

What to Expect from the Trump Administration 2.0: Focus on the South China Sea and the Philippines-U.S. Alliance



Introduction

- Since taking over the Presidency in January 2025, President Donald Trump has implemented a foreign policy that has been characterized as chaotic and hardball.



Introduction



- Pursuing a peace deal with Russia at the expense of Ukraine and U.S. NATO allies in the Euro-Atlantic Area.

Introduction

- **Disparaging comments against key U.S. allies at NATO and pushing them to increase their defense spending.**



Introduction



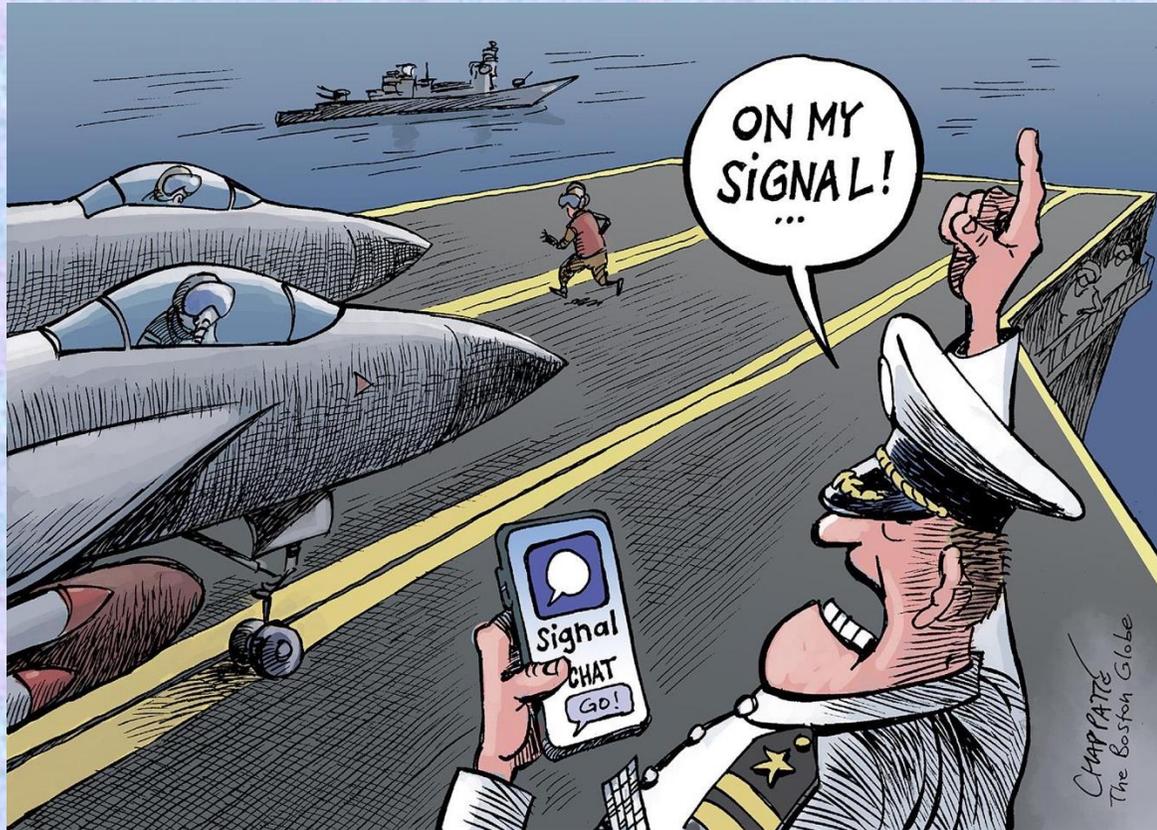
- Threatening U.S. allies in NATO about the withdrawal of American troops from Europe and the abrogation of Washington's treaty obligation in the 1949 Washington Treaty creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Introduction

- Secretary Pete Hegseth's speech at the Daniel Inouye Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies which called for the U.S. and its allies to deter China and if deterrence fails, prepare for a possible armed conflict with Beijing.



Introduction



- The 2025 U.S. Annual Threat Assessment points out that China stands out as the one “most capable of threatening U.S. interest globally.

Introduction

- **The U.S.-Philippine Joint Statement on Secretary Pete Hegseth's Inaugural Visit to the Philippines declares both allies to establish deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region and achieve Peace Through Strength.**



Introduction



- Secretary Hegseth announced that the DOD has started phase one of upgrading U.S. Forces Japan to a joint force headquarters, which has upgraded from an administrative to a warfighting headquarters with operational capabilities.

