

21ST ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT
THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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FERDINAND R MARCOS, JR

PRESIDENT, PHILIPPINES

Ferdinand R Marcos Jr, President, Philippines

Thank you very much for that very kind and thorough introduction. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Sir John Chipman of course, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I thank the International Institute for Strategic Studies for convening this open, frank and constructive conversation on pressing strategic issues confronting our region. I also thank the government of Singapore, especially Prime Minister Wong and Senior Minister Lee, for providing an environment that is conducive to this Dialogue.

The notion of Shangri-La conjures up a mystical sense of tranquillity, of free souls living in peace and harmony. And it may sound like a wishful concept, but it is symbolic of a continuing dream: an international community that lives in peace, upholds the rule of law and enables all nations to thrive in pursuit of their respective aspirations.

We Filipinos are paragons of this dream. Our history reflects our commitment to the values that engender amity, fraternity and sovereign equality amongst nations. Our commitment to peace and to the rule of law inheres in how we have defined our sovereign home. When we established our Commonwealth in 1935, we put together a constitution that defined our territory in accordance with the international treaties that became the basis of our archipelagic unity. The Treaty of Paris between Spain and the United States crystallised our islands into a cohesive whole. The Treaty of Washington clarified the extent of our sovereignty and patrimony and a line set by international powers. We sought to uphold and preserve the integrity of our country's physical unity through international law.

Together with others, we put forward the archipelagic doctrine which regards all archipelagic states as a single unit, with the waters around, between and connecting the islands irrespective of their breadth and dimension forming part of their internal waters. This doctrine has since been enshrined in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS. The same convention also clarified the limits of each state's maritime zones and defined the extent with which they could exercise sovereignty, their sovereign rights and jurisdiction over those zones. Accordingly, we have made a conscious effort to align our definition of our territory and our maritime zones with what international law permits and recognises. This has been inscribed in Article 1 of our constitution. As senator, I was proud to co-sponsor our Archipelagic Baselines Law, which defines the basis of our maritime jurisdictions. As President, I look forward to signing our Maritime Zones Law, which will clarify the geographic extent of our maritime domain.

Our efforts stand in stark contrast to assertive actors who aim to propagate excessive and baseless claims through force, intimidation and deception. In the West Philippine Sea, we are on the front lines of efforts to assert the integrity of the UNCLOS as a 'constitution' of the oceans. We have defined our territory and maritime zones in a manner befitting a responsible and law-abiding member of the international community. We have submitted our assertions to rigorous legal scrutiny by the world's leading juries. So, the lines that we draw in our waters are not derived from just our imagination, but from international law. We have on our side the 1982 UNCLOS and the binding 2016 arbitral award, which affirms what is ours by legal right.

In this solid footing and through our clear moral ascendancy, we find the strength to do whatever it takes to protect our sovereign home to the last square inch, to the last square millimetre. The life-giving waters of the West Philippine Sea flow in the blood of every Filipino. We cannot allow anyone to detach it from the totality of the maritime domain that renders our nation whole.

As President, I have sworn to this solemn commitment from the very first day that I took office. I do not intend to yield. Filipinos do not yield. Ladies and gentlemen, we are not only unyielding in protecting our patrimony, our rights and our dignity as a proud and as a free country. We are also firm

in our commitment to regional and global peace. We renew this commitment at this turbulent juncture of our history. I would repeat what I said at the United Nations almost two years ago: amidst challenging global tides, an important ballast stabilises our common vessel. Our open, inclusive and rules-based international order is governed by international law and informed by the principles of equity and of justice.

For the past 79 years this rules-based order has allowed our region to flourish. The stability and the predictability that has engendered has been crucial to the success of the stories of our region – be it the post-war revival of Japan, the economic miracles of Korea and in Southeast Asia, the rise of China and of India. When this world order was built in 1945, our forebears vowed to make the floors of the UN the last battlefield. We made a determination for humanity to survive and to never again be wiped out in another holocaust. The Philippines has always been part of that history. Amidst the rubble of war, we were there. Amongst the architects of the new peace, we stood on behalf of colonised peoples of Africa and Asia. We opposed attempts to dilute the inviolability of the right to self-determination. We helped enshrine the right to independence in the Charter of the United Nations. In 1982 we led our global community in unanimously adopting the Manila Declaration on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes. This affirmed that differences amongst nations must always be solved peacefully, through legal and diplomatic processes, never through the threat or the use of force.

