The Office for Strategic Studies and Strategy Management, Armed Forces (OSSSM) attended on 17 1330H – 1530H July 2020 APPFI's Track Two Observer Forum on Philippine International Defense and Security Engagements. CDR JUDE JOSEPH A SUMPAY PN (GSC), Chief, Policy Studies Division, Ms. Rowena S Tatad CivHR and Mr Erick Nielson C Javier CivHR of the Strategic Studies Division.

BACKGROUND:

The Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation Inc. is a Manila-based independent policy think tank that aims to promote development, peace and security, and cultural understanding for peoples of the Philippines and the Asia Pacific through research, international dialogue, and cooperation. With the support of the Philippine Office of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, they hosted a Track Two Observer Discussion Forum on Philippine International Defense and Security Engagements on 17 July 2020.

TTO is a recurring project of APPFI since 2017 which gathers experts, policymakers and think tank analysts to discuss issues affecting Philippine foreign relations and regional affairs, as well as to share updates on their Track Two engagements. Cognizant of the role of Track Two diplomacy in assisting governmental or "Track One" initiatives in regional diplomacy, the forum aimed to develop a broader and more participatory and inclusive constituency for strategic and foreign policy concerns by providing a platform for information exchange, professional networking, and collaboration.

The particular discussion, the first of three throughout the year, examined the Philippines' international defense and security engagements, particularly in relation to the evolving "independent foreign policy" direction of the Duterte administration.

Below are the key takeaways of the discussion:

a.) Readjustment of defense cooperation frameworks to allow for diversification of security partners;
b.) Aligning defense cooperation activities with the so-called "independent foreign policy";
c.) Prospects for a non-aligned foreign policy by smaller states amid increasing great-power rivalry and active pursuit of expanding spheres of influence by China and the US;
d.) The temporal nature of Philippine foreign and defense policies, particularly as the 2022 Presidential elections looms; and
e.) The potential cascading effects of COVID-19 on our international defense engagements, especially in relation to the increasing salience of non-traditional security such as infectious disease response.

Professor Charmaine Willoughby, Professor, International Studies Department, De La Salle University moderated the discussion and introduced the two speakers and the reactor.

First Speaker: Professor and Chairperson, UP Department of Political Science; Research Fellow, APPFI; and Convenor of Strategic Studies Program, UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS)

Professor Kraft was asked to answer the following questions:

a.) What are the continuities and changes in external defense relationships under the Duterte administration?

The US-China major power rivalry in the region continues despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The status of the Philippines' relationship with the US remains in question despite the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) cancellation process being suspended. While the US remains the only country that the Philippines have an existing alliance treaty with, the moves to increase Philippine relations with Russia and China has, to a large extent, changed the status quo. The decision to improve relations with China in particular has changed the situation and has made Philippine IDSE include non-traditional partners and allies.

b.) What is your assessment of this current strategic direction and its impact on national security?

The Duterte administration's emphasis on "independent foreign policy" gave the Philippines more flexibility in the conduct of its foreign affairs (greater agency). However, unlike the preceding Aquino administration that sought to strengthen external defense, the Duterte administration returned to a traditional way of looking at national security by focusing on internal security operations (ISO).

While the Philippines sought to have closer relations with China and focus on ISO, the structure of the international system and the increasing great power rivalry leaves little space for the Philippines to exercise its agency. Furthermore, recent actions by the Duterte administration such as the suspension of the abrogation of the VFA may send a signal that we are taking sides.

Developments in the region gives a spotlight on the future of regional security multilateralism, especially within ASEAN.

c.) To what extent does or will the ongoing global health pandemic affect the conduct and priorities of our international security cooperation activities? (e.g. non-traditional security refocusing on disease control; law enforcement cooperation with China due to migrant inflows).

ASEAN is the platform with which the US and China engage with Southeast Asia, regionally. However, major power rivalry is now also dominating how regional security and cooperation is being conducted.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an expectation that there will be a re-emphasis on regional security cooperation, especially in addressing non-traditional security (NTS) issues such as pandemics and communicable diseases, since the regional security architecture was designed to promote cooperation on such matters of common concern. However, regional security cooperation is increasingly being overtaken and superseded by the rivalry between the US and China. Furthermore, the COVID-19 did not provide the impetus for more multilateral security cooperation or multilateralism, nor did it alter the mindset about the nature of the strategic environment. The COVID-19 pandemic should have restored the confidence in multilateral institutions. Unfortunately, it wasn't the case. What is evident is that countries are looking at pandemic as a purely national issue. In the Philippines, public health has become a matter of policing. In this regard, international security cooperation remains a secondary consideration in face of this global emergency.

