

A National Security Strategy (NSS) for the 17th Philippine President: The Case for A Limited Balancing Strategy



**Panel on Advancing Multilateralism and Strategic Partnerships:
2022 Philippine Foreign and Security Policy Outlook, November 25,
2021, 9:00 -12:00 PM**

Introduction

“The Philippines’ policy in dealing with China is the ‘opposite of appeasement’ as it has been consistently asserting its territorial rights in the West Philippine Sea,” Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. declared sometime in August 2020 during an interview in ABS-CBN News Channel.



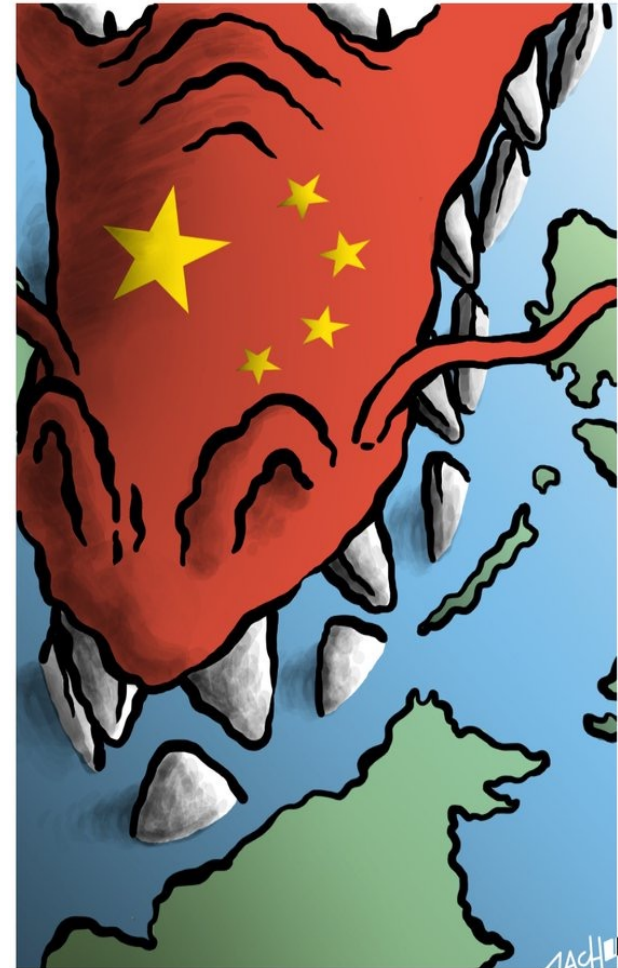
Introduction



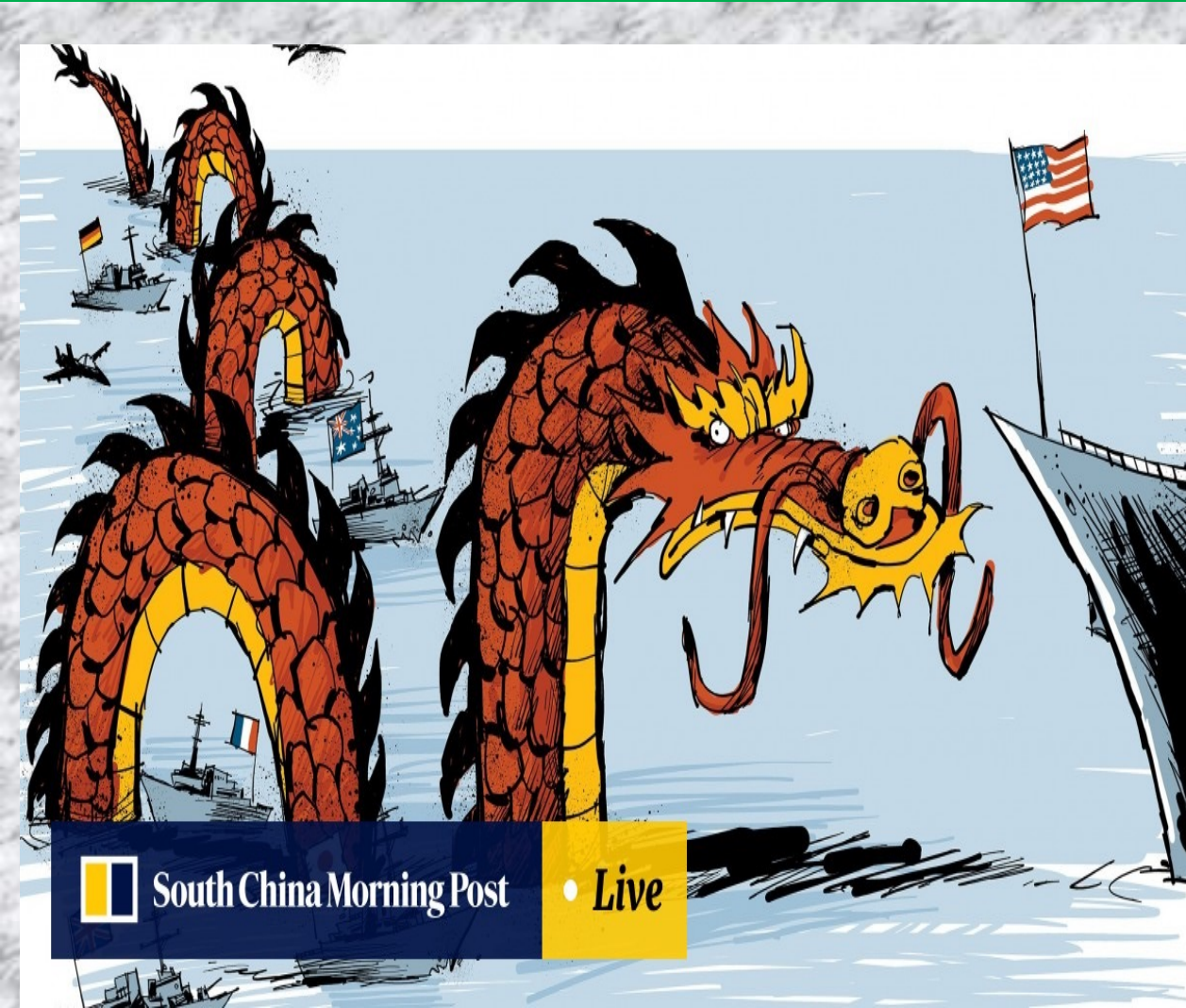
“To begin with, you’re looking at the opposite of appeasement right now. Every transgression and incursion made by the Chinese, or even just a suspicion of it, is immediately reported to me and we craft a diplomatic note and fire it off. Every single one without fail,” Locsin added,

