

The Katipunan Dialogue Podcast

Season 4

August-December 2024



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Table of Contents

2 Foreword

Aaron Abel T. Mallari

6 EPISODE 1

6 Navigating the Tides: Anchoring Sovereignty through the Maritime Zones Act

Karina Daniel P. Melencio

12 EPISODE 2

12 Defense Measures: Building the Philippines' Self-Reliant Defense Posture

Karina Daniel P. Melencio

18 EPISODE 3

18 The United Nations: Examining How International Governance Structures Function (or Falter)

Karina Daniel P. Melencio

22 EPISODE 4

22 Between Giants: Southeast Asia's Strategic Path Amid the US-China Geopolitical Rivalry

Maria Almira V. Abril

28 **EPISODE 5**

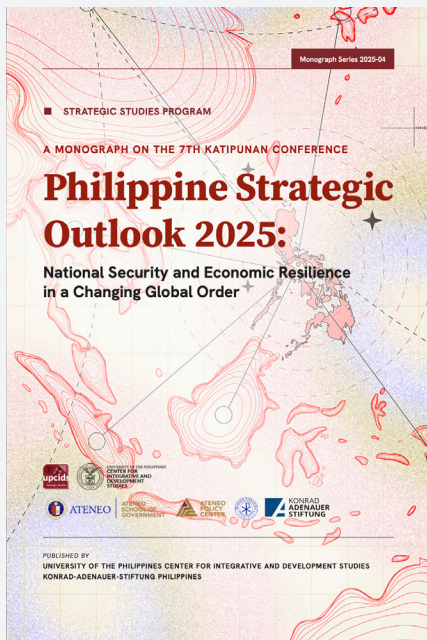
28 **From Vulnerability to Strength: Analyzing
Foreign Interference in the Philippines**

Maria Almira V. Abril

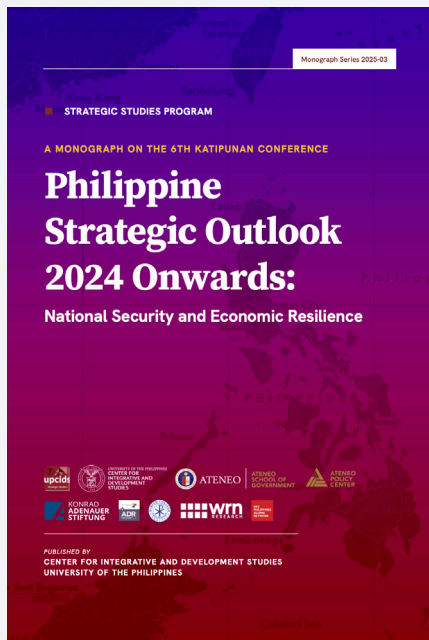
31 **References**

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Foreword

Aaron Abel T. Mallari

Assistant Professor, UP Diliman Department of Political Science

Host, Katipunan Dialogue Podcast Season 4

As one of the major projects of the Strategic Studies Program (SSP) of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS), the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast aims to cultivate a space for meaningful conversations dealing with the Philippines' national security and foreign policy, regional strategic landscape, as well as broader themes of global issues and international relations. In 2024, this important initiative remains committed to its objective of offering insights into pressing concerns of our time. Entering its fourth season with the intention of broadening the reach of the podcast, the Strategic Studies Program forged a partnership with DZUP, the official radio station of the University of the Philippines, allowing the episodes to air on DZUP 1602 and various social media and streaming platforms. With this partnership, we hope to expand the audience and create a wider impact.

The five episodes comprising the season began airing in August 2024, with one episode featured every month. The season tackled topics intersecting national security, regional geopolitics, global governance, and international law. We had conversations with esteemed experts and practitioners in order to shed light on timely issues related to the national security and foreign policy agenda of the Marcos Jr. administration, the continuing challenges posed by the US–China rivalry not only to the Philippines but to the broader region of Southeast Asia, as well as the importance of talking about aspects of the global governance architecture amid ongoing international conflicts.

With the persisting tensions in the West Philippine Sea, the first two episodes dealt with the ways in which the Marcos Jr. administration leverages international law and domestic policies. The season opens with Professor Jay Batongbacal in Episode 1, titled “Navigating the Tides: Anchoring Sovereignty through the Maritime Zones Act.” Highlighting the implications of the Philippine Maritime Zones Act to national sovereignty, international law, and

regional dynamics, Professor Batongbacal underscored how the legislation aligns the Philippines' legal framework with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), marking its importance to understanding how the Philippines positions itself amid the West Philippine Sea/South China Sea disputes. This episode is followed by Episode 2, "Defense Measures: Building the Philippines' Self-Reliant Defense Posture," with defense analyst Mr. Jesse Pascasio discussing the Self-Reliant Defense Posture Revitalization Act. In this discussion, we note the challenges and opportunities in harnessing the transformative potential of the legislation in relation to national security and defense capabilities.