The Philippines' autonomy, like other countries in the region, are constrained with respect to their alignment to either US and China. The Philippines is facing the challenge of limited agency or flexibility in the conduct of foreign policy. It is therefore imperative for the country to conduct an honest assessment of the strategic situation and identify principal concerns. To increase the Philippines' flexibility in foreign affairs, it must work with key partners in the region via ASEAN and minilaterals. However, ASEAN seems to be a weak option because of the lack of strategic convergence as regards the member-states' appreciation of the situation. Therefore, minilateral cooperation with countries with common and similar security threats (i.e. Trilateral Cooperation Agreement) might be a viable option.

Second Speaker: RADM ROMMEL JUDE ONG AFP (Ret), Professor of Praxis, Ateneo School of Government

RADM Ong (Ret) was asked to answer the following questions:

a.) What are the domestic and regional balance-of-power implications of the uncertainty regarding the scheduled, and now postponed, termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement?

To put the context on the implications of Philippines–US relations on the Philippines' foreign and defense policies, RADM Ong mentioned several recent significant regional developments (i.e. Chinese incursions in the Malaysian, Indonesian and Vietnamese Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), the passage of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative by the US Congress, Australia's diplomacy posture vis-à-vis China, and the pro-Chinese Kiribati presidential candidate winning their recent election. In terms of naval balancing, the US presence in the South China Sea (SCS) provides a much-needed strategic deterrence vis-à-vis China and benefits other ASEAN states around the SCS. While the effectiveness of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) is debatable from a legal, tactical and strategic standpoint, their presence prevents the recurrence of the 1990s power vacuum which happened as an unintended consequence of the closing of US bases in Clark and Subic.

Domestically, the US presence and operations in the Philippines provides capabilities that complements the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) in external defense, counter-terrorism, maritime domain awareness, etc. While the AFP can do these roles, the US can enhance its deployed forces and resources, particularly during contingencies (i.e. Yolanda typhoon and surveillance missions

during the Marawi siege). While the VFA abrogation was announced months ago, the government assured that the AFP is quite capable of handling ISO even without VFA, which RADM Ong considers as an issue. Considering that the government may decide to ultimately abrogate the VFA afterall, the question that the government needs to answer remains: are we prepared to shift funds and resources to external defense missions to compensate for the loss of deterrence provided by the US? Are we capable of addressing security challenges on three fronts with the current force when all resources are currently shifted to addressing the pandemic? RADM Ong thinks that this is next to impossible.

b.) Is the state of Ph-US relations a brief gearshift or is it indicative of shifting sands that would outlast the incumbent administration – a new "normal" in a bipolar world order?

As the Chief Architect of the Philippines' foreign policy, the President bears sole responsibility for the current form and shift of this hedging phenomena – the accommodation with China, engagement with Russia and the distancing from the Philippines–US alliance. Across government agencies and among senior officials, support for the President's "independent foreign policy" is more likely driven by personal interests or some preservations rather than a result of deep strategic thought among national security agencies. However, there is no off button that easily upends the military-to-military relationship between the US and the Philippines, which was nurtured by decades of sustained engagement. This compels the security sector to navigate along the government's political lines, making it difficult to implement prior agreements such as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), and coming up with a coherent and joint strategy in the SCS.

c.) Is the alliance system giving way to more issue and program-specific partnerships? Are there tradeoffs in pursuing an alliance-based versus partnership-based strategy?

