

Counterterrorism Cooperation Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership

Don McLain Gill*

The Philippines, an archipelago containing over 7,000 islands, has a complex security environment not only due to external traditional threats, but also because of various non-traditional security challenges that range from militancy to piracy and terrorism. The Southeast Asian state also faces the world's longest running communist insurgency, led by the New People's Army (NPA), that has endured for six decades. Additionally, while over 86 per cent of its population is Roman Catholic, the Philippines also faces a Muslim separatist movement in the southern island of Mindanao. This reality explains why Manila has placed a distinct focus on internal and domestic security for the longest time.

With the dawn of the 21st century, the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, (henceforth, 9/11) restructured how states viewed and understood the dynamics and evolving nature of security threats coming from terrorism and terrorist

* Don McLain Gill is a Philippines-based geopolitical analyst, author, and lecturer at the Department of International Studies, De La Salle University. He is also the Director for South and Southeast Asia at the Philippine-Middle East Studies Association (PMESA). He specialises on Philippine and Indian foreign policy and India-Southeast Asian relations.

activities. The catastrophic 9/11 attacks had two important lessons for states: first, the unfolding process of globalisation, the increase in the cross-border flow of people, and rapid technological advancements have provided non-state actors across the world with a conducive environment to carry out attacks, with critical international security implications; second, the 9/11 attacks also showed how the most materially powerful state in the world was unable to effectively shield itself from the disruptive forces of terrorism.

Following the United States' (US) initiation of a global war against terror under the leadership of President George W. Bush, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) also unanimously adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006, which served as a pivotal blueprint for the states to address the exacerbating, deepening, and broadening contours of terrorism through individual, multilateral, and regional frameworks.

The global attention on the need to address terrorism resonated deeply within Manila's defence establishment and policy-makers. In the initial years of the 21st century, the alliance with the US was largely utilised by the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the context of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.¹ In fact, to demonstrate her government's commitment to the global war against terror, the Philippines quickly agreed to take part in the US-led coalition in Iraq. However, it was not until the administration of President Benigno Aquino III that Manila began recalibrating its security perspectives towards a more

1 Rommel Banlaoi, "The Role of Philippine–American Relations in the Global Campaign Against Terrorism: Implications for Regional Security", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Volume 24, Number 2, 2002, p. 294, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25798598>.

external-oriented focus on territorial defence.² This does not mean that the focus on territorial defence completely outweighed Manila's internal threat perception brought up by terrorism. Rather, there remains a notable focus on these issues due to the evolving nature of terrorist activities, along with advancements in technology and the increasing movement of people across borders.

Today, the Indo-Pacific has cemented its role at the forefront of international geopolitics not only because of its dynamism but also because of the deepening and broadening of various traditional and non-traditional threats. Within the region, the Philippines holds a particularly important position, given its geographical location in maritime Southeast Asia and its centrality in the brewing power competition between the US and China. Nevertheless, along with the significance of its geopolitical role, lies the continuous exacerbation of threats in the non-traditional security realm. Moreover, given that the nature of contemporary Indo-Pacific politics is largely characterised by its interconnectedness and growing interdependence among states in the realms of economics, security, and social affairs, the complexity of transnational terrorism becomes an even bigger threat for regional peace and stability.

In the Philippines' fight against terrorism, it has largely relied on the US and its 'hub and spokes network' in the Western Pacific. The US retains a dominant and influential role in providing material aid towards Manila's efforts to curb terrorist activities. Moreover, the Philippines also participates in regional counterterrorism frameworks within the Association

2 Renato de Castro, "The Aquino Administration's Balancing Policy against an Emergent China: Its Domestic and External Dimensions", *Pacific Affairs* Volume 87, Number 1, 2014, p. 15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43590820>.

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to collectively address the growing problems created by transnational terrorism. However, given that any security issue in the Indo-Pacific has direct or indirect implications for regional states in extended neighbourhoods, it is necessary for Manila to leverage its strategic position to forge and expand its cooperation on counterterrorism, even with states that are not among its traditional partners. Diversifying its strategic partnerships will allow Manila to not only enhance or broaden its capacity and knowledge but also to expand its security network in the region. In this context, the role of the emerging Philippines-India security partnership must be highlighted.

