

Philippine Strategic Outlook 2024 Onwards

National Security and Economic Resilience

The Sixth Katipunan Conference Proceedings

5 November 2024


Areté, Ateneo de Manila University

Prepared by Jaqueline Joy J. Eroles



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES





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Philippine Strategic Outlook 2024 Onwards

National Security and Economic Resilience

Jaqueline Joy J. Eroles

The Sixth Katipunan Conference, themed “Philippine Strategic Outlook 2024 - Onwards: National Security and Economic Resilience,” offered a timely and critical platform for insightful discussions on the Philippines' evolving strategic landscape. It was held on 5 November 2024 at the Areté, Ateneo De Manila University. This whole-day conference brought together leading experts, policymakers, and stakeholders to analyze pressing challenges and explore pathways towards a more secure and economically resilient future for the nation.

This year's conference opened with remarks by Fr. Roberto “Bobby” Yap, President of Ateneo de Manila University, Dr. Rosalie Arcala Hall, Executive Director of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, and Ms. Daniela Braun, Country Director of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Philippines.

Fr. Yap opened the Conference by underscoring its relevance amid shifting geopolitical tides and escalating economic uncertainties. He called for sustained dialogue among scholars, policymakers, and practitioners at the nexus of national and global financial security. He reaffirmed Ateneo de Manila's commitment to social transformation through education, research,

and public service—ideals shared by co-organizers Miriam College and the University of the Philippines.

Dr. Hall formally opened the conference by recalling its institutional origins and continued evolution. Now in its sixth iteration, she emphasized that the Katipunan Conference has expanded from a forum on strategic studies into a dynamic platform bridging diverse policy communities. This year's conference, she noted, marks a deliberate shift toward framing security as a multidimensional agenda—one that integrates economic resilience, technological change, and public health alongside traditional defense concerns.

Finally, Ms. Braun affirmed KAS's support for deepening conversations on the critical intersections of economy and national security. Drawing from Europe's lessons in energy dependence and geopolitical risk, she emphasized the urgency of addressing economic vulnerabilities. She called for stronger evidence-based research, cross-sector collaboration, and strategic foresight to build national resilience, urging participants not to "hit the snooze button" but to act with clarity and resolve in the face of growing uncertainty.

Keynote addresses were given by Sec. Gilbert Teodoro Jr. of the Department of National Defense and Sec. Frederick Go Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs. Their perspectives set the stage for in-depth panel discussions led by prominent figures such as RAdm. Rommel Jude G. Ong (Ret), Dr. Josef T. Yap, and Prof. Herman Joseph S. Kraft. The discussions were moderated by Ms. Julia Abad, with the morning plenary session hosted by Ms. Joyce Ilas-Reyes of the Stratbase ADR Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ADRI).

The Sixth Katipunan Conference featured 29 papers that interrogated key issues organized as sub-themes that substantiated the overarching subject of the Conference:

- Intelligence Frontiers: Shaping Philippine Strategy in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape
- Forging Resilient Economic Futures: Philippine-China Relations in Focus
- Internal Security and Governance in the Philippines: Civil, Economic, and Human Dimensions

- Maritime Defense and Diplomacy: Building Strategic Resilience in the West Philippine Sea
- Strategic Imperatives: Shaping Philippine National Security in a Shifting Geopolitical Landscape
- Examining Foreign Interference: Global Forces and Local Impacts in the Philippines
- Cybersecurity, Innovation, and Sustainability: Strategic Technologies for the Philippines

The Sixth Katipunan Conference convened 267 participants from different institutions. Nearly half (47.9%) came from the education sector, including university officials, faculty, researchers, and students. The private sector accounted for 9%, while 7.4% represented government security institutions and 4.8% came from other state agencies. Additional participants included representatives from non-profit organizations (6.9%), media (5.9%), international organizations (5.9%), the diplomatic community (3.7%), and interested individuals. Select papers and presentations will be published in the forthcoming Sixth Katipunan Conference Monograph, extending the dialogue to a wider policy and academic audience.

Organized with the support of esteemed institutions including the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Philippines, WR Numero, ADRI-Stratbase, and the Harvard Kennedy School Alumni Association of the Philippines, this conference proved to be a vital forum for fostering dialogue, generating innovative ideas, and contributing to a robust and forward-looking Philippine strategic outlook.

