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Results of the Track 1.5

2025 Germany-Philippines Strategic Dialogue

Maritime Security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific

*Fostering Stronger Cooperation
Between Germany and the Philippines*

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1. Introduction

Key Convergences

Despite geographical distance, Germany and the Philippines face parallel maritime threats:

- Grey zone tactics and hybrid warfare: Both confront great powers employing coercive maritime operations designed to avoid direct military confrontation.
- Critical infrastructure vulnerability: Both depend on submarine data cables in strategically contested regions, creating exposure to sabotage or disruption.

- Eroding security architecture: Growing uncertainty regarding U.S. security commitments compels both countries to diversify partnerships and build independent capacity.

Germany possesses regulatory expertise and technology transfer capacity; the Philippines offers regional leverage within ASEAN and experience with transparency initiatives as counter-grey-zone strategies. These asymmetries enable practical bilateral cooperation addressing gaps in both countries' maritime security posture.

Concrete Next Steps Identified

Box 1

1. Seabed Mining and Marine Environmental Protection

Germany can assist the Philippines in developing regulatory frameworks for seabed governance and critical submarine infrastructure protection, addressing a critical Philippine policy gap.

2. Critical Submarine Infrastructure Protection

Establish a dedicated bilateral dialogue to develop cable repair protocols, implement international advocacy for recognizing submarine cables as global commons, and enable technology cooperation on cable protection and cyber defense.

3. Countering Cognitive Warfare and Disinformation

Exchange best practices on responding to grey zone tactics, with the Philippines sharing lessons from its Transparency Initiative and Germany contributing European experience in countering hybrid threats at multiple governance levels.

4. Information Sharing Mechanisms

Develop robust infrastructure for timely intelligence exchange and coordination among national agencies, addressing persistent gaps in both countries' capacity to respond effectively to maritime threats.

5. Humanitarian Preparedness and Contingency Planning

Collaborate on foresight workshops and contingency planning for potential regional crises (Taiwan contingency for the Philippines, Baltic contingency for Germany), including maritime evacuation protocols and refugee management.

Why this cooperation is urgent

Institutional momentum: Recent defense policy dialogue revival, signing of the German-Philippine Defence Cooperation Arrangement (May 2025), and drone delivery to the Philippine Coast Guard demonstrate growing institutional engagement and political will.

Strategic window: The Philippines' 2026 ASEAN chairmanship provides a platform for advancing maritime security within regional forums. Germany's increased security engagement in the Indo-Pacific creates leverage for coordinated action.

Cascading risks: Escalation in either the South China Sea or Baltic region impacts stability in the other theatre. Taiwan and Baltic contingencies threaten simultaneous crises requiring rapid, coordinated response. Bilateral cooperation now strengthens capacity to manage overlapping emergencies.

About the Dialogue

The 2025 Germany-Philippines Strategic Dialogue on Maritime Security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific – Fostering Stronger Cooperation Between Germany and the Philippines was co-organized by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the Foundation for the National Interest (FNI), and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). Hosted by SWP in Berlin on October 14, 2025, this second Track 1.5 Strategic Dialogue built on the success of the inaugural session held in Manila in 2024. The event brought together academics, policymakers, and civil society representatives from both countries to discuss shared and distinct maritime security challenges and identify approaches for closer cooperation.

The main objectives of the dialogue were to:

- Enhance mutual understanding of both countries' maritime security priorities and the evolving strategic context, including traditional, hybrid, and emerging threats.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange by bringing together experts and policymakers to share operational experiences and align perspectives.
- Explore practical areas of cooperation between Germany and the Philippines to strengthen maritime security, resilience, and governance.
- Develop actionable policy recommendations to advance bilateral cooperation and contribute to a stable, rules-based maritime order.