Introduction

- The U.S.F.J. will operate with Japan's Joint Operations Command, which the Japanese government established in 2024 to command the three branches of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces—Maritime Self-Defense Force, Ground Self-Defense Forces, and the Air Self-Defense Forces.



Introduction



- The Internal DOD document labeled as the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance details the Trump Administration's strategic vision to prepare for and win a potential war against Beijing and defend the United States from threats soon, including Greenland and the Panama Canal.

Introduction

- The document reorients the U.S. military to prioritize deterring China's seizure of Taiwan and shoring up homeland defense by assuming risk in Europe and other parts of Europe.

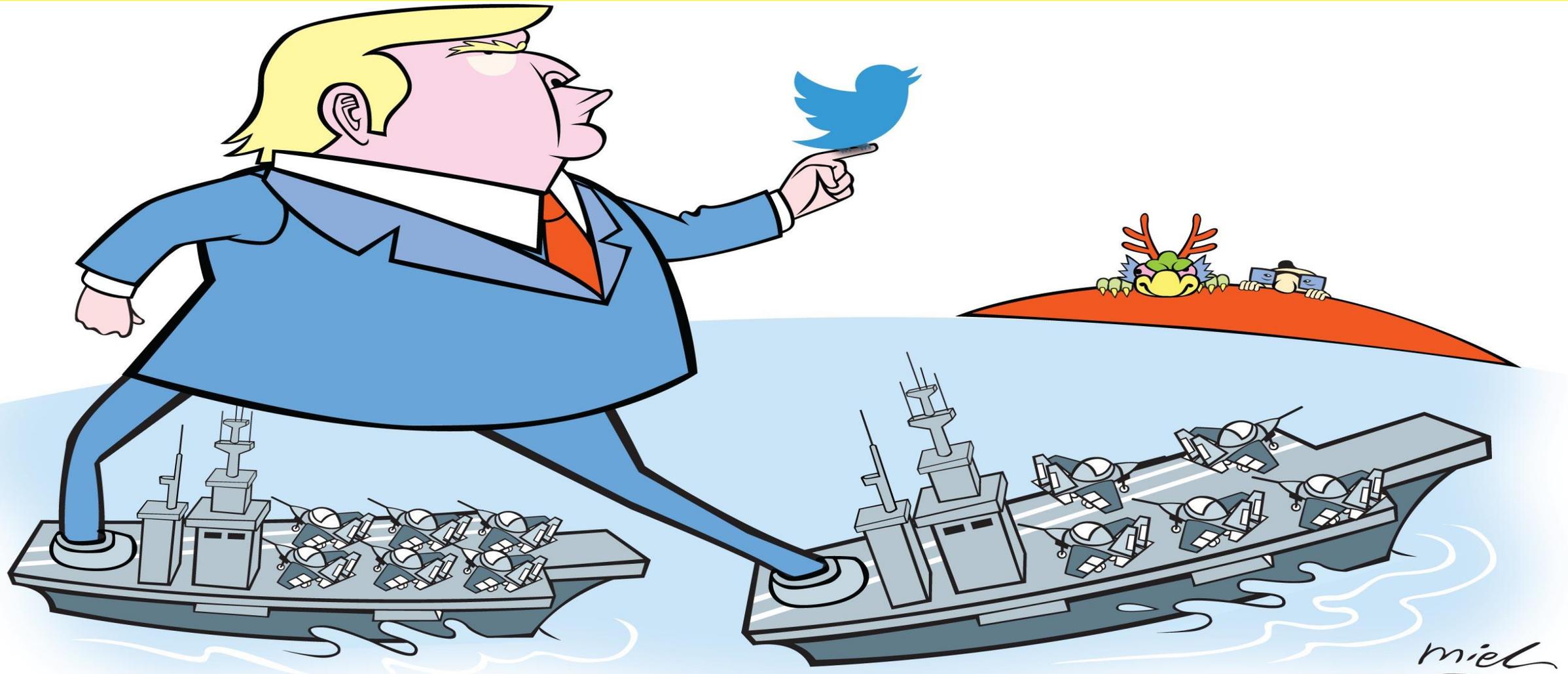


Introduction



- The document guides and directs the U.S. military and American allies by providing an extraordinary description of the potential invasion of Taiwan as the exclusive animating scenario that must be prioritized over other potential dangers.

A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific



A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The first Trump Administration focused on protecting U.S. interests and bolstering its influence to counter Chinese efforts to undermine liberal-democratic values and the rules-based global order.

