

Speech delivered by  
**Rep. Edcel C. Lagman** during the Parallel Session on ***Great Power Competition, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea Disputes)***  
on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats [CALD] in Taipei, Taiwan  
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The history of nations is punctuated by the intense rivalry for expansion and power from ancient times, to the Persian and Roman empires, to the European nations' quest for colonies in Asia and the Americas, the Napoleonic wars, and down to the present day powerplay between United States and China in the West Philippine Sea (also known as the South China Sea) and the Taiwan Straits, disturbing the geopolitical landscape in Southeast Asia and East Asia.

On July 12, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration unequivocally awarded to the Philippines most of the territories in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) which were declared part of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This decision was based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the regime of rule-based international order.

Accordingly, China's nine-dash line which asserted ownership over the vast and mineral-rich WPS was rejected as spurious with finality.

However, China has contumaciously defied the arbitral decision by:

1. Continuing its occupancy of areas declared under the Philippine sovereignty and ownership;

2. Amassing additional areas;
3. Building structures and military facilities in areas it reclaimed in the WPS;
4. Prohibiting fishing by Filipinos in the adjudicated areas awarded to the Philippines; and
5. Obstructing navigation and transit in the WPS.

China just recently disclosed a new map which it denominated as its 10-dash line expanding its pretentious claims in the WPS. This new spurious map has been rejected by most Southeast Asian nations and Asian countries.

It needs emphasis that the enforcement of the arbitral award in favor of the Philippines has growing international support. All G-7 countries, and many European Union member nations; Australia; and India have expressed their support. They have vowed to help the Philippines enforce the award by stopping China's recidivist defiance of the arbitral decision and its continuing incursions and militarization in the West Philippine Sea.

### Brief History of the Taiwan Strait Crises

The Taiwan Strait crises refer to a series of tense situations and conflicts that have occurred between China and Taiwan over the status and sovereignty of Taiwan and its surrounding waters.

This is not one crisis but a series of military actions instigated by China.

The Taiwan Strait's importance is directly linked to its strategic location:

(1) It is a vital global maritime trade route, linking the East China Sea and the West Philippine Sea.

(2) It is strategically positioned and connects the western Pacific Ocean to the east and Southeast Asian regions.

(3) It is a foothold with enormous national security implications for China.

(4) Lastly, it has implications for international relations, particularly with regard to the US. Any crisis or conflict in the Strait could affect US relations with China and other regional powers.

### **US vs. China: two giants face-off for dominance in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific**

As the two economic giants and military superpowers face-off for dominance, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Indo-Pacific have become hotbeds for powerplay and increasing rivalry between the two nations.

Both countries are vying for control and influence in these regions. This competition has significant implications on the security and stability of the regions and beyond.

With 10 countries and a combined 655 million people, the Southeast Asian region is the world's third largest population, the fifth largest economy, and a top investment and export destination of both the US and China.

The major protagonists, the United States and China, maintain and expand their respective military and economic presence and influence in the Southeast and East Asian regions as they struggle for regional hegemony even as their ambitions inflame tension in the regions.

While the said regions continue to be a battleground between these two giants, individual nations must always stand their ground when it comes to: (1) their sovereignty and independence; (2) economic deals based on fair and transparent trade agreements; and (3) adherence to the international rule of law, democracy, and liberalism.

The strategic maneuverings of the US and China and their implications are also keenly felt by Taiwan. Its security is a major concern in this power struggle.

### Taiwan Strait and the West Philippine Sea

Although not mirror images of each other, Taiwan Straits Crisis and the territorial claims of China and the Philippines over islands in the WPS have several stark similarities.

Like in the Taiwan Strait crises, the dispute over the WPS revolves around territorial claims, maritime rights, and marine and petroleum resources.

There have also been instances of military aggression, including China's brazen occupation of disputed islands, incidents at sea, and the construction of military installations by China.

But one major difference is that the Philippines initiated arbitration action against China, which it eventually won and is now final and executory.

The Philippines needs to expand its military alliances with friendly nations in order to deter further maritime terrorism in the WPS.

Resort to diplomacy fortifies peace. The initial and principal response is diplomacy and dialogue. We must seek consensus, not conflict. We must, perforce, strive for peace in the regions and help maintain the balance of power, or balance of terror, if you may, between the United States and China.

If the fragile balance is superseded by the ascendancy of one of the superpowers, which is known for its hostility against libertarian values and democratic ideals, the CALD will not be allowed to flourish and celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary 10 years from now.

I am not saying that the other protagonist does not have its own share of aberrations.

But how do we pursue diplomacy and dialogue with a recidivist aggressor which rejects the rule of law and CALD's cherished missions?

It is time for the Philippines to consider requesting kindred nations like the United States, Japan, Germany, Canada, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Australia, India, and other European Union countries to enforce calibrated economic sanctions on errant China so that it would honor the final arbitral award in favor of the Philippines over its Exclusive Economic Zone of maritime territories

known as the West Philippine Sea, and stop its military intervention in the Taiwan Strait.

Economic sanctions will fall hard on China at this time when it is threatened by an impending economic meltdown.

No amount of diplomatic protest and discourse can tame a recalcitrant bully. We must seek non-military recourse with the help of kindred nations.

Exhortations on democracy and liberalism, now truisms, may become motherhood statements if China continues and succeeds in its aggression in the Southeast Asian and East Asian Regions.

Thank you.