The discussions were structured around three broad thematic areas: evolving maritime threat assessments, the rise

of grey zone activities, and the protection of maritime critical infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific and the Baltic Sea. Participants reflected on how geopolitical competition, regional crises, economic interdependence, and technological vulnerabilities shape these challenges across both regions. Debates highlighted the growing convergence of security concerns - from countering grey zone activities and hybrid and cognitive warfare tactics to the protection of undersea infrastructure and the economic and environmental dimensions of maritime resilience - while noting that the nature of threats and the actors involved differ between regions. Comparative insights from Europe and the Indo-Pacific pointed to opportunities for mutual learning and coordination, especially in managing grey zone risks, enhancing infrastructure resilience, and improving collaboration between different public, private, and national actors.

2. Context Setting

The 2025 Germany-Philippines Strategic Dialogue took place at a moment of heightened geopolitical uncertainty. Both countries are navigating an increasingly contested global order shaped by great power competition. The erosion of the rules-based international system is visible across Europe and the Indo-Pacific - from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its hybrid tactics in the Baltic Sea, including the deployment of the shadow fleet, to China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea and its confrontational posture toward the Philippines. These tensions unfold against the backdrop of a more inward-looking United States under the Trump administration, marked by volatility, protectionist tendencies, and uncertainty regarding the durability of its security commitments. As a result, both Germany and the Philippines - long reliant on U.S. security guarantees - are compelled to seek new models of burden sharing, diversify their partnerships to reduce unilateral dependencies, and strengthen strategic cooperation to safeguard maritime stability and uphold international law.

In this context, the dialogue reflects a growing interest in deepening the bilateral engagement and institutional cooperation. Bilateral relations between Germany and the Philippines have gained new momentum in recent years. Three recent milestones in German-Philippine relations underscore this trend: the revival of the defence policy dialogue marked by Defence Minister Boris Pistorius' 2024 visit to Manila, the signing of the German-Philippine Defence Cooperation Arrangement in May 2025, and Germany's reaffirmed support for the Philippine Coast Guard through the delivery of unarmed drones.

As the bilateral ties gain new momentum, the Philippines' 2026 ASEAN chairmanship will test its ability to manage regional disputes; key challenges including the Myanmar crisis, the Thailand-Cambodia border conflict, and rising cross-strait tensions. Participants noted that ASEAN remains divided along maritime and continental lines; while maritime nations contend with territorial disputes with China, continental members are preoccupied with issues in the Mekong region. The Philippines faces the dual challenge of maintaining ASEAN unity by bridging divisions and preventing ASEAN from being divided into competing spheres of influence and promoting a regional stance to uphold the rules-based order and defend international law.

Beyond the challenge of ensuring ASEAN unity, other structural and political barriers constrain effective responses to maritime security threats. Within the Philippines, bu-

reaucratic coordination challenges across national agencies impede cohesive maritime security responses. Meanwhile, the European Union faces resource and mandate limitations that hinder fully harmonized submarine cable protection and coordinated cross-border operations.

Participants however emphasized that maritime security is not a distant or abstract concern but a core pillar of economic and national security for both countries. The stability of trade routes, supply chains, energy corridors, and undersea cable networks - on which Germany's and the Philippines' economies depend - is increasingly at risk from geopolitical frictions and hybrid threats. The dialogue thus provided a constructive platform for experts and policymakers to align perspectives, exchange operational insights, and explore practical ways to further cooperation between both countries.

3.

Maritime Security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific

The dialogue revealed eight cross-cutting themes that structure contemporary maritime security challenges in both regions. Rather than representing isolated regional issues, these themes, spanning from great power competition and rules erosion to infrastructure vulnerability and strategic commitment uncertainty, shape the threat environment that Germany and the Philippines must navigate.

1/ The Rules-Based International Order Under Pressure

The maritime domain faces a fundamental question: will the future order be one of *mare liberum* (freedom of the seas) or *mare clausum* (closed seas and spheres of influence)? China's decade-long refusal to abide by the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Ruling and Russia's challenge to international maritime norms undermine foundational principles of maritime governance. Russia's shadow fleet has been linked with submarine cable disruptions and is suspected of intentional critical infrastructure sabotage. Both powers employ grey zone tactics in the maritime domain and view existing legal frameworks as constraining rather than legitimate.