Special Presentation

by Dr. Josef T. Yap¹

Senior Research Fellow, Ateneo School of Government

Dr. Yap's presentation introduced resilience as a framework for mitigating and addressing geopolitical risk and economic vulnerabilities. He drew insights from the Fund for Peace's State Resilience Index which defines resilience as "the extent to which a country can anticipate, manage, and recover from a crisis relative to the severity of that crisis." Dr. Yap cited seven pillars from the Index's framework that can be used to gauge economic resilience: inclusion, social cohesion, state capacity, individual capabilities, environment and ecology, economy, and civic space. The components of "economy" are: diversification, business environment, dynamism/innovation, physical infrastructure, capital flows, and economic management. These components can be used to gauge economic resilience.

He emphasized three key issues that can be managed or addressed by the resilience framework—climate change, technological advancements like artificial intelligence, and geopolitical tensions, (e.g., Russian war in Ukraine). These risks surface the following imperatives: managing geopolitical risks to prevent crises, building resilience to address crises if they occur, and coping with disruptions. Thus, the necessity of regional and global collective action was underscored, with the Paris Agreement cited as a successful example of cooperative risk management.

Focusing on the Philippine economy, the speaker identified insufficient economic diversification and limited access to capital as major challenges. He cited data that showed that the Philippines trails behind other Southeast Asian countries in product diversity, potentially increasing its vulnerability to

¹ This presentation will be available as a chapter in the forthcoming Sixth Katipunan Conference Monograph.

external shocks. The speaker advocated for maximizing regional agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), to diversify the industrial base and strengthen economic ties. He also discussed potential benefits of joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

On financial resilience, the speaker stressed climate-proofing financial flows and aligning them with sustainability goals under the Paris Agreement. Efforts to “green finance” and “finance green” were described as essential to promoting long-term resilience. The speaker concluded by urging collaborative efforts to address economic vulnerabilities and improve national resilience through diversification, innovation, and robust regional cooperation.

Keynote Speech

by Sec. Frederick Go

**Special Assistant to the President for Investment and
Economic Affairs**

Secretary Go opened the keynote session by outlining the Philippine economy's current trajectory and strategic direction amid ongoing geopolitical and regional uncertainties. He prefaced his presentation by acknowledging the broader geopolitical climate—the war in Ukraine, Middle East tensions, and frictions in the West Philippine Sea—as influential to the country's economic outlook. Despite these challenges, he noted, the Philippines remains a regional growth leader.

He shared that the country posted a GDP growth rate of 5.5% last year, followed by 5.7% and 6.3% growth in the first two quarters of the current year. These place the Philippines among Southeast Asia's top performers. "Other countries around the world would be envious of such a growth rate," he remarked, adding that multilateral agencies forecast sustained growth at or above 6% in the near term.

Inflation has also significantly eased, falling to 1.9% in September and 2.3% in October. Sec. Go attributed this in part to the government's decision to cut rice tariffs from 35% to 15%, a move designed to cushion the public from food price volatility.

He likewise highlighted the country's progress toward upper-middle-income status by 2026 and cited the recent upgrade in credit rating from the Japan Credit Rating Agency, moving the Philippines from BBB+ to A-. "A higher credit rating means our country can borrow at lower interest rates, which in turn means lower rates for corporations and consumers."

Sec. Go detailed a wide-ranging reform agenda anchored in investment liberalization, infrastructure development, and regulatory modernization. Key accomplishments include:

- **Green Lanes for Strategic Investments:** Comprised of 162 projects worth PHP 4.5 trillion that covers spanning renewable energy, digital infrastructure, manufacturing, and food security.
- **Executive Order No. 32:** This directive aims to streamline the permitting process for telecommunications and internet infrastructure.
- **Ease of Paying Taxes Law:** This law will allow taxpayers to file returns from any location, modernizing tax administration and safeguarding taxpayer rights.
- **Capital Market Reforms:** These include the adoption of shorter settlement cycles, reduced IPO processing times, and the removal of outdated broker commission requirements.
- **Public-Private Partnership Law:** The newly-enacted law updates the decades-old Build-Operate-Transfer framework and has already enabled the successful privatization of three international airports, including the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).
- **Build Better More Infrastructure Program:** Comprised of 186 flagship projects worth PHP 9 trillion, the initiative prioritizes national connectivity through roads, bridges, and transport corridors.
- **Digital National ID System:** Now operational across 11 government agencies, four banks, and the largest e-wallet platform, the digital ID is essential for inclusion, efficient service delivery, and data-based policymaking.

Looking ahead, Sec. Go outlined three key priorities:

1. The CREATE MORE Law, which seeks to streamline fiscal incentives and encourage foreign investment through clearer, more predictable regulations;
2. Cybersecurity Skills Development, identifying it as a high-growth sector where the Philippines can generate better-paying domestic jobs;

3. The Luzon Economic Corridor, launched through the Philippines–U.S.–Japan Trilateral Summit, which aims to improve logistics and infrastructure from Subic to Batangas, with support from multiple international partners.

