Redefining Philippine Interests in the South China Sea

EXPLORING POST-ARBITRATION CHALLENGES FOR THE DUTERTE ADMINISTRATION

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The South China Sea disputes in Philippines-China relations

- 4 A’s
  - China’s assertiveness
  - Aquino’s response: alliance, arbitration, ASEAN

- Impact of disputes on PH ties with China
  - Political-diplomatic
  - Security
  - Economic
  - People to people

- Opportunities for a reset?
SCS and emerging geopolitics of the Asia Pacific

- SCS as arena for US-China maritime power competition
- Claimant states’ different approaches to the disputes
- ASEAN between China and the US
- ASEAN unity and centrality
- Philippines’ ASEAN chairmanship in 2017
Significance of the arbitration

- Outcome: Upheld EEZ rights of the Philippines, declared China’s “historic rights” (9 dashed line) claim as without legal basis. Did not rule on sovereignty or on military activities.

- To bilateral PH-China ties
  - Jumpstart negotiations or lead to sustained tensions?

- To ASEAN regional cooperation
  - Ruling applies only to PH-China but legal principles as relevant

- To geopolitical competition between China and the U.S.
  - Rules-based order? Might is right?
Duterte’s unfolding position

- More conciliatory towards China, restore economic ties
- Open to early and direct negotiations, eventually upholding arbitration ruling
- ASEAN: joint statements not as important
- Coordination with allies
- FVR “personal” mission to HK
Arguments

- What are key interests and goals?
  - Normalization (improvement) of ties with China (political-economic)
  - Access to EEZ resources (economic)
  - Contribute to regional security and stability (security)
  - Contribute to rules-based order (normative)

- How best to achieve goals?
  - To take a more principled or a more pragmatic position
  - To resolve quickly or take small steps
  - To emphasize bilateral more than multilateral (ASEAN) or pursue as parallel and equal tracks
  - What role should alliances play?
The way forward?