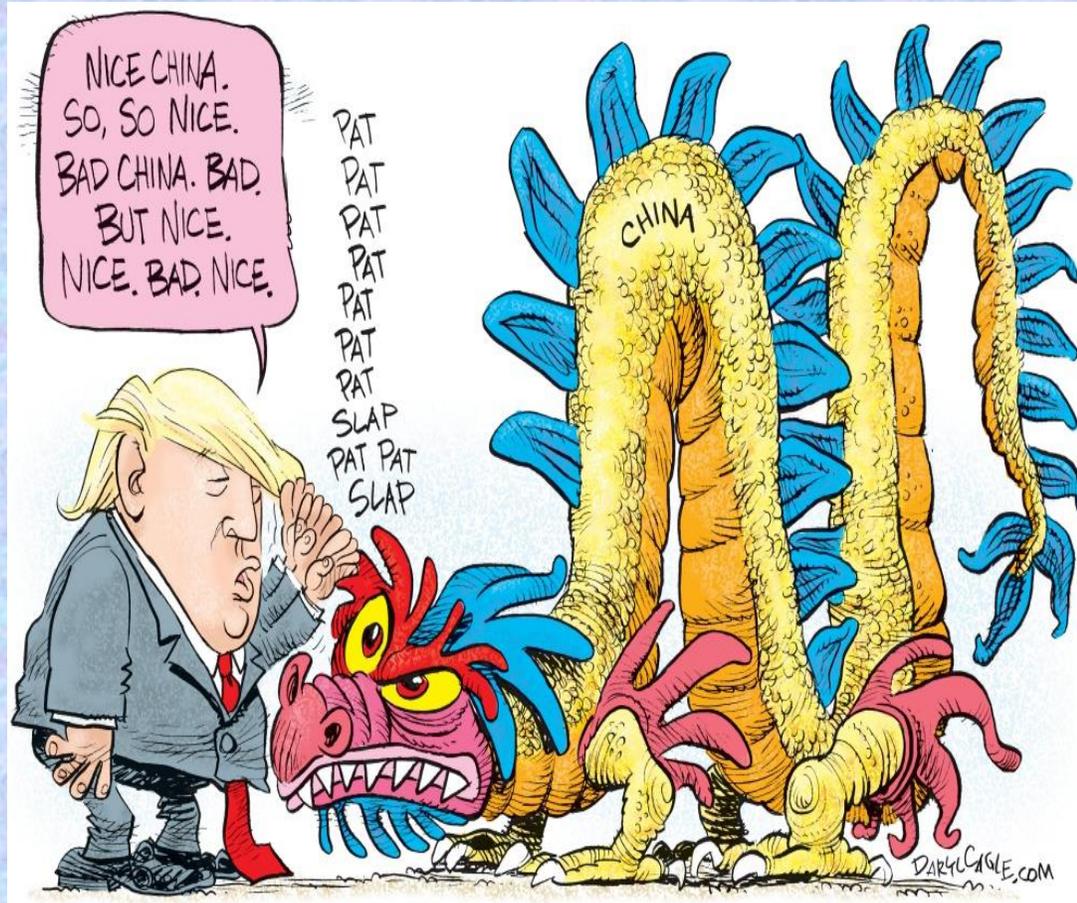


A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific



- **This is reflected by Washington's growing concern over the South China Sea dispute during the First Trump Administration.**

A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific



The idea of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” was first used by President Donald Trump in his 10 November 2017 speech during the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC) summit in Hanoi, Vietnam, when criticized China for “using its economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda.”

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On 18 December 2017, the Trump Administration released the “*National Security Strategy (NSS)*,” which provides the overview for his administration’s national security threats and the blueprint on how it will address these threats and in January 2017, the DOD came out with the unclassified portion of the “*National Defense Strategy (NDS)*,” which describes how the defense department’s strategic goals and capabilities will be directed to support the *NSS*’ objectives.