Introduction

The major security conundrum that has confronted the Philippines since the second decade of the 21st century is China's expansion into the West Philippine Sea.



Introduction



In March 2010, China declared the South China Sea as one of its “core interests,” indicating its determination to assert its rights over the disputed waters; while top-level Chinese officials abandoned their moderate public posture on the maritime dispute, and became increasingly forceful and nationalistic.

Introduction

By the 2011, China's militant nationalism, growing naval prowess, and unilateral actions are overtly directed against a militarily-weak Southeast Asian country—the Philippines.



Introduction



The late President Benigno Aquino III implemented a strategy of balancing or challenging China's expansive maritime claim in the West Philippine Sea.

Introduction

He countered China by shifting the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP's) focus from domestic security to territorial defense; bolstering closer Philippine-U.S. security relations; acquiring American military equipment; seeking from Washington an explicit security guarantee under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT); and promoting a strategic partnership with Japan.



Introduction



President Rodrigo Duterte unraveled his predecessor's strategy of balancing China's expansive claim in the South China Sea as he managed the West Philippine Sea dispute according to China's terms, i.e., bilateral negotiations, setting aside the July 12, 2016 arbitral awards to the Philippines, preventing third parties from interfering in the dispute, and talks about joint development.

Introduction

After more than five years of pursuing a policy of appeasement toward China, the defense, military, and foreign affairs establishments are questioning President Duterte's policy and are pushing for a grand strategy aimed at constraining China's revisionist agenda in the South China Sea.





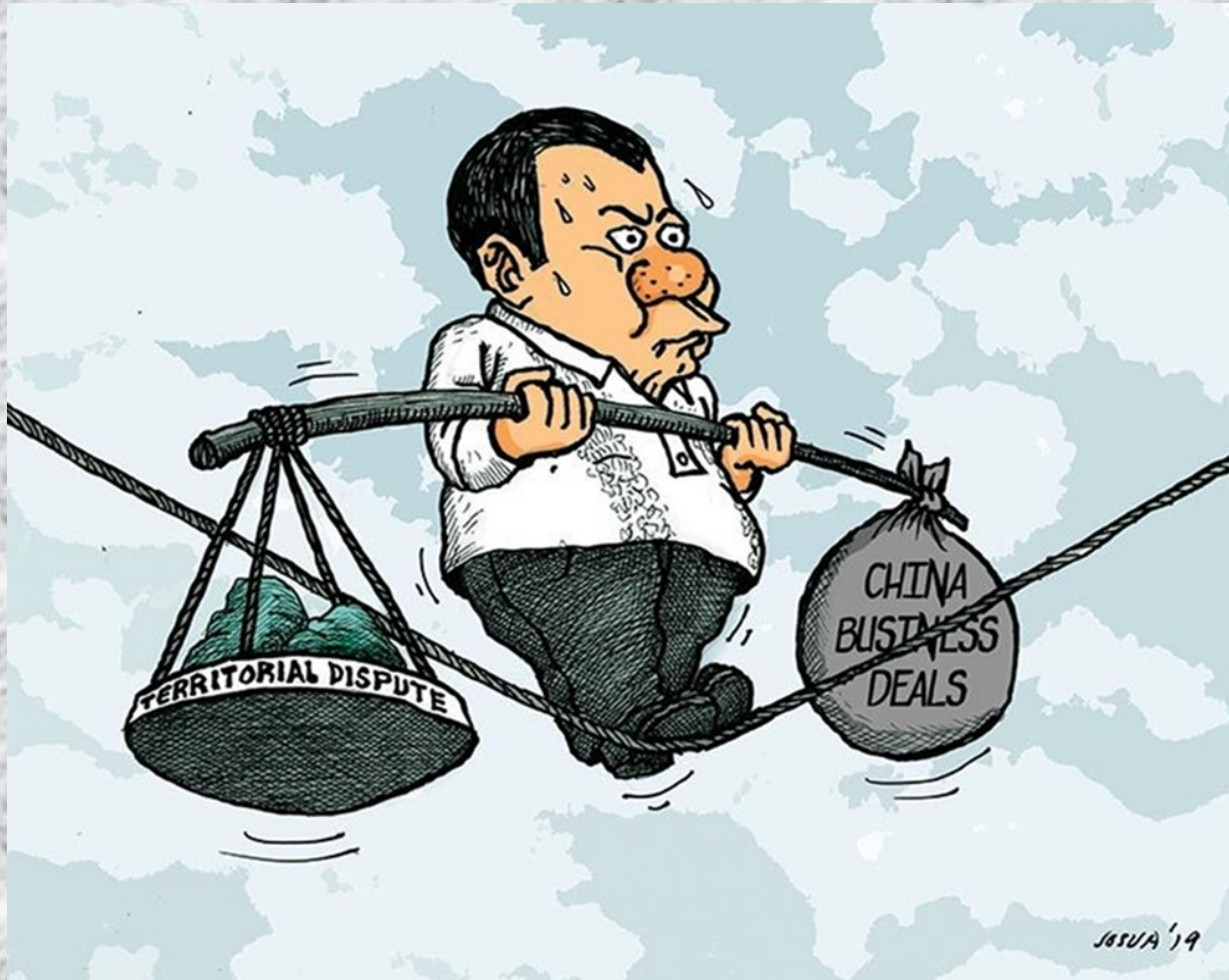
The current administration is pondering on a grand strategy of limited hard balancing; this strategy requires building up the Philippine military's external defense capabilities, maintaining its alliance with the U.S., and making security arrangements with other middles powers like Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