In international affairs, security cooperation is often viewed as one of the most critical areas for cooperation and collaboration between states, as it entails sensitive intelligence sharing and access to each other's defence infrastructure. Hence, notable security cooperation between states only occurs when there is mutual trust, shared interests, and common goals. Given that Philippines-India security ties have only recently strengthened, Manila and New Delhi must sustain this momentum to maximise the utility of their emerging partnership.

The Philippines and India are at the centre of this unfolding security dilemma brought about by the compounding challenges of terrorism. While both states may have different approaches towards issues of terrorism within and outside their respective borders, it is important to note that both states share common challenges in terms of the presence of factions with ties to international or regional terror groups. Therefore, this paper argues that, as the rise of the Indo-Pacific continues to link both the Philippines and India within one strategic region, it will be practical for both states to enhance their recently reinvigorated

Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership

security partnership to not only encompass traditional issues, but also non-traditional ones, with a special emphasis on their shared concerns on terrorism. Additionally, both states also have the potential to evolve their growing security partnership in both multilateral and institutional formats.

The first section provides a concise overview of the various issues of terrorism the Philippines continues to face and how Manila seeks to address them through important legislations. The second section will provide context to the traditional bilateral, institutional, and sub-regional cooperative frameworks Manila engages in to spearhead cooperation on counterterrorism. In this context, the importance of the US as a traditional security provider is highlighted, along with existing ASEAN and sub-ASEAN mechanisms. The third section points to the growing security partnership between Manila and New Delhi, which has been taking shape since 2016. The last section will provide justification for the need to strengthen and deepen the emerging Philippines-India security partnership, particularly in counterterrorism.

TERRORISM IN THE PHILIPPINES

Against the backdrop of the Philippines' experience with terrorism since its independence in 1946, two specific groups have often been identified in the context of terrorist activities. The first group is composed of Mindanao-based secessionists: including the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and its offshoot, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The second group, based on communist ideology includes the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army.

These groups, however, are not exclusive. There have been several new strands of terrorist factions that eventually emerged in the 1990s to amplify the fight for Moro Liberation.

Such groups include the Abu Sayyaf Group and other variants, such as the Rajah Solaiman Movement and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters. Among these, the Abu Sayyaf Group has consolidated its presence due to devastating attacks on the security of the Philippines. To give an example of its notoriety, Stanford University's Mapping Militants Project (MMP) highlighted how, during the 1990s, the Abu Sayyaf Group was able to swiftly attract national and international attention by engaging in mass violence through bombings, assassinations, kidnapping, and selective attacks on foreigners and Christians.³ In fact, this particular group also targeted Philippine military officials as a symbol of their disdain towards the national government and the status-quo political boundaries of the state.⁴

Due to increasing movement of people across borders, the rise of foreign fighters and transnational terrorism continue to complicate the national security architecture of the Philippines. From 2014 to 2015, there were a series of attempts by groups such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and the Abu Sayyaf Group to demonstrate their transnational characteristics by pledging their allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).⁵ While the nature, operationalisation, and formality of these pledges are still debated, such acts nevertheless provided significant symbolism for their cause and a boost in their morale, which catalysed more aggressive actions against the Filipino people and the order established

3 Mapping Militant Organizations, "Abu Sayyaf Group", Stanford University, February, 2022, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/abu-sayyaf-group>.

4 Mapping Militant Organizations, op.cit.

5 Mico Galang, "The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: A Direct Threat to the Philippines", *NDCP Policy Brief*, April 23, 2015, p.1, <https://ndcp.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-Islamic-State-of-Iraq-and-Syria-Part-2.pdf>.

by the national government. Furthermore, evidence of foreign terrorist fighters surfaced in the 2017 Marawi siege, albeit in small and limited numbers.⁶

More recently, it can also be observed that the strategies incorporated by terror groups in the Philippines towards their attacks have drastically changed from a pattern of killings, armed attacks, and kidnappings in the past, to a more noticeable focus on suicide bombings in recent years.⁷ In fact, between mid-2018 and 2019, the Southeast Asian state witnessed six suicide bombing attacks.⁸ Therefore, along with the more emphasised transnational characteristics of terrorism today, the Philippines continues to face not only a deepening but also a broadening of terror activities. It is in this context that that inter-state cooperation for counterterrorism becomes even more important. While Manila has passed important legal frameworks to address the evolving issue, such as the Human Security Act (HSA) of 2007 and Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, along with the formation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the limits to its material capabilities continue to create difficulties in effectively operationalising such endeavours. In fact, the concept of a ‘whole-of-nation’ approach while tackling issues of terrorism has only been recently taken into serious consideration by Manila.

