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PHILIPPINE DEFENSE MODERNIZATION:

A COMPARISON BETWEEN
HORIZON 2 AND THE MILITARY
MODERNIZATION OF
INDONESIA AND VIETNAM



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PHILIPPINE DEFENSE

The Philippines recently announced the approval of the next phase of defense modernization. In comparing what is known about the modernization plans to neighbors Vietnam and Indonesia, it is clear that Indonesia and the Philippines are building their militaries around a broad set of capabilities, largely around weapons systems with both internal and external defense applications. Vietnam, meanwhile, has focused its defense acquisitions around modern capabilities for a potential maritime conflict.

On June 20, the Department of National Defense (DND) announced that President Rodrigo R. Duterte approved the second phase of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) defense modernization program, Horizon 2.¹ Horizon 2 will extend from 2018 to 2022 and has been described by the DND as a transitional phase from internal defense to territorial defense.² According to these announcements, PHP 300 billion (USD 5.6 billion) in acquisitions were approved, more than double the PHP 125 billion linked with the program early in 2017, and almost four times the size earmarked for Horizon at PHP 85 billion.³

However, it immediately became clear that the acquisitions under Horizon 2 were not finalized and were still subject to various internal approval processes. By June 22, the Philippine News Agency was reporting that the Department of Budget and Management (DBM)

would evaluate and decide which programs to acquire first. According to DND spokesman Arsenio Andolong, "In the case of (diesel-electric) submarines, we can get just one or two, if needed, and for the multi-role fighters, we don't need to get the whole squadron (12 aircraft). We can just get six, we can comply with the budget."⁴

Furthermore, the program's funding is not necessarily fixed, with only PHP 125 billion or PHP 25 billion per year over a five-year period allocated by Congress. The remainder of Horizon 2 is earmarked to be funded through the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law and revenues generated by the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA), and that funding is dependent on the revenue generated in those channels.

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The announcement was also not specific on the numbers and types of weapon systems set for procurement. Instead, a generalized list of system types was provided to reporters.

PHILIPPINE ARMY

- Howitzers (Towed and Self-propelled)
- Multiple Launch Rocket Systems
- Light tanks
- Armored Recovery Vehicles
- Fire Support Vehicles
- Tactical Radios
- Ground Mobility Equipment (light, medium, and heavy)
- Individual Weapons
- Crew-Served Weapons
- Night Fighting Systems

PHILIPPINE AIR FORCE

- Multi-role Fighter Aircraft
- Radar System
- Light Utility Aircraft
- Medium Lift Aircraft
- Heavy Lift Aircraft
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
- Helicopters (Attack and Combat Utility)
- Special Mission and Long-Range Patrol Aircraft
- Trainer Aircraft

PHILIPPINE NAVY

- Frigates
- Corvettes
- Submarines
- Amphibious Assault Vehicles
- Anti-Submarine Helicopters
- Attack Craft
- Medium Life Helicopters
- Multi-role Vessels

OTHERS

- Combat Engineer Equipment
- Force Protection Equipment
- EOD Equipment
- CBRN Equipment
- HA/DR Equipment
- Medical Equipment

While the list is unspecific, some of the purchases should be assumed to consist of additional numbers of previously acquired weapon systems, obtained through Horizon 1 or other means. These will likely include the Multi-Purpose Attack Craft (MPAC), AW-159 Lynx Wildcat Helicopters, and AW109 Power naval helicopters. Furthermore, acquisition under Horizon 2 has reportedly already begun with the purchase of the Israeli Hermes 450 Unmanned Ariel Vehicles, which are scheduled for delivery at the end of 2018 or beginning of 2019.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT – INDONESIAN AND VIETNAMESE MILITARY MODERNIZATION

The Philippine defense modernization is happening within a regional context of increased defense spending and ongoing military modernization in Southeast Asia. A comparison of defense modernization between the Philippines and its Southeast Asian neighbors is illuminating in terms of the policy choices made by the countries, along with the strategic context driving those choices. However, there are also potential lessons to be learned by each country from the experiences of its neighbors.

Below follows a brief summary of military procurements by Indonesia and Vietnam over the last ten years. Unless otherwise indicated, the information represents a summary of data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) arms transfers database.⁵ The SIPRI database has its limitations, namely, that it is based on open source data, only covers international transfers, includes orders that are not yet complete in delivery, and requires a degree of knowledge about military weapon systems on the part of the reader. However, it is widely accepted as the best single source of information on international arms transfers, and the lists below are checked against a wide range of open source material.