Introduction

Its goals are to develop a credible defense capability for the armed forces; while at the same time, to promote and strengthen comprehensive and strategic alliances the Philippines has forged with its friends and partners in the international community.



Introduction



This representation examines the prospect of limited hard balancing as the next administration's grand strategy in the next six years as it raises this question: why should the next administration consider limited hard balancing as its grand strategy in a changing Indo-Pacific region?

A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President



A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President

Grand Strategy is a conceptual framing that describes to a specific state sees how the world is, envisions how it ought to be, and specifies a set of foreign and defense policies that can achieve that ordering.





It is defined as the purposive application of military, diplomatic, and economic instruments of statecraft to realize particular goals, and consists of a set of ideas for using a nation's resources to achieve its interests over the long run.

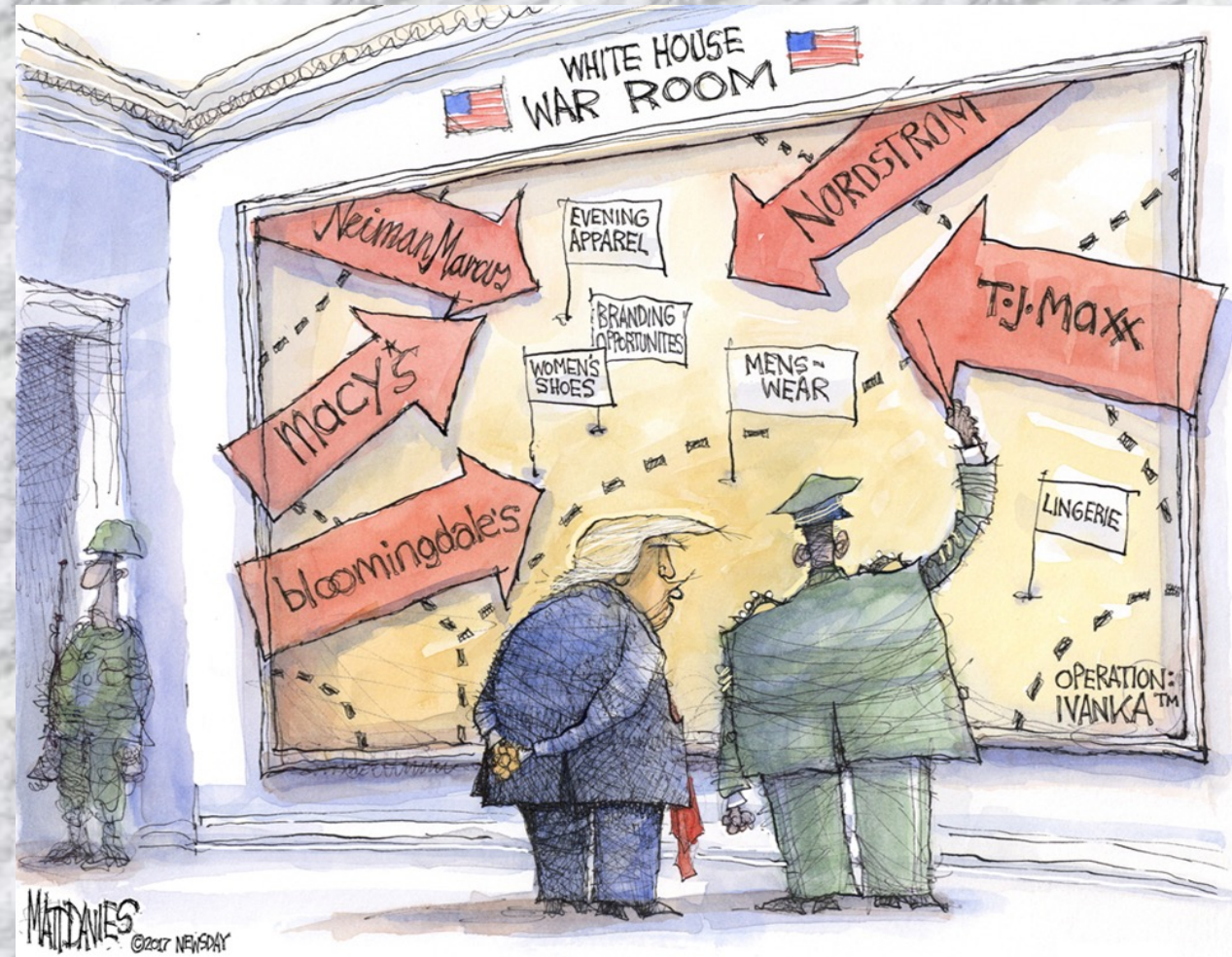
A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President