Today these norms are under significant stress. The world is facing a watershed moment. In our region recent patterns of aggression and militarisation and emerging arms races threaten our lands of promise with an uncertain future. In the midst of these significant shifts I see seven realities in the Indo-Pacific.

First, the future of our region will be determined by many nations, each with its own unique experiences and aspirations. Yet their respective agencies are being challenged by attempts to undermine our faith in prevailing international norms.

Second, the strategic competition between China and the United States is permeating the evolving regional landscape. This rivalry is constraining the strategic choices of regional states. This contest is exacerbating flashpoints and has created new security dilemmas.

Third, the region looks to ASEAN as the institution that will hold the centre amidst these evolving dynamics. Yet challenges threaten our unity and our centrality.

Fourth, as geopolitics continues to permeate the global governance infrastructure, the role of bridge-builders has become increasingly important to forge decisive multilateral solutions.

Fifth, the global commons will continue to be crucial to the security of all states in the region. Access of developing countries to the high seas and to outer space, and the peaceful uses of science and technologies, is crucial to international development.

Sixth, climate change remains a deadly challenge for the region and for the world. It is the first truly global threat and for the first time we face a crisis that affects every single human being on Earth and requires action from every single human being as well.

And finally, the development of advanced technologies is rapidly transforming human life and experience. These technologies will solve many of our old problems, but they are so powerful that they also have the potential to disrupt our political and our social orders.

These seven realities muddle the waters that we have to navigate in our collective journey as a community of nations. We cannot reverse course. We must persevere. We must push through. The

current juncture does not call for a revision of the regional order. Instead, it calls for the reaffirmation of the wisdom of San Francisco in 1945, of Bangkok in 1967, and of Manila in 1982. Let us return to San Francisco and reaffirm the sovereign equality of all states. We must reject unjust narratives that seek to subsume distinct national interest in a so-called major-country dynamic which seeks to impose a hierarchy amongst nations. Those who came before us worked painstakingly throughout the last century to bury the era of spheres of influence and buffer states. We should not allow its ghost to haunt our region once again. Let us also return to Bangkok and support ASEAN's effort to build a rules-based, people-oriented and centred on regional community. Any state that professes a stake in the continued peace and stability of this region must respect ASEAN's centrality, not only with words but with action. All partnerships and arrangements must never displace or dilute, but rather uphold and complement ASEAN's central role.

So let us return as well to Manila and reaffirm our common understanding of how international law governs the peaceful settlement of disputes. Amidst misleading narratives that seek to discredit international legal procedures, there is a need to reaffirm that those modalities are an expression of good faith. They are a service to the progressive development and qualification of international law. They are never an unfriendly act.

Ladies and gentlemen, the past inspires the needed clarity and foresight to confront the challenges of the present and to build a future to which we all aspire. From the achievements of San Francisco, Bangkok, Manila, we as a region draw our abiding compass. First, the sovereign equality of states must remain sacrosanct. Second, ASEAN and ASEAN-led processes must remain central. Third, the rule of law and the integrity of multilateralism must prevail. These three constants guide our efforts to prepare ourselves for the challenges ahead.

We need to begin by resoundingly rejecting misguided interpretations that paint our region as a mere theatre of geopolitical rivalries. We are not mere bystanders to unfolding world events. We are the actors that drive those events. We are the main characters in our collective story. We are the owners of the narratives of our regional community. Thus, we reject any attempt to deny strategic agencies, especially by force, that seek to subordinate our interest to anyone else's. China's determining influence over the security situation and the economic evolution of this region is a permanent fact. At the same time, the stabilising presence of the United States is crucial to regional peace. It's never a choice. Both countries are important. The continued stability of this region requires China and the United States to manage that rivalry in a responsible manner. Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, China and the United States have a unique responsibility to undertake concrete measures to reverse the recent increase in nuclear stockpiles and to alleviate the risks of nuclear conflict.