The administration, he noted, is also encouraging investment in clean energy, tourism, semiconductors, mineral processing, food security, and steel—sectors considered vital to national self-sufficiency and long-term competitiveness.

“Economic security includes food, energy, and water security,” Sec. Go stressed. “We aim to produce these essentials locally, as economic security is critical to our daily lives.”

Concluding with a call for collaboration across sectors, particularly among scholars and policy thinkers, he emphasized that “no one has a monopoly on good ideas.” He ended his presentation with a challenge and invitation: “together, let’s guide our country toward sustainable economic growth, ensuring progress and prosperity that leaves no one behind”.

Expert Panel Discussion

Dr. Josef T. Yap

Senior Research Fellow, Ateneo School of Government

RAdm. Rommel Jude G. Ong, PN (Ret)

Professor of Praxis, Ateneo School of Government

Prof. Herman Joseph S. Kraft

Program Convenor, UP CIDS - Strategic Studies Program
Professor, Department of Political Science, UP Diliman

Moderated by:

Ms. Julia Abad

Harvard Kennedy School Alumni Association of the Philippines

The morning plenary session of the Sixth Katipunan Conference built on the essential insights shared by Sec. Go in his keynote speech. Sec. Go outlined the government's strategic economic framework, emphasizing recent milestones such as sustained GDP growth, infrastructure development under the Luzon Economic Corridor, and policy reforms aimed at fostering economic resilience. With this context established, the expert panel session further explored the nexus of national defense and economic resilience.

The expert session convened experts in economics, defense, and foreign policy to assess how the Philippines can build national security and economic resilience amid rising geopolitical tensions. Moderated by Ms. Julia Abad, the panel responded to the government's current priorities and probed deeper questions of strategy and structural reform.

In an insightful exchange on national defense and economic resilience, panelists emphasized the need to align industrial and investment policy with broader strategic goals, from securing critical infrastructure to reinforcing ASEAN partnerships. They called attention to the risks of economic overexposure, the need for institutional accountability, and the importance of reframing security through departure from pre-conceived notions of what constitutes “national security.”

1. Economic resilience must be grounded in a holistic industrial policy

Dr. Yap underscored the need to move beyond infrastructure and investment figures, toward deeper integration of exports, manufacturing, and industrial policy. Drawing on Indonesia's success in nickel processing, he questioned why the Philippines has not adopted similar policies: “Investment must align with exports and manufacturing. These three represent the success of East Asia.” He emphasized that economic resilience requires not just growth but structural transformation grounded in strategic industrial planning.

2. Security threats now include "weaponized investments" and economic coercion

RAAdm. Ong raised concerns about Section 24 of the Public Service Act and the short 45-day vetting window for foreign investments. He warned that inadequate safeguards could allow “toxic” investments, particularly from China, to compromise sectors like energy. According to him: “We might end up with weaponized investments... We're in a Catch-22, potentially being held hostage in our energy sector.” He advocated stronger screening mechanisms and highlighted the Philippines' strategic flexibility, noting it is a net importer from China and thus less exposed to retaliatory trade measures.

3. Economic and security resilience are interdependent and require collective regional action

Prof. Kraft reinforced the idea that economic strategy cannot be disentangled from national and regional security. He emphasized moving from the outdated lens of “economic development” to one of economic resilience—that is, the ability to absorb and respond to shocks, stating that “resilience means preparing for challenges beyond our control.” He called for deeper ASEAN diplomatic engagement, arguing that “stronger relations within Southeast Asia” are essential in reducing overdependence on great powers.

4. The Philippines can leverage economic geography and diversify strategic partnerships

RAdm. Ong and Dr. Yap both discussed how the Luzon Economic Corridor (NCR, Region III, and Region IV-A) accounts for over 60-63% of GDP and should be prioritized for critical investments.

Ong also pointed out that the trilateral cooperation with the U.S. and Japan on infrastructure and mineral processing presents an opportunity to redirect economic interdependence away from China. He mentions how “redirecting critical minerals like nickel to countries developing electric vehicles (EVs) can reduce our reliance on China.”

5. Institutional accountability and policy continuity are essential for long-term resilience

In their closing remarks, both Dr. Yap and Prof. Kraft highlighted institutional deficits in the Philippines. Dr. Yap noted that while many of Sec. Go’s initiatives are promising, “accountability is often lacking.”

Prof. Kraft stressed that “political will is essential” to sustain reforms and build systemic capacity. Rear Admiral Ong added a poignant note, identifying malnutrition and stunting as hidden national security risks. “Lack of nutrition impacts future workforce potential... sometimes national security threats are less obvious but critically important.”