RADM Ong believes the US needs to reexamine the hub-and-spokes alliance system in the region, taking into consideration several recent developments such as the increased prominence of regional fora such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), the increasing role of Japan in regional security, and disagreements and incongruities between and among alliance partners (e.g. Japan vs South Korea). While the Philippines' IDSE strategy seeks out partnerships within

ASEAN and other states which it shares interests with, these do not diminish the importance of the US-Philippine alliance, but rather complements it.

d.) Is there a long-term vision for independent foreign policy? (e.g. shift from mere hedging to middle power activism)

It is ideal for a state to have a long-term vision or a true independent foreign policy. Unfortunately, the circumstances in the country doesn't allow it because of the following reasons:

1) There are no institutions in the Philippines with either the strategic culture or the mandate to push for a vision beyond the six-year term of any administration, due to the tendency of personalities within the institutions to confirm to the incumbent President's wishes, even if it overrides previous decisions;
2) The Philippines' geopolitical circumstances and archipelagic character mean there is no escaping the geopolitical rivalry, no matter how much it wants to; and
3) The Philippines does not possess the economic or military gravitas that would allow it to project influence abroad or pursue an activist foreign policy posture.

However, the Philippines has the following options:

1) In the SCS, the Philippines can cooperate with like-minded ASEAN member states like Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam and aggregate hard and soft power to create a countervailing balance, either to stay in the neutral middle of the US-China competition, or align further with democratic states with the shared interest for a free and open SCS (i.e. Trilateral Cooperation Agreement of the IndoMalPhi and the International Cooperation Agreement on Malacca Strait Safety).
2) The Philippines can explore opportunities for more formal military-to-military engagement with Japan, and a Track II outreach with Taiwan.
3) The Philippines must also pay attention to the Basi Channel, the ingress and egress towards the Philippine Rise and the Philippine Sea where there has been increased PLA Navy presence and MSR activities since the past few years.

Reactor: Matsuya Yoshihide, Head of Government and Law Division and Security Studies Department, The National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan Ministry of National Defense

His remarks focused on the common concern of the Philippines and Japan such as the increased Chinese activities in their respective maritime areas surrounding the Philippines and Japan. Chinese Coast Guards and PLA Navy continue to patrol Japan's contiguous zone. China has intruded Japan's seas more than forty times, and he thinks it is similar in terms of Chinese activities in the SCS. He also mentioned Japan's new Defense White Paper, which was just made available to the public a week before this conference. The Defense White Paper also discussed increased Chinese activities in the East China Sea wherein China has relentlessly conducted unilateral moves to change the status quo. He affirmed that Japan, along with like-minded countries, believes that the rule of law, and the freedom of navigation and overflight should be maintained in the East and South China Seas. He also believes the US presence in the region is necessary in order to deter these aggressive activities.

He commented on the decision of President Duterte to cancel the VFA. He said that it may significantly affect the US FONOPs in the region. Although the VFA suspension has been suspended, they are curious as to the long-term prospects of the agreement.

Remarking on Professor Kraft's presentation, he stated he had done similar research on ASEAN and its effectiveness. He finds it particularly striking that Prof. Kraft considers ASEAN mechanisms as not really effective in managing regional security, or facilitating cooperation against the COVID-19 pandemic. He believed that ASEAN's long tradition of security cooperation in NTS, such as military assistance during the SARS virus outbreak or the avian influenza virus outbreak, would still make the regional organization an effective platform for cooperation in that regard.

Remarking on RADM Ong's presentation, he agreed that the TCA is one defense cooperation mechanism that can be adopted in the SCS. He also agreed on the notion that the alliance isn't only meant to pursue a zero-sum choice. He asked about the extent to which President Duterte and the political elite understand the usefulness of partnerships. He thinks that Japan can be an important Philippine partner. He also considered the prospect of Philippines–Japan military cooperation in logistics and defense equipment support.

Open Forum

Questions were raised on the "purposefulness" of the choice to "pivot to China" to focus on internal security, as well as the extent of the influence of China in Philippine decision-making. Professor Kraft brought up that this was purposeful insofar as the Duterte administration has demonstrated a clear preference for China as a partner and a preference for internal security over external security. Advisors to the administration have brought up the old argument of the Chinese economy being able to help the Philippines in its own growth path as a justification. However, this does not necessarily translate that China has complete control and influence over Philippine decision-making.

