



PROCEEDINGS 2026-14
Strategic Studies Program

Diplomacy in the Age of Technological Disruption

23 April 2025
UP Asian Center, Seminar Room 1, University of the Philippines - Diliman



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

ISSN 2718-9295 (PRINT)
ISSN 2718-9309 (ONLINE)



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UP CIDS PROCEEDINGS

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UP CIDS Proceedings is published by the

**University of the Philippines
Center for Integrative and Development Studies**

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ISSN 2718-9295 (Print)

ISSN 2718-9309 (Online)

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DISCUSSION PAPER

In Technology We Trust:
The Struggle to Build
a Cyber Force in the
Philippines



PROCEEDINGS

The Katipunan Dialogue
Podcast: Season 4

About the Proceedings

On April 23, 2025, the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program, in collaboration with the Foreign Service Institute, hosted its second roundtable discussion titled “Diplomacy in the Age of Technological Disruption” at the UP Asian Center. This roundtable discussion is part of an ongoing institutional partnership that aims to harness the expertise from both the government and the academe, to stir meaning conversations on pressing and critical national security issues with the broader public.

The roundtable convened distinguished experts from the United Nations, the International Organizations Office of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), and the Philippine Space Agency. In their discussions, they emphasized the Philippines’ proactive engagement in multilateral efforts to establish international norms and procedures related to cyber technologies, including lethal autonomous weapons and outer space operations.

The roundtable drew traction from select government agencies, and students aligned with international relations studies. The open forum provided an opportunity for rich exchange and sharing of prospects of the country’s future engagements and trajectory. The expert panel discussion and the session was moderated by Assoc. Prof. Francis Rico C. Domingo, Co-Convenor of the UP CIDS Strategic Studies Program and esteemed scholar and professor on international relations and cybersecurity at the Department of Political Science at the University of the Philippines - Diliman.

Diplomatic Approaches to Cyber Operations and Lethal Autonomous Weapons

Jan Michael Gomez

Director, Peace and Security Issues, Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Jan Michael Gomez is the Director of the Peace and Security Division at the Department of Foreign Affairs - Office of United Nations and International Organizations (UNIO). He is a seasoned diplomat who has represented the Philippines in key international forums on disarmament, emerging technologies, and outer space security. His work focuses on advancing responsible state behavior and preventing an arms race through multilateral diplomacy.

His presentation centered on the Philippines' diplomatic strategies on two intertwined yet institutionally distinct security issues: cybersecurity and lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). He situated the Philippines' engagements within procedural and substantive diplomatic tracks; and with a keen eye, highlighted key areas of improvement that would address institutional fragmentation, regional dynamics, and global power politics through a balance between norm-building and capacity development.

Divergent Frameworks, Normative Gaps

Dir. Gomez began by distinguishing the multilateral treatment of LAWS and cybersecurity. LAWS is discussed in Geneva under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), while cybersecurity is tackled in New York via the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on ICT Security. The United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is the leading institutional body that convenes experts to discuss questions related to emerging technologies related to lethal autonomous weapon systems. Despite annual meetings that began in 2014, there remains no consensus on the scope of LAWS but in 2023, the body of experts have agreed that LAWS-related

technologies “must not be used if they are incapable of being in compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL).”¹

This institutional divergence is mirrored domestically, where responsibilities are split across various Philippine agencies and divisions. The speaker underscored the resulting disconnect in coordination, noting that cybersecurity is often viewed in the Philippines primarily through a cybercrime lens, with emphasis on misinformation, disinformation, and data breaches—constraining more strategic conversations on state-level cyber operations and critical infrastructure defense. “In the Philippines, cybersecurity is often seen through the lens of cybercrime... This may overshadow the strategic cybersecurity discussions.”

Approaches to LAWS: Constraints, Opportunities, and Strategic Duality

At the bilateral level, LAWS is not addressed as a standalone issue. Dir. Gomez clarified that weapons acquisitions with autonomous capabilities are often incidental, reflecting global market availability, rather than part of a comprehensive (defense) strategy.

Regionally, there is a concerted effort to put LAWS on the ASEAN agenda; although there are inroads, there is not much inertia to move things forward. Despite the inclusion of a paragraph on LAWS in the 2023 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) Joint Communique, ASEAN mechanisms remain underdeveloped.