Grand strategy represents the total design and presents the overall mosaic into which the pieces of specific day-to-day policy (and strategy) fit as it is the unifying concept that guides or direct all other national security related policies.

A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President

A National Security Strategy (NSS) represents a nation's plan for the coordinated use of all the instruments of national power—from diplomacy to the military capability—to pursue the objectives that defend and advance the national interests.



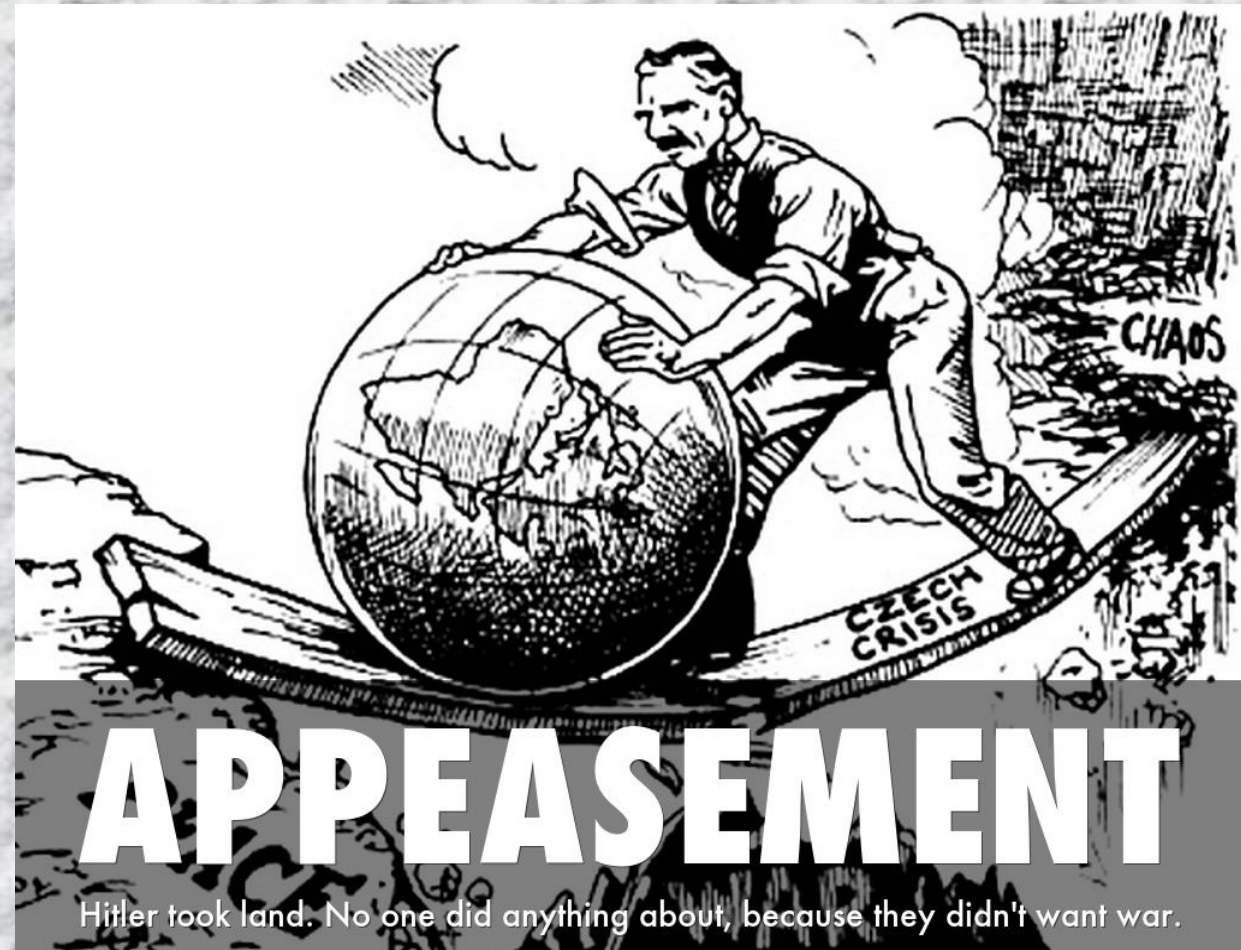
A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President



Balancing aims to strengthen the state's ability to defend its vital interest in the face of a perceived threat through some combination of internal mobilization for arms-build up and alliance formation, through typically leaders do attach greater weight to one strategy or the other.

