



DEVELOPMENTS IN UNITED STATES – PHILIPPINES SECURITY COOPERATION

Synopsis: In March and April 2025, Washington and Manila announced their intention to expand their military cooperation by agreeing to deploy the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS) and Typhon missile platforms; to deploy a new Marine Corps littoral rotational force; and sell F-16 multirole fighter aircraft. These developments represent the most substantial reinforcement of the alliance in decades and take place amid spiraling tensions in the South China Sea.

Previous U.S.-Philippines Defense Cooperation

The 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines was one of the United States' first major defense pacts in Indo-Pacific. The 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement paved the way for combined U.S.-Philippine military exercises, including *Balikatan* and *Salaknib*. Held annually, these exercises emphasize defense cooperation and interoperability, including crisis planning, air and missile defense training, and live-fire amphibious assault drills. [1] In 2014, the United States and the Philippines signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). The EDCA, which both sides agreed to expand in 2023, allows for the United States to maintain a larger military footprint in the Philippines, provides U.S. forces with access to certain bases and facilities, and authorizes U.S. military personnel to assist in operations to support humanitarian and maritime operations. [2]

Hegseth's Announcement in Manila

As part of a series of visits to nations across the Indo-Pacific, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth gave a speech in Manila in which he outlined various security developments. The March 28th announcement attempts to build on previous security agreements while signaling Washington's continued commitment to the Philippines. [3] Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's statement, which came soon after the announcement of a Marine Corps rotational deployment to Luzon, touted the deployment of anti-ship missile systems and unmanned surface vehicles, as well as combined special forces training.

Littoral Rotational Force on Philippine Soil

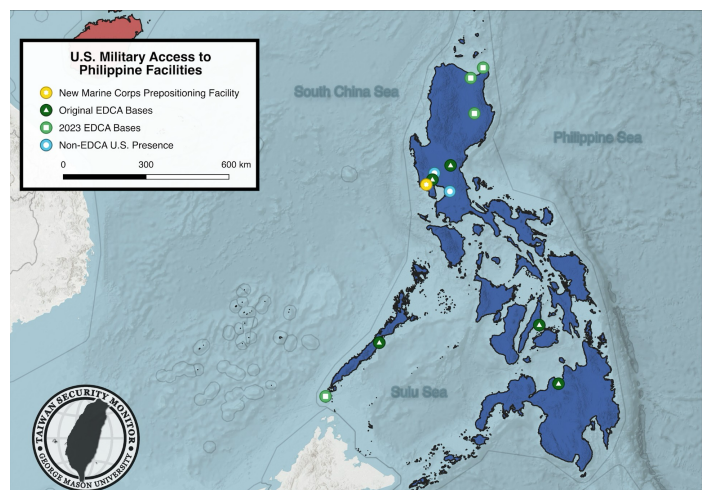
The Littoral Rotational Force-Luzon is a new Marine Corps unit comprised of elements from the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment (3rd MLR) currently based in Hawaii. This unit will rotate to the Philippines as part of this year's *Balikatan* exercise from April 21 to May 9, where it will participate in coastal defense drills, maritime domain awareness sensing, and air defense activities in Northern Luzon and the Luzon Strait. [4] This deployment comes in the wake of the U.S.'s return to Subic Bay, from which it withdrew in 1992. [5] The Navy recently purchased and retooled a former Naval Supply Depot so that it can store equipment as part of the Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Philippines. [6]

NMESIS and Typhon Battery

NMESIS is an anti-ship and land attack missile platform. Each NMESIS battery carries two Naval Strike Missile (NSM) containers on a remote-operated unmanned Joint Light Tactical Vehicle. The missiles have a range of up to 100 nautical miles. The 3rd MLR will showcase NMESIS as part of *Balikatan 2025* and will remain in the Philippines with 75 Marines until the conclusion of *Kamandag* bilateral exercises in June 2025. [7] The Typhon missile platform, also known as the Strategic Mid-Range Fires System, is used to launch SM-6 and Tomahawk missiles, which have a range of at least 2,000 kilometers. This deployment will represent the second Typhon battery deployed in the region. The U.S. and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) previously hosted a Typhon system at Laoag Airfield, in Northern Luzon. [8] Beijing claims to be alarmed by these deployments, and China's Foreign Ministry has previously demanded the Typhon's removal while threatening retaliatory action. [9] Both the NMESIS and Typhon battery deployments will have significant implications for U.S.-Philippines cooperation and security in the South China Sea. The introduction of these advanced missile platforms underscores a strategic pivot toward more distributed and survivable strike capabilities, in the face of a broader pivot by the AFP away from counterterrorism and towards the possibility of conflict with China. [10]

F-16 Foreign Military Sale

On April 1, 2025, the U.S. Department of State notified Congress of its intent to sell 16 F-16C and four F-16D Block 70/72 multirole fighter aircraft to the Philippines for approximately \$5.58 billion. Included in the deal are 24 engines, 22 AESA radar systems, 112 AIM-120C-8 AMRAAM radar-guided missiles, 40 AIM-9X Block II missiles, a wide range of precision-guided bombs and launchers, electronic warfare systems, targeting pods, advanced communications and navigation equipment, and logistics and training support. [11] This sale aims to bolster the Philippine Air Force's capability for regional security, air sovereignty, and interoperability with U.S. and allied forces, and is slated to be "ready for delivery" by 2027; although as recent U.S. arms sales indicate, timely deliveries are unlikely. [12] [13]



Visualization showing U.S. Military Access in the Philippines
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