

KARAGATAN OBSERVER | OCTOBER 2022

Summary

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In China, the Communist Party held its 20th National Congress with President Xi Jinping securing a third term in office. Meanwhile, North Korea ramped up its missile tests and rhetoric.

Near the end of the month, the Philippines also suffered from the wrath of Typhoon Paeng (Nalgae) which resulted in hundreds of lives lost and extensive damage to farms and fisheries.

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Date

7 November 2022

Recommended citation

APA: Uy, M.C. and Florence Principe Gamboa (2022). “Karagatan Observer: October 2022.” *Amador Research Services*.

CMOS: Matthew C. Uy and Florence Principe Gamboa. “Karagatan Observer: October 2022.” *Amador Research Services* (2022).

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100 days and more

The Marcos administration [commemorated 100 days](#) in office, touting the President’s early visits and the investments that came in the aftermath. The administration also celebrated the deepening of relations, particularly with both the United States (US) and China.

China’s ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian [assured](#) Filipinos that China had no intention of bringing war or colonization to the country. He mentioned that the disputes between the two are “normal” for neighbors and should not affect the other dynamics of relations. Yet the Philippine Coast

Guard (PCG) [reported](#) earlier in the month spotting Chinese Coast Guard and maritime militia vessels near Panatag Shoal. This matter has put [pressure](#) on the government to ensure the free rein of Filipino fishers. Members of the legislative have [expressed frustration](#) at China's continued occupation of disputed territory. A [report](#) from Chinese media suggests that more than 5000 Chinese military staff live on the occupied islands in the South China Sea.

On the other hand, relations with the US have warmed to the point that the US State Department is willing to grant [\\$100 million USD](#) to finance the military modernization, which has long been experiencing [budget issues](#), with more military cooperation expected in the future. Earlier in the month, a bipartisan [congressional delegation](#) from the US arrived concurrent with the first joint military exercises under the Marcos administration. The Philippine Navy also [welcomed](#) the USS Reagan, a Nimitz-class supercarrier, just as the US and the Philippines concluded the *Maritime Training Activity Sama-Sama Lumbas*. The Philippines has expressed gratitude and [reliance](#) on the US to help defend its sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea.

Other allies and partnerships the Philippines has nurtured or reached out to are: [Indonesia](#), with the agreement on the delineation of maritime boundaries; [South Korea](#), which participated for the first time in the Philippine-led *Kaagapay Ng Mga Mandirigma ng Dagat* (KAMANDAG) Exercise; [Japan](#), with which the Philippines officially resumed bilateral military dialogue, a first in three years; and Australia, as the Marcos administration [greenlit](#) an Australian energy firm to pursue oil exploration in the Palawan basin, which the Philippines is set to [redevelop](#). These partnerships even extend to allies in northern Europe such as [Norway](#) with a recent maritime-energy conference.

Energy security was highlighted this month as it concerned access to the West Philippine Sea. [Senator Win Gatchalian](#) filed a resolution in mid-October to have the Senate examine the energy potential of the area. While the Philippines has had [recent success](#) in unencumbered supply runs to disputed territory, a more long-term solution has been eyed in the creation of a [Maritime Baselines Bill](#), submitted to Congress by Cagayan de Oro Representative Rufus Rodriguez. The bill argues for the need to finally delineate the country's maritime boundaries, including its 200-mile exclusive economic zone. [Lawmakers in Palawan](#) have also pushed legislation to further enhance security in their area, the closest of the whole country to the disputed waters.

President Marcos, in a [speech](#) to the PCG on the 121st anniversary of their founding, reaffirmed his administration's commitment to the maritime security of the nation.

Analysis: The Philippines and the Status Quo

In the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, [President Xi Jinping](#) spoke of the need for a "world-class" military to protect its sovereignty. He was also [reappointed](#) as leader of China for an "unprecedented" third term, of which Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated him for. Regarding Taiwan, Xi [declared](#) that the "use of force" would never be abandoned, reaffirming the commitment to uphold China's sovereignty claims. Taiwan also notably celebrated the 111th [National Day](#) with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen tying Taiwan's future to that of the world and international peace and prosperity. Taiwan declared over the course of October that it would [not rely on others](#) when it comes to its defense and it would [not compromise](#) on issues of freedom and democracy. Taiwan [revealed](#) in early October that it would treat future Chinese military flights into Taiwanese airspace as "first strike," in an effort to step-up defense.

The seriousness of which both Taiwan and China take their sovereignty and defense are to be emulated by the Philippines. The steps undertaken by the Marcos administration during its first 100 days are on the right track. Yet there is more that can be done.

One step is to resolve the issues of military modernization. Asia-Pacific nations [spending](#) on defense has passed \$1 trillion USD in 2021 alone. The Philippines not only needs to catch up to the “world-class” aspirations of China, but it must also catch up with its neighbors as the entire region prioritizes security. But it is not enough to focus on assets alone; the Philippines must keep in mind that, despite its chief concern in the maritime domain, security has [multiple dimensions](#) that need to be considered. This is seen in how the US seeks to [deny](#) China a technological advantage. The Philippines must continue to strengthen relations, as seen between the [US and Taiwan](#), and to pursue innovation and self-reliance, as in the [example of Ukraine](#) deploying self-made naval weapons against Russia.

Another step is to be aware of larger scale threats. The Philippines is right to prioritize security in its own borders, and it must continue to do so, but as part of the international community, the country is susceptible to external factors. An example of this is in [North Korea’s missile tests](#) which has prompted responses from [regional allies](#) such as the US, Japan, and South Korea. Japan notably suffered a panic at a North Korean missile [flying over](#) the country. China has also noticed and sought to [deepen relations](#) with Pyongyang rather than be confrontational. The Philippines is affected by events in the Taiwan Strait. Thus, it is in the best interests of the country to urge restraint and diplomacy while solidifying security, with [deterrence](#) said to be the only means of avoiding war. This principle also applies to nuclear proliferation, as [noted](#) by US President Joe Biden, a growing trend since the onset of the Russo-Ukraine War.

The Philippines, under the Marcos administration, will continue to face the complicated balancing of relations between China and the US. With one country professing to be a friend yet encroaching on Philippine sovereign areas, while the other pledges to modernize and cooperate on enhancing security, it is not hard to see which of the relations has a greater capacity to serve Philippine national interests. Leaders of the country need to continuously watch out and be mindful of empty diplomatic words and promises that contradict actions and policies especially in the West Philippine Sea.