6 International Crisis Group, “Addressing Islamist Militancy in the Southern Philippines”, Report Number 323, March 18, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/philippines/addressing-islamist-militancy-southern-philippines>.

7 Ronald U. Mendoza, Rommel Jude G. Ong, Dion Lorenz L. Romano, and Bernadette Chloe P. Torno, “Counterterrorism in the Philippines”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 15, Number 1, 2022, p. 51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26984797>.

8 Ibid.

Don McLain Gill

TRADITIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION: BILATERAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND SUB-REGIONAL

The US is the Philippines' sole treaty ally and its traditional security provider. Washington DC has also been an undeniable force in providing critical support to the Southeast Asian state, particularly in the realm of security. In this context, the role of counterterrorism figures prominently in the US-Philippines alliance.

With the rise of the Abu Sayyaf Group in the 1990s, the US was quick to recognise the perils of the former's expansion in the southern islands of the Philippines. Being one of the oldest treaty allies of the US in the Indo-Pacific, the Philippines presents its uniqueness within the 'hub and spokes system', given its geography, topography, and centrality in Western Pacific geopolitics. Hence, with the emergence and increase in activities by terrorist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf, both the US and Philippines acknowledged the need to enhance their counterterrorism cooperation given their large stakes in regional peace and stability.

The Joint United States Military Assistance Group-Philippines (JUSMAG-PHIL) is an essential component of the Philippines-US alliance to strengthen and improve military-to-military interoperability, to limit and neutralise the terrorist threats stemming from southern Philippines. As a part of the JUSMAG-PHIL Special Operations Taskforce Philippines, hundreds of American personnel are deployed to train and improve the capacity of the Philippine armed forces for counterterrorism.⁹ The American and Philippine troops also take part in annual exercises such as the as *Balikatan* (literally

9 Peter Chalk, "U.S. Security Assistance to the Philippines", *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 1, Issue 3, 2008, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/u-s-security-assistance-to-the-philippines-a-success-story-against-terrorism/>.

“shoulder-to-shoulder”) to hone their individual and collective skills to address the ongoing threats posed by terrorist groups. Another important point is that the Philippines continues to be largest recipient of US military assistance in Asia, receiving over USD 1.14 billion worth of armoured vehicles, planes, small arms, and other defence equipment and training from 2015 to 2022.¹⁰

While US defence assistance today is more geared towards Manila’s desire to bolster its territorial defence and maritime security, a considerable portion of this assistance has been directed to promote defence reforms tailored to logistics for counterterrorism operations. Moreover, in addition to military assistance, the US has also endeavoured to train Philippine armed forces in a holistic and multi-faceted manner. In fact, the Southeast Asian state is a top recipient of US International Military Education and Training (IMET) support. This kind of assistance encourages participants to acquire crucial understanding and skills, such as norms of engagement, human rights, and international military law (among others), which complement existing military efforts and create the right conditions for peace and stability.¹¹

While the US remains the most crucial security partner of the Philippines, Manila also continues to coordinate and participate within ASEAN’s counterterrorism frameworks. Regional cooperation is crucial, given the fluidity of transnational terrorism in the region. Interestingly, before the 9/11 attacks, ASEAN did not delve too comprehensively into issues on terrorism. However, as the US amplified the call

10 “U.S. grants Philippines \$100 million in foreign military financing”, *Reuters*, October 14, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-grants-philippines-100-million-foreign-military-financing-2022-10-14/>.