2/ Russia-China Cooperation

The deepening Russia-China partnership poses risks across both the Baltic and Indo-Pacific regions. Joint Chinese-Russian naval exercises, including operations in the Baltic, Sea of Okhotsk, and Philippine Sea, signal mutual support and operational learning. Russia has opened ports in Murmansk and Vladivostok to Chinese vessels, while cooperation extends to coast guard coordination between the FSB and Chinese maritime forces. This partnership enables Russia to sustain its war in Ukraine while providing China with operational experience in submarine warfare, naval manoeuvres, and airdropping operations.

3/ Grey Zone Tactics and Hybrid Threats

Grey zone tactics, defined as coercive actions below

the threshold of war with the aim of gaining advantages without triggering an open armed conflict, present growing challenges to maritime governance and stability. These activities include deployment of paramilitary maritime forces, coercive use of civilian or state-affiliated vessels, ambiguous territorial claims, cyber operations targeting maritime assets, and information warfare.¹ Such tactics have increasingly become defining features of maritime security competition from the Baltic Sea to the Indo-Pacific.

Both China and Russia employ grey zone strategies that push the limits of acceptable conduct in the physical, cognitive, and virtual domains. China coordinates a maritime militia, coast guard, and naval vessels for operations in the South China Sea, while Russia relies on its shadow fleet.² Both conduct sophisticated disinformation campaigns³ and cyber operations, blending coercion with ambiguity and plausible deniability. Participants agreed that if targeted countries yield to grey zone tactics and fail to counter them, both actors will continue to push boundaries.

4/ Critical Maritime Infrastructure

Critical maritime infrastructure – including ports, undersea cables, offshore energy platforms, and shipping lanes – underpins the global economy and digital connectivity. Submarine data cables are particularly vital: over 95% of international internet traffic flows through these systems. The South China Sea and Baltic Sea represent unavoidable geographic choke points, concentrating critical infrastructure in strategically contested regions. Both the Philippines and Germany are heavily reliant on these critical infrastructure networks.

Submarine cables face multifaceted threats spanning accidental damage to intentional grey zone attacks. While fishing trawlers remain the most common cause of cable damage, incident probability has risen markedly since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in September.

¹ Through information warfare or hybrid warfare, Russia seeks to shift the battlefield from the physical to the cognitive realm, influencing perception and societal will to create insecurity and doubt in Western institutions

² The Russian shadow fleet consists of mainly old, often uninsured oil tankers, many lacking ice-class certification, that operate covertly in the Baltic Sea and Arctic and beyond to evade Western sanctions. These vessels use tactics like disabling tracking systems and complex ownership structures to obscure their origin, facilitating sanctioned oil exports while increasing maritime safety risks in these strategically sensitive and environmentally harsh waters. The deployment of the shadow fleet has been linked with rising maritime grey zone activities, including suspected undersea cable sabotage.

³ China employs disinformation targeting international and domestic audiences, primarily portraying the Philippines as an instigator, delegitimizing the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Ruling, and using whataboutism to justify its own actions. While this tactic yielded some success with ASEAN neighbour's, the narratives have had limited impact on domestic Philippine opinion, with most Filipinos maintaining negative views of China and supporting current government maritime policies.

ber 2022, suggesting deliberate sabotage alongside accidents. As part of broader grey zone tactics, cables additionally face risks of cyber-attacks and espionage. Cable disruptions carry severe consequences: repairs are costly and lengthy, with cascading effects on economic activity, financial services, and national security. A key challenge lies in attribution: distinguishing deliberate sabotage from accidental submarine cable damage remains difficult. This ambiguity is compounded by liability issues, as flag states bear responsibility for cable damage incidents rather than private operators, complicating accountability and making grey zone attacks on undersea cables potentially low-risk and high-reward.

Protecting critical infrastructure requires robust governance frameworks. The Philippines currently lacks comprehensive regulatory frameworks for critical submarine infrastructure protection and seabed management, a gap that undermines the country's capacity to safeguard these vital assets.

