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Summary

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Half-a-year has also passed since the onset of the Russo-Ukraine War and its impacts continue to be felt in the Indo-Pacific region, specifically in China and Taiwan. Entering August, United States (US) House Speaker Nancy Pelosi ignored Chinese warnings and visited Taiwan as part of her tour of the region. This caused a flurry of activity from China and a myriad of reactions from the international community.

Notably, Japan and the Philippines, respectively, mourned the passing of its leaders former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in early July and former President Fidel V. Ramos on July 31.

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The Chinese Way: Any Means Necessary

Tensions between the US and China reached a crescendo in late July regarding Taiwan. Before the visit, the US had [sent](#) an aircraft carrier group towards Taiwan. During a phone call, Chinese President Xi Jinping warned US President Joe Biden not to “*play with fire*” on the Taiwan issue. Russia expressed [solidarity](#) with China over Taiwan. The US had [expected](#) China to ramp up activities close to Taiwan in protest. China had announced it would hold live-fire exercises in the [Fujian province](#), closest to Taiwan, and its Air Force noted that it was [capable](#) of circling the island nation.

Speaker Pelosi visited Taiwan in the late evening of August 2, the [first time](#) a sitting US House Speaker has done so in 25 years. China responded strongly by accusing the US of violating [Chinese sovereignty](#) and by holding [live-fire exercises](#) around the island, which [threatened](#) key locations. Russia once again [backed China’s position](#) on sovereignty grounds. The US insisted that the visit did [not change](#) existing policy while [pledging](#) not to abandon Taiwan.

In the days immediately after the visit, China engaged in a flurry of activity. It continued its live-fire drills (which Taiwan [condemned](#) as illegitimate and irresponsible), it implemented [trade restrictions](#), and it engaged in [cyber-warfare](#) (Taiwan [reported](#) 272 attempts made in a week at a disinformation campaign). Taiwan [maintained](#) preparation for war without desiring it; after China’s drills, Taiwan [demonstrated](#) its F-16V aircraft. ASEAN released a [statement](#), calling for “maximum restraint”. President Marcos [remarked](#) that the Pelosi visit and the aftermath demonstrated the intensity of the conflict. China warned that it would [use](#) “*any means necessary*” to reunite Taiwan with itself.

Chinese rhetoric was increasing even before the visit. It had [criticized](#) a US-born idea of maritime counter-insurgency as complicating territorial disputes in the region. It objected to the [freedom of navigation exercise](#) of the US Navy’s 7th Fleet in the South China Sea in July, which the US conducted [twice](#) in a week. The Chinese Embassy in the Philippines [accused](#) the US of attempting to smear China’s image in the region. US officials have [stated](#) that Chinese activities have a “*clear and upward trend*” against Indo-Pacific states. One example is in China’s dealings with Japan. It sent an [unmanned drone](#) near Japan’s Okinawa prefecture for the first time, its missiles fired during its Taiwan exercises [landed](#) in Japanese waters, and it [sent ships](#) close to the Senkaku Islands.

The Filipino Way: We Will Not Waver

The late President Ramos was known to have [quipped](#): “*Kaya ba natin ito? Kayang-kaya basta tayo ay sama-sama!*” (*Can we do this? We can! If we just work together!*)

This coincides with the Marcos administration’s calls for unity as it began to formulate its maritime security framework. Notably, the new Secretary of Foreign Affairs [Enrique Manalo](#) reaffirmed the [2016 Arbitration Award](#) as an “anchor” of Philippine policy. Members of the legislature [agreed](#), arguing that any settlement must be “rules-based” and abide by the Award. There was also a [push](#) to institutionalize the term “West Philippine Sea,” using the Award as a partial basis. National Security Adviser [Clarita Carlos](#) met with different agency members to discuss the West Philippine Sea. During the first SONA of his term, President Marcos [promised](#) that he “*will not preside over any process that will abandon one square inch of territory*” – emphasizing the “Filipino way” of determination and cooperation. During the SONA, he announced his priority bills which [included](#) the amending of the “*antiquated*” National Defense Act of 1935. The Department of National Defense (DND) [praised](#) the president’s remarks. A few days later, a [bill](#) was filed in Congress to amend the defense law.

Military modernization remains important to the country’s maritime security. President Marcos vowed to accelerate modernization, specifically for the [Philippine Air Force \(PAF\)](#). The PAF is reportedly eyeing South

Korea's multi-role KF-21 "Boramae" fighter. The DND has submitted a request for Congress to [review the budget](#) for Horizon 3 of modernization, set to last from 2023 to 2028. Japan defense officials promised to [continue assistance](#) with military modernization.

Bilateral relations with China and the US saw no change from public perception to national policy. Filipinos [trust](#) the US the most and China the least, a recent poll shows. The US has [committed](#) to "stand united" with the Philippines and the new administration, this was shown at the [appointment](#) of a new ambassador. It also [reaffirmed](#) its policy regarding the 2016 Arbitration Award. Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez, Philippine envoy to the US, [argued](#) for increased investment into the US. Members of a US delegation [discussed security cooperation](#) with members of the Western Mindanao Command. China, meanwhile, continued to [dismiss](#) the award. China has also [warned](#) against reinforcing Ayungin Shoal. The Marcos administration was [called to respond](#) to this, a means of gauging how relations with China will be for the next six years. Despite that, the Philippines and China have agreed to continue bilateral dialogue to find a "friendly solution" to their differences in the South China Sea. More than a month later, it was announced that the government was [studying a joint exploration venture](#) with China in the West Philippine Sea.