11 US Department of State, “Military Assistance”, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/60649.pdf>.

for a global coalition against terror in 2001, ASEAN speedily mobilised and adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism in November of the same year. It is important to note that ASEAN's approach to terrorism is centred on the view that there is no correlation between a terrorist and a particular religion or race, which reflects the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious demographics of the region.¹²

The Bali bombings in 2002, motivated ASEAN member states to demonstrate their collective commitment more emphatically in the fight against terrorism, given the expanding implications it has for Southeast Asian security. This effort was evidenced in the ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime and the adoption of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT) in January 2007. The ACCT, in particular, serves as a key regional platform for regional states to evaluate and address the continuous spill-over of terrorist activities in the region by harnessing a more functional environment for inter-agency coordination among member states.¹³ In addition to these initiatives, the ASEAN Our Eyes Initiative (AOEI), which includes intelligence-sharing between member states, also represents the efforts of Southeast Asian states to diversify their approaches towards counterterrorism in the region.¹⁴

Yet, despite these notable developments within ASEAN, the regional bloc remains obstructed in effectively implementing

12 US Department of State, "ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism", <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/65902.htm>.

13 ASEAN, "ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism", <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ACCT.pdf>.

14 Prashanth Parameswaran, "ASEAN Our Eyes Meeting Spotlights Counterterrorism Cooperation", *The Diplomat*, March 10, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/asean-our-eyes-meeting-spotlights-counterterrorism-cooperation/>.

and operationalising these policies and frameworks at a collective level.¹⁵ Consequently, most responses to terrorism in the region have either been unilateral or sub-regional in nature, due to the institutional and structural limitations of ASEAN. Examples of such attempts include the agreement between the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, to establish a joint counter-terrorism framework for action in 2017, a few months after the Marawi siege in Mindanao on May 23, 2017 (in which around 300 people died), where cross-border activity by Southeast Asian militants was observed.¹⁶

This illustrates that, while traditional modes of cooperation are crucial for the Philippines, there also remain great opportunities to look towards the diversification of strategic partnerships, especially in the context of the increasingly dynamic nature of contemporary terrorism. In this context, it is worth exploring the strengthening of the security partnership between the Philippines and India, which has gained significant momentum since 2016.

FROM 2016 AND BEYOND: DEEPENING PHILIPPINES-INDIA SECURITY TIES

Despite being Asian neighbours with a shared colonial past and an adherence to democracy, the Philippines and India have maintained cordial relations at best for over two decades, since the end of the Cold War. Notwithstanding the presence of conducive structural conditions since the beginning of the 21st Century, the divergences in state perceptions between Manila

15 Matthew Bukit, "ASEAN needs to unify its counter-terrorism strategy", *East Asia Forum*, September 22, 2018, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/09/22/asean-needs-to-unify-its-counter-terrorism-strategy/>.

16 Cliff Venzon, "Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia create counter-terrorism axis", *Nikkei Asia*, June 23, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Philippines-Indonesia-Malaysia-create-counter-terrorism-axis2>.

and New Delhi led to a significantly under-utilised bilateral relationship. This was in contrast with other Southeast Asian states like Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Myanmar, which were able to forge closer strategic relations with India much earlier.

However, upon the electoral victory of former President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, Philippine foreign policy achieved a notable recalibration with the prioritisation of the diversification of strategic partnerships.¹⁷ This opened the door for the Philippines and India to explore, deepen, and broaden their security partnership. From regular high-level visits between both states to the enhancement of naval cooperation and the sale of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, the Philippines-India bilateral partnership witnessed significant developments particularly in the realm of defence. Moreover, the rise of the Indo-Pacific construct, which gained momentum when the US renamed its Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command in 2018, allowed both states to perceive each other as closer Indo-Pacific neighbours, rather than being distant neighbours in South and Southeast Asia. This led to more convergences in interests to preserve and protect the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific's security architecture. In addition, both states also share similar concerns towards a rising and belligerent China.

As President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. took office in 2022, the increasing momentum in bilateral ties between Manila and New Delhi is likely to be sustained, given the acknowledgement of the current Philippine President towards the importance of

17 Don McLain Gill, "The present and future of the Philippines-India partnership", *The Manila Times*, April 28, 2022, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2022/04/28/opinion/columns/the-present-and-future-of-the-philippines-india-partnership/1841507>.

strengthening Philippines-India ties further.¹⁸ In this context, the potential of the much-needed strategic ice breaker in 2016 between both states must be maximized and leveraged, to expand the scope of existing security relations. Among such areas of expansion is counterterrorism.