INTERNATIONAL INDONESIAN ARMS PROCUREMENTS (2010 – 2017)

- Self-propelled guns in the form of 18 M-109A1s and 55 CAESAR 155mm wheeled howitzers
- Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) consisting of 26 ASTROS II and 36 RM-70s
- Relatively modern APCs/IFVs, including 42 Marder-1A3s, 54 BMP-3s, and 22 Black Fox IFVs from South Korea

- 3rd generation main battle tanks including 103 second-hand Leopard 2A-4s from Germany
- Advanced Anti-Tank Guided Missiles in the form of 180 FGM-148 Javelins and 25 launchers
- Multiple air detection and defense systems, including 8 Chinese TD-2000B air defense systems and 5 Forceshield SAM systems from the UK and 1 NASAMS-2 from Norway
- Multiple squadrons of multi-role fighters including 24 F-16Cs, 11 Su-35s, and potentially 50 of the under development KFX aircraft from South Korea, for fighter/ground attack/sea attack roles
- 8 Super Tucanos for ground attack roles
- 16 T-50 “Golden Eagles” for jet-training and light attack
- Transport helicopters, including an order of 25 Bell-412s and 10 AS-532 Cougar
- Attack helicopters including 8 AH-64Es and 12 multipurpose AS-550 Fennecs
- Frigates equipped with beyond visual range anti air missiles, short range naval SAM systems, Anti-Ship missiles, and CIWS, including 3 “Bung Tomo” frigates manufactured in the UK and 2 SIGMA-10514 frigates partially manufactured in the Netherlands
- 3 Type-209/1400 Diesel Submarines partially produced by South Korea

Also noteworthy is the domestic production of Indonesian fast attack craft by shipbuilder PT PAL, such as Sampari-class and Clurit-class fast attack craft.⁶ This is happening alongside the domestic production of more advanced foreign vessels under license, for example one of the three above Type-209/1400 diesel submarines⁷ and along with the joint production of the two SIGMA-10514 frigates in partnership with Dutch shipbuilding company Damen.⁸

INTERNATIONAL VIETNAMESE ARMS PROCUREMENT (2010 - 2017)

- 3rd Generation main battle tanks in the form of 64 T-90s Russian tanks
- Multiple air detection and defense systems, including 5 Israeli SPYDER MRs, 5 S-125T Pechora-2Ts from Belarus, and Russian S-300 PMU-2s⁹
- Negligible number of new Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), consisting of 10 Guardians, which are a kind four-wheeled armored vehicle
- Multiple squadrons of multi-role fighters, consisting of 32 Su-30MKs for fighter/ground attack/sea attack roles
- Limited investment in transport helicopters and transport aircraft, consisting of two EC725 Super Cougar Helicopters, 3 C-295s transport aircraft from Spain, and 3 DHC-6 Twin Otter transport aircraft from Canada
- Frigates with ASMs and AS torpedoes, consisting of 2 Gepard-class frigates
- Fast attack and patrol craft including 2 Molniya missile attack craft from Russia
- 6 Kilo class diesel electric submarines manufactured by Russia (to be supported by a submarine rescue vessel domestically constructed)¹⁰
- Surface to surface missile systems for coastal defense including of 2 K-300P Bastion-P systems from Russia
- Surface to surface missiles for targeting fixed targets, namely 100 EXTRA guided rockets from Israel (note: the EXTRA guided rockets may have some use in an anti-ship role, but this is debatable, partially due to its GPS guidance which is vulnerable to jamming)

A significant component of Vietnam's modernization, or at the very least, its defense posture, also comes from its investment in a maritime militia. This maritime militia is designated for the Vietnam Fisheries Surveillance Force (VFSF). The maritime militia has its legal basis in the "Law on Militia and Self Defense Forces" passed in 2009.¹¹ According to a recent article published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies' (CSIS) Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, the VFSF is a critical component of how Vietnam intends to conduct a "People's War at Sea." The report cites a Vietnamese estimate of 8000 ships in the VFSF, which is lightly armed but equipped with infrared vision and communications equipment.¹² The VFSF is apparently designed to excel at the kind of grey zone conflicts, the informal blockades and harassing of vessels, that frequently characterize South China Sea disputes, such as the May 2014 placement of a Chinese oil rig in waters claimed by both China and Vietnam.