5/ Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

Maritime domain awareness has emerged as essential for protecting critical infrastructure and countering grey zone activities across both regions. Both the Philippines and EU states identified the need for greater investment and coordination in monitoring maritime activities to increase their capacity to effectively respond to these challenges. Transparency toward the public represents a key countermeasure: exposing adversary tactics undermines the ambiguity that grey zone actors exploit. For the Philippines, exposing Chinese tactics through the Transparency Initiative⁴ remains the leading approaches. Support from international partners like Germany and Canada, through drones and the dark vessel detection systems, has proven valuable for the Philippine coast guard. In the Baltic Sea, extending intelligence by integrating sensors, including civilian systems, and ensuring violations of international law are made public starts to parallel this strategy. Support from international partners—such as drones and dark vessel detection systems—has proven valuable for coast guards in both regions. Coastal states around the Baltic Sea and Indo-Pacific can learn from each other's experiences in building effective domain awareness capabilities.

6/ Concerns About U.S. Reliability and Strategic Commitments

As Germany and the Philippines invest in MDA and infrastructure resilience, a critical uncertainty looms: the durability of U.S. security commitments they are currently depending on. Both countries face growing anx-

ity regarding American strategic reliability in an era marked by volatility, protectionist tendencies, and shifting strategic priorities.

For the Philippines, questions persist about U.S. strategic reliability despite repeated reassurances, illustrated by the imposition of tariffs on Philippine exports despite the declared strategic importance of the alliance. Yet the Philippines remains central to any U.S. strategies regarding Taiwan, which continues to define U.S.-Philippine bilateral relations. For Germany and Europe, U.S. strategic reorientation compounds existing security vulnerabilities and raises questions about American commitment to NATO and European security. This shared anxiety about American commitments compels both Germany and the Philippines to seek new models of burden sharing, diversify their partnerships to reduce unilateral dependencies, and strengthen strategic cooperation independent of U.S. guarantees.

7/ Taiwan and Baltic Contingencies

A Taiwan contingency emerged as a critical shared concern with far-reaching implications across both regions. For the Philippines, a potential crisis would trigger a humanitarian emergency requiring large-scale maritime evacuation of Filipino workers from Taiwan and mainland China, while simultaneously paralyzing Philippine decision-making and creating a massive influx of refugees. For Europe, a Taiwan conflict would severely disrupt supply chains and pose broader economic security risks through interruption of international trade routes.

The risk extends beyond regional boundaries. A U.S. shift of military resources to the Indo-Pacific would heighten the risk of Russian kinetic action against Baltic NATO members, potentially creating simultaneous crises in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Similar humanitarian and military pressures could emerge from a Baltic contingency, where Russian military aggression against Baltic states would trigger potential large-scale maritime evacuation requirements. These overlapping scenarios underscore the interconnected nature of regional security: escalation in one theatre directly impacts stability and resources in the other, leaving both Germany and the Philippines vulnerable to cascading crises.

8/ Key Maritime Threats, Drivers, and Responses: Philippines vs. Germany

⁴ The Philippines' Transparency Initiative, also known as assertive transparency, is a counter-grey-zone strategy that systematically exposes China's coercive maritime activities through public disclosure of visual evidence and incident documentation, and has become central to Philippine credibility and strategic deterrence in the South China Sea.