The third and fourth episodes expanded the vista as the discussions centered on global and regional governance about contemporary developments and lingering conflicts and issues, with Ambassador Laura Quiambao-del Rosario, Episode 3, titled "The United Nations: Examining How International Governance Structures Function (or Falter)," reflected on the role of the UN in dealing with international conflicts, such as the ongoing conflict in Palestine. Ambassador Del Rosario not only talked about the relevance of international organizations but also touched on the importance of critiquing the power imbalance within the UN. Sharing her wealth of experience in diplomacy, Ambassador del Rosario highlighted how the Philippines could advocate for a more inclusive and effective international system. For the fourth episode, Professor Herman Joseph Kraft delved into the implications of the US-China rivalry on the regional dynamics and security in the Southeast Asian region in the context of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the conversation titled "Between Giants: Southeast Asia's Strategic Path Amid the US-China Geopolitical Rivalry," Professor Kraft discussed the potential impacts of the second Trump administration on the US-China rivalry and how ASEAN navigates the geopolitical tensions in the face of diverse national interests and external pressures. The episode underscores how ASEAN maintains its relevance and cohesion amid a rapidly changing world order.

The season ended by returning to the Philippines, talking about the pressing issue of foreign interference and how this reveals the country's vulnerabilities. In Episode 5, "From Vulnerability to Strength: Analyzing Foreign Interference in the Philippines," Retired Navy Captain Xylee Paculba unpacked the issue of foreign interference and how this poses a challenge to national security and sovereignty—calling for strengthening the Philippines' resilience in facing foreign interference, Captain Paculba proposes ways forward to deal with the

threats. This episode tied together the season's overarching themes of looking at the domestic and international interconnectedness.

The Strategic Studies Program of UP CIDS is proud to continue the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast. The fourth season is a testament to our steadfast intent to foster discourse and ignite engaged conversations on matters of national security, foreign policy, and international relations. We extend our gratitude to the esteemed guests who shared their expertise and insights this season. We also thank DZUP for the partnership and support as we look forward to the fifth and succeeding iterations of the podcast.

EPISODE 1

Navigating the Tides: Anchoring Sovereignty through the Maritime Zones Act

Originally aired on 28 August 2024

Karina Daniel P. Melencio¹

The first episode of the fourth season of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast focused on the Senate Bill No. 2492,² or the “Philippine Maritime Zones Act.” The proposed bill aims to reinforce our sovereign rights and jurisdiction over our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) by aligning our domestic law with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).³ This will pave the way for the

1 Ms. Melencio is an intern at the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program and a fourth-year BA Global Affairs and Diplomacy Major in Humanitarian Diplomacy student at Miriam College, Quezon City. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Chi Rho, the official student publication of Miriam College, Quezon City.

2 When this episode was first aired, the Philippine Maritime Zones Act was in its third reading in the senate as Senate Bill No. 2492 (Philippines Senate 2024). The Philippine Maritime Zones Act became a law on 7 November 2024 as Republic Act No. 12064.

3 On 12 July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) made the landmark decision under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to rule in favor of the Philippines in its case against China over disputes in the South China Sea. The tribunal rejected China’s “nine-dash line” over the South China Sea and stated that it had “no lawful effect unless entitled to under UNCLOS.” It affirmed that certain areas in the South China Sea are within the Philippines’ EEZ, and China’s activities, such as island-building and operation of official vessels that prevented Filipinos’ fishing activities, are illegal and have breached the Convention with respect to the Philippines’ sovereign rights (Campbell and Salitchanova 2016).

Philippines to realize its full potential as an archipelagic state and strategic importance as a maritime crossroads, thus affecting our relationships with regional powers and the global maritime community.

The guest speaker for the episode was Professor Jay L. Batongbacal. He is a lawyer, a Professor at the University of the Philippines College of Law, and the Director of the Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea. He was the legal advisor to the Philippines' delegation before the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that successfully pursued the Philippines' claim to a continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in the Benham Rise Region (University of the Philippines College of Law 2024).

The discussion began with an explanation of the Philippine Maritime Zones Act, which Professor Batongbacal described as a proposed law that declares the Philippines' maritime zones and boundaries and defines the geographical extent of our maritime domain based on the standards set by the 1982 UNCLOS. These zones comprise the Philippines' internal waters, archipelagic waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and continental shelf.

Professor Batongbacal stressed its importance as a “foundational law” as the bill forms the “basic layout” of the state's authority and jurisdiction over its territorial seas in accordance with UNCLOS, thus harmonizing our local legislation with international law to promote a rules-based order in maritime governance. This effectively establishes our sovereign rights over our EEZ and continental shelf emanating from our total and absolute sovereignty over our internal waters and defines the rights that neighboring states and foreign vessels may exercise when within our maritime zones.

Upon the enactment of the Archipelagic Baselines of the Philippines Act through Republic Act (RA) No. 3046 in 1961 and consequently amended by RA No. 5466 in 1968 and RA No. 9522 in 2009, the Philippines established itself as a whole archipelagic unit whose territorial seas span from our archipelagic baselines, not merely coastal baselines. Professor Batongbacal presented the difference between the two: the archipelagic baselines connect the outermost points of the islands and drying reefs, unlike coastal states, where the baseline follows the coastline.