During and after the Pelosi visit, China [expressed](#) "hope" that the Philippines would abide by the One-China Policy. The Marcos administration [stated](#) that its reactions to international affairs would be "studied", arguing against "knee-jerk reactions". The government was called to [formulate a contingency plan](#) in the event that tensions with Taiwan escalate. Others [recommended](#) that the Philippines should have a "nuanced approach" to foreign policy, to continue its investment in security, and to consider joint patrols with allies. President Marcos backed stronger ties with both [the US](#) (wherein the [defense pact](#) was once again reaffirmed) and [with China](#).

Analysis: This is the Way Forward

The Philippines must achieve unity in action and approach, adopting the mantras of Presidents Ramos and Marcos. There are a myriad of lessons and examples that the Philippines can draw from.

One side is to follow the example of late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's [leadership](#), when Japan deepened its relations throughout the Indo-Pacific and with its allies across the world. The Philippines joined in [mourning](#), praising the flourishing of relations with Japan under his leadership. His [legacy](#) of focusing on defense and strengthening relations continues to influence Japan. An announcement was made of a cooperative with the United Kingdom to create a [Sixth Generation Fighter](#). Japan has [stressed](#) the effect of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on international norms and the immediate threat to Taiwan. The latter issue has evolved to the point of a hypothetical Chinese invasion being included in Japan's [defense white paper](#) for the first time. After the Pelosi visit, Japan announced [plans](#) to increase its missile armament. Japan's focus on security is [leading](#) it to become one of the world's biggest defense spenders.

On another side are China, Russia, and North Korea – states which are pushing strongly for their own interests. Despite its [multitude of challenges](#), China has pushed where it can. This was [most effective](#) during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic with economic and medical aid. It has also effectively used diplomacy and [political maneuvering](#) to utilize "the Asian Way" as a regional cultural approach against the rules-based international framework. On the issue of Taiwan, China has firmly and repeatedly stated its ownership. Its consistent rhetoric is now backed by action as it has begun to ignore the [median line](#) of the Taiwan Strait. Russia has done the same regarding Ukraine and in its pact with China. Russia [threatened](#) an intensification in the war over US statements regarding China. On Russia's Navy Day, President Vladimir Putin [marked the US](#) as Russia's main rival. Another side is [North Korea](#) which has announced the readiness of its nuclear deterrent against so-called "threats" from South Korea. North Korea [reacted strongly against](#) Pelosi's visit to the Korean border and her [call for denuclearization](#). The consistency of North Korea's stand on its nuclear arsenal was shown when it

rejected both the [United Nations](#) and [South Korea](#) over denuclearization. The Philippines must imitate the seriousness in which these states hold their security.

On yet another side, lessons for ASEAN and the US can be applied to the Philippines. How the various states of the region react to the [ongoing US-China rivalry](#) will be key indicators on how to manage individual relationships. One example of this is how [Australia](#) renewed its focus towards the Pacific Island nations given the possibility of a Chinese base. Another example is through economics as [India](#) considers deepening its ties with the region. [ASEAN](#) has also called for community effort in addressing common problems. The [European Union](#) has expressed its belief in cooperation in addressing the “Jenga tower” of regional challenges. The US has continued to defy China’s warnings. It sent [warships](#) to the Strait. There were also two more delegate visits to Taiwan: [the second](#) was on August 15 and [the third](#) a week later.

The Russo-Ukraine War is a prime example of the need to [combat norm regression](#) as a whole and Chinese aggression specifically. On the war itself, [US State Secretary Antony Blinken](#) said that it would be “*open season*” on a global scale if Russia was simply allowed to invade another country. A victory for Ukraine can only be brought about [by sustained political will](#) from Western states. A similar show of will is necessary from the Philippines and its allies in addressing existing and potential conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region. China has proven itself serious regarding Taiwan, from the seemingly minor acts of [stealing sand](#) to the aforementioned live-fire exercises, an invasion poses [several risks](#), such as potentially suffering economic sanctions far [more severe](#) than Russia’s. This comes at an unprecedented moment as Beijing’s once-every-two-year [National Congress](#) is set to happen later this year. But Taiwan has responded just as seriously by conducting [war games](#) with lessons gained from Ukraine, vowing to [counterattack](#) any Chinese breach of its territory (already demonstrated when Taiwan fired [warning shots](#) at a Chinese drone).

This is the way forward: gathering lessons and applying them. One of the last acts of the Duterte administration was to [cancel](#) a P12.7 billion helicopter deal with Russia for fear of suffering economic sanctions. The Philippines must keep in mind that its foreign policy has consequences not only for its own national security but for the region, especially as it has a responsibility to be an upright member of the international community. Indeed, this would be in contrast to China’s negligence of norms which has reached the point of setting aside protocols of bilateral ties – as clearly seen when it [neglected to share](#) any information regarding the uncontrolled return of one of its booster rockets which landed in the [Sulu Sea](#). The new administration must ensure that its actions are in line with long-held and agreed norms – the better to combat the actions of those who seek to replace them for their own benefit. Indeed, should the Philippines and its allies fail at this, the alternative is a breakdown of the post-Second World War order and a [return](#) to great power war.