Thus, at the multilateral level, Dir. Gomez proposed a dual strategic approach:

1. Normative Constraint – Support for frameworks that limit the proliferation of LAWS, especially among major powers.
2. Access and Capability – Advocacy for national capacity-building to leverage artificial intelligence for military applications.

1 “Timeline of LAWS in the CCW – UNODA,” n.d. <https://disarmament.unoda.org/timeline-of-laws-in-the-ccw/>.

Dir. Gomez outlined three multilateral tracks:

1. The CCW Process – Preferred by great powers due to its consensus requirement, which is deemed favorable, especially if the intent is to move at a slow pace or to not move at all.
2. The “New York Process” – An emerging track modeled after the Ottawa/Oslo process (e.g., landmines), pursued as a fallback in case of CCW stagnation.
3. Other Initiatives – Including regional consultations (e.g., the 2023 Manila Indo-Pacific meeting), and frameworks like the REAIM process and the U.S.-led political declaration on military artificial intelligence (AI).

Notably, the 2023 Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) LAWS report introduced a “two-tiered approach” distinguishing between prohibitions (for fully autonomous systems) and regulations (for semi-autonomous systems). Dir. Gomez credited Philippine participation in the Group of 16 supporting a legally binding instrument (LBI), positioning the country as a bridge-builder despite having a more moderate stance compared to progressive allies.

Critical debates revolve around:

- The definition of LAWS (with intentionality of including the qualifier “lethal”);
- The applicability of international humanitarian law; and
- Ethical considerations, such as the Vatican’s assertion that “only humans should be allowed to take a life.”

Approaches to Cybersecurity: From Capacity to Contestation

Dir. Gomez outlined an active bilateral landscape in which the Philippines engages with key partners, the United States, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom, on cyber cooperation, primarily through capacity building and information sharing. Attribution or identifying perpetrators of state-sponsored cyber operations is emerging as a priority in these dialogues.

At the regional level, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Intersessional Meeting on ICT Security serves as the principal platform. The Philippines co-chairs the ARF's Open-Ended Study Group (OESG) on Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), which includes mechanisms such as a regional directory of cyber Points of Contact (POCs). Dir. Gomez stated that "since the ARF directory is more advanced than the UN's, ASEAN is putting it forward as a global model."

On the multilateral front, Mr. Gomez identified two competing processes:

- The OEWG on ICT Security (2021–2025), originally a Russia-led initiative.
- The UN Programme of Action (UNPoA) on Cybersecurity, introduced by France in 2022 as an alternative.

Dir. Gomez was skeptical about duplicating diplomatic processes, emphasizing the limited capacity of the Philippines to engage in both. However, he interpreted the UNPoA initiative as a geopolitical response aimed at discrediting the Russian-backed OEWG.

Despite limitations, the Philippines plays an active role in capacity-building initiatives such as the Global Cybersecurity Cooperation Portal and the Cyber Capacity-Building Catalog (a joint ASEAN working paper), modeled after the EU P2P Export Controls platform.

Prospects and Recommendations

Dir. Gomez's extensive discussion on multilateral, bilateral frameworks, and approaches has provided key recommendations, anchored in the country's national policy.

1. Advance LAWS discussions within ASEAN and reinforce the Philippine push for a legally binding instrument through the Group of 16, in the context of regional security stability and the promotion of norms in emerging technologies.
2. Maintain presence in CCW while leveraging New York-based initiatives as strategic leverage.

3. Continue leadership in ARF/OESG and promote ASEAN's model for global cyber confidence-building.
4. Prioritize capacity-matching platforms like the Cyber Capacity-Building Catalog to align requests with global resources.
5. Institutionalize whole-of-government mechanisms to synchronize responses across cybersecurity, defense, and foreign policy.

Dir. Gomez finished his presentation with the following quote: "The Philippine approach is clear: we must not only limit and regulate dangerous technologies but also ensure we are not left behind in accessing and shaping them."

Diplomatic Strategies for Addressing National Security Challenges in Outer Space

Atty. Noelle Riza D. Castillo

Director, Space Policy and International Cooperation Bureau, PhilSA

Atty. Noelle Riza Castillo is the Director of the Space Policy and International Cooperation Bureau of the Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA). This bureau handles the legal and diplomatic matters related to space affairs, working closely with the DFA, especially on international cooperation and space security.