Following this distinction, Professor Batongbacal explained that the Philippine Maritime Zones Act would enhance the country's strategic importance as a maritime crossroads in the global maritime community. The bill's reinforcement of the Philippines as a unified archipelagic nation and establishment of the nation's sovereignty and jurisdiction over its waters in alignment with UNCLOS is crucial to regulate foreign vessels passing through Philippine waters. Despite traditional maritime law granting authority to the vessel's flag state, with the application of our domestic law through the Philippine Maritime Zones Act, the Philippines is granted authority over certain aspects of foreign vessels within our waters, ensuring a balance between respecting the rights of the flag state and upholding the interests of the coastal state. However, the primary aim of these regulations is not to hinder maritime trade but to facilitate it through clear and enforceable legal frameworks.

Despite the benefits the Philippine Maritime Zones Act would allow, diverging perspectives have deemed the act less urgent than other methods to strengthen our territorial claims, such as Former Associate Justice Antonio Carpio, who has suggested that drawing nautical charts should be prioritized instead. Professor Batongbacal responded that it may not be necessary for one to be prioritized over the other, as the most appropriate course of action would be contingent on the Philippines' main objective with regard to its territorial seas.

The country has been unable to fully assert itself over its maritime zones due to past Philippine maritime law not being aligned with international law and UNCLOS, thus rendering our domestic law inapplicable when other states' foreign vessels encroach on the Philippines' maritime zones and causing further uncertainty on which to prioritize: domestic or international law. The Philippine Maritime Zones Act serves to unify our domestic law with international law, such that its enforcement would be recognized by the international community and compel states to abide by our regulations.

The discussion also took into account China's reaction to the Philippine Maritime Zones Act. China has expressed strong opposition to its passing as it may "further complicate regional dynamics." Contrary to China's narrative, Professor Batongbacal pointed out that the Philippines has sustained relatively peaceful agreements with neighboring countries that also have contesting claims over the WPS despite the introduction of the Philippine Maritime Zones Act.

This put into question how the Philippines should proceed with balancing a regional power such as China. Professor Batongbacal responded that this is all the more reason to pursue alignment with international law that serves as a “great equalizer” between nations, despite their relative political and economic power or size.

Furthermore, the formalization of the Philippine Maritime Zones Act would give weight to the Philippines’ maritime claims on an international scale and impact the regional neighborhood’s perceptions of China. Upon insisting on its own nine-dash line⁴ (now the “ten-dash line” released in China’s new standard map last 2023⁵) representation of the South China Sea through increased aggression with Philippine vessels, China would be pushed further into isolation as a “rogue state” with an untrustworthy reputation, ultimately hindering China’s ability to navigate its way in the international realm.

In addition to initiating international pressure against China, the Philippine Maritime Zones Act would also serve as a legal basis to protect the Philippines’ future economic exploration in the contested areas of the WPS. However, as we have seen a rise in China’s intensified gray zone tactics as an instrument of raw political power, Professor Batongbacal stressed the need to consider the unfolding geopolitical tensions of the “great power competition” as part of the Philippines’ strategic approach to defend itself.

Professor Batongbacal also discussed how the Philippine Maritime Zones Act plays a foundational role in paving the way for other maritime-related legislation, particularly the Archipelagic Sea Lanes Bill and the Blue Economy Bill. The Archipelagic Sea Lanes Bill will specify where foreign ships, particularly military vessels and aircraft, can pass through Philippine maritime passageways and grant the Philippines jurisdiction to influence and limit their transit. In this sense, the Philippine Maritime Zones Act sets the stage by defining the country’s maritime zones upon which the Archipelagic

4 China’s unilateral claim is based on its “nine-dash line”; a historical claim originating from Chinese 1940s maps over the South China Sea which encompasses approximately 90 percent of the entire sea. It was originally 11 dashes, but China dropped two in light of their Gulf of Tonkin pact with Vietnam in the 1950s. Read more at Carpio (2020).

5 In August 2023, the Ministry of Natural Resources of China released a new map which features a ten-dash line that includes the island of Taiwan in its territorial claims and “depart[s] from the nine-dash line standard” (Clayman 2023).

Sea Lanes Bill enables the proper management, monitoring, and enforcement of the passage of foreign vessels through these zones.

Additionally, the Blue Economy Bill aims to give proper attention to the maritime component of the Philippine archipelago. While the country's economy stands to gain significantly from ocean-based industries and activities, it is crucial to conduct these activities sustainably due to the ocean's sensitivity to environmental changes. The bill represents an effort to ensure that the Philippines benefits from its oceanic resources responsibly and sustainably. The Philippine Maritime Zones Act helps in clearly defining the state's rights in exploiting its resource bases in the ocean.

Despite the benefits of the Philippine Maritime Zone Act, there are still challenges that hamper its successful implementation. Professor Batongbacal identifies three main obstacles. First, misinformation brought about by disapproving actors with vested interests may disrupt proper deliberation. Second, the "historical inertia" from previous domestic maritime laws that were not in line with international law may cause inconsistencies in the understanding of both the public and policymakers regarding new configurations of the law of the seas. Third, the implementation of the proposed legislation will be complicated by politics, which will be further worsened by the combination of the first two obstacles. Misinformation fueled by propaganda, historical misunderstandings, and inadequate knowledge of international and domestic laws may hinder the country's ability to fully assert rights and entitlements in the WPS.

In conclusion, the Philippine Maritime Zones Act serves as the legal framework that would promote maritime progress of the Philippines and compel states to recognize our claims over our maritime zones, but faces challenges to ensure its proper deliberation and enforcement both internationally and domestically.