Keynote Speech

by Sec. Gilbert “Gibo” C. Teodoro, Jr.

Secretary of National Defense

Secretary Teodoro addressed the Sixth Katipunan Conference against the backdrop of mounting climate-related disasters. He immediately framed his remarks around the twin imperatives of defense and development. “Solidity in national defense contributes to economic resilience and growth,” he said, pointing to risks ranging from disrupted supply chains to unfavorable credit assessments when security architecture is weak or reactive.

Central to the Secretary’s address was a decisive reorientation of the Armed Forces’ mandate. He asserted that the “the Armed Forces of the Philippines are duty-bound to secure not only terrestrial areas—Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao—but also our Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and other areas of jurisdiction.” This expanded role, he explained, requires hardened systems, new operational doctrines, and close civilian-military coordination, particularly as the country transitions from internal security to territorial and archipelagic defense.

Sec. Teodoro emphasized that defense reform must be institutional and anticipatory. The Department of National Defense Transformation Bill, currently under deliberation, seeks to widen its talent pool by allowing the Department to hire experts whose skills—especially in cybersecurity—fall outside the traditional civil service mold. He noted that “we need people with unconventional skills.” Furthermore, he states that “rather than allowing them to fall to the dark side, we should encourage them to work for government.”

Beyond personnel reform, Sec. Teodoro outlined structural and logistical modernization goals anchored in the Self-Reliant Defense Posture (SRDP), recently enacted into law. He stressed that early efforts will focus on command and control, deterrence capabilities, and logistics reach—especially in the West Philippine Sea. “We are catching up on necessary infrastructure,” he

said, noting that 10 naval vessels are currently without dedicated dockyards. He cautioned against the overuse of shared-use facilities such as Subic, remarking that “a joint commercial and defense facility generally won’t work for high-security items.”

Sec. Teodoro also highlighted the underappreciated connection between defense spending and macroeconomic credibility. “Defense spending is a sovereign responsibility,” he said. “It is an investment in freedom—fundamental, indivisible, and essential to our survival as a political entity.” He pointed out the mismatch between rhetoric and resources, noting that the Bases Conversion Law had yielded only PHP 46 million for defense modernization in 26 years, far less than the PHP 67 billion needed annually just for pension obligations.

Climate resilience, too, was woven into his analysis. Teodoro underscored that natural disasters are not peripheral to defense planning but are now central to it. Recent typhoons have damaged critical air assets and revealed gaps in structural resilience. “Typhoons have wrecked hangars built with light materials—one storm even caused two aircraft to collide inside,” he shared. He argued that such vulnerabilities demand serious investment in durable infrastructure and forward-operating capacity, especially in remote archipelagic zones.

In closing, Sec. Teodoro invited participants to view defense not simply through the prism of sovereignty but as an enabler of economic continuity, investor confidence, and disaster readiness. He states that “at the end of the day, it’s about cash flow, profitability, and sustainability,” further emphasizing how “defense policy must be compatible with a modern investment logic.”

Open Forum

Q&A Session with the Secretary of Defense

Secretary Teodoro indulged the audience with a rare open forum, offering attendees the chance to further explore key policy frontiers in national security. The session surfaced invaluable insights into how the country's national defense is retooling its framework to advance modernization, encourage civilian preparedness, and strengthen both strategic alliances and institutional resilience.

ASEAN and the Limits of Collective Defense

On the prospect of a NATO-style alliance within ASEAN, Teodoro was blunt: “That’s far off.” Structural differences among member states—some closely tied to China, others to the United States—preclude meaningful military integration. He pointed to “dichotomies and divergences between country interests” as a persistent constraint. Yet, he welcomed what he called “progress” in ASEAN’s emerging consensus around China’s “expansive and admittedly illegal activities” in the South China Sea. Rather than pursue unrealistic military coalitions, he advocated for sub-regional legal or cooperative mechanisms tailored to specific security threats.

Industrial Strategy and Defense Self-Reliance

Sec. Teodoro offered a pragmatic lens on the Philippines’ newly enacted Self-Reliant Defense Posture (SRDP) law. While affirming that the country is “open for business” in terms of defense manufacturing, he cautioned against supply-led procurement. “We know what we want, we know what we need,” he stated firmly. Investment, he argued, must align with mission requirements, not simply commercial opportunity.

He identified longstanding administrative hurdles—including the 1977 State Audit Code (PD 1445)—as obstacles to agile, tech-forward defense governance. He stressed that reforms must center on talent development: “We must prioritize human development, organizational development, and human capital development.” In cybersecurity, for example, Sec. Teodoro called for

integrating unconventional talent, noting, “rather than allow them to fall to the dark side, we should give them space in the national defense infrastructure.”