There were also questions on what the potential ramifications were of increased ASEAN-China maritime cooperation, and whether there were viable alternatives to existing defense cooperation and consultation mechanisms, such as the bilateral consultation mechanism on the SCS. To this, RADM Ong stated that the ASEAN-China maritime cooperation was essentially informal and a byproduct of the ADMM. It had its limits, citing no prior consultations with the implementing agencies (i.e. the Navy). The leaked China-proposed draft of the Code of Conduct demonstrated a clear attempt to impose a Sino-centric order in the SCS under the cover of maritime cooperation with ASEAN. While RADM Ong does believe engagement with China is important, he stresses that it should be at the Philippines' terms, given the strengths and weaknesses of the country and the tendency of the Chinese to manipulate mechanisms too. Currently, the Bilateral consultation mechanism allows airing of views and grievances, but that's all it can do for the moment. While the developments on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the United States, India, Japan and Australia are important, the Philippines should go ahead and forge its own minilateral engagements with other states willing to assist with issues immediately relevant to the Philippines, as he sees the Quad is aimed at larger geostrategic contexts, not just the SCS/WPS.

There were also questions on the capability of small states to pursue "independent foreign policy"; more than political whim there was the matter of material and financial capabilities. To this, Professor Kraft notes that small states are often easily dismissed in the face of opposition from large states, especially as the large states often create the international structure within which small

states are forced to play. While they do have lesser capacities individually, small states could cooperate with one another, band together to exercise a degree of independence. However, the question depends on what kind of capability is needed. Both large and small states can exercise strategic diplomacy, subject to certain limitations. RADM Ong added that small states that resort to cooperation must coordinate and complement each other's small capabilities, rather than create duplicate capabilities.

What is the role of path dependency on US-PH relations? What are the domestic arrangements and institutions that should be developed to strengthen Philippine defense and security engagements? RADM Ong believes that the alliance system has become a crutch for the Philippines, leading it to not adequately develop its military capabilities and expecting the Americans to be there for an external emergency, to the point that in terms of external defense the Philippines does not actually contribute anything to the alliance beyond perhaps locations. Professor Kraft believes that path dependency will always be present in the way foreign policy is conducted; previous decisions effectively lock-in succeeding administrations and put limits to the agency available to the Philippines. Cooperation with other small states and pooling capabilities is one way to reduce path dependency. On the question of strengthening domestic institutions, one of the problems Professor Kraft notes is the lack of strategic appreciation among the political elite governing the Philippines and even among officials within the institution. The domestic political situation, wherein the main focus of politicians and bureaucrats is what can be done within a given presidential administration, forces us to ignore long-term implications of foreign relations and foreign policy. This also makes the Philippines vulnerable to electoral manipulation by hostile powers such as China, as influencing policy can be done simply by funding the right candidates to implement policies favorable to them. Professor Matsura meanwhile commented on the importance of domestic political considerations to strategy, citing the example of the very recent cancellation of the Aegis Ashore missile defenses and the various domestic political reasons brought out to justify this policy.

The forum ended at around 1500H, with Dr Misalucha-Willoughby thanking everyone and informing the body of a follow-on forum where participants can share their IDSE experiences, especially engagements of an informal Track II or otherwise unclassified nature.

OBSERVATIONS

Although the discussion had many interesting insights, it should be noted that the actual topic of the forum, international defense and security engagements, was hardly discussed except in broad terms. The second half of 2019 was bound to have several interesting international defense and security engagements especially in the informal Track II setting. It is also important to note what other institutions' IDSE engagements are, given the context that was mentioned by the speakers of a China that is fast trying to spread and promote its influence both through formal and informal channels. Recommend attend next iteration of this forum to get additional information on other institutions' IDSE engagements.

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ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL: THE AFPTR E-TRAINING

KIMBERLY M AFUNDAR

In 2014, when the AFP Transformation Roadmap (AFPTR) was fully launched, the AFP, through the OSSSM,started spearheading numerous cascading and training initiatives to disseminate information and capacitate key AFPTR personnel.

Yearly, various activities are conducted to ensure that all key AFPTR personnel is kept abreast of their roles and responsibilities. Updates regarding new policies entailing new processes are also cascaded. Along with these are the training and seminars where they are being equipped with AFPTR tools and mechanisms to produce the expected outputs of their Unit/Office. These include the conduct of the Information Drive, AFPTR Trainers' Training, Skills Lab, and AFPTR Coaching.

With the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that led to a global health crisis, safety procedures and precautionary measures are placed in preventing the spread of this disease. The challenge arose from the prohibition of live-in training and seminars and face to face meetings.