A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President

Appeasement involves extending concessions to an emergent power in the hope that its aggression will be moderated or terminated, sparing the appeasing state a costly war and possibly a peaceful and cooperation relations with the emergent power.



A Grand Strategy for the 17th Philippine President



Limited hard balancing, which relies on limited arms build-up and semiformal alliances such as strategic partnerships that allow joint efforts and sharing of strategic resources but not offensive warfare or operational coordination.

The Aquino Administration's Balancing Strategy



The Aquino Administration's Balancing Strategy

The late President Benigno Aquino pursued a balancing strategy toward China although his administration was never able to come out with a formal National Security Strategy (NSS) as he initially showed little interest in foreign relations and strategic matters.



The Aquino Administration's Balancing Strategy



The late President Aquino, however, was overtaken by unexpected international developments which forced him to pay more attention to foreign policy and security matters than what he initially anticipated in mid-2010.



President Benigno Aquino III spoke of “enhanced security” for national defense and put forward the country’s claim for territories in the South China Sea through capability upgrades and modernization of the air-force and navy.

The Aquino Administration's Balancing Strategy

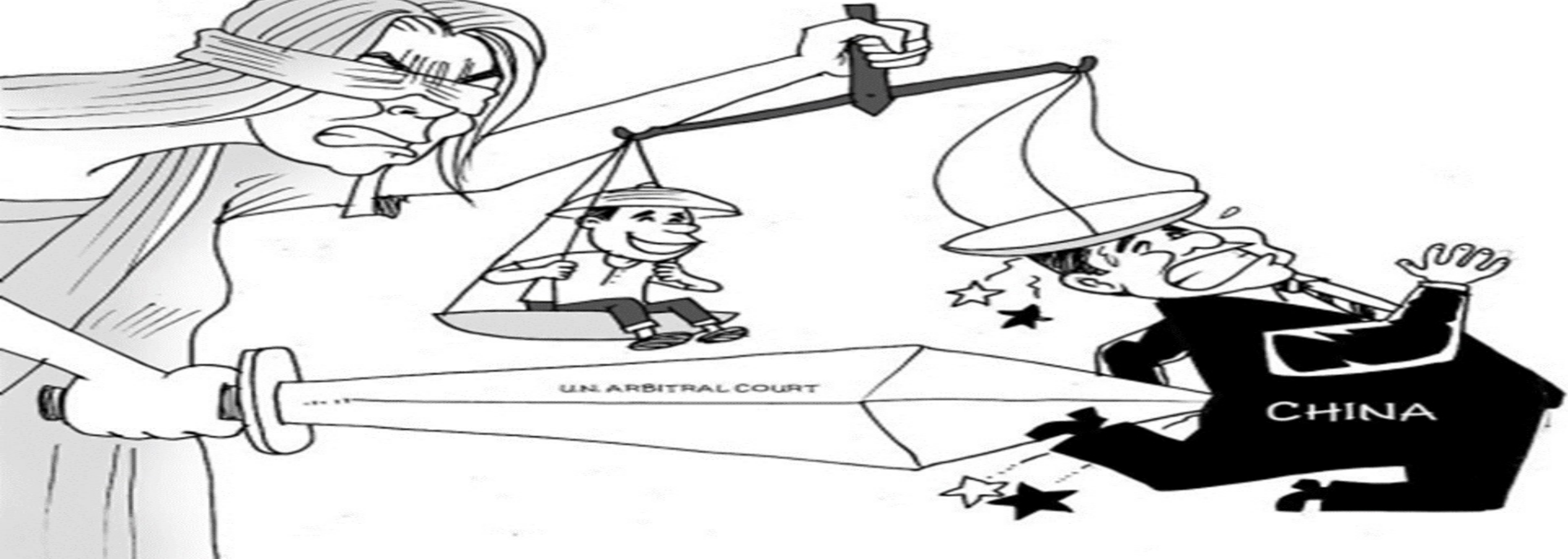


- **U.S. military assistance.**
- **American security guarantee as provided for in the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).**
- **The 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).**

The Aquino Administration's Balancing Strategy

During his first state visit to Japan in June 2015, the late President Aquino met then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the two heads of government discussed how they can strengthen the Philippine-Japan security partnership in the face of China's aggressive behavior.





22 January 2013 Philippines' submission of Notification and Statement of Claim to the United Nations Arbitral Tribunal for the holding of arbitral proceedings to establish the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Philippines over its maritime entitlements in the South China Sea.