Also noteworthy are the absence of many conventional land-based systems. Vietnam remains reliant on early to mid-Cold War era self-propelled howitzers and Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS). These systems lack range and flexibility in comparison to the systems currently fielded by its neighbor China.¹³ Prior to the delivery of the T-90s, which began in November 2017,¹⁴ Vietnam was reliant on early and mid-Cold War T-54/55s, T-62s, and Type 59s, tanks frequently left over from the Vietnam War and used against the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and US forces. Further missing is a significant investment in modernized Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) and Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFVs), particularly in comparison to Indonesia.



Image Credit: thuanhiepnews.com

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND MILITARY MODERNIZATION OF THE THREE COUNTRIES

In comparing the military modernization of the three countries, the differing strategic contexts of the countries immediately come to the forefront. While little current information is publicly available about how the Vietnamese military views military doctrine and strategy, as its last White Paper publicly available was published in 2009,¹⁵ it is clear that Vietnam does not face the internal security challenges that Indonesia and the Philippines do. There is no insurgency threat comparable to the threat of the New People's Army, which affects large portions of the countryside in the Philippines, or the various autonomous groups which participate in the Papua insurgency in Indonesia. Vietnam does not face a threat from Muslim extremism and terrorism. The Philippines, on the other hand, faces threats from a variety of Islamic groups in Mindanao, with the military contribution necessary in countering those threats, highlighted most recently by the Marawi Siege from May to October 2017. Indonesia is not only experiencing an ongoing crackdown on terrorist elements linked to the Islamic State, but also has a history of armed insurgency in Aceh until 2005, and more recently, in Central Suluwesi, along with historic concerns about holding together a large ethnically diverse country spread out over the world's largest archipelago.

Vietnam's military modernization and major procurements appear to be focused on maritime security-related challenges in the South China Sea.¹⁶ The acquisitions of 6 Kilo class diesel electric submarines and K-300P Bastion-P anti-ship missile systems as dedicated coastal batteries stand out in that regard. Other systems acquired are designed primarily for external threats, but not necessarily exclusive to a South China Sea conflict, such as the Israeli SPYDER air defense systems, Russian Su-30MKs, and Israeli EXTRA guided rockets. However, most notable in support of the argument that modernization has been focused around

a potential South China Sea conflict is the lack of investment in capabilities designed to excel in external defense in a land-based conflict, such a lack of investment in modernized artillery systems, infantry fighting vehicles, modern attack helicopters, and only a very recent investment in a relatively limited number of modernized tanks (64 modern T-90s tanks compared to island nation Indonesia's 103 Leopard 2A4s).

On the other hand, Indonesia appears to be following a similar path to the Philippines in its modernization, although it may be characterized as approximately five to ten years ahead on the Philippine's path in Horizon 2. The recent defense acquisitions of Indonesia align strongly with the relatively unspecified list provided by the AFP at the announcement of Horizon 2. These acquisitions include modern self-propelled guns such as the CAESAR 155mm. In 2013, the Philippine AFP, on the other hand, was linked with the modern Israeli self-propelled howitzer, the ATMOS 2000.¹⁷ Other areas where recent Indonesian acquisitions overlap with the proposed acquisitions under Horizon 2 include Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), attack helicopters, light ground attack planes, and armored fire support vehicles.

Also, while Indonesia operates missiles which may be launched from shore-based systems, such as the C-802, the Russian Yakhont SS-N-26, and the French MM-40 Exocet, those missiles are intended for Indonesian navy frigates. Nowhere was it identified that Indonesia posed the equipment to operate these missiles from coastal batteries.¹⁸ Similarly, Horizon 2 makes no provisions for dedicated shore-based anti-ship missiles, which were reportedly planned early on in Horizon 1,¹⁹ but now appear to have been delayed until at least Horizon 3.

There are, however, also differences between Indonesia's modernization since 2010 and the Philippine's under Horizon

2. Notably, Indonesia invested in modern Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs), while no investment in SAMs has been announced as part of Horizon 2. SAMs are reportedly scheduled for the next phase of modernization in Horizon 3. Indonesia also chose to invest in heavy Main Battle Tanks (MBTs), while the Philippines only plans to invest in relatively light armored fire support vehicles and light tanks. Similarly, Indonesia acquired large numbers of Infantry Fighting Vehicles, which provide both an armored transport role and fire support role, while the Philippines appears to be intent on largely meeting those requirements in separate vehicles.