Threat Actors (Who presents a threat?)	Philippines → China → Multi-actor approach: Chinese Coast Guard, PLA Navy, maritime militia	Germany → Russia → Shadow fleet
Strategic Drivers and Objectives (Why do they present a threat?)	China seeks to → control critical sea lanes, critical underseas infrastructure (e.g., data cables) and maritime resources → consolidate territorial control over disputed maritime features → extend its geostrategic reach and geopolitical leverage	Russia seeks to → sustain its war in Ukraine → secure oil export shipping routes through Baltic and Arctic waters and evade Western sanctions → maintain operational freedom and sea control in Baltic region without NATO constraints → achieve strategic depth and protection from external influence → undermine Western unity and decision-making capacity
Maritime Security concerns (What threats do the actors present?)	For the Philippines China poses threat(s) to: → the territorial integrity and sovereignty over disputed maritime features → the livelihoods of Filipino fisherfolk → the control of critical maritime resources → critical submarine infrastructure → freedom of navigation in strategic sea lanes Non-traditional threats: Marine ecosystem degradation, fisheries decline, coastal development pressures, and transnational crime	For Germany Russia's shadow fleet and broader maritime operation poses: → threats to critical maritime infrastructure → environmental risks (oil spill) → threats of navigation system disruptions → risks of supply chain disruptions → potential military threats in case of conflict
Operational Methods and Tactics (How do they present a threat?)	Chinas grey zone tactics vis-à-vis the Philippines: → occupies features and builds artificial military installations in disputed territories within the Philippines EEZ → harassment of fishing and coast guard vessels including water cannons and ramming → intrusions into the Philippines territorial waters ⁵ → incremental territorial encroachment with multiple simultaneous operations to overwhelm Philippine Coast Guard capacity → cyber and disinformation campaigns	Russia's grey zone tactics vis-à-vis Germany / the EU: → sabotage operations targeting critical undersea infrastructure → deployment of the shadow fleet to facilitate oil exports and evade Western sanctions → navigation system disruptions → increased naval activity to create uncertainty and exert political pressure → information warfare

⁵ On October 12, 2025, China intruded for the first time into Philippine territorial waters within Pagasa Island, deploying water cannons and ramming a Philippine vessel deliv-ering assistance to fisherfolk as part of an anti-poverty program.

<p>Current Responses and Strategies (continued)</p>	<p>Philippines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Transparency Initiative: central strategy → exercise strategic restraint, avoiding military escalation → deterrence measures: installed missile systems → enhance MDA → diversify partnerships to reduce economic dependence on China and security dependence on the U.S. 	<p>Germany's / EU's response to maritime threats:</p> <p><i>National level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → In Germany port and critical maritime infrastructure protection is a domestic issue that falls primarily under the jurisdiction of the police → Across different EU countries responsibility remains fragmented between various national law enforcement and military authorities <p><i>EU level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Policy framework: EU Action Plan on Cable Security establishes cable protection requirements → Regulatory integration: NIS2 Directive integrates submarine cables into critical infrastructure protection framework → Coordination: High-level political coordination during damage incidents <p><i>Nato level</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Institutional coordination: Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO HQ → Operational Command: Maritime Centre for Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure → Field Presence: Commander Task Force Baltic → Active Operation: Operation Baltic Sentry⁶
<p>Capacity Gaps and Structural Vulnerabilities (What are the limitations of the current response strategy?)</p>	<p>Philippine Capacity Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → control critical sea lanes, critical underseas infrastructure (e.g., data cables) and maritime resources → consolidate territorial control over disputed maritime features → extend its geostrategic reach and geopolitical leverage <p>Structural Vulnerabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Uncertain policy continuity beyond 2028; institutional weaknesses and corruption undermine response effectiveness → Lack of regulatory frameworks for critical submarine infrastructure protection and seabed management <p>Constraints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Economic dependence on China (primary trade partner, critical infrastructure (electrical grid) investor) 	<p>Germany /EU Capacity Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Limited EU submarine cable repair vessels → limited naval presence relative to MDA requirements <p>Structural Vulnerabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Fragmented security landscape: port security primarily national police responsibility; unclear responsibility at sea-land interface → Limited data sharing among EU member states and between civil and military institutions; hesitation over operational details and intelligence sharing complicates cross-border operations → Implementation of the EU policy frameworks remains fragmented <p>Constraints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Data cable damage attribution and accountability issues → Baltic Sea: data cable choke point → Concerns about U.S. reliability and strategic commitments

⁶ Launched January 2025 to deter and monitor threats to undersea infrastructure, though resource demands raise sustainability questions

<p>Capacity Gaps and Structural Vulnerabilities (Continuation)</p>	<p>Constraints (continued):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → ASEAN division, weak enforcement, lack of unified protection for critical submarine infrastructure and preference for soft measures (capacity building) over hard measures (resource pooling) make grey zone activities low risk → Concerns about U.S. reliability and strategic commitments 	
<p>Emerging Threats and Future Challenges (What is next?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Taiwan Contingency → 2026 ASEAN Chairmanship challenges: maintaining ASEAN unity to enable unified responses to maritime threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Baltic Contingency → Taiwan Contingency: economic risks and potential simultaneous European and Indo-Pacific crises → Green energy transition will require more offshore installations and intensify infrastructure vulnerability

4.