The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy



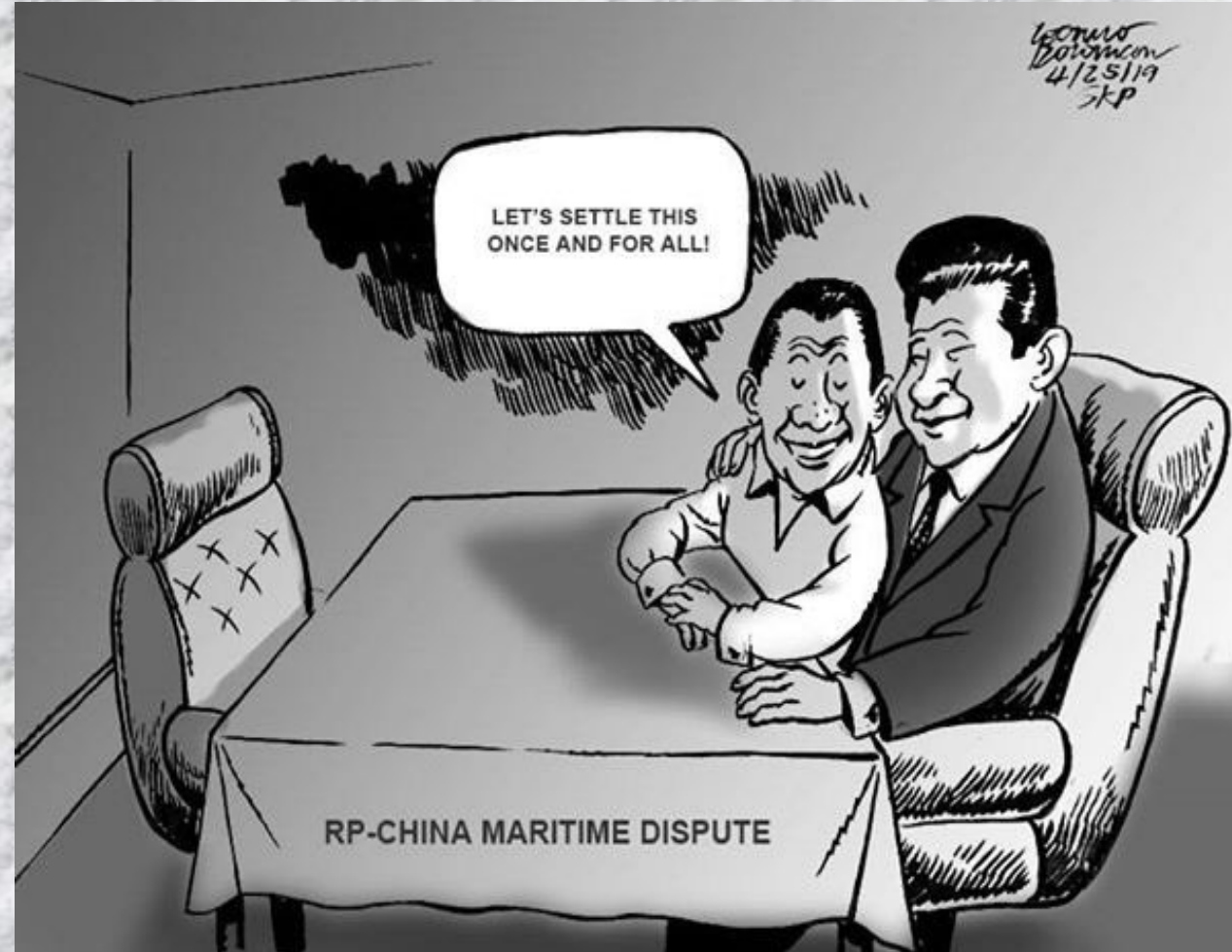
The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy



He down-graded the Philippines' long-standing alliance with the U.S., alienated Australia and the European Union, and announced his plan to move closer to China and Russia.

The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy

He was candid about his intention to change Manila's hardline policy toward Beijing and this was manifested when he reacted with sobriety and extreme caution when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) Arbitral Tribunal came out with the July 12, 2016 awards to the Philippines.



The Duterte Administration's Appeasement Policy



The Duterte Administration accepted China's core procedural norms for dealing with the South China Sea dispute—shelving the sovereignty issue, discussing the conflict in bilateral forums, and agreeing on bilateral engagements such as joint development, strengthening of bilateral trade and increased trade—in exchange for Chinese support for Philippine development.

From Appeasement to Limited Balancing Policy



From Appeasement to Limited Balancing Policy



On May 16, 2018, President Duterte signed the first National Security Strategy (NSS) since the Philippines became an independent republic in 1946.

From Appeasement to Limited Balancing Policy

The 2018 NSS did not mention any specific country that threatens the Philippines as it raised three important issues concerning the Philippines's external security environment: 1) The perils of traditional geo-strategic threats; 2) the necessity for the Philippines to develop a credible defence capability and; 3) to strengthen its comprehensive strategic alliances or cooperation with its friends and security partners in the international community.



From Appeasement to Limited Balancing Policy



PHILIPPINES SUSPENDS TERMINATION OF VISITING FORCES AGREEMENT

The release of the 2018 NSS coincided with a shift in Philippine policy towards China from appeasement to limited hard balancing and this shift can be partly attributed to the Philippine military's stance vis-a-vis China's expansion into the South China Sea.