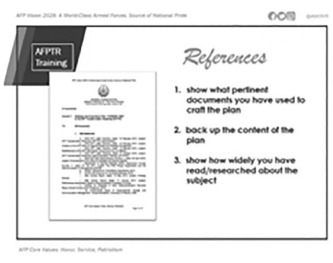
The first AFPTR e-Training

Conforming with the issued mitigation guidelines, capacity building activities laid out this year are necessitated to be conducted in online platforms. Henceforth, the semi-annual conduct of the AFPTR Trainers' Training has to go online. The OSSSM organized and held the first AFPTR e-Training on 19-22 May 2020 via Zoom Video Teleconferencing (VTC).

The AFPTR e-Training is a four-day online training to continuously capacitate the AFPTR key personnel even during the imposed community quarantine. Specifically, it is aimed to (1) capacitate the selected personnel on AFPTR topics related to the delivery of their respective Unit/Office AFPTR, (2) fast-track the completion of AFPTRIP documentary requirements particularly

those they are having difficulty with, and (3) assist Units and Offices in completing the AFPTR Institutionalization Pathway (AFPTRIP) eligibility requirements.

With the thrust to continually implement the AFPTRIP, the topics included are the areas where Units and Offices are having difficulty with based on the documents pre-assessed by the OSSSM. Thus, it was participated mainly by GSMO personnel, AFPTR Action Officers, Guild of Civilian Human Resource, and other interested personnel from the 64 General Headquarters, Unified Commands, and AFP Wide Support and Separate Units (GUAs).



Now that community quarantine is in effect due to COVID-19, there are amendments in the AFPTRIP Proficiency and Institutionalization Stage Process, which was disseminated in the first part of the training.

Critical to strategy execution, Ms. Laura Nisperos explained the step by step process on how to accomplish properly the Strategic Initiative Profile (SIP), Project Management Plan (PMP), and Work Breakdown Structure (WBS).These documentary requirements are crucial in the planning, programming, execution, and monitoring of the scorecard's strategic initiatives. Supplementarily, LTC JAY S BAQUIRAN PAF (GSC), Chief of Strategy Management Division, discussed how to ensure that scorecard strategic initiatives have allocated funds in the Annual Budget Plan (APB) of Units and Offices.

Organizational alignment includes the personnel alignment to the strategy. The alignment of AFP's personnel is ensured through the personal scorecard implementation. CDR NESTOR M CABUNALDA PN comprehensively presented the alignment of an individual's duties and responsibilities to their respective Office/Unit's Scorecard. The periodic monitoring and reporting of the professional and personal facets are lynchpins to the success of personal scorecard management. Hence, these are constantly emphasized as part of the hallmarks of the AFPTRIP Proficiency and Institutionalization Stage.

Apart from organizational alignment, monitoring and evaluation are also integral to strategy execution. Status of operations should be tracked, and the progress of the strategy should be reviewed. Ms. Mary Ann Magno demonstrated the use of a dashboard and scoreboard as monitoring tools. Both are being used the tracking of major activities' progress and monitoring of Unit and Office Scorecard's overall performance. Also, these monitoring tools are useful in operations review and strategy evaluation. Mr. Jayson Clemente expounded the Execution Evaluation Process (EEP), which outlines the reporting tools and review processes to be used. Reporting includes the Performance Evaluation Report Form and Monthly Strategic Initiative Progress Report Form and by which proper accomplishment is fundamentally significant.

Indisputably pivotal in avoiding failure to execute the strategy is communicating the vision to all levels of the organization. Therefore, 1LT PEARLY REGALADO PA(QMS) imparted the relevance of having a good Strategic Communication Implementation Plan (STRATCOM IMPLAN) by setting Measure of Performance (MOP) and Measure of Effectiveness (MOE). These STRATCOM initiatives are intended to create, strengthen, and preserve awareness on and support for the AFPTR using appropriate themes, messages, mediums, and tools.

To fully assist Units and Offices, all questions, clarifications, issues, and concerns raised were addressed during the training. The lectures are also available and accessible online, thus providing a wider reach of participants.Despite the challenges and limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, Units and Offices remain committed to this endeavor by attending and actively participating in the training and thriving to complete the eligibility requirements.

