

The Japanese-Philippine Military Logistics Pact Raises the Risk of War with China

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The US is forming two Asian trilaterals with itself and Japan that are centered on the Philippines in Southeast Asia and South Korea in Northeast Asia.

It's no secret that the US is preparing to "[Pivot \(back\) to Asia](#)" in order to more muscularly contain China, but few have paid attention to the form in which this is expected to take in the coming future. Instead of the US doing so on its own or through the previously assembled [Quad](#) of itself, Australia, India, and Japan, it's increasingly relying on the [Squad](#). This framework swaps India out for the Philippines, and its latest relevant development was the clinching of a [Japanese-Philippine military logistics pact](#).

That agreement follows April's first-ever trilateral US-Japanese-Philippine summit, which [tightened the US' containment noose](#) around China, and came [approximately nine months after](#) those three's National Security Advisors met for the first time ever in June 2023. In practice, Japan will likely ramp up its military exercises with the Philippines and [explore more arms deals](#), with those two possibly also roping Taiwan into their activities to an uncertain extent in the future given that it's roughly equidistant between them.

This will increase the chances of a conflict by miscalculation since China has already recently shown that it has the political will to respond to violations of the maritime territory that it claims as its own as proven by its [latest low-intensity clashes](#) with the Philippines. Even though the US has mutual defense obligations to the Philippines and has recently reminded China of them, it's been reluctant to meaningfully act on its commitments for de-escalation reasons, but that could easily change.

After all, the US would be pressured to respond if China clashes with both its Japanese and Philippine allies in the event that they jointly violate the maritime territory that Beijing claims as its own, though they might of course abstain from such a provocation for the time being for whatever reason. In any case, it can't be ruled out that something of the sort might eventually transpire, which could prompt a dangerous brinkmanship crisis that risks spiraling out of control if cooler heads on all sides don't prevail.

Southeast Asia isn't the only battleground in the Sino-US dimension of the [New Cold War](#) since Northeast Asia is rapidly shaping up to be a complementary one as well. [North Korea](#) recently accused the US, South Korea, and Japan of conspiring to create an "[Asian NATO](#)" after their latest trilateral drills. South Korea is a prime candidate for joining the Squad, which can also be described as AUKUS+, with Japan playing the senior partner role in that scenario exactly as it now plays with the Philippines.

That likely won't happen anytime soon though since the South Koreans remain resentful of Japan's World War II-era occupation that Tokyo hasn't ever taken full responsibility for in their view. Trilateral drills under America's aegis are one thing, but entering into a military-logistics pact with their former colonizer is an altogether different matter, especially if it leads to the latter gaining the upper hand. Nevertheless, South Korea is expected to scale up its role in AUKUS+, with Japan as its top Asian partner.

The grand strategic trend is that the US is forming two Asian trilaterals with itself and Japan that are centered on the Philippines in Southeast Asia and South Korea in Northeast Asia. Australia's role is largely symbolic for the time being, and these two trilaterals haven't yet merged into a multilateral defense network along the lines of NATO, but the writing is on the wall. It's unclear how China will respond to these moves, but there's no doubt that they make the New Cold War much more dangerous.

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