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### **Summary**

As 2022 comes to an end, trends established since the Marcos administration began will continue into the new year. The most notable foreign policy of the current government is its attempt to balance relations between the United States (US) and China.

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### **The Marcos Administration and the Maritime Domain**

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. was largely [expected](#) to follow his predecessor's foreign policy direction, specifically in the balancing of relations with both the US and with China. Envoys of both countries welcomed his new administration. Notably, the new government inherited many factors affecting the Philippine maritime domains such as (1) a greater [appreciation](#) for the 2016 Arbitration Award, which many have [recommended](#) be used as a basis for a new National Security Strategy; (2) a military modernization project entering its final phase and an interest for the creation of a local defense industry; and (3) rising tensions with China over repeated incidents of territorial incursions and maritime harassment.

The Marcos administration has not been idle. At his first State of the Nation Address, President Marcos [promised](#) that his government will not "surrender an inch" of Philippine territory. On the sixth anniversary of the award, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo affirmed the 2016 Arbitration Award as an [anchor](#) of Philippine policy. The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) also celebrated the [40th anniversary of UNCLOS](#) and its role in reinforcing Philippine sovereignty. Note verbales and diplomatic protests were [issued](#) following continuing issues with Chinese vessels. As of late September 2022, the DFA reported that the Philippines has lodged at least [405 diplomatic protests](#) since 2020; the [latest incident](#) due to China "forcefully retrieving" space debris near the Spratlys.

Relations with neighbors on maritime matters were also strengthened. The president visited Indonesia and Singapore, [securing](#) more than P800 million, before a visit to the US where he [gathered](#) \$4 billion in investments from various sectors. A notable example is with the middle-power of Japan, wherein relations have improved such

that [bilateral dialogue](#) was reestablished, [Japanese aircraft](#) took part in an exchange program, and the establishment of a [Visiting Forces Agreement](#) (VFA) is being considered. President Marcos also pushed for [progress](#) on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Within Philippine waters, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources imposed a fishing ban in the [Visayas Sea](#) until 15 February 2023. It is currently facing criticism for the recent re-enforcement of a two-decades old [salmon and pampano ban](#) for market vendors and grocery stores. Fisher groups have been advocating for the Marcos admin to [support](#) local scientists. This sentiment has been [pushed](#) by the University of the Philippines – Marine Science Institute, specifically in the support and development of marine scientific research.

At the close of the year in late November, both China and the US were welcomed by the Philippines. At APEC, President Marcos met with [Chinese President Xi Jinping](#), thanking him for Chinese support during the pandemic, and accepted an offer to visit China in January 2023. The Philippines welcomed [US Vice President Kamala Harris](#) who visited the Philippines and personally reaffirmed US support should the Philippines be attacked over the South China Sea. Former Supreme Court Justice Antonio Carpio took her visit as a [sign](#) to China that the Philippines has the means to defend itself.

### **Analysis: First year of Six**

The Philippines, under the Marcos administration, will need to work closely with its ally and like-minded partners to attain its security goals. Policy makers must align with the general will of the people (especially in regard to the defense of the country's sovereignty) and ensure compliance with the rules-based order that has promoted peace and prosperity since the end of the Second World War.

While the Marcos administration should be credited for the work it has done, it must not rest on its laurels. Many other issues remain to be addressed. Primarily, there is an urgent need for the creation of legislation to strengthen the country's sovereignty and foster greater scientific and economic opportunities. There have been calls to [amend](#) the Baselines Law and [amend](#) the National Defense Act of 1935, a [Magna Carta for Seafarers](#), and to [pass laws](#) on maritime zones and the Archipelagic Sea Lanes. Second, the proper management of potential resources in the West Philippine Sea needs to be improved. The Marcos administration must carefully secure the country's energy security while keeping its overall national security in mind. Whether a [joint exploration](#) will be conducted with China or not, the key is to utilize and maximize the resources for the benefit of the Philippines. Third, the Marcos administration is called on to stand firm against China. As China constantly [calls](#) for "friendly consultations" and issues [warnings on US activities](#) in the region, it has not called off its vessels encroaching on Philippine waters. While the Philippines has observed Chinese vessels getting [closer](#) to Palawan, it has inefficiently pursued the [course of diplomacy](#) and calls for peace and stability - to no avail.

The Philippines, while continuing to defend its sovereignty, can learn from and emulate China's unwavering resolve to push its national interests. In early December, the US released a [report](#) on China's power, presenting an official picture of China's goals and actions. Since President Marcos was elected, China has unveiled an [advanced aircraft carrier](#), taken a step towards forcefully reuniting with Taiwan with an [amended policy](#) in apparent imitation of Russia's justifications to invade Ukraine, reinforced its holdings in disputed territory such that more than [5000 military staff](#) now occupy the territory, deepened relations with Russia and North Korea, and has most notably given President Xi Jinping an [unprecedented third term](#) in office.

China has taken the issue of its sovereignty claims with unceasing seriousness. As China continuously dismisses the 2016 Arbitration Award, the Philippines should be firm in upholding it. The more that China acts in a manner contrary

to international law, the more that the Philippines should adhere to it and publicize Chinese activities for the world to see. The Philippines must continue to defend what rightfully belongs to the nation and its people without compromising its values or its relations with other states. In the [report](#) on Chinese power, it is clear that China is using a “whole-of-society” approach to advance its interests; the Philippines must do the same.

Taiwan is also another notable model for the Philippines in terms of defense. Throughout 2022, Taiwan has had to endure multiple Chinese incursions while bolstering its defenses for a potential invasion. These include the [subterfuge](#) of China using Taiwanese officials to act as spies. Ever since the Afghanistan debacle in 2021 called into question US support, Taiwan has [repeatedly insisted](#) that it would not rely on others for its defense. It changed its [policy to consider](#) any future Chinese military flights in Taiwanese airspace as a “first strike”.

A self-reliant defense should be a priority for the Philippines. It has made good first steps in this direction with the naval base in [Subic](#); the inter-agency partnerships for locally made armaments such as with Projects [BUHAWI](#) and [COBRA](#), both of which are expected to augment both local labor and the overall economy; as well as the increase in asset acquisitions from partners and their subsequent commissioning for service. Above all else, the Philippines must also remember that its partners are [leveraging their relationships](#) to gain an advantage, such as is the case with the US and China. Policymakers should consider that a VFA with Japan will diversify Philippine defense relations and give it more leverage and room for maneuvering when dealing with violations to its sovereignty.

For the years to come, how the Marcos Administration conducts foreign and security policy will be an important and lingering question. What will the Philippines do with its long and historic alliance with the US? How can the Philippines lessen dependence on its sole ally? How will the Philippines push forward with its relations with China while simultaneously defending its national interest? What are the mutual interests that the Philippines has with its neighbors? How can the Philippines contribute to the prosperity and security of the region? These are but a few questions that the Philippines must seriously contemplate moving forward.