A number of weapon systems have been or are set to be acquired by all three nations, including modern frigates, missile capable fast attack craft, unmanned aerial vehicles, modern multi-role fighters, and diesel submarines.

The similarities between the acquisitions approach of Indonesia and the planned approach of the Philippines should not be surprising given the similar strategic context of both countries. As mentioned above, both countries face a variety of insurgency and terrorist threats, although the insurgency threats are more substantial and widespread in the Philippines. As island nations, both countries are geographically similar, with a similar vulnerability to natural disasters. The formal formulation of both nation's national security strategies, the 2016 Indonesian Defense White Paper and the Philippines' 2017 – 2022 National Security Policy both devote extensive space to a multitude of non-nation state security threats.

Both nations have an ongoing maritime dispute with China, although the Philippine dispute is more pressing as it includes occupied maritime features in disputed territories. The Indonesian Natuna Islands, on the other hand, are outside of Chinese claims, even though the maritime claims are overlapping.

The vast majority of equipment procured by Indonesia, and set to be acquired by the Philippines, should be considered multi-role, with potential roles in both internal and external defense. This is in line with what has been described as a “flexible” defense policy being pursued by the Philippines,²⁰ with the exceptions being submarines, which are being procured by both countries, and the SAMs and advanced anti-tank missiles that have been procured by Indonesia, which have few serious roles to play in internal defense. All other weapons systems have a potential role to play in some internal and external defense scenarios. For example, armored vehicles may be used to provide fire support against fortified insurgents or terrorists (as was the case in Marawi) or to oppose a full-scale invasion from a foreign power. Similarly, frigates may be used to patrol littoral seas against pirates and smugglers, or launch missile strikes against foreign navies. Multi-role fighters may be used to conduct airstrikes against insurgents, to help defend the skies against foreign air forces, or deployed for naval attack roles.

However, just because the equipment is multi-role in both foreign and internal defense does not mean that it is the best suited to counteract the most probable and/or consequential threats a country face. Most analysts argue that the Philippines and Indonesia face little risk of an invasion from a foreign power. Much of the equipment procured by Indonesia, and set to be procured by the Philippines, is only applicable to external defense in the context of a foreign invasion. Tanks, armored vehicles, self-propelled artillery, and MLRS offer little capability in terms of protecting the interests of a country in disputed maritime claims. Furthermore, many of the advanced capabilities acquired by Indonesia, such as Leopard 2A4, BMP-3s, CAESAR self-propelled guns, ASTROS II MLRS, and multi-role fighters are expensive to use in internal defense roles and/or frequently excessive in their firepower.

THE OTHER DRIVERS OF MILITARY MODERNIZATION AND ACQUISITION

BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

Of course, rational calculations about defending the nation, against either external or internal threats, are not the only drivers behind the choices made during military modernization and acquisition. The most obvious of course are the limitations of the budget. World Bank data highlights that the Philippines spent 1.4% of its GDP on military spending in 2017, while Indonesia spent 0.8% and Vietnam spent 2.3%. Total defense spending on the other hand, as measured by SIPRI, is USD 4.3 billion in 2017 for the Philippines, USD 8.1 billion for Indonesia, and USD 5 billion for Vietnam. With the lowest overall spending of the three countries, and perhaps the greatest defense requirements, the Philippines has to be more discerning than its neighbors.



However, overall spending is only a part of the equation. One criticism made of the modernization efforts in the Philippines, which began under the Ramos administration, is that it temporarily increased the capabilities and requirements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines without securing additional long-term funding to sustain those capabilities.²¹ The current modernization efforts may encounter similar difficulties. In Vietnam, on the other hand, due to different political circumstances, military units gained permission to engage in commercial activities, securing them long-term funding which allowed them to compensate for budget cuts and pay for modernization.²²

NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL BASE

Military acquisition programs are often driven by considerations of investment in and upgrading of the domestic defense industrial base. This driver is most clearly apparent in Indonesia. The Indonesian government set an ambitious target of 2029 for full self-sufficiency in arms for production.²³ While that target is almost certainly unrealistic, as even major arms manufacturers like the United States import weapons, it is a policy that has been backed by tangible measures. State-owned arms manufacturers PT Dirgantara, PT PAL, and PT Pindad have received various subsidies and investment from the government.²⁴ In October 2012, Indonesia passed the Defense Industry Law, which includes strict stipulations for a 35% local contribution and technology transfers.²⁵ These stipulations are driving factors in the joint development and production of the SIGMA-10514 frigates with the Netherlands, as well as the Type-209/1400 submarines and the KFX multi-role fighter program with South Korea. Vietnam's and the Philippines' defense industry are comparatively underdeveloped.