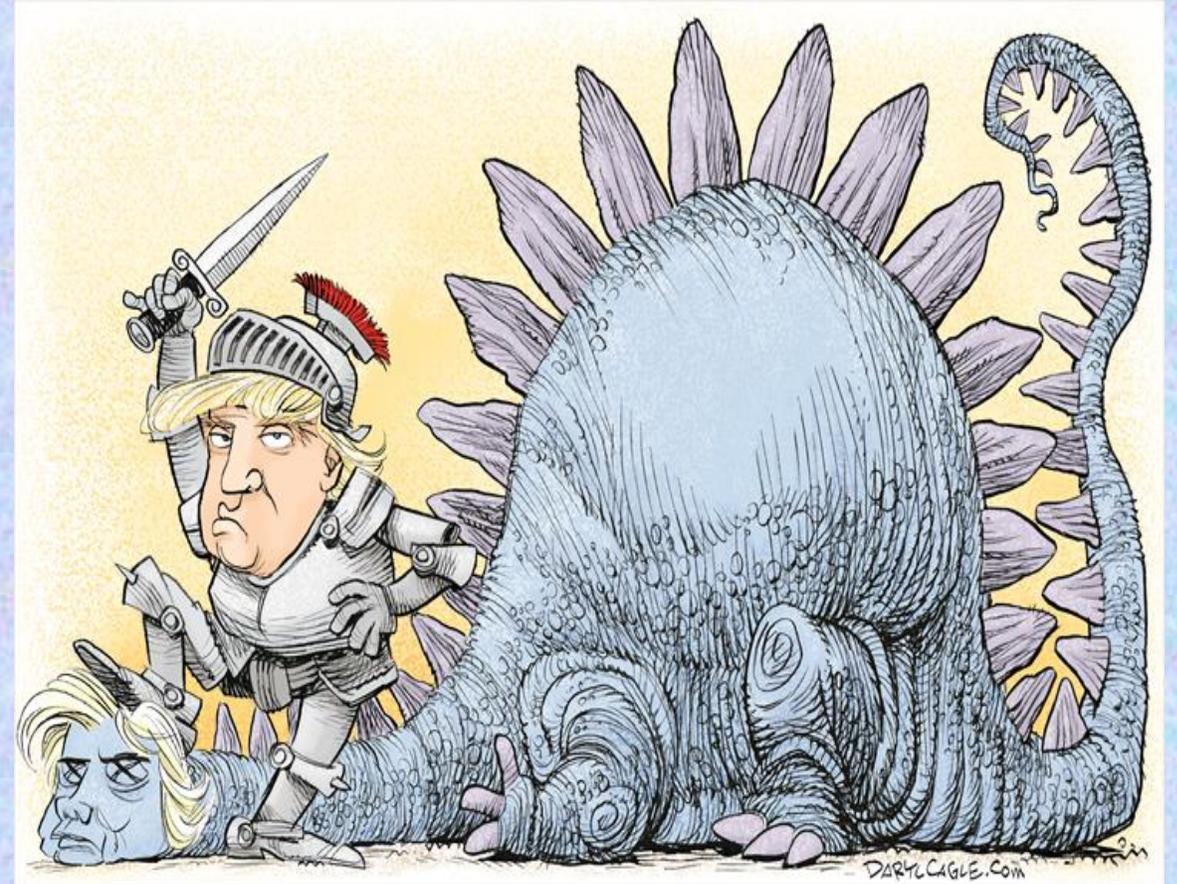
A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific



Both documents claimed that two regional powers, China and Russia, want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian values, and in the process, replace the free and open order that has enabled global security and prosperity since the Second World War II.

A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific

- **The two documents are open declarations by the U.S. to confront China in a highly competitive great game in the Indo-Pacific region.**



A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Starting in 2017, the Trump Administration reworked on the Obama Administration's rebalancing policy by treating China as a strategic competitor rather than a potential and responsible stakeholder, and in the process, it abandoned any delusion of power-sharing with China.