Summary of Findings and Policy Recommendations

Foundation for Cooperation

Germany and the Philippines possess distinct but complementary capabilities that address gaps in each country's maritime security architecture. Germany can contribute technical expertise in critical infrastructure governance, standards development, and capacity-building on maritime domain awareness and cybersecurity. It also brings European experience in coordinating cross-border infrastructure protection and managing intelligence sharing on hybrid threats. The Philippines offers strategic geographic positioning within vital Indo-Pacific connectivity zones, established regional influence within ASEAN, and demonstrated experience with transparency initiatives as a response to grey zone tactics. The country's operational insights from navigating contested maritime environments and managing coalition-building among regional maritime states provide practical knowledge increasingly relevant to European security challenges.

This asymmetry of capabilities enables both countries to address specific vulnerabilities in their respective security frameworks. Germany's regulatory expertise and technology transfer capacity complement the Philippines' need for governance frameworks and infrastructure protection standards. The Philippines' regional leverage and transparency experience offer Germany and Europe valuable lessons for Baltic security operations. Bilateral cooperation can therefore leverage these complementarities to create targeted, practical initiatives that strengthen maritime resilience in both regions.

Key Considerations

Participants emphasized that successful bilateral cooperation between Germany and the Philippines should be targeted and practical. Rather than pursuing broad strategic initiatives that risk duplication with existing cooperation frameworks, the dialogue identified specific areas where cooperation can address real gaps and complement ongoing efforts with other partners.

While defence and security provide important entry points, lasting cooperation should extend to maritime governance, infrastructure resilience, economic security, and humanitarian issues to ensure sustainability. Philippine participants also noted that while the EU is increasingly compelled to assume security responsibilities, the EU's core strengths lie

in trade, economic security, technology transfer, the green transition, and human security. These areas should remain central to cooperation. Maritime security offers a practical space where both defence concerns and economic interests converge, enabling both countries to diversify their relations while building towards a multifaceted strategic partnership.

Guided by these considerations, the dialogue identified five areas to advance bilateral maritime cooperation.

1/ Seabed Mining, Resource Governance, and Marine Environmental Protection

The Philippines currently lacks comprehensive norms, standards, and policies governing seabed infrastructure management, particularly regarding seabed mining. Growing interest and external pressure to exploit seabed resources have been met with pushback due to the absence of a regulatory framework. Germany could provide concrete assistance by sharing expertise and best practices on developing national regulations that balance resource extraction with rigorous environmental standards.

This cooperation offers both economic and environmental incentives. Establishing sound governance frameworks would enable the Philippines to manage seabed resources responsibly while protecting marine ecosystems. Germany's experience in environmental regulation and marine resource management positions it well to support capacity building in this area. Such collaboration would address a critical gap in Philippine policy and create a foundation for sustainable ocean governance aligned with international environmental commitments.

2/ Protection of Critical Submarine Infrastructure

Submarine cables have not yet featured prominently in Philippine defence and security policy discussions with strategic partners, representing an important opportunity for bilateral cooperation. The dialogue identified cooperation opportunities at both the international and bilateral levels.

At the international level, participants proposed that Germany and the Philippines jointly advocate at the United Nations for classifying critical submarine infra-

structure as a global common or global public good. As influential states in their respective regions, both countries are well-positioned to initiate this debate. Establishing broader international recognition of submarine cables as essential and inviolable infrastructure would strengthen protections and norms governing their security.

At the bilateral level, Germany and the Philippines should establish a dedicated dialogue among decision-makers focused on protecting critical submarine infrastructure. This dialogue should aim to develop repair and reporting protocols for damaged submarine cables and explore technological cooperation on cable protection and cyber defence. The Philippines could benefit significantly from adopting European best practices on protecting maritime critical infrastructure.