Indeed, the e-Training accelerated the AFPTRIP implementation even during these trying times. Its success can be seen with the continuous submission of AFPTRIP applications. The documents are continuously processed, thereby conferral of Units and Offices are still being facilitated. As we transition to the new normal, the OSSSM, on the other hand,will explore more and be adaptive by using innovative learning tools in the conduct of its future training.

About the Author

KIMBERLY M AFUNDAR is a Bachelor's degree holder in Development Communication at the University of the Philippines Los Banos. She writes for both technical and literary publications. As a Strategic Communications Research Analyst in the Strategy Management Division, OSSSM, she uses all possible platforms in print and multimedia for the cascading of AFP Transformation Roadmap concepts and practices.

CHIEF'S CORNER

OSSSM'S EFFORTS TOWARDS THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF AFP TRANSFORMATION ROADMAP

KIMBERLY M AFUNDAR

The Armed Forces of the Philippines, more than its commitment to fulfill its mandate of protecting the people and the state, is also dedicated to achieve its vision of becoming a "World-class Armed Forces, Source of National Pride" by 2028. A central means to this is by having a strategic mindset that translates to strategic performance. It puts high premium in having strategies in place and successful strategy execution. Through the Office for Strategic Studies and Strategy Management (OSSSM), one of the Personal Staff of the Chief of Staff, AFP, the organization ensures that it is on track in its journey to transformation and turning this vision into a reality.

The OSSSM was established last April 23, 2014 as indicated in the Staff Memorandum Nr 04. It states that the office:

> *"shall be primary responsible for the conduct of strategic, special, and policy studies in order to assist the CSAFP in decision-making relative to the AFP and National Security; and manage the execution of cross functional processes related to governance and strategy management to ensure the successful implementation of the AFP Transformation Roadmap."*

The AFP Transformation Roadmap (AFPTR) is a fifteen-year strategy that was crafted by the organization to ensure an institutionalized systems and processes, and strategy execution management process as primary drivers of Security Sector Reform (SSR). As the local adaptation of the Performance Governance System (PGS), the AFPTR seeks to strengthen the functionality of the Governance Strategy Management Offices (GSMOs) in carrying out the strategic initiatives and in ensuring the alignment of systems and processes to the overall strategy of the organization. This involves capability development and professionalization of ranks, making AFP a strong and credible public institution built on good governance.

The AFP Transformation Institutionalization Pathway (AFPTRIP) sustains the implementation of AFPTR, drives the accomplishment of set initiatives and guarantees strategy-driven budget. Through its incentivization mechanisms, the performance and milestones of the office/unit are recognized. Thus, the AFPTRIP also communicate hallmarks of successes of the 64 Program 4 Units/Offices in their journey. The four stages, namely, Initiated, Compliance, Proficiency and Institutionalization, are indicative of milestones linked to their respective scorecards and its strategy alignment to the Chief of Staff, AFP Performance Scorecard (CSAFP Scorecard).

The four stages involve the following: (1) strategy formulation; (2) establishment of alignment and mechanisms and completeness of documents; (3) functionality of systems and processes; and (4) attainment of breakthrough goals through the integration of FREM alignment. These stages are conferred with Copper Anahaw Leaf, Bronze Anahaw Leaf, Silver Anahaw Leaf and Gold Anahaw Leaf, respectively.

The OSSSM, through the Strategy Management Division (SMD) serves as the secretariat of the conduct and management of the AFPTR and AFPTRIP. According to the office's Staff Memo, the division: (1) oversees the implementation and progress of performance scorecards and the management of strategic initiatives and programs; (2) facilitates the execution of governance and strategy implementation to ensure alignment of systems and processes to the strategy; (3) oversees and coordinates the conduct of strategic planning; (3) aligns systems and functions; policies and budget; and individual personnel to the strategy by cascading the strategy map and the CSAFP performance scorecard to the various staff, subordinates units, other support offices, and to all AFP personnel; (4) manages and monitors strategic performance through the management of CSAFP Performance Scorecard; (5) communicates and advocates the strategic plan, governance programs, and other reform initiatives to both internal and external stakeholders, among others.

The SMD, OSSSM is currently composed of four branches:Strategy Alignment Branch, Performance Management Branch, Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Branch and Strategic Communication Branch.