National Space Policy

Atty. Castillo began by introducing the Philippines' legal and institutional foundation for outer space engagement through Republic Act 11363,² or the "Philippine Space Act of 2019." This law established the Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) and the Philippine Space Council, a high-level body chaired by the President and composed of secretaries from the departments of defense, foreign affairs, agriculture, finance, and science and technology.

Atty. Castillo emphasized that PhilSA is not attached to the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), but an agency directly under the authority of the Office of the President. The law outlines five pillars: efficient use of space resources, capacity building, enhancement of national defense, international cooperation, and adherence to international treaties and principles established by the United Nations. Atty. Castillo highlighted that "even at the level of our national law, international diplomacy is at the heart of our space agenda."

2 "Republic Act No. 11363," n.d. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2019/ra_11363_2019.html.

Governance Framework

Atty. Castillo outlined the United Nations governance frameworks for outer space, primarily split into two institutional bodies:

1. Vienna (UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space): Through the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), COPUOS oversees peaceful uses, long-term sustainability, and the development of legal frameworks. It has two subcommittees: Legal and Scientific & Technical.
2. Geneva (UN First Committee and Disarmament Forums): Deals with the security aspects of space, including arms control and prevention of weaponization.

Atty. Castillo pointed out that despite this division, safety and security issues are deeply interrelated, with these being “two sides of the same coin.”

She shared that the Philippines is an active member of COPUOS and has participated in both legal and technical discussions, often jointly represented by PhilSA and the DFA. She underscored that participating in these fora allows the country to bring the national interest to the attention and consciousness of other countries.

She shared that currently there are five binding Outer Space Treaties, namely:

1. Outer Space Treaty (1967) – affirms peaceful use, due regard for others, and non-appropriation;
2. Rescue Agreement (1968) – obliges states to assist stranded astronauts;
3. Liability Convention (1972) – establishes liability for damage from space objects;
4. Registration Convention (1974) – mandates registration of space objects; and
5. Moon Agreement (1984) – least ratified, affirms moon and celestial bodies as the province of mankind.

The Philippines is party to the Registration Convention and the Moon Agreement. It has signed but not ratified the Outer Space Treaty, Rescue

Agreement, and Liability Convention. Atty. Castillo noted that ratification efforts are underway.

Threats to Space, Security, and Sustainability

Atty. Castillo enumerated a range of pressing threats to the sustainability and security of outer space:

- Space debris, particularly in low Earth orbit, posing collision risks;
- Militarization and weaponization despite formal treaty prohibitions;
- Irresponsible behavior such as destructive anti-satellite tests (ASATs) and unnotified satellite proximity operations; and
- Lack of transparency, such as countries failing to inform neighbors of rocket launches that may impact territorial safety

She emphasized that while the Philippines is a small space actor, it is vulnerable to the consequences of these threats. According to her, the country, to date, has only one satellite, which is called “sovereign satellite” and is used for national security. Once this satellite is undermined in space, the country’s national security capabilities will likewise be threatened.

The Philippines, through PhilSA, has consistently participated in multilateral initiatives to raise awareness and help define responsible norms. These include:

- Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF)
- UN COPUOS sessions
- OEWG on Responsible Space Behavior (2022–2023)
- GGE on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (GGE-PAROS)

PhilSA’s declared interests in these discussions include:

- Clarifying the principle of due regard
- Ensuring the application of international law and IHL

- Asserting the rights of developing states
- Promoting transparency and notification protocols
- Advancing cooperative frameworks

Risks and Threats to Space: The Philippines' Contributions

Principle of Due Regard

In the 2022–2023 OEWG sessions, the Philippines tabled a working paper on the principle of due regard, a key provision of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. This principle requires states to conduct activities in outer space with consideration for the interests of other countries.

To advance this, both PhilSA and the DFA co-organized a side event on interpreting and operationalizing "due regard." The goal was to build consensus around state obligations in satellite launches, space operations, and conflict avoidance. The said event was critical for operationalizing, and not simply articulating the legal implications of 'due regard' as a principle, and address the gap in the Autospace Treaty.