From Appeasement to Limited Balancing Policy

Despite its efforts to appease China, the current administration does not want to put the fate of the Philippines in the hands of a more powerful and aggressive China.



From Appeasement to Limited Balancing Policy



By appeasing an expanding power, the Philippines accepts and faces greater vulnerability in a false hope that Chinese appetites for further expansion into the West Philippine Sea are sated or diverted.



Philippines, US, Japan kick off MTA Sama Sama

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This is evident in the Duterte administration's three policies: a) the continued funding of the AFP modernization program; b) downgrading the Philippines' security relations with the U.S., but keeping the alliance intact; And c) bolstering the Philippines' security partnerships with Japan (China's traditional rival in East Asia) and Australia.

Limited Balancing as a Grand Strategy for the 17th President



Limited Balancing as a Grand Strategy for the 17th President

The Duterte Administration was confronted by China's failure to deliver the promised loans and direct investments to finance the Philippine government's Build, Build, build program, and increasing naval presence and assertiveness near the artificial islands it constructed in the South China Sea; this forced this administration to reluctantly embrace a policy of limited hard balancing.



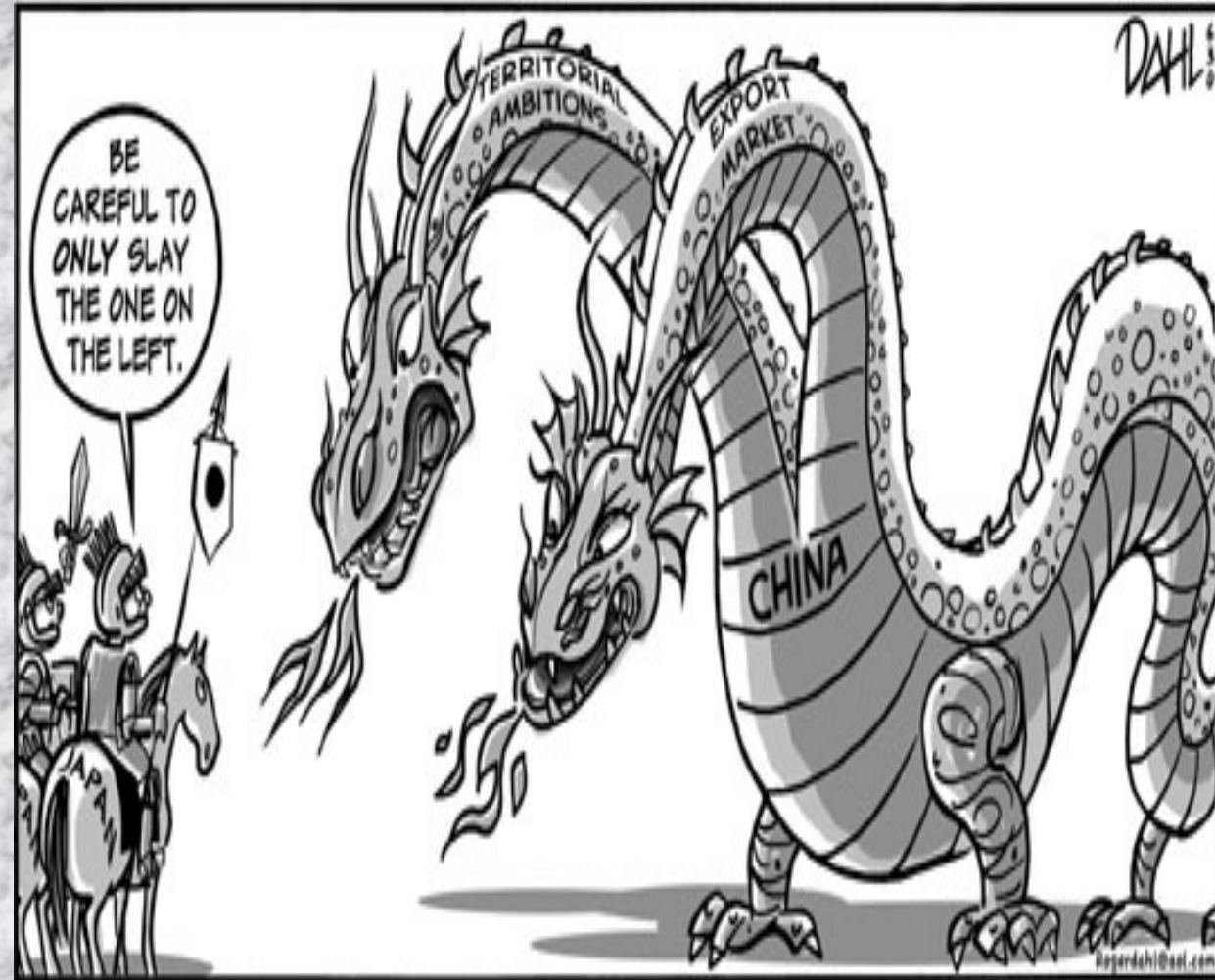
Limited Balancing as a Grand Strategy for the 17th President



The strategy of limited hard balancing towards China stemmed from the current administration's realization that a policy of appeasement requires the weaker party (the Philippines) to put its strategic stakes in hands of a more powerful state (China) which is harboring hostile intention of maritime expansion in the West Philippine Sea and is bent on exploiting the country's military weakness.