While the division aims to fulfill its mandated duties and responsibilities at the utmost of its capabilities, serving as the secretariat has its limitations. The progress in achieving set targets and the conferrals of units/offices still primarily lies on the GSMOs

and the lead measure owners of the strategic objectives. Fortunately, the organization had already surpassed its Basecamp 2016 and are now moving towards the attainment of Basecamp 2022. Year after year, the OSSSM, since its inception in 2014, ensures that the organization is always a step closer to attaining its vision.

The year 2020 has been filled of challenges not only for the organization but also for the nation. The challenges brought about by the pandemic, Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) demands strict compliance to the safety procedures and precautionary measures that halted almost all face-to-face interactions, mass gatherings, capability-building activities, consultations and focus group discussions that are necessary to a well-functioning unit, serving its purpose. Despite the limitations, the OSSSM ensures continuity of its activities and conducted many of its conference, trainings and reviews online, via Zoom Teleconference, an online platform that enables meetings online and the participants to display presentations easily.

AFPTR and the CSAFP Performance Scorecard

To monitor the implementation of the strategic performance, a regular conduct of annual, semi-annual, and quarterly performance scorecard and strategy reviews is held. Last February, an Annual Strategy Review of the CSAFP Performance Scorecard participated by the AFP Strategy Management Committee (AFP SMC), AFPTR Action Officers and Guild of Civilian Human Resource (HR) was conducted. The 2019 CSAFPScorecard had an average of 80.7% accomplishment rate and additional measures were included to gauge the attainment of the strategic objectives.These will be implemented for the rest of 2020 to 2022.

While the Annual strategy review was still conducted face-to-face, the first quarter strategy review was held online via Zoom. Due to the challenges brought about by the pandemic, the lead measure owners of CSAFP Performance Scorecard have reported that many of their programs, projects and activities are affected, thus affecting all the strategic initiatives as well. In this regard, an adjustment of the set targets was proposed by the AFP SMC. Moreover, the lead measure owners crafted action plans that would stillprovide continuity to the programs and activities despite the current situation.For the time being, all succeeding programs reviews, strategy refresh and focus group discussions are being conducted via Zoom Teleconference.

AFPTRIP Conferrals

The set target for 2020 is to have all Program 4 Units and Offices achieve the Proficient Status by the year end. This target was recalibrated due to the challenges imposed by COVID-19. With the limited face-to-face interactions and travel restrictions in place, the auditors paying an on-site visit to units and offices to conduct interviews and document audits, as well as the GSMOs and Civilian Guild HR wanting to do consultations with SMD personnel, are both prohibited from doing so. In order to address this, a revision of AFPTRIP process was proposed through the publication of Letter of Instruction #35 "AFPTRIP Proficiency and Institutionalization Stage Process during ECQ and Post ECQ Under Strict Covide-19 Protocols," which was subsequently approved by the Chief of Staff General Felimon Santos Jr AFP. In this revised process, the pre-assessment of submitted documents will be conducted by SMD personnel. Online interviews of randomly selected personnel applying for regarding their unit/office's AFPTRIP will be conducted via Zoom Teleconference. The SMD personnel serves as the panel of interviewers as well. Even the conduct of Revalida or the presentation of the office's/unit's transformation journey is done online. The presentations, both the Audio-VisualPresentation (AVP) and Powerpoint presentations are shared through the screenshare function of the Zoom application and the ratings are given through an online survey platform, the SmartSurvey.

As of the second quarter of the year, there were 12 Program 4 units and offices conferred. These were: Compliance Stage – AFP Health Service Command (AFP HSC); Proficiency Stage –Office of the Chief Special Service (OSPS), AFP Reserve Command (AFPRESCOM), Special Operations Command (SOCOM AFP), Office of The Inspector General (OTIG), Presidential Security Group (PSG), Communications Electronics Information Systems Service(CEISSAFP), The Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, J5 (OJ5), Office of the Chief of Staff, AFP (OCSAFP), Office of The Provost Marshal General (OTPMG); and Institutionalization Stage – Western Command (WESCOM) and Office of the Chief Nurse (OTCN).There were two AFPTRIP awarding held during the flag ceremony at the GHQ Canopy area.