EPISODE 2

Defense Measures: Building the Philippines’ Self-Reliant Defense Posture

Originally aired on 2 October 2024

Karina Daniel P. Melencio⁶

In the second episode of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast, the discussion centered on House Bill No. 09713 and its counterpart Senate Bill No. 2455, or the “Self-Reliant Defense Posture Revitalization Act.” Signed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on 8 October 2024 as Republic Act No. 12024 (Cabato 2024),⁷ the new law aims to strengthen the Philippines’ capacity for national defense through investing in the defense industry and promoting its growth and innovation.

The guest speaker for the episode was Mr. Jesse Pascasio, a defense analyst and researcher specializing in strategic policy analysis, defense economics, and maritime policy and security. He has served as a research consultant for the Office of the President, the Department of National Defense, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and the Philippine Navy Operations Division.

⁶ Ms. Melencio is an intern at the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program and a fourth-year BA Global Affairs and Diplomacy Major in Humanitarian Diplomacy student at Miriam College, Quezon City. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Chi Rho, the official student publication of Miriam College, Quezon City.

⁷ When this episode aired, the law was still in the process of legislation.

Additionally, he has been a member of technical working groups focused on strategic marine and defense issues. He is an alumnus of the US International Visitors Leadership Program on Port Security and International Trade Safety in Southeast Asia and a fellow of the Australia Awards Fellowship (University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies 2024).

Mr. Pascasio defined self-reliant defense posture as a nation's ability to protect itself using its industries and resources without relying on external assistance. While a nation may depend on other countries for certain materiel, it retains ownership of the essential technology it requires. Independence from foreign military aid and ownership of essential technology ensure the government's vested interest in developing its defense capabilities.

Historically, the Philippines' defense posture has not been considered self-reliant. Only after the US announced its withdrawal of armed forces in Asia in the late 1970s (namely, from Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines) did the region see a rise in self-reliant defense posture programs. However, the Philippines has lagged as its neighbors progressed.

As of current, most materiel in our inventory is considered backward. This persisted even after the establishment of Republic Act (RA) No. 7898 or the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Act in 1995 (subsequently revised by RA No. 10349 in 2012), as it was stipulated that the government can only buy arms from manufacturers whose products have been used by at least two other foreign militaries and those who met the "Single Largest Completed Contract (SLCC)" requirement or have accomplished at least one project worth no less than 50 percent of the contract to be bid (Santiago 2017). These requirements largely hindered the process of becoming self-reliant.

To succeed in establishing a self-reliant defense industry, Mr. Pascasio noted four main elements. First, the government's role in developing defense technology and equipment must be defined. Second, clear financing schemes with specified funding sources must be stipulated. Third, the government should guarantee the purchase of materiel produced by the country's defense sector. Lastly, there should be insurance for private investments in research and development (R&D) efforts for the defense industry.

While the first and second elements are provided in the bill, the third element regarding a "guaranteed buy" from the government is not explicitly mentioned.

However, there are provisions that exempt local defense enterprises from national internal revenue taxes, value-added tax, customs duties, and the aforementioned requirements under the Modernization Act. Insuring private research and development (R&D) investments is also not stated in the bill. Mr. Pascasio thinks that this may pose a challenge to incentivizing private sector investments due to a lack of a comprehensive insurance plan.

Despite the need for the support of the private sector, Mr. Pascasio emphasized the main difference between public-private partnerships (PPP) and private-sector investments in the defense industry. The former aims to profit while the latter only aims to achieve a break-even point that ensures the recovery of the invested capital. As such, the state's interest in its defense supersedes any interest in return on investments (ROIs).

Mr. Pascasio also stressed the importance of the bill in enabling an evolving policy direction apart from the country's traditional defense concerns. Concerns about the impact increased foreign exchanges and acquisitions will have on the general economy and the decaying quality of past World War II vessels have brought forth the new national security plan of President Marcos Jr.

Within the plan, the "Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept" was instituted, shifting our defense outlook from internal to external (Torrecampo 2024). Coupled with this is the recognition of the changing geopolitical situation; with rising conflicts both in the West and East and closer to home in the West Philippine Sea, anxieties about a greater, global conflict underway have become more concrete. The Marcos administration also began to expand the role of the government as an investor, under which the SRDP may be realized.

But while changes in our policy direction are making great strides, Mr. Pascasio warned that the results will not be seen instantaneously. For more effective implementation, there must also be strong political will and long-term commitment to enable the stability and durability of the self-reliant defense program.

Mr. Pascasio suggested where the country may begin in establishing its self-reliant defense industry, highlighting our electronics and shipbuilding sectors—with the Philippines already known as a major exporter of electronics

and the fourth top shipbuilding country in the world (Tila 2024; Cheema 2023)—as the main contenders, while pointing to aviation as our most lacking area of self-reliant defense manufacturing.

The new self-reliant program may also redefine dimensions and initiate more creative forms of cooperation with partner states, emphasizing the importance of knowledge transfers to spur innovation within the Philippines' defense industry.