Limited Balancing as a Grand Strategy for the 17th President

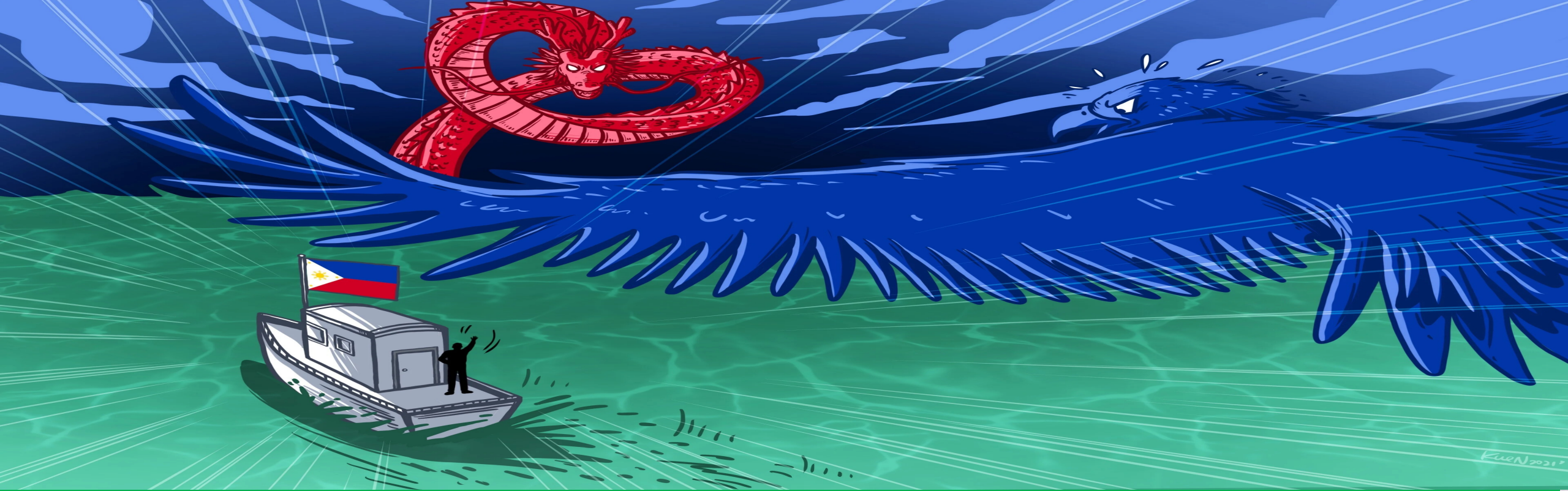
A policy of limited hard balancing requires accepting that China is a major economic and military power in the region and that the Philippines must maintain a healthy economic and diplomatic relations with this emergent power.



Limited Balancing as a Grand Strategy for the 17th President



The Philippines must seek to mitigate any adverse externalities of this geopolitical reality, i.e., assertiveness, coercive behavior, and territorial expansion, by developing credible military capabilities and harnessing counter-vailing coalitions of other major powers designed to thwart or impede specific Chinese policies.



Limited hard balancing involves the Philippines' effective coordination of both military and diplomatic efforts in order to obtain outcomes contrary to China's preference of controlling a large portion of the West Philippine Sea, and the waters of the first-island-chain; it seeks to constrain China's ability to unilaterally impose its preferences on the littoral states through limited arms build-up and reliance on diplomatic coalition of states that will defend their common interests.

Recommendations for the 17th President



Recommendations for the 17th President

The policy of limited hard balancing was a result of the defense, military, and foreign affairs establishments questioning President Duterte's appeasement policy; leading to this administration's belated realization that it needs an impromptu strategy aimed at constraining China's revisionist agenda in the South China Sea.



Recommendations for the 17th President



The key challenge for the 17th Philippine president is to transform the current administration's unplanned and makeshift policy of limited hard balancing into a well-thought, comprehensive, and formal grand strategy that will guide the Philippines in the next six years.



Immediate formulation by the National Security Council (NSC) of a new National Security Policy (NSP) and National Security Strategy (NSS) based on the July 12 2016 Arbitral Ruling on the South China Sea Dispute.

Recommendations for the 17th President



Build the AFP's territorial defense capabilities with a specific focus on developing its ability to wage asymmetrical warfare in the country's maritime domain.

Recommendations for the 17th President

Increase Philippine defense spending while effecting reforms to reduce the proportion of the budget allocated for personnel expenditures.



Recommendations for the 17th President



Strengthening the Philippine-U.S. alliance by implementing the 2014 EDCA and forming with the U.S. a bilateral “4+4 strategic, diplomatic, economic, and public health dialogue mechanism that will advance a comprehensive security partnership between the two allies.

Recommendations for the 17th President

Enhancing Philippine security partnerships with other American allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and Australia; while at the same time, leveraging on existing and newly formed multilateral arrangements that are committed in defending the rules-based international system.





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Thank you
very much
for your attention!