THE UNDERUTILISED PHILIPPINES-INDIA COUNTER-TERRORISM PARTNERSHIP

Like the Philippines, India has experienced the brunt of terrorism in its immediate geographic space – from ethno-nationalist terrorism, religious terrorism, and left-wing terrorism, to narco- terrorism and cross border terrorism. In fact, even prior to the 9/11 attacks, India was sounding the alarm bells for the need to amplify the international discourse on terrorism more explicitly. In fact, amid the call for a global war on terror, India was able to play a larger role as a security provider in Asia, especially in the non-traditional realm. To provide an example, in 2001 and 2002, the Indian Navy escorted US ships in the pirate-swarmed Strait of Malacca.¹⁹ Moreover, upon realising India’s significance to the peace and security of the continent, the US overtly endorsed the idea that India should continue to play a larger and more active role in Asian security, particularly in Southeast Asia.²⁰

18 Filane Mikee Cervantes, “Marcos, India PM vow improved ties, cooperation”, *Philippine News Agency*, August 6, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1180766>.

19 “Navy’s escort mission to US ships”, *The Times of India*, July 17, 2002, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/navys-escort-mission-to-us-ships-still-on/articleshow/16204626.cms>.

20 Sangeetha Kandavel and Joe A Scaria, “Look East, and act East, too: US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to India”, *The Economic Times*, July 20, 2011, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/look-east-and-act-east-too-us-secretary-of-state-hillary-clinton-to-india/articleshow/9299669.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

The Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005 and the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 accentuated the conditions for inter-state cooperation between India and the Philippines in the area of counterterrorism. More importantly, the growing international characteristics of terrorism have provided both states with common grounds for coordination in this field. The rise of the Indo-Pacific also adds momentum to the incentives to cooperate, given the region's highly vulnerable and interconnected security architecture. Accordingly, India has been providing training to Philippine security personnel and running community-based deradicalisation modules. In line with the warming of security ties between Manila and New Delhi since 2016, several important developments have taken place since then.

The first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on counterterrorism was held in April of that year. In addition, as a sign of New Delhi's overt support for the Southeast Asian state's fight against terror groups in the south, India provided the Philippines with USD 500,000 worth of aid for the rehabilitation of people affected by the Marawi siege of 2017. It must be noted that this was the first time New Delhi provided any form of financial assistance to any state with the specific purpose of combatting terrorist activities.²¹ Furthermore, as a sign of deepening bilateral security ties, it was reported on October 2022 that the Indian Armed Forces were willing to provide operational and cyber-security training to the Philippine Armed Forces.²² Given the increasing weaponization of technology by

21 Rahul Mishra, "India and the Philippines: Time to go beyond the ASEAN Framework", *RSIS*, August 1, 2019, p. 10, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/india-and-the-philippines-time-to-go-beyond-the-asean-framework/>.

22 Priam Nepomuceno, "India to train AFP on operational readiness, cyber security", *Philippine News Agency*, October 10, 2022, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1185721>.

Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership

non-state actors, the importance of cyber defence cooperation will not only broaden the scope of security ties between both states but will also provide Manila the much needed platform to boost its cyber capabilities, given its current limited capacity.

The Philippines-India counterterrorism partnership also involves institutional dimensions through an India-ASEAN partnership framework. The Southeast Asian regional bloc continued to engage with its extra-regional partners on a wide array of strategic issues. Throughout the years, India has demonstrated its willingness to strengthen its coordination with ASEAN, particularly in counterterrorism cooperation. This was evident with the signing of the ASEAN-India Joint Declaration for Cooperation to Combat International Terrorism in 2003. Additionally, both sides also agreed to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Work Plan on Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime during the 16th ARF in 2009. More recently, the 2018 Delhi Declaration also serves as a crucial milestone to expand and strengthen efforts between India and ASEAN towards the fight against terrorism. Accordingly, this document emphasised the need to “deepen cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, violent extremism and radicalisation through information sharing, law enforcement cooperation and capacity building” through a range of established frameworks, including the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) + India Consultation and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM)-Plus Experts’ Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.²³ More importantly, in November 2022,

23 Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Delhi Declaration of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit to mark the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations”, January 25, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29386/Delhi+Declaration+of+the+ASEANIndia+Commemorative+Summit+to+mark+the+25th+Anniversary+of+ASEANIndia+Dialogue+Relations>.

