

United States–Philippines Joint Statement on Secretary Hegseth’s Inaugural Visit to the Philippines



From the U.S. Department of Defense, March 28, 2025

United States Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth made his inaugural visit to the Philippines as part of his first trip

to the Indo-Pacific region to meet with President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. and Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro, Jr. on March 27-28, 2025.

The leaders underscored the enduring strength of the U.S.-Philippines alliance and reaffirmed its importance for upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Teodoro reiterated both countries' shared commitment to the 1951 U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) in an increasingly complex security environment. The Secretaries also reaffirmed that the MDT extends to armed attacks against either country's armed forces, aircraft, and public vessels – including those of their coast guards – anywhere in the South China Sea. They also underscored that, in addition to the MDT, the 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) are critical foundations for continued alliance coordination and interoperability.

Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Teodoro agreed to take several bold steps and set a robust agenda for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) to reestablish deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region and achieve Peace through Strength. These efforts will accelerate the defense partnership and ensure that the alliance is postured to address the most consequential challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key new initiatives include:

- **Deploying more advanced U.S. capabilities in the Philippines, including the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS) and highly capable unmanned surface vessels.** Exercising with the NMESIS – a mobile, ground-based anti-ship missile launcher – as part of Exercise BALIKATAN and other service-to-service activities will improve interoperability and strengthen

deterrence by providing coverage of strategic sea lanes from coastal positions. Training and testing on NMESIS and unmanned surface vessels as part of realistic exercises in the Philippines will increase the interoperability and operational readiness of U.S. and Philippine forces to leverage cutting-edge military capabilities in Indo-Pacific operational environments.

- **Conducting advanced bilateral Special Operations Forces training in the Batanes Islands.** U.S. Special Operations Forces and Philippine Marines will train together on complex landing scenarios to enhance interoperability between U.S. forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines and improve combined capability to conduct high-end operations in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Publishing a bilateral defense industrial cooperation vision statement.** The United States and the Philippines continue to advance their alliance through closer defense industrial base cooperation. This is intended to promote more robust military and industry partnerships, build supply chain resilience, strengthen our readiness, and bolster both nations' economies. The Secretaries announced the release of a [defense industrial cooperation vision statement](#) that identifies priority areas for near-term cooperation, including potential co-production of unmanned systems and more robust logistics support. The statement includes lines of effort that the United States and the Philippines will explore to advance these priority areas, namely seeking to: reduce barriers, collaborate on new technology, and identify discrete opportunities for collaboration. Both countries intend for this vision statement to serve as a basis to advance regional security, economic security, and Indo-Pacific prosperity.

- **Launching a bilateral cybersecurity campaign.** The DoD and DND will collaborate to reduce cyber vulnerabilities and enhance resilience across the alliance. This campaign intends to address three primary lines of effort: establishing a secure defense network, developing a capable cybersecurity workforce, and enabling advanced operational cooperation. Enhanced cyber capability and capacity will enable greater information and intelligence-sharing, improve our lethality, and facilitate increasingly advanced operational coordination.