Mr. Pascasio provided the example of Japan, which utilized production under license, shifting its focus from R&D to purchasing licenses, designs, and patents of foreign defense manufacturers to build its own arms (Satō 2024). In balancing our cooperative agreements with foreign nations, he also suggested that the introduction of the SRDP may promote more complex industrial cooperation with fellow nations, such as the establishment of maintenance and repair hubs that may expose Filipinos to advanced technologies and replicate them internally, or a joint project to develop a port and defense industrial zone within the country.

However, the most significant factor of the SRDP that may affect ties with other states is its ability to deter attacks against the country, which promotes the program not as a mere tool for warmongering, but for evading armed conflict.

Domestically, the bill also paves the way for a multidisciplinary approach that was lacking in past self-reliant defense programs. This includes setting forth provisions that also delegate roles and the involvement of more technical government agencies aside from the Department of National Defense (DND), such as the Philippine Board of Investments (BOI).

The SRDP faces both challenges and opportunities in its enactment. One major challenge lies in the implementation and the speed at which the law will be enforced once passed. Mr.

Pascasio underscored that the execution of the bill's provisions must be done without sacrificing essential values. Another challenge is convincing the private sector to invest in a self-reliant defense industry. Businesses may hesitate to invest billions without certainty that the government will actually purchase their products, which necessitates a series of government campaigns to secure their support.

On the other hand, the SRDP bill presents significant opportunities. Mr. Pascasio expressed that it would allow the country to leapfrog technologically, shifting from a slow, incremental approach to rapid advancements. This also opens doors for the youth and startup sectors to innovate, providing young people with a valuable opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the program's implementation.

Aside from proper implementation and the opportunity for rapid technological advancements, the SRDP may present one of the most remarkable turns for Philippine foreign policy: a paradigm shift in how we view our military ties and cooperation with foreign states and their presence in our country—not as a threat, but as an avenue for learning to expand our defense capabilities.

As the Philippines emerges as a middle power, recognized for its leadership on regional and international issues such as in the West Philippine Sea, the country must assert a more confident foreign and national security and defense perspective, necessitating stronger alliances and a clear, independent defense strategy.

In conclusion, the SRDP bill marks a significant step toward strengthening the Philippines' national defense capabilities, offering both challenges and opportunities for effective implementation and gaining the trust of key stakeholders. Despite these, the opportunities present a promising future for the country's security, enabling our potential to foster local innovation while bolstering the local defense industry. However, to attain greater heights, the country must reframe its view on foreign military cooperation and embody a more confident, self-assured national security policy.

EPISODE 3

The United Nations: Examining How International Governance Structures Function (or Falter)

Originally aired on 30 October 2024

Karina Daniel P. Melencio⁸

In the third episode of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast, the functions and architecture of the international governance system, specifically the United Nations (UN) role in the context of the intensified Israeli war operations in Palestine, were discussed.

The guest speaker for the episode was Ambassador Laura Quiambao-del Rosario, a career diplomat with a track record of 37 years in the Philippine foreign service. Her career culminated in her appointment as Undersecretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs for International Economic Relations. She also served as the Director General of the Foreign Service Institute from 2009 to 2011. Her committed work in the government was recognized with the Gawad Kamanong Presidential Award (the Grand Cross) in 2012 and the

8 Ms. Melencio is an intern at the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program and a fourth year BA Global Affairs and Diplomacy Major in Humanitarian Diplomacy student at Miriam College, Quezon City. She is the editor-in-chief of Chi Rho, the official student publication of Miriam College, Quezon City.

Sikatuna Presidential Award for her work as chair of the Senior Officials' Meetings for the APEC Manila Summit in 2016. Ambassador del Rosario is the President of Miriam College (University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies 2024).

Ambassador del Rosario expressed that the current structure of the UN may now be outdated and insufficient to face the present issues. The concentrated power of the UN Security Council (UNSC) reflects the victory of the Allied Powers and the remnants of their influence from the Second World War. Critics have called for the abolishment or expansion of the "Permanent Five" and their use of the veto power, citing decision-making paralysis, gridlocks, and politicization of UN resolutions as issues stemming from the power imbalance in the UN governance structure (Al Jazeera Staff 2023).

Despite the challenges of the current UN structure, Ambassador del Rosario believes that the organization has not strayed from its original mandate. Governance reforms have been proposed, but due to structural and political constraints posed by changing global dynamics and interdependence, the UN hesitates to effect deep-rooted changes and address longstanding issues of the organization, ultimately undermining its effectiveness.

With the increasing ineffectuality of the UN, the trend of conflict escalation and seemingly irreparable differences between nations has risen in the international community. Ambassador del Rosario observes that one main point of contention in the breakdown of international cooperation and channels of peaceful, diplomatic communications is states' failure to fully consider multifaceted historical, cultural, and social aspects of their disputes. Without consideration of such factors, states are not able to build relationships of trust and empathy, barring them from creating lasting, sustainable resolutions.

In search of different avenues of resolution, Ambassador del Rosario suggests that outside of formal international governance mechanisms, enhancing the power of activism, public support, and diplomatic pressure on conflicting parties by the global community may play a role in resolving conflicts—which were the same alternative routes taken by the South African anti-apartheid movement, eventually leading to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 1761 in promoting change and establishing the UN Special Committee on Apartheid (United Nations General Assembly 1962).