ASEAN and India decided to elevate their partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership, which is the highest level of partnership ASEAN accords to its extra-regional partners. This demonstrates the growing strategic convergences between ASEAN member states and India towards the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to institutional collaborations between the Philippines and India through ASEAN, India is also a close strategic partner of Manila's traditional ally and defence partners. Under the Marcos Jr. Administration, the Southeast Asian state has deepened and broadened its security ties with the US, Japan, and Australia. Under the current Philippine government, several firsts were achieved within this multilateral framework – from the expansion of the US-Philippines Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to the establishment of the US-Philippines-Japan trilateral sea drills in the South China Sea and the potential emergence of a four-way security dialogue between the US, the Philippines, Japan, and Australia. Similarly, India was recognized as a major defence partner of the US, while India-Japan ties enjoy Special Strategic and Global Partnership status. Additionally, India and Australia share a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Furthermore, India, Australia, the US, and Japan operationalize their strong partnerships through bilateral and multilateral formats like the Quad, the Malabar, and the G20.

While the Philippines-India security partnership has strengthened, also encompassing counterterrorism cooperation, much room remains for the further maximization of security ties, given exacerbating threats posed by terrorist activities throughout the Indo-Pacific. Structural conditions remain highly conducive for both states to deepen and broaden their partnership in non-traditional security issues.

Leveraging the Philippines-India Security Partnership

Accordingly, positive signs can be observed from the Marcos Jr. Administration, given its interest in continuing the diversification of strategic partnerships. During a meeting with newly appointed Filipino ambassadors (including a new Philippine ambassador to India), Marcos Jr. emphasized the need to enhance cooperation with like-minded non-traditional partners in the fields of trade, security and defence.²⁴ Therefore, given the conducive internal and external strategic environment, it will be beneficial for both the Philippines and India to continue bolstering their engagements consistently, to explore more critical areas of mutual interest, particularly in counterterrorism cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

Being Indo-Pacific neighbours with shared interests in securing the regional rules-based order and having been at the receiving end of terrorist activities, India and the Philippines are natural partners in the fight against the evolving and multi-faceted characteristics of terrorism. However, throughout most of its post-independence years, the Philippines concentrated on its counterterrorism efforts through improving its internal capacity and utilising existing cooperative frameworks with its traditional ally (and its extended alliance network in the Western Pacific) and with ASEAN member states. However, along with the recalibration of Philippine foreign policy in the latter part of the 21st century's second decade, Manila began exploring new areas of strategic cooperation with non-traditional partners such as India. Since 2016, there have been a series of new and crucial developments in the Philippines-India bilateral partnership – among them, the realm of counterterrorism.

24 Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos, "PBBM wants 'non-traditional' partners in trade, security", *Philippine News Agency*, June 7, 2023, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1203097>.

While the training of soldiers has been a general pattern since the beginning of the 21st century, the increasing convergence of interests between Manila and New Delhi resulted in the opening of new avenues to deepen counterterrorism cooperation. However, while both internal and external conditions have become quite conducive, much room remains for both states to operationalise their growing security partnership in the domain of non-traditional security cooperation. By deepening coordination in this direction, Manila will benefit not only from India's notable material resources, but also its vast experience in dealing with the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious nature of terrorism. More importantly, given the constant evolution of terrorist threats in the Indo-Pacific, it is only practical for both like-minded states to leverage their growing bilateral strategic ties for mutual benefit.

FORM IV
(See Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication: Delhi
2. Periodicity of Publication: Quarterly
3. Printer's Name: Kautilya Books
Whether citizen of India? Yes, Indian
Address: 4378/4B
Ansari Road, Daryaganj
New Delhi – 110 002
4. Publisher's Name: Ajai Sahni
Whether citizen of India? Yes, Indian
Address: Suite 58 & 70,
India International Centre,
Max Mueller Marg,
New Delhi 110003.
5. Editor's Name: Ajai Sahni
Whether citizen of India? Yes, Indian
Address: Suite 58 & 70,
India International Centre,
Max Mueller Marg,
New Delhi 110003.
6. Names and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one per cent of total capital. Ajai Sahni
Suite 58 & 70,
India International Centre,
Max Mueller Marg,
New Delhi 110003.

I, Ajai Sahni, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

August, 2023

(Sd) Ajai Sahni
Signature of Publisher