Image Credit: jabarprov.go.id

COMPETITION BETWEEN INTERNAL POLITICAL ACTORS

Military modernization policies are also widely attributed to political bargaining and competition between internal political actors. However, separating the political calculations from genuine decisions regarding the threat environment is sometimes challenging. For example, Laksmana cites the fact that Indonesian procurement spending is roughly evenly divided between the three services, despite what he argues should be a maritime focus, as evidence of an army-centric organizational structure.²⁶ Raymond argues that naval modernization has been “under the shadow of army dominance,” contending that the Indonesian army continues to hold a dominant position in the armed forces and in command positions, and hence control over a disproportionate share of the budget.²⁷ An alternative explanation is that Indonesian decision makers take seriously potential internal threats to the country, or the need to prepare for the contingency of some form of ground conflict with Malaysia, East Timor, or Papua New Guinea, even potentially one involving Australia. However, these kinds of dynamics make Vietnam’s targeted acquisitions of capabilities in the maritime theater all the more remarkable.

Similar internal political calculations are often attributed to the decisions surrounding the Philippines’ defense modernization program. At least one respected analyst describes the approval of Horizon 2 as an effort by the administration to maintain the support of the military and ease the pressures of domestic public opinion.²⁸ Croissant, in his study of Civil-Military Relations in Southeast Asia, identifies both modern Philippines and Indonesia as a “Praetorian-Professional” systems, meaning that their civil military relations are

in between full civilian primacy and political systems where the Army controls affairs behind the scenes, regularly intervening in politics.²⁹ In such systems, it should be expected that the Army will capture a significant share of modernization funding. Vietnam, on the other hand, is characterized by Croissant as a “revolutionary” system of civil-military relations, with a symbiosis of military and party elites, and a highly politicized but still subordinate military.

PRESTIGE AND INTERNATIONAL RESPECT

One final factor regularly attributed as a driver of modernization programs is a desire on the part of the military for prestige or respect, particularly in comparison to other regional militaries.³⁰ In fact, many statements of Philippine defense officials refer to concepts such as international respect or prestige. In justifying the purchase of submarines, Vice Adm. Robert Empedrad said of other nations, “If they know you have submarines, they will start to respect the Philippine Navy.”³¹ Major General Restituto Padilla Jr., according to an official Philippines News Agency statement, indicated that the President was keen on the modernization program so that the Philippines would earn the respect of other nations.³² Chief of Staff Eduardo Año reportedly testified before congress that the AFP will be satisfied if it is at par with other Southeast Asian militaries and if it is a respected force in the region.³³

Submarine acquisition, in particular, is frequently attributed to a desire for prestige amongst Southeast Asian nations. According to a report produced from a RSIS workshop, “One impetus is the

level of national prestige that comes with submarine ownership, with submarine display during national parades and ‘show the flag’ missions being conducted by countries to showcase their naval capabilities, partly for purposes of deterrence. The desire to keep up with one’s neighbors is therefore another reason for acquiring submarines in the region.”³⁴ This also highlights, however, the difficulty of separating the concepts of “respect” or “prestige” from deterrence. At least one thesis, which attempted to explore the reasons for submarine acquisition amongst Southeast Asian nations, concluded that prestige was unconvincing as a driver for the purchase of submarines by those nations, finding deterrence as a stronger explanation.³⁵

CONCLUSION

In comparing the three nation’s modernization plans, based on recent defense acquisitions by Vietnam and Indonesia, and the announcements made by the Philippines for Horizon 2, it becomes clear that Vietnam’s modernization efforts have been relatively narrowly targeted around modern capabilities for a maritime conflict. Indonesia and the Philippines, on the other hand, are building their militaries around a broad set of capabilities, largely around weapons systems with both internal and external defense applications. Strategic considerations and the respective assessments of the threat environments by the three countries stand out as the major drivers of this difference. However, strategic considerations are unconvincing on their own as the sole explanation.

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