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Summary

The Philippines celebrated Maritime and Archipelagic Awareness Month (MANAMo) throughout September. President Marcos Jr. made two noteworthy state visits to Singapore and Indonesia in early September and later an official visit to the United States (US) to attend the 77th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

Meanwhile the successful counter-offensive of Ukraine has forced Russia into calling reservists, and to depend on its relationship with China. China has relentlessly defended its position regarding Taiwan, notably complaining after US President Biden once again pledged to come to Taiwan's defense.

The Philippines also joined the world in mourning over the death of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom.

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Marcos makes his mark?

The President's first state visit was to Indonesia where he and Indonesian President Jokowi [signed](#) agreements including a plan to [cooperate](#) from 2022 to 2027 and a [renewal](#) of the 1997 defense agreement, stating a commitment to regional stability [through ASEAN](#). Cooperation with Indonesia also extended to [food security](#) and [discussion](#) on how to address overlapping maritime claims. President Marcos then visited Singapore where a number of [deals](#) were signed which included counterterrorism, digital cooperation, and [development](#) of New Clark City. The Philippines and Singapore agreed on the [need](#) for the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea. Together, President Marcos is reported to have [secured](#) approximately ₱804.78 billion in investments.

Later in the month, President Marcos traveled to the US to participate in the UNGA. There he met with several [business leaders](#), he called for the [maximization](#) of economic ties and [called](#) for a peaceful end to current tensions and ongoing conflicts. Beforehand, he had stated that he cannot imagine a [future](#) for the Philippines that did not have the US as a partner. He emphasized this again with a [bilateral dialogue](#) with President Biden, the first since 2010. President Marcos assured the US that “*we [the Philippines] are your partners, we are your allies, we are your friends.*” The president’s trip to the US was lauded as a [success](#), his participation was [praised](#) as symbolizing the role of the Philippines in advancing peace. The trip is estimated to have [garnered](#) nearly \$4 billion in investments from multiple sectors; one of these is from the tech sector, which the president had [previously](#) emphasized the importance of.

The Marcos administration continues to balance its relations with China and the US. In early September, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin III assured the Philippines that their [commitment](#) was “*ironclad*” – a sentiment [reaffirmed](#) personally by President Biden. The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) [conducted](#) search-and-rescue exercises with the US Coast Guard. The US also conducted [training](#) on chemical, biological, radioactive, and nuclear incidents.

While the Marcos administration has filed over [52 diplomatic protests](#), some [critics](#) including the president’s sister - Senator Imee Marcos - asked if these were effective. The PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu [responded](#) that Philippine protocols and policies are consistent with the administration’s sovereignty defense through diplomatic means. China has [remarked](#) that a “golden era” of relations can come about under the current administration. Indeed, the Marcos administration has not dismissed the idea of [joint exploration](#) in the South China Sea.

International commitments – To be or not to be?

China was less amicable to the US. The US made several waves regarding Taiwan: the [approval](#) of the \$1.1 billion arms package and the passage at the Senate committee level of the [Taiwan Policy Act](#) (which would bolster Taiwan’s membership in international organizations; [celebrated](#) by Taiwan). China took particular issue with President Biden’s [60 Minutes interview](#) when he [affirmed](#) US protection of Taiwan if subjected to an “*unprecedented attack*”. China [complained](#) about this statement. President Biden’s recent remarks have further [confused](#) the perception of US policy over Taiwan, especially after the US government [backtracked](#) him again.

Taiwan is [attempting to step up](#) its presence on the world stage, asking for the assistance of neighboring states such as the Philippines. French lawmakers [visited](#) in early September, the fourth such visit within a year. Taiwan’s defense remains at the forefront: [Robert Tsao](#), Taiwan’s most successful businessmen and founder of the major microchip maker United Microelectronics Corp., announced the funding of three million “*civilian warriors.*” Taiwanese President Tsai remarked that China’s repeated drills have [improved](#) Taiwan’s defenses. Taiwan also welcomed the [joint passage](#) of US and Canadian ships through the Strait.

Meanwhile, Russia’s losses in its war with Ukraine coupled with the effects of sustained economic sanctions have forced a turn to [North Korea](#) and [China](#). Russian President Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping met and [agreed](#) to work together on “*respective core interests.*” This was President Xi’s [first visit outside](#) of China since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. China also participated in [Vostok 2022](#), Russia’s annual military exercises.

North Korea passed a law that [allowed](#) a preventive nuclear strike, which Kim Jong-Un summed as: “*The status of our country as a nuclear weapons state has become irreversible.*” North Korea’s delegation at the UN [blamed](#) US-led military buildup for the policy change. At the UNGA, the [leaders of South Korea and Japan](#) spoke and agreed to improve relations, with North Korea as a pressing issue. The US and South Korea conducted naval drills [after](#) North Korea test fired a ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan.

Analysis: End of an Era?

With the actions of Russia in Ukraine and China in the Indo-Pacific, that rules-based international order is under threat. This order has brought about an era of peace since the end of the Second World War – one that has partially defined the second Elizabethan era. The behavior and attitude of states, most especially in the face of [challenging](#)

ideologies and powers will determine the outlook and survival of such order. Cooperation among the international community is vital for this order to persist.

Taiwan [warned](#) in mid-September how the states such as Russia and China could threaten global peace. Likewise, the Philippines expressed [concern](#) over possible nuclear proliferation. Recent years and recent events have given credence to assertion. Russia has doubled-down its policy regarding Ukraine with the [pronouncement](#) of the Russian World; North Korea made nuclear weapons inseparable from its foreign policy; and China has spent years [undermining norms](#) in the Indo-Pacific, from the Philippines to Japan.

Cooperation among allied states remains paramount. The Philippines demonstrated this well with the recent visits of President Marcos, a breath of fresh air after his predecessor's controversial policies and rhetoric. The Philippines has the opportunity to expand relations bilaterally and [trilaterally](#) with its regional neighbors such as [Japan](#) and [South Korea](#) and with other Western powers such as [Australia](#), [Germany](#), [France](#), and [Norway](#). In a recent [forum](#), the French envoy to the Philippines reaffirmed [commitment](#) to shared values and the protection of sovereignty. The issue and [strong possibility](#) of being entangled into an armed conflict involving Taiwan further presents the Philippines with the [opportunity](#) for enhancing relations. It can also use the example and best practices of other nations such as Japan to further [develop](#) itself economically and to [establish](#) a credible deterrence. It is fundamental that the Philippines prioritizes engagements with like-minded allies as when South Korean and European firms won a [contract](#) to develop Sangley Point International Airport. All of these should be oriented towards the Philippines becoming self-reliant, not being overly dependent on the strength of its allies. It should take inspiration from states like India which made news early in the month by [commissioning](#) its first locally built aircraft carrier. The Philippines must continue to enhance its relationships, emulating their best practices, and all that builds toward the preservation and advancement of its interests and that of the rules-based order.