Deterrence, Not Appeasement

A powerful intervention came from Harvard undergraduate Ylasha Gotiaco, who referenced her grandmother’s experience as a World War II veteran. She asked what past missteps had weakened the country’s defense posture and what lessons should be drawn to prevent history from repeating.

Sec. Teodoro firmly stated: “Appeasement is the worst thing you can do because appeasement only feeds an increasing appetite of the abuser. It doesn’t whet an appetite; it stimulates an appetite.” He urged the next generation to internalize this logic as a sober lesson in strategic resilience.

Infrastructure and Operational Integrity

On the subject of shared infrastructure, the Secretary acknowledged that while proximity between defense and commercial operations is not automatically a liability, context matters. “Shared facilities like Subic may not always be feasible for high-security operations,” he cautioned, pointing to the need for separation in sensitive environments. He revealed ongoing efforts to address basic infrastructure gaps: “We currently have 10 naval vessels without a proper dockyard,” a condition that undermines readiness and sustainability.

Civilian Preparedness and Service Reform

Responding to a question about reinstating mandatory military training in schools, Sec. Teodoro offered a broader perspective. He advocated for mandatory national service that includes, but is not limited to, military engagement. “Discipline and patriotism can be cultivated in diverse ways—not solely through military service,” he said. He argued that civilian roles in resilience, such as community responders, emergency workers, or administrative professionals in defense institutions are critical to comprehensive security.

He proposed reforms to the National Service Training Program (NSTP) and endorsed a more balanced civil-military composition within the Armed Forces, emphasizing the value of non-uniformed expertise in areas like law, finance, and logistics.

Cyber Threats and Foreign Election Interference

When asked about foreign interference in the 2025 elections, Sec. Teodoro called it a legitimate and pressing concern. He cited vulnerabilities stemming from “loose immigration regulations” and the country’s largely unbanked population. “The battleground has taken... cyberspace,” he warned, urging stronger coordination among COMELEC, the DICT, and the National Security Council. He cited recent instances of foreign-linked economic disruption—such as substandard steel production—as early signals of malign influence.

Strategic Messaging Abroad

Throughout the session, Sec. Teodoro underscored the importance of foreign advocacy. “The battleground for our territorial rights... lies in foreign lands,” he said, encouraging young Filipinos to occupy influential spaces in global institutions and academic networks. The goal, he emphasized, is not merely to assert sovereignty at home but to defend it in arenas where global opinion and geopolitical leverage are shaped.

Following the conclusion of the open forum, the host proceeded to invite the participants to explore the plenary break to explore the paper presentations, these were—

Defense Procurement and Industry Partnerships

A study by Consebido et al. explored the rationale behind the Philippine government’s engagement with South Korea’s defense industry. Using a qualitative case study of procurement patterns, this research provided insights into the dynamics of this bilateral defense relationship.

Water Governance and Security in the Philippines

Dr. Poe-Llamanzares presented an analysis of the current water governance system in the country. His work identified challenges and proposed areas for reform to ensure sustainability and long-term water security in the Philippines.

Pro-Beijing Narratives on the West Philippine Sea

Tumanut's study examined the portrayal of key state actors in emerging pro-Beijing narratives surrounding the West Philippine Sea. This research explored the implications of these narratives on regional and national discourse.

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The UP CIDS Discussion Paper Series features preliminary researches that may be subject to further revisions and is circulated to elicit comments and suggestions for enrichment and refinement. They contain findings on issues that are aligned with the core agenda of the research programs under the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS).

CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Established in 1985 by University of the Philippines (UP) President Edgardo J. Angara, the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) is the policy research unit of the University that connects disciplines and scholars across the several units of the UP System. It is mandated to encourage collaborative and rigorous research addressing issues of national significance by supporting scholars and securing funding, enabling them to produce outputs and recommendations for public policy.

The UP CIDS currently has twelve research programs that are clustered under the areas of education and capacity building, development, and social, political, and cultural studies. It publishes policy briefs, monographs, webinar/conference/forum proceedings, and the Philippine Journal for Public Policy, all of which can be downloaded free from the UP CIDS website.

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The **Strategic Studies Program (SSP)** aims to promote interest and discourse on significant changes in the Philippine foreign policy and develop capacity building for strategic studies in the country. It views the country's latest engagement with the great powers and multilateral cooperation with other states in the Asia-Pacific as a catalyst for further collaboration and multidisciplinary research among the intellectual communities in the region.

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