For a long time the nuclear-disarmament discourse has focused on the Euro-Atlantic. Together with our strategic partners, Australia and Japan, the Philippines has been seeking to bring Indo-Pacific issues to the fore. We promote nuclear-risk reduction in the region through the ASEAN Regional Forum. We push for the negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty at the United Nations. We will not waiver in these efforts. Our work towards a world free of nuclear weapons is rooted in our desire to extinguish the last vestiges of the Cold War. Yet the danger of regional regression towards Cold War thinking has never been more pronounced. It has become even more crucial for us to assert that the future of our region will be driven not by one or two powerful countries, but by all of us. Peace, security and stability are the business of all countries. The interests and responsibilities of all states in the community of nations will always be acknowledged. All our voices must be equally heard.

As a Pacific nation, the Philippines shares with our Eastern kin the same experience of a climate-vulnerable country. It is clear to us that the Pacific island states must become part of any meaningful discussion regarding the future of our region. It's time to put the Pacific back into Indo-Pacific. We also

share with South Asian states similar aspirations as rapidly growing economies. Their continued development rests upon the maintenance of peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region.

In the same vein, the economic security of East Asia depends upon the freedom of navigation and unimpeded passage in the South China Sea and in the East China Sea, and the stability of the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. By virtue of geographic proximity and the presence of Filipinos in Taiwan, we have a legitimate interest in cross-strait issues. The Filipino people have a long history of fraternal bonds with the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Peace and stability must prevail. Therefore, we continue to urge all parties to exercise restraint on the issue. Lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula, on the other hand, is a collective responsibility of the entire region. The DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea] must comply with all its international obligations under relevant UN Security Council resolutions and commit to constructive and peaceful dialogue with the Republic of Korea.

Finally, any effort to resolve maritime differences in the East China Sea and the South China Sea must be anchored on international law, particularly UNCLOS. We must accord due regard to the legitimate interests of all parties and respect legally settled rights. We cannot afford any other future for the South China Sea other than the one envisioned by ASEAN: that of a sea of peace, stability and prosperity. Unfortunately, this vision remains for now a distant reality. Illegal, coercive, aggressive and deceptive actions continue to violate our sovereign rights and jurisdictions. Attempts to apply domestic laws and regulations beyond one's territory and jurisdiction violates international law, exacerbates tensions and undermines regional peace and security.

But despite all this, the Philippines remains committed to the cause of peace upon which our constitutional order is premised. We are committed to addressing and managing difficult issues through dialogue and through diplomacy. The 1982 UNCLOS and the binding 2016 arbitral award provide a solid foundation for the peaceful resolution and management of disputes. Our policy in the South China Sea is built upon these two touchstones.

We will continue to work with ASEAN and China towards an effective and substantive code of conduct, one that is firmly moored in UNCLOS. As the world's second-largest archipelagic nation, we have more sea than land in our territory. We are among 18 mega-diverse countries in the world, and we have the fourth-longest national coastline. We will continue to build upon our significant footprint in enriching UNCLOS, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the High Seas Treaty.

As we work to uphold the rule of law in international affairs, so shall we build our capabilities to protect our interest in our own maritime domain and in the global commons. Under our comprehensive archipelagic defence concept we shall develop our capacity to project our forces into areas where we must, by constitutional duty and by legal right, protect our interest and preserve our patrimony. And as we build our defence capabilities, so shall we continue to invest in diplomacy. Our commitment to ASEAN centrality shall remain a core element of our foreign policy. At the same time, we shall strengthen our alliance with the United States and our strategic partnerships with Australia, Japan, Vietnam, Brunei and all the other member states of ASEAN. We will also pursue more robust collaboration with friends such as the Republic of Korea, India, amongst others. Collaborative endeavours among a few states that share specific interests build into pillars that support the architecture of regional stability. It is in this spirit that we pursue trilateral collaboration with Indonesia and Malaysia in the Celebes Sea.