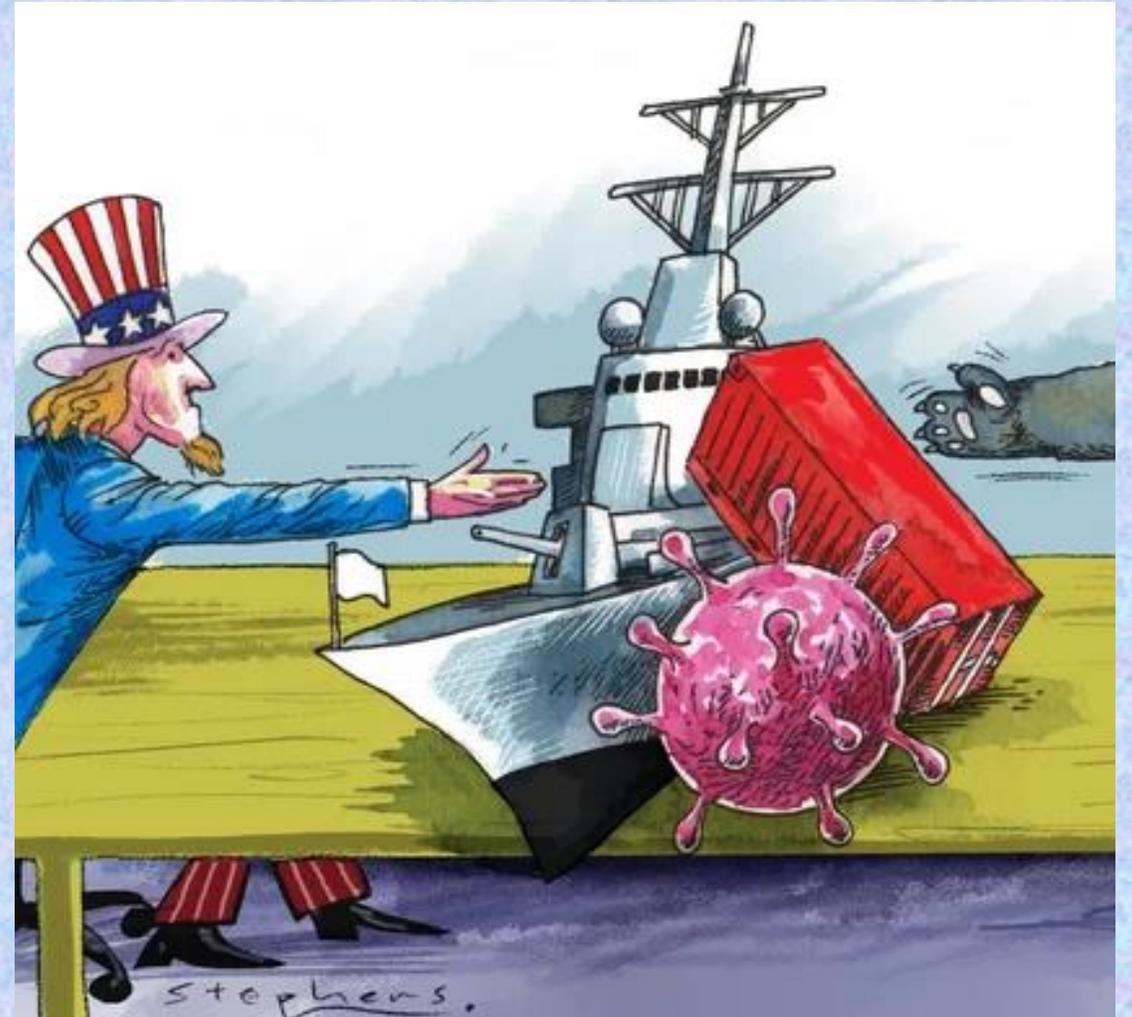
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The Trump Administration saw no need to integrate China into the liberal world order; as it considered China's actions and goals as major destabilizing elements in the Indo-Pacific region.

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The 2019 DoD report recommended the “strengthening and evolving U.S. alliances and partnerships into a networked security architecture to uphold the international rules-based order, while also continuing to cultivate intra-Asian security relationships capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains.”