Philippines–Germany Joint Working Papers

One of the most significant diplomatic achievements shared by Atty. Castillo was the joint authorship of two landmark working papers with Germany:

1. **Space Security Risks and Irresponsible Behaviors:** This classified threats into categories such as destructive anti-satellite weapons (ASATs), unnotified proximity operations, and interference with civilian infrastructure.
2. **Norms of Responsible Behavior:** This proposed specific actions states should take, including securing consent before satellite approaches, avoiding ASATs, issuing pre-launch notifications, and ensuring continuity of space services.

Atty. Castillo emphasized that these papers positioned the Philippines as a serious contributor to norm-building, offering practical frameworks for space

stability that bridge technical clarity and political feasibility. “These joint papers,” as she noted “are repeatedly cited as examples of what North–South cooperation in multilateral diplomacy should look like.”

GGE-PAROS (2023-2024)

Atty. Castillo also represented the Philippines in the Group of Governmental Experts on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, composed of 25 member states. The group succeeded in adopting a consensus report in August 2024 despite the polarized geopolitical context.

Key recommendations of the report included:

- Clear definitions of space weapons;
- Prohibition of force and destructive acts in space;
- Verification mechanisms for treaty compliance;
- Affirmation of existing disarmament obligations; and
- Transparency and confidence-building measures

Continuing Discussions on Space Security

Atty. Castillo laid out the roadmap for ongoing and upcoming discussions:

1. OEWG on PAROS (2025–2028): The Philippines supports this new forum, which merges parallel efforts on behavioral norms (UK-led) and treaty-based arms control (Russia-led). Castillo warned against duplication, noting that developing states lack the bandwidth to engage in too many parallel processes.
2. APRSAF 2025: The Philippines will host this regional forum and mainstream space security into its agenda, especially within the working group on space policy.
3. National Security Strategy (NSS) Implementation: PhilSA is actively participating in workshops and other initiatives to integrate space security in national policy and framework, under the National Security Council’s leadership.

4. ASEAN Regional Space Agenda: The Philippines is also actively exploring mechanisms within the ASEAN and potential collaboration between member states, towards forging a shared vision and position on regional space governance and cooperation.

Policy Recommendations

To close, Castillo advanced several forward-looking recommendations:

1. Strengthen due regard enforcement by integrating it into international legal and normative frameworks.
2. Continue pushing for a legally binding treaty that incorporates prohibitions, verification, and peaceful use provisions.
3. Expand bilateral strategic partnerships, such as the Philippines–Germany collaboration, to enhance influence in global debates.
4. Prioritize transparency and confidence-building, including pre-launch notifications and standardized communication channels.
5. Elevate regional cooperation, especially within ASEAN, to amplify the collective voice of emerging space actors.
6. Invest in sovereign space capability, ensuring that diplomatic positions are backed by real technological assets.

Synthesis

Assoc. Prof. Francis Domingo synthesized the discussions and identified three central insights on the strategic and diplomatic challenges faced by the Philippines in outer space and cyber governance:

1. Great Powers Set the Terms

A recurring theme from both presentations was the outsized role of great powers—particularly the U.S., Russia, and China—in shaping global norms and technological governance. In domains like space and cybersecurity, the inability of major powers to agree often leads to stagnation. This reality reflects what is taught in basic international relations: “Great powers do what they must.” For relatively smaller states like the Philippines, the strategic challenge is how to assert its agency in a system where the rules are often dictated by great powers. The speakers suggested that leveraging coalitions such as the Group of 16 or engaging more assertively in multilateral forums could be viable paths.

2. Geopolitics is Inescapable Across All Domains

While technological actors such as Elon Musk or corporations like Google and Amazon often present their innovations as beyond politics, the speakers emphasized that geopolitics permeates every domain—including space, cyberspace, and AI. The presumed neutrality or global character of these technologies is often undermined by the strategic interests of states. This point was clearly underscored through references to contested regulatory spaces, power asymmetries, and the uneven capacity of states to shape outcomes.

3. The Need to Break Disciplinary Silos

The final observation focused on the limitations of siloed technical approaches. Though institutions like the University of the Philippines possess strong capabilities in fields such as computer science and encryption, these resources remain underutilized in policy and diplomatic engagements. The speakers advocated for an interdisciplinary approach—integrating technical, legal, strategic, and diplomatic expertise—but acknowledged that institutional silos continue to be a barrier to sustained collaboration.

