

**IMPLEMENTING EDCA :
INSIGHTS INTO THE BILATERAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE**

*Remarks by the Hon. Albert F. del Rosario
Secretary of Foreign Affairs (2010-2016)
and
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On behalf of the ADR Institute, it is my privilege to welcome you here this morning.

Unlike in Washington DC, think tanks focused on foreign policy are not very visible in the Philippines. They are also not normally part of the public discourse, outside the academic setting. This series of events is therefore our contribution to the effort to bring foreign policy issues to a wider audience. We believe this is an important step in helping explain to the public how these issues impact the lives of our people.

I have had the privilege of a ringside seat as the relations between the Philippines and the US evolved in the last decade. I was the Philippine Ambassador to the United States when the Philippines had to leave the coalition of the willing in Iraq, which was admittedly one of the low points of our longstanding alliance. I returned to government in 2011 after a 5 year hiatus, at a time when the US was beginning its rebalance to Asia. Our shared values and the incipient regional concerns underscored the value of working more closely together in the interest of regional peace and stability.

Historically, much of our security activities have been coordinated through the Mutual Defense Board – Security engagement board, which meets at various levels throughout the year. The resurgent partnership has been manifest in the network of bilateral mechanisms that have since been established to compliment the work of the MDB-SEB.

One mechanism is the Two Plus Two Ministerial Dialogues, which I have been honored to attend with Secretary Gazmin in 2012 and 2016 with our counterparts from the State Department and the Pentagon. I was very pleased to note that from our 2012 exchange of views on opportunities for cooperation, our discussions earlier this year have progressed significantly to actual cooperative activities and endeavors.

We have also developed parallel mechanisms among our economic folks, to discuss a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. Similar dialogues, albeit

informal, also take place in the area of agriculture, labor and employment, justice, science and technology, law enforcement, and many others.

The Bilateral Strategic Dialogue however, is unique in the sense that it brings together the four major tracks that underpin the very broad relations, namely defense and security, economic development, rule of law, and regional and global diplomatic engagement. Since the first BSD, we have covered much ground on many issues, including combatting human trafficking, enhancing access for Phl products under the GSP, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The idea behind the EDCA was first discussed at the second BSD in Washington DC in January 2012. This was early on in the implementation of the US rebalance policy, and at a time of rising regional concerns, described by then Secretary Hillary Clinton as *“military buildups matched with ongoing territorial disputes [that] create anxieties”*.

Discussions on the EDCA spanned two years. It will be a fair assessment to say that both delegations made adjustments and compromises to achieve our alliance goals in a way that will be responsive to regional concerns, and consistent with both countries' interests, laws and regulations.

In January of this year, the Philippine Supreme Court upheld the validity of the EDCA, confirming that it was in accordance with the existing laws of the land. This allowed formal discussions on its implementation to continue, and at the 6th BSD in Washington DC in March, five (5) facilities were identified, portions of which will host the agreed locations for EDCA activities.

The full implementation of the EDCA could not have come at a more propitious time. Domestically, a new administration is about to assume office, vowing to implement the EDCA in a manner that will be respectful of our national interests. At the same time, the region and the world eagerly anticipate the ruling of the arbitral tribunal hearing the case brought by the Philippines against China's nine dash line.

The primary purpose of the EDCA is to enhance our joint abilities to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and help build capacity for the modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. It is not directed against any country. In real terms, it is a concrete demonstration of the strength and relevance of the alliance.

I look forward to discussions this morning, on the EDCA in particular, and the BSD and the full range of alliance issues. It is our hope that we are able to make a humble contribution to a better understanding of these important issues that affect our daily lives.

Thank you.