However, Ambassador del Rosario also expressed that there are key differences between the dismantlement of South African apartheid and the Israeli war on Palestine. She emphasized the historical and religious differences between the two groups, noting that a lack of consensus on the two-state solution, opposed by Palestine and Arab nations (Baconi 2024), complicates the matter and calls for a more targeted resolution that takes these deeply entrenched factors into account.

The rivalry between the Permanent Five members of the UNSC also significantly impacts the UN's ability to enforce peace. If a conflict involves opposing sides supported by different Permanent Five members, it becomes harder to achieve consensus, as each member has veto power. However, Ambassador del Rosario also suggests that the UN's broader structure, including its arms like the Commission on Human Rights or United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), can still address urgent and more humanitarian aspects of world conflicts, such as human rights violations or children's welfare.

Among the shortcomings of the UN governance structure and its bureaucratic drawbacks, Amb. Del Rosario recognizes the international body as an essential forum for keeping communication open and providing a platform for various perspectives. With this, the Philippines also has an important role to play in advocating for a more inclusive and humanitarian-focused approach to international conflict resolution using the UN as its international platform. Its advocacy also has an impact on its own domestic affairs. Being a major source of migrant workers, the country is directly affected by the regional conflicts. Its diplomatic stance must navigate the delicate balance between supporting its citizens abroad, its cultural ties, and its commitment to humanitarian principles.

As such, Ambassador del Rosario stresses that the Philippines must prioritize a humanitarian approach when engaging with international conflicts, advocating for policies that focus on alleviating human suffering rather than political victories. She acknowledges the complexities of voting in international forums, especially when there are competing interests, as seen in the Philippines' historical decisions in the UN. The country must not be swayed easily by political pressures but should strive to maintain its integrity by considering the broader humanitarian context.

In considering the future of the UN and its role in resolving international conflicts, Amb. Del Rosario highlights the need for strengthened disciplinary and accountability measures that empower the rule of international law to ensure the organization can fulfill its fullest potential. For the UN to truly live up to its founding principles and address the complex global challenges of today, it must enhance its internal processes to hold member states accountable for violating international agreements and human rights conventions and take charge of implementing impactful changes and reforms to its overall governance and bureaucratic structure.

In conclusion, the future of the UN hinges on its ability to adapt to the changing dynamics of global power and governance. As Amb. Del Rosario emphasizes, the UN must not only improve its internal mechanisms for accountability but also remain steadfast in its commitment to its humanitarian goals. Through continued reforms, the UN can fulfill its potential as a true force for global cooperation and peace, remaining true to the principles on which it was founded while adapting to the complexities of the modern world.

EPISODE 4

Between Giants: Southeast Asia's Strategic Path Amid the US-China Geopolitical Rivalry

Originally aired on 4 December 2024

Maria Almira V. Abril⁹

On 5 November 2024, the United States held its 47th presidential election. Republican-bet Donald Trump won the electoral race again, garnering 312 electoral votes (Associated Press 2025). The fourth episode of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast centered on the possible implications of a second Trump administration in Southeast Asia's strategic landscape.

The guest speaker in the fourth episode is Professor Herman Joseph Kraft, a full professor in the UP Diliman Department of Political Science, Convener of the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program, and the Executive Producer of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast. He is a published author and a known scholar in International Relations and International Security, specifically on regional security in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN, security sector reform, and intrastate conflict in the Philippines (University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies 2024).

⁹ Maria Almira V. Abril is a Junior Office Assistant at the Strategic Studies Program. She is the producer, director, and editor of the fourth season of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast.

Professor Kraft began the conversation by explaining the dynamics and the role played by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a convergence of cooperation in the region and as a flashpoint of geopolitical tension. He backtracked on how the ASEAN primarily focused on sociocultural exchange, as member states focus more on national development, state formation, and nation-building. However, in the past three decades, ASEAN was chosen to become a driving force of regionalism in East Asia. Such development pushed ASEAN to talk about regional security and to engage more in great power politics, the opposite of its initial vision of insulating the region from tensions and keeping it autonomous.

For Professor Kraft, ASEAN could become a mediator in the competition between the United States and China only if it could agree on a unified position on the importance of both powerful countries and the implications of their tension in the region. However, consensus-building among ASEAN members is easier said than done. Professor Kraft pointed out that the varying bilateral relationships and interests of Southeast Asian nations with the two powerful countries make it harder for the region to insulate itself from the great power politics and to put forward a common regional interest that is reflective of each member's national interest.

In terms of our country's position in forging this unity, Professor Kraft pointed out how the Philippines is often considered an "outlier" within ASEAN, as it is known to be a long-time ally of the United States and has an ongoing maritime dispute with China over the West Philippine Sea. He also pointed out that former President Rodrigo Duterte's explicit and "bold" efforts to build a relationship with China, as part of his anti-US stance, caused the issue of the West Philippine Sea to be sidelined. While efforts were there, Professor Kraft was critical of how it became a "zero-sum game" for the former president and how it worked against our favor in our claims in the West Philippine Sea. Unlike other ASEAN member-states that maintain a certain distance from the US and China (or what they call "hedging"), in our situation, he said, institutionally, we already have taken sides.