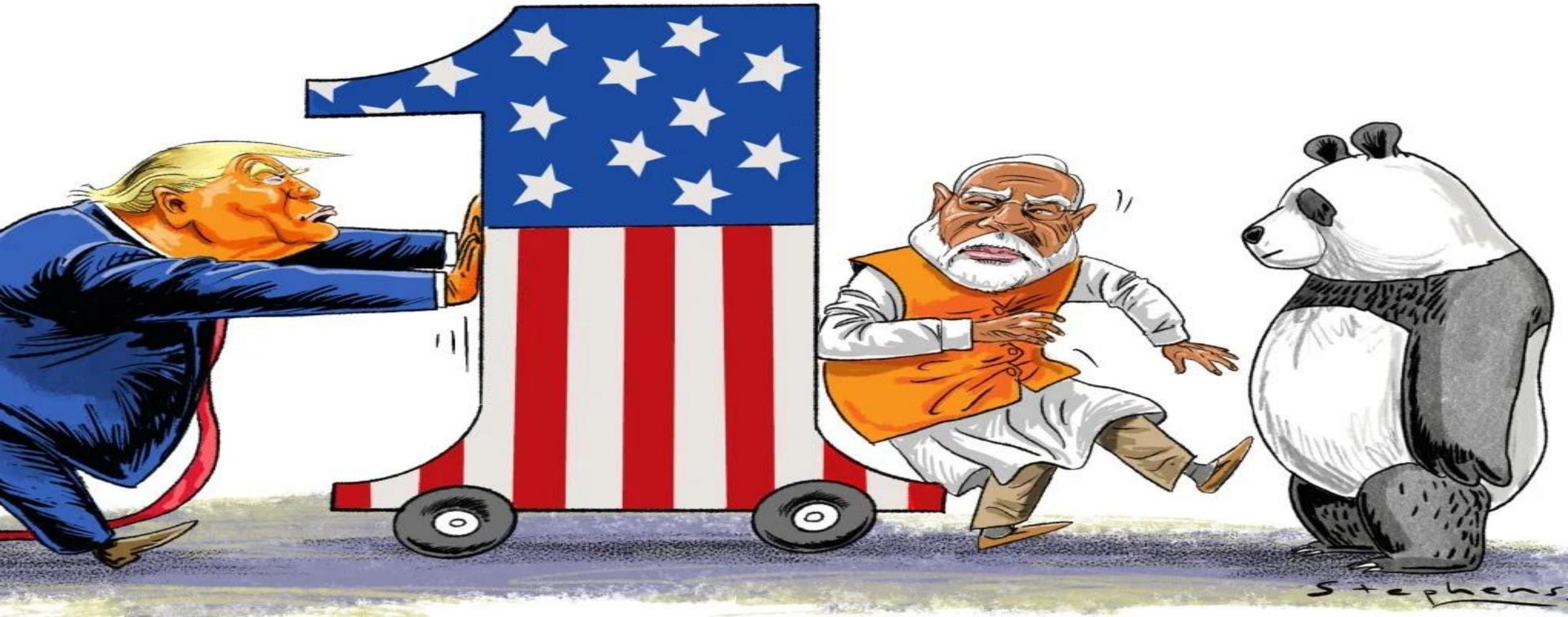


A Continuation of the Trump Administration 1.0's Free and Open Indo-Pacific



In June 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) released its *Indo-Pacific Report*, which pointed to China as the U.S.'s primary security challenge since the former is a revisionist power that seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations.

The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition



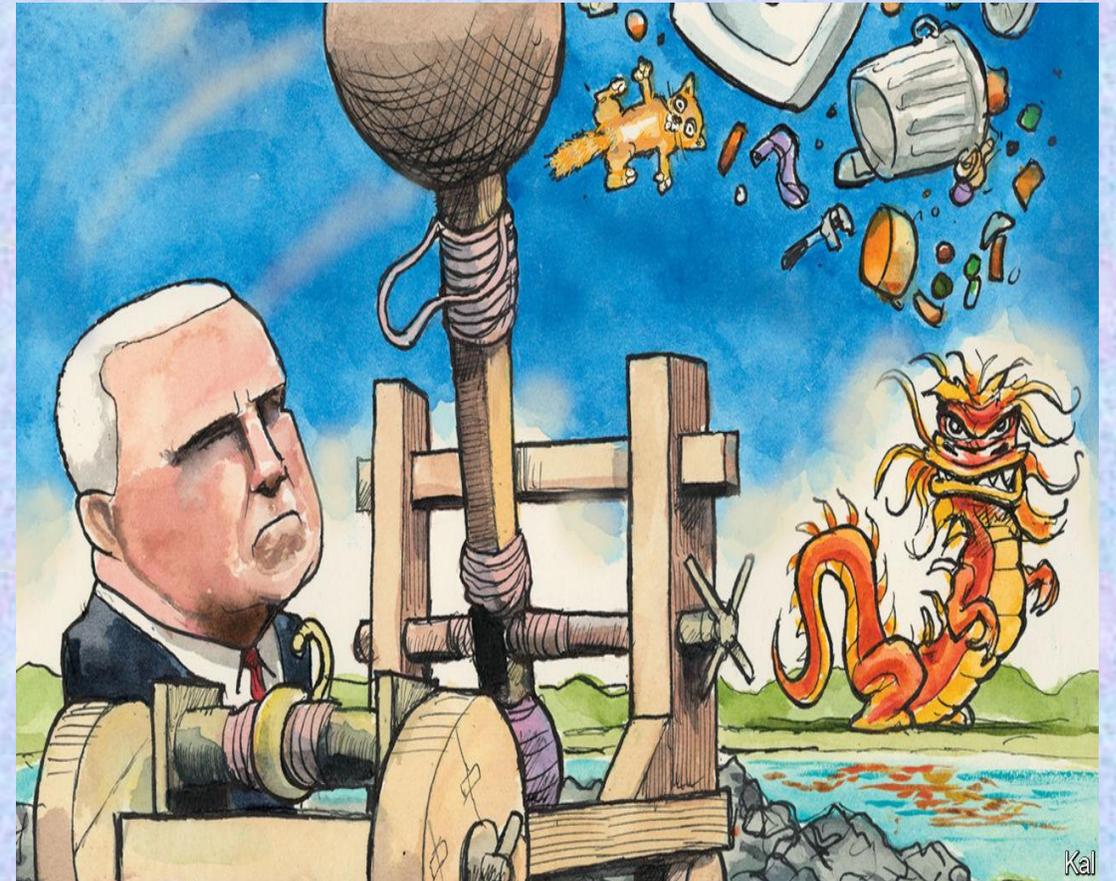
The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition



- The DOD's Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance is largely based on the conservative think-tank Heritage Foundation's *The Prioritization Imperative: A Strategy to Defend America's Interests in a More Dangerous World*.

The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition

- It provides a realist assessment that the U.S. military can no longer deter China, and the risk of a third world war is rising.



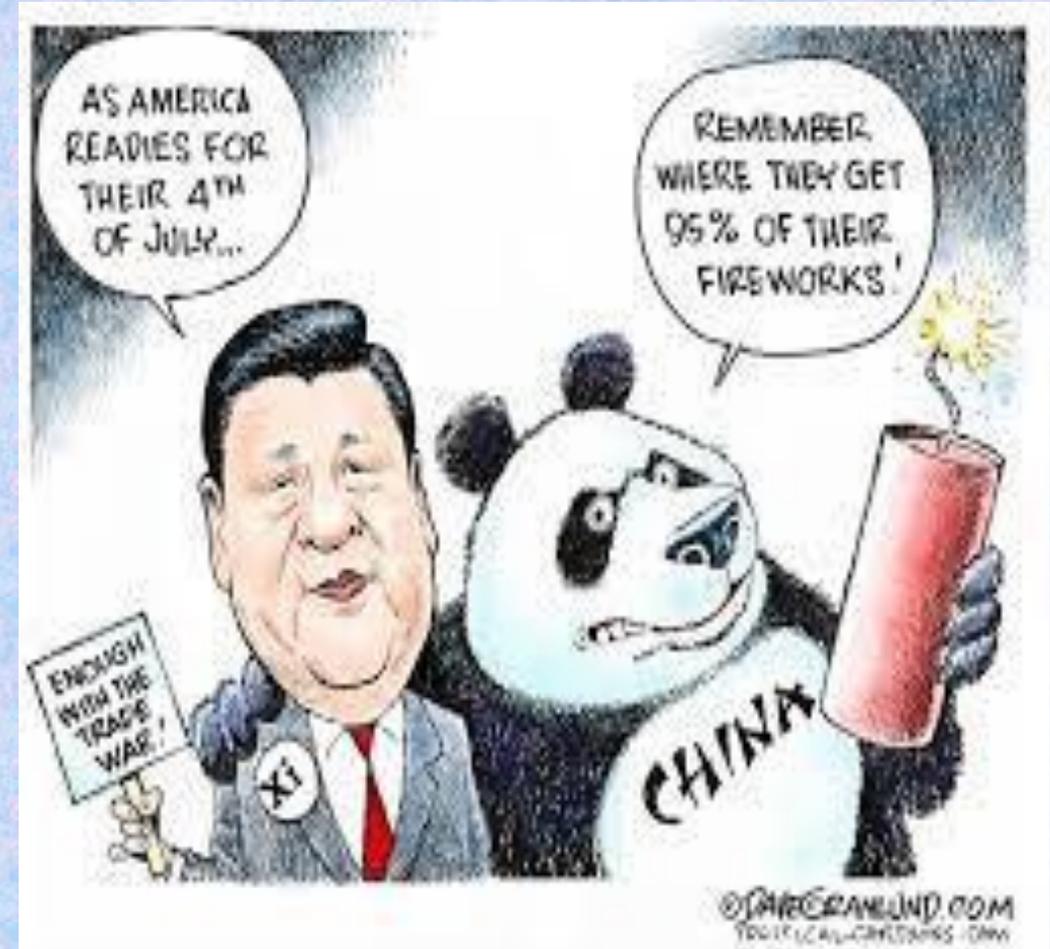
The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition



- It offers a strategy of selective defense that prioritizes the U.S. Homeland and denies China's imperial ambition in the Indo-Pacific, most urgently deterring Beijing from invading Taiwan.

The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition

- The U.S. has strong interest in preventing China from dominating the Indo-Pacific region.