Moreover, the SMD also publishedan addendum to Letter Directive number 18 incorporating the AFTRIPRe-certification process that would ensure the sustainability of the Functions, Resources, Expectations and Messages (FREM) Elements integrated in the unit's/office's systems and processes. On the

other hand, the application to Palladium Balanced Scorecard Hall of Fame, a world-renowned award that is considered as the gold standard for strategic performance management,is also under way with the development of a three-year workplan of the AFP's bid to the Palladium Balance Scorecard Strategy Execution Hall of Fame.

Trainings and Conferences

A key to successful AFPTRIP implementation is the proper cascading of AFPTR concepts, strategy, and mechanisms to ensure a seamless scorecard development, strategy alignment, strategy execution and strategy-driven budget within the Program 4 units and offices. This is primarily done through face-to-face consultations, interventions, and trainings. To ensure a high rate of conferrals, SMD personnel consistently conduct interventions and welcome face-to-face consultations in the office. For the first and second quarter, there were 14 units and offices visited to help them with their application.

The first live-in AFPTR Trainers' Training scheduled for this year was postponed due to the spread of COVID-19. A few weeks prior to the conduct, President Rodrigo Duterte declared an Enhanced Community Quarantine, prohibiting people to travel to and from the National Capital Region (NCR). To push through with the training and to continuously facilitate learning among AFP personnel, the SMD came up with the e-Training, a five-day online training via Zoom teleconference, held last March 19-22, 2020. Selected topics were discussed as comprehensive as possible and a few hands-on activities were incorporated to maintain participants' interest and active interaction. Moreover, unlike the usual whole day discussion, the online trainings were held in the afternoon from 1 to 4 pm, to increase focus and avoid screen fatigue among the participants. The e-training was well-received and was participated by 200 AFP personnel. The division aims to have a second installment by third quarter this year.

The OSSSM, spearheaded by SMD, also conducts conferences annually and convenes strategy managers, officers, AFPTR Action officers and Civilian Guild HR through the Strategy Management Family Conference (SMFC). This year, the SMFC was conducted with the objective of ensuring effective coordination and collaboration within and among the stakeholders towards the achievement of AFP Vision 2028.The deliberate inclusion of the principle objectives of Executive Order No. 70 "Institutionalizing the Whole-Of-Nation Approach in Attaining Inclusive and

Sustainable Peace, Creating a National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, and Directing the Adoption of a National Peace Framework" to the enhanced AFPTR and CSAFP Performance Scorecard, prompts the cascading of its narratives, set measures and targets of the EnhancedCSAFP Scorecard S.2019 to the stakeholders within the organization. Attended by 100 AFP personnel, the SMFC served as a platform to ensure that the represented 64 Program 4 units and offices significantly contribute to the alignment and achievement of the set Strategic Objectives.

Multi-Sector Governance Council

The need to have accountability within and outside the organization is important to AFP in its strategy formulation and execution. In this regard, the AFP established the AFP Multi-Sector Governance Council (AFP MSGC). These stakeholders are composed of individuals from various sectors of society who: (1) champion the AFPTR to the organization's external stakeholders in order to encourage support and participation; (2) provide expert advice in the implementation of the AFPTR; and (3) help improve transparency and accountability in reporting performance.

Since its establishment in 2014, there were 20 regular meetings that have been conducted, and several programs and projects with its AFP counterparts. The MSGC is composed of four committees: Communications and Advocacy, Strategy Assessment and Review, Resource Planning and Generation, and Governance and Policy.

As of this writing, the members were still unable to meet and hold its sub-committee and regular meetings due to conflict of schedules. Moreover, due to the pandemic, the future meetings are scheduled by the end of second quarter via Zoom Teleconference. The OSSSM, through the SMD, maintains its commitment to function as the secretariat and ensures the continuity of MSGC initiatives and all its engagements.

The year 2020 has been filled with challenges brought by the pandemic. One cannot deny that there are problems in the implementation of set programs and projects for this year resulting to a hindered success, worse, significant losses, but this does not mean that a division, a unit or an office, remains paralyzed and unable to carry out basic duties and functions. With the utilization of technology and adopting an innovative mindset, a workaround and even a better means of doing what used to be conventional might prove that a good strategy,when properly executed can usher the

organization in achieving its goals no matter what the circumstances are.

The OSSSM through the Strategy Management Division remains steadfast in its commitment of a world-class armed forces that the Filipino can be proud of.

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