On the other hand, Professor Kraft also elaborated on the idea of integration among ASEAN states and how possible it is in the current situation. He premised integration with ASEAN's three pillars—the economic community, the sociocultural community, and the political security community—and how it is practiced in reality.

Professor Kraft pointed out that integration intuitively implies economic integration, similar to that of the European Union. However, he argued that ASEAN is far from this than aspired. This is largely because of the similarities in economic structure among Southeast Asian countries, which makes the competition tougher.

While economic integration is more difficult for ASEAN, Professor Kraft believes that tighter integration is possible in the socio-cultural community. Yet, this pillar is the weakest of all. As for the political security pillar, Professor Kraft stressed the differing concerns of continental and archipelagic states in the region. This difference can be best seen with the South China Sea issue. With all these, he believes the region is still beginning to make integration possible. He added that maritime disputes and great power politics make it harder for ASEAN to achieve regional integration.

Apart from the challenges in regional integration, the discussion moved forward to other regional concerns, particularly the implications of Donald Trump's return to the White House. Professor Kraft began by sharing his insights about the Philippines' strategic relations with the United States, as the known closest ally in the region. United States Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson expressed her confidence that the US and the Philippines will remain "ironclad allies" and "steadfast friends" regardless of the November 2024 US presidential election results (Garner 2024). However, for Professor Kraft, examining how the US-China relationship will progress under the Trump administration and how their interaction will affect the region is more crucial. One way their relationship can go is through an intensified trade war. With Trump's pronouncement of higher tariffs for Chinese products (Cheng 2024), China's economic capacity to withstand trade sanctions will affect Southeast Asia, as China is one of the driving forces for regional economic growth.

Another perspective on how the US-China relationship will go is largely attributed to the transactional character of Donald Trump in foreign policy. Professor Kraft presents the possibility that Trump's pronouncements are openings for possible deals between the two powerful countries. He recalled how Trump prides himself as someone who did not ignite a new war under his watch. In this light, Trump maintains that the US will not be the first to fire a gun against China, but he will use America's economic strength to force China to play fair. Professor Kraft also pointed out how Trump is very much focused on domestic politics and is almost on the verge of isolationism.

In the scenarios presented, the maritime concerns of the Philippines are out of the picture. Professor Kraft said that for us, it is an issue of how fast and responsive the US will be in guaranteeing mutual defense against China, but for the Trump administration, it is more about America's relationship with China. Either way, Professor Kraft said, "As they say, right, when elephants make love or fight, it's the grass that gets trampled."

Relating this to the entire region, Professor Kraft said that the US-China relationship would impact the different member states. However, the effects of this relationship may differ depending on their bilateral connection with the two countries.

For the Philippines, if a deal is made between the US and China, it may not necessarily favor us unless a space for diplomatic dialogues is set up to discuss the maritime dispute in the West Philippine Sea. Professor Kraft pointed out that such dialogues are harder to set up as China sees the United States, our strongest strategic ally, as a dubious actor.

In what seems to be a deadlock, Professor Kraft put into the discussion the possible role of the middle powers, such as Japan, Australia, South Korea, and ASEAN, in resolving disputes in the South China Sea. While these are possibilities, challenges are also present. For ASEAN, it goes back to the question of consensus-building on the issue.

Despite these presented perspectives on the possible impacts of the US-China relationship on regional security and international affairs, Professor Kraft still sees an opportunity for the region to remain isolated from great power politics. However, to realize this opportunity, ASEAN must go beyond the respective interests of its member states to be able to unite towards a common regional interest and a regional response to the volatile relationship between the US and China.

When asked about factors that will push ASEAN to have a unified position on the US-China rivalry, Professor Kraft thinks of several scenarios. First is the emergence of a strong regional leader, not just a personality but a country that will take the lead and embody a truly ASEAN stance. When candidly asked if the Philippines can take the lead, Professor Kraft is not optimistic. Citing our country's history in the association, he said we were never seen as initiators since most issues that required consensus-building in the past concerned the continental states more.

In some cases, where it looked like we took the initiative, Professor Kraft said that it is more about following through on prior initiatives by civil society groups or other member-states. He cited the creation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the sociocultural community as examples. In recent engagements, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has been trying to initiate a discussion on the West Philippine Sea and US-China relations.

However, the association has not yet taken up the initiative. For Professor Kraft, the Philippines will need to build its credibility, and taking up the chairmanship for ASEAN 2026 is an opportunity. It will now be a matter of how we can push the region toward our strategic interests.

The second scenario is when ASEAN has no choice but to build consensus. For Professor Kraft, this scenario is quite extreme and, in reality, only works when most member-states will side with the US since the Philippines is already an outlier and has institutionally sided with the Western state. Third, if the competition between the US and China is resolved, the region will not need to choose.

The podcast concluded with the question of how national security and foreign relations issues, particularly the maritime dispute in the West Philippine Sea, will be relevant to the upcoming 2025 midterm elections in the country. Professor Kraft said these concerns do not take the front seat in the voters' concerns. He said that ordinary Filipinos' gut issues are mostly economic in nature—wages, prices, social services, etc. In this light, it becomes a question of how aware and affected the Filipinos are of the matter of the West Philippine Sea. Professor Kraft believes that regardless of the election result, it must become the government's priority to acknowledge the importance of the issue for the country and the people and to forge a united position on the issue. He stressed the need to communicate and educate the people about the West Philippine Sea and what is at stake for us as a nation.