3/ Countering Cognitive Warfare, Misinformation Campaigns, and Grey Zone Tactics

Responding to cognitive warfare, disinformation, and grey zone tactics employed by third countries represents a critical area for bilateral learning and cooperation. The Philippine transparency initiative, which publicly exposes Chinese incursions in its EEZ and illegal activities in the South China Sea, offers valuable lessons for countering maritime grey zone activities. Europe, facing similar challenges in the Baltic Sea, could benefit from understanding the Philippine experience in transparency and public exposure as part of its response strategy.

Both regions could also benefit from exchanging best practices on preventing interference and disinformation in the cognitive realm. Germany and the Philippines should establish mechanisms for sharing experiences and strategies on countering disinformation, cognitive manipulation, and hybrid threats. This includes learning what has proven effective in each region and adapting approaches to local contexts. Cooperation in this domain strengthens democratic resilience and helps both countries navigate the challenges posed by sophisticated information operations targeting their societies and institutions. A key consideration is that subnational governments do not always share the threat assessments of national authorities. Bilateral cooperation must adopt nuanced approaches that account for these gaps and build resilience at multiple levels of governance.

4/ Information Sharing

Effective information sharing remains a persistent challenge for both countries and within the EU and ASEAN. Participants identified significant room for improvement in accessing, sharing, and coordinating information among national agencies and across regional organisations.

Germany and the Philippines can learn from each other's experiences in building robust information-sharing infrastructures. Key questions include how to facilitate timely and secure information exchange between governments, how to coordinate among multiple national agencies with overlapping responsibilities, and how to engage private sector stakeholders who control critical maritime infrastructure. Addressing these challenges requires both technical solutions and institutional frameworks that build trust and ensure operational effectiveness.

5/ Humanitarian Preparedness and Contingency Planning

Humanitarian preparedness for potential regional crises stood out as critical area for mutual learning and cooperation. Both Germany and the Philippines face potential scenarios requiring large-scale evacuations and refugee management: a Taiwan contingency for the Philippines, and a Baltic states contingency for Europe.

In a Taiwan crisis, the Philippines would confront a challenging political situation involving Filipino workers in Taiwan and mainland China, alongside the massive humanitarian emergency of facilitating maritime evacuations and dealing with a large influx of refugees. Similarly, a crisis in the Baltic region would require Germany and European partners to conduct maritime evacuations of civilians and potentially wounded troops. Both scenarios present logistical and infrastructure challenges, demanding careful planning for the safe maritime evacuation of large numbers, including those needing medical care, and ensuring adequate facilities such as hospitals and shelters.

To effectively address these challenges, participants recommended Germany and the Philippines to collaborate on foresight workshops and capacity-building initiatives focused on contingency planning. Key areas of interest include identifying resources and actors to mobilize during crises, developing maritime evacuation protocols including the use of civilian vessels, and ensuring adequate health services and infrastructure for evacuees. Despite differing geographic conditions, the Philippines could benefit from Germany's recent experience in managing refugee crisis. Such joint efforts will enhance preparedness, align strategic interests, and strengthen bilateral coordination.

Results of the Track 1.5 2025 Germany-Philippines Strategic Dialogue

Maritime Security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific

Fostering Stronger Cooperation Between Germany and the Philippines

Global supply chains and digital connectivity face unprecedented peril. The 2025 Strategic Dialogue Report details how the security fate of Germany and the Philippines is now fundamentally linked by shared threats to critical undersea infrastructure and coercive tactics in both the Baltic Sea and the South China Sea. With regional stability eroding and great power competition intensifying, both nations must rapidly diversify their security architectures away from uncertain U.S. commitments. The findings outline a pragmatic five-point plan to build resilience, leveraging German technical expertise in governance and the Philippines' operational insights into countering grey zone strategies. This report is essential reading for understanding the cascading economic risks a major regional contingency poses and the urgent new cooperation required to safeguard the world's vital maritime commons and economic arteries.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

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