Open Forum Summary

The open forum explored the intersection of emerging security threats, arms control, and the Philippines' evolving role in space governance and defense technologies.

1. On arms control and LAWS

A participant asked how a potential treaty on lethal autonomous weapons systems might diverge from the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC). Dir. Jan Michael Gomez explained that the key difference lies not in content, but in process. The APMBC advanced when negotiations stalled under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), prompting states to convene outside the UN framework, known as the Ottawa or Oslo process. A similar path is being considered for LAWS, amid persistent resistance from major powers. Austria leads discussions at the UN, with the Philippines part of a supportive core group. While open to alternative tracks, the Philippines remains committed to the CCW, using the threat of an external process to pressure consensus.

2. On domestic space industry and GPS vulnerability

Atty. Castillo of the Philippine Space Agency noted that while the country has no mature space industry yet, steps are being taken to nurture one. PhilSA is drafting a Space Industry Roadmap and encouraging local participation to shift from space technology user to producer. On GPS jamming, she admitted limits to offering a technical assessment but acknowledged the concern and emphasized interagency efforts to access foreign technologies and strengthen resilience.

3. Autonomy versus capability

When asked whether supporting international LAWS regulation might undermine the Philippines' asymmetric defense ambitions, Dir. Gomez clarified that the country does not possess fully autonomous systems. Some weapons in use have autonomous features, but not the capacity to select and engage targets independently. The Philippines supports a ban on fully autonomous systems, or "killer robots," but remains cautious of sweeping definitions that could constrain legitimate defense needs.

4. On accountability in multilateral forums

One participant questioned how sincerity and accountability are gauged in global arms and space governance, especially when enforcement mechanisms are weak, citing the Philippine-China MOU on launch notifications as a case in point, often disregarded in practice. Dir. Gomez asserted that China, tends to engage selectively and is more responsive when initiatives are backed by coalitions like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Atty. Castillo added that earlier in PhilSA's engagement with China, the agency discovered gaps in domestic capacity to receive or interpret notices. Since then, interagency coordination has improved, enabling timely civilian warnings through Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs).

5. Space congestion and debris

Responding to a query on space pollution, Atty. Castillo explained that international norms now require satellites to have end-of-life disposal plans. She assured that Philippine satellites are small and de-orbit safely, while also mentioning Astroscale's commercial satellite-cleaning technologies. Although costly, these are being encouraged for state adoption.

6. Dual-use technologies and geopolitics

Dir. Gomez discussed the blurred lines between civilian and military technology. He pointed to "space claw" technology, which could be repurposed as a weapon, and noted that components made in the Philippines were found in Russian drones in Ukraine, an example of weak export control regimes. He emphasized the need for safeguards, even as the country aspires for a larger role in space governance.

7. Spaceports and strategic geography

Asked about space launch potential near the equator, Atty. Castillo said the idea is under consideration but remains aspirational. A national space policy is underway, aimed at aligning with international standards. The opportunities however, lead to potential building of a domestic launch facility, but its feasibility and environmental implications should be thoroughly studied.

8. On space diplomacy

Atty. Castillo affirmed that space diplomacy enhances national security by cultivating cooperative relations. These strengthen the Philippines' position in international forums and raise the likelihood that its concerns will be

acknowledged. Engagements like the UN Open-Ended Working Group and the nomination of a Filipino expert to the Group of Governmental Experts have improved the country's standing.

9. On crafting adaptive policy

Asked how to design policies that are both inclusive and targeted, Mr. Gomez stressed that “everything starts with a clear definition of national interest.” Without it, engagement becomes directionless. Atty. Castillo agreed, and at the same time emphasized the importance of interagency coordination. She mentioned the leading role of the Department of Foreign Affairs in advancing the State’s voice in international space security forums, enabling the country to gain credibility in these arenas. This has contributed to the successful nomination of a Filipino expert to the GGE, which gives the country leverage to advance its advocacy of responsible state governance.

The forum concluded with an acknowledgment of the Philippines’ growing profile in space and arms governance. While there is an admission that there is still much work to be done, the Philippines is making headway in proactive norm-building as part of its broader diplomatic engagement.

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.

The Program

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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