EPISODE 5

From Vulnerability to Strength: Analyzing Foreign Interference in the Philippines

Originally aired on 18 December 2024

Maria Almira V. Abril¹⁰

In the fifth and last episode of the fourth season of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast, the discussion centered on foreign interference and why the Philippines is vulnerable to being a target of it.

The guest speaker for the episode is Captain Xylee Paculba PN (Ret.), a retired captain of the Philippine Navy with over two decades of military service and a senior lecturer at the University of the Philippines Department of Political Science. She is also an independent consultant to national and international organizations working in the areas of international and maritime security, maritime domain awareness, and gender and development (University of the Philippines Diliman Department of Political Science 2025). Currently, Captain Paculba is a research fellow of the Strategic Studies Program and is working on a research paper about foreign interference in select local government units in the country.

¹⁰ Maria Almira V. Abril is a Junior Office Assistant at the Strategic Studies Program. She is the producer, director, and editor of the fourth season of the Katipunan Dialogue Podcast.

Captain Paculba started the conversation by defining foreign interference as “covert, deceptive, corrupt, and illegitimate actions by foreign actors or their proxies aimed at undermining political, economic, and social stability.” She emphasized the word corrupt to stress how foreign actors target our decision-makers to interfere with our democratic processes. According to her, this proposed definition aligns more with our evolving threats and the country’s security priorities, as available literature provides a rather limited definition.

When asked about how foreign interference happens, Captain Paculba started by describing countries that try to interfere as having the power to coerce (P2C) and the Philippines as a susceptible target. She listed several factors that make us vulnerable, from our geographic location, weak border control, and a large number of migrant workers to our internal vulnerabilities.

As per the Philippines’ internal vulnerabilities, the country’s inherently weak government institutions, riddled with corruption and inefficiencies, make it an easy target of foreign interference. According to Captain Paculba, foreign actors need not do much to corrupt our local officials; all they have to do is look for the weakest link that they can corrupt more and later on, influence and manipulate. She also stressed the dominance of a few elite families in the country’s key sectors as another contributing factor. It makes it easier for foreign actors to identify who should be the target of their influence.

Foreign actors capitalize on the legitimate needs of local governments to influence. Widespread poverty in the countryside, socioeconomic inequalities, and regional disparities serve in favor of foreign entities. These phenomena become a gateway for external influence in local government and decision-makers, under the guise of foreign aid and investments. Based on the research conducted by Captain Paculba, this situation can be seen in some areas of Cagayan, Mindanao, and Bicol.

Captain Paculba also pointed out the country’s media oligopoly, worsening educational crisis, and Filipino’s intense social media exposure as factors to our susceptibility.

Citing a comprehensive digital report released by We Are Social and Meltwater in January 2024, Capt. Paculba stressed how Filipinos’ intense exposure to the internet makes them more vulnerable to online propaganda. The report shows that Filipinos are among the top internet users, spending on average 8

hours and 52 minutes online daily, far from the 6 hours and 40 minutes global average use (We Are Social and Meltwater 2024, 57–59). Additionally, data shows that 98.8 percent of Filipino internet users surf the internet through smartphones or a feature phone (66).

With all these factors contributing to our country's vulnerability to foreign interference, Captain Paculba explained that foreign entities' methods of influencing us are simultaneous, multi-layered (from national and subnational levels to local levels), and multi-sectoral. She also mentioned that foreign interference is omnidirectional, which means it is hard to attribute the act of interfering to just one foreign entity.

For Captain Paculba, foreign interference should not only be viewed as a security threat but also as an issue of public order, public safety, and economics. She circled back to the discussion of the multi-layered and multi-sectoral methods used by foreign entities that are not confined to security measures alone, but also the economic coercion and information operations.

Captain Paculba affirmed the presence of foreign interference in the country, which can be seen in different sectors, from the academe to commerce. For her, foreign interference has always been there, as all countries try to influence one or more countries. This is also why foreign interference is often associated with foreign malign influence, since it becomes harder to distinguish between legitimate influencing activities and illicit activities done to interfere with a country's democratic processes. However, Captain Paculba said that during President Rodrigo Duterte's administration, it became more apparent and overt.

Relating to the topic of foreign interference in the upcoming midterm elections in May 2025, Assistant Professor Mallari asked how foreign actors use local and national elections as schemes to interfere. Captain Paculba shared that one of the schemes used by foreign actors is investing in rising politicians, whether through campaign donations, dirty tactics, or social media propaganda. She referred to it as “grooming” rising politicians:

Foreign actors operate intricately and insidiously to try to interfere with our democratic processes for their political and economic interests. As mentioned earlier, they operate simultaneously, multilayered, and omnidirectionally.

For Captain Paculba, our response as a nation must also be simultaneous, coordinated, multimodal, and multilayered.

Captain Paculba's final words in the podcast centered on building the country's national resilience in the face of foreign interference. She premised this resilience on strengthening and implementing our legal framework, increasing civilian intelligence capacity, diversifying and scrutinizing foreign investments, promoting cyber and media literacy and public awareness, reaching out to the Filipino diaspora overseas, and demanding public offices' transparency.

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