

Remarks for Stratbase ADR Forum

A Decade of the Arbitral Award:

Credible Deterrence in Defense of the West Philippine Sea

Panel 2: Strengthening Defense Cooperation Among Like-Minded States to Defend the West Philippine Sea

Excellencies, colleagues, friends

Ladies and gentlemen,

Magandang hapon po sa inyong lahat!

Natutuwa po akong makasama ang napakaraming kaibigan at katuwang sa paggunita ng ika-sampung anibersaryo ng Arbitral Award.

("Good morning, everyone. I am pleased to join so many friends and partners in commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Arbitral Award.")

Lubos akong nagpapasalamat sa Stratbase Institute sa patuloy nilang pagbibigay ng plataporma para sa makabuluhang diyalogo.

("I sincerely thank the Stratbase Institute for continuing to provide a platform for meaningful dialogue.")

This is the most important part for me.

Today, we mark the tenth anniversary of the Arbitral Tribunal's Award concerning the disputes in the South China Sea. At the same time, when I look back at the path I have taken in my career, I find that this year, 2026, also marks the 30th anniversary of the ratification of UNCLOS by Northeast Asian countries, Japan, Republic of Korea, and the People's Republic of China.

I remember efforts then toward establishing new maritime frameworks fitting to the new norm of UNCLOS in Northeast Asia; new fishery treaties; notification scheme for scientific research and so forth.

Three decades have passed since UNCLOS entered into force for Northeast Asia. A decade has passed since the Arbitral Award. And yet, we are left with a world of greater tensions and growing concerns both in the East and the South China Seas.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ARBITRAL AWARD

The South China Sea stands as one of the world's most critical maritime corridors. It serves as a lifeline for global trade, underpins economic development, and supports millions of livelihoods.

The security and stability of these waters are directly linked to the prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region and the integrity of international order based on the rule of law. The norms that govern these waters, or the absence of them, carry repercussions that reach every corner of our interconnected world.

The Award is final and legally binding on the parties to the dispute under the provisions of UNCLOS. Any refusal to accept this binding ruling contravenes the principle of peaceful resolution of international disputes and undermines the rule of law.

Japan places the utmost importance on upholding and reinforcing a free and open international order based on the rule of law. In this regard, Japan highly welcomes and

supports the steadfast commitment of the Government of the Philippines, which has consistently complied with the Award.

Despite the passage of a decade, we continue to witness persistent and intensified unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the region.

Japan strongly opposes any such actions and remains deeply concerned about repeated actions that increase regional tensions, including dangerous actions against Filipino.

We are likewise seriously concerned by the ongoing militarization of disputed features, the unilateral establishment of "Nature Reserves," and recent reports regarding a floating structure in Scarborough Shoal.

Furthermore, this week's launch of a submarine-launched ballistic missile by China underscores its broad and rapid military build-up. Japan views this with concern as it has clear implications for the security of Japan and the

region, and the world.

Japan fervently hopes that all parties to the dispute will comply with the Award and International law, ensuring that the South China Sea remains a sea of peace, stability, and cooperation.

EVOLUTION OF JAPAN'S SECURITY POLICY

As the international security environment has become increasingly severe and complex over the past decade, Japan has steadily made its proactive efforts for peace and stability.

Earlier this May, Prime Minister TAKAICHI Sanae unveiled Japan's Updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific. This strategy underscores Japan's enduring commitment to working closely with regional partners to advance peace, resilience, and prosperity.

Central to this vision is the strengthening of multilayered security cooperation through the coordinated,

seamless use of Japan's policy tools. This includes the strategic alignment of Official Development Assistance (ODA), Official Security Assistance (OSA), and defense equipment and technology cooperation.

DEEPENING JAPAN–PHILIPPINES PARTNERSHIP

The Philippines sits at the very heart of this maritime vision.

As neighboring maritime nations situated along critical sea lanes, Japan and the Philippines are bound not only by shared strategic interests but by a profound, collective responsibility.

Our partnership has evolved into one of Indo-Pacific's most dynamic and trusted relationships.

This historic chapter was highlighted by the State Visit of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to Japan in May this year.

Among the landmark outcomes of the visit was the commencement of formal negotiations to delimit the

maritime boundary of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf between the Philippines and Japan in accordance with international law, in particular UNCLOS. Our defense and security cooperation has reached new heights as well.

The establishment of a dedicated working group to advance discussions on defense equipment transfers, including Abukuma-class vessels and TC-90 aircraft, demonstrates our concrete resolve to build a future-oriented security partnership.

The implementation of the Japan–Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) has already enabled closer, seamless cooperation between our forces through joint exercises, training, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations.

In January this year, we also signed the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), and we expect its entry into force soon, as Japan’s Diet already approved the

Agreement in June. Discussions have likewise commenced on an agreement concerning the protection of classified military information.

Nevertheless, as was emphasized by other colleagues, agreements alone are not enough; building enduring capabilities for credible deterrence are necessary. Japan remains fully committed to supporting the enhancement of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' defense capabilities through Official Security Assistance and equipment transfer. Furthermore, we will continue to strengthen maritime law enforcement capabilities through close, unwavering cooperation with the Philippine Coast Guard under our ODA.

STRENGTHENING DEFENSE COOPERATION AMONG LIKE-MINDED STATES

Credible deterrence is strengthened through trusted partnerships founded on mutual trust and shared democratic

values. In recent years, Japan, the Philippines, and the United States have made remarkable progress in advancing trilateral cooperation.

During the Second Japan-U.S.-Philippines Maritime Dialogue, our three countries reaffirmed our strong opposition to unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion.

Strengthening regional resilience also requires us to broaden our network of like-minded partners. Japan has actively participated in Multilateral Cooperative Activities alongside the Philippines and other partners, while expanding practical cooperation among maritime and coast guard agencies.

CONCLUSION

Trust is the ultimate cornerstone of our partnership, we must continue nurturing it through dialogue, concrete cooperation, and unyielding respect for international law. When that trust is shared, it becomes our strongest source

of deterrence and the surest path to lasting peace.

We must also skillfully conduct diplomacy for a free and open international order based on the rule of law.

The responsibility now rests with all of us to ensure that the legacy of the Arbitral Award is translated into enduring action.

Let us remain steadfast. Let us remain united. And let us ensure that the rule of law prevails in the South China Sea. Today, and for generations to come.

Magkaisa po tayo sa pagtataguyod ng isang malaya, bukas, at mapayapang Indo-Pacific.

(Let us unite in advancing a free, open, and peaceful Indo-Pacific.)

Mabuhay ang matatag na pagkakaibigan ng Japan at Pilipinas.

(Long live the strong friendship between Japan and the Philippines.)

Maraming salamat po!