It is the same rationale behind our broader cooperation with Australia, Japan and the United States in our exclusive economic zone. Last month the Philippines, Japan and the United States adopted our Joint Vision Statement on enhancing economic cooperation and contributing to regional peace and

security through trilateral cooperation. These partnerships reflect our commitment to preserving, defending and strengthening the rules-based regional order. And yet the scope, the depth, the breadth of the challenge that our region now faces requires our collective, our inclusive and our decisive action.

Addressing the realities of our regional security landscape requires a greater collective political will. Let us begin by realising the vision set for us by leaders past. In 1976, five leaders of Southeast Asia, including my father, signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in the Southeast Asia, or the TAC. This landmark treaty is meant to promote perpetual peace, everlasting amity and cooperation amongst nations. Its goal is to contribute to their strength, their solidarity and closer relationship. The TAC's provisions were relevant then and they remain relevant to this day. It is no wonder then that 54 parties from all regions of the world, many of which are represented in this Dialogue, have now acceded to this landmark instrument, with nearly a dozen more countries expressing their desire to be bound by the TAC's tenets. This indicates that all stakeholders in the future of this region are committed to peace. It is timely for parties to consider how this treaty can help address the geopolitical and geo-economic issues facing the region today and the looming challenges ahead. So, as we look to the future, let us breathe new life into this noble purpose and the principles of this treaty.

Ladies and gentlemen, beyond the regional horizon, we recognise the importance of upholding multilateralism. It remains the single viable platform for collective action against transcendent global challenges. We must therefore step back from the precipice of paralysis. We should transcend geopolitics, find common ground, work to strengthen global institutions. This requires active leadership on the part of middle powers, which have the capacity to cross political and ideological lines, forge genuine consensus and lead credible efforts towards decisive multilateral solutions. I am proud of the Philippines' effort to build bridges on issues ranging from climate action to disarmament and non-proliferation, from sustainable development to equitable global health cooperation. In all our multilateral engagements we seek to bridge global conversations with our unique regional perspectives. Just as Indo-Pacific states must determine our own destiny, so too must we be active participants in charting the future of the world. We must shape the rules. We must build those bridges.

It is in this context that we are actively seeking to amplify Indo-Pacific voices in the context of global conversations on the issue of lethal autonomous weapon systems. We likewise seek regional consensus regarding the development of norms of responsible behaviour in outer space and in cyberspace. We will bring our experience as a trusted partner, credible pathfinder and committed peacemaker when elected to the United Nations Security Council for the term of 2027–2028. My country has come a long way in our painstaking, often difficult but steady journey towards the fulfilment of our people's aspirations. Despite daunting challenges and our increasing vulnerabilities, we remain on track to achieve our goal of a high-income economy and a prosperous country by the year 2040, a place where Filipinos live strongly rooted, comfortable and secure lives. Our strong potentials come with an inevitable rise in our global standard. Just as we have done in the past, we will embrace our role in this region and around the world with a sense of purpose. We are determined to be a force for the good, a force for peace, a champion of regional and global unity, a staunch defender of the rules-based international order.

The Indo-Pacific holds much promise as the fastest-growing economic hub and the largest contributor to global growth. That promise must be kept alive. Furthermore, that promise must be fulfilled. Geopolitics must not distract us from our fundamental duty as civil servants, as public intellectuals, as statesmen to deliver for our people and to safeguard the future of the coming generations. This is the reason why we strive for stability, for security and for peace. This, ladies and gentlemen, is our core purpose, our collective commitment, our calling. It is for this most noble of causes that we must come together to win the future of our region and to make a better world. And with your help, with our partnerships, with the alliances that we forge, we will make it happen.

Thank you and good evening.

Sir John Chipman, Executive Chairman, IISS

Thank you very much for an inspiring address.