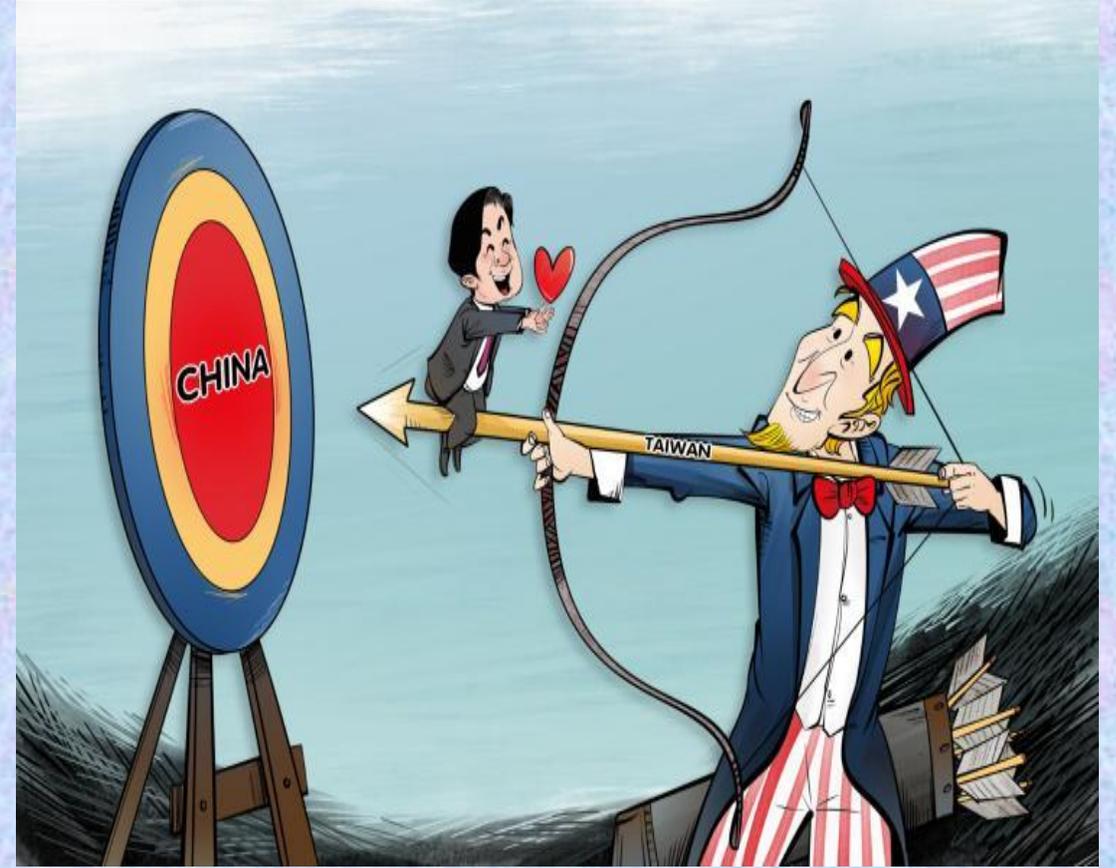
The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition



- The U.S. military is designed to fight and win only one major war at a time.

The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition

- The U.S. can only focus its armed forces on defending the American homeland and denying China's imperial ambition, most urgently by deterring Beijing from invading Taiwan and offering the President credible options if deterrence fails.



The Trump Administration 2.0's Grand Strategy in the U.S.-China Strategic Competition



- The U.S. should empower allies and partners to lead efforts to defend against other regional challengers to American interests, such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance



Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance



In late 2016, former President Duterte was determined to foster closer economic and military ties with China and Russia while empathetically threatening to sever the Philippines's long-standing alliance with the U.S.

Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

Confronted by this dire situation in the Philippine-U.S. alliance, the Trump Administration adopted a policy of strategic patience to the Duterte Administration.



Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

This policy entailed key U.S. policy-makers exercising patience, and maintaining focused on the long-term interest of both countries to keep their alliance intact; despite, President Duterte's skepticism on the value of the Philippine-U.S. security relations, and his intention to gravitate closer to China.



Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance



This also involved maintaining robust security cooperation between the AFP and the U.S. armed services albeit a refocused security agenda, such as shifting away from external defense and maritime security to counter-terrorism, and Humanitarian Assistance and Risk Reduction (HADR).

Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

The Trump Administration's policy of strategic patience required addressing the Philippines' doubts or even cynicism on whether or not the U.S. would extend its treaty commitments to cover AFP units deployed in the South China Sea; while at the same time, tolerating the Philippines' gambit to explore forging closer economic and diplomatic relations with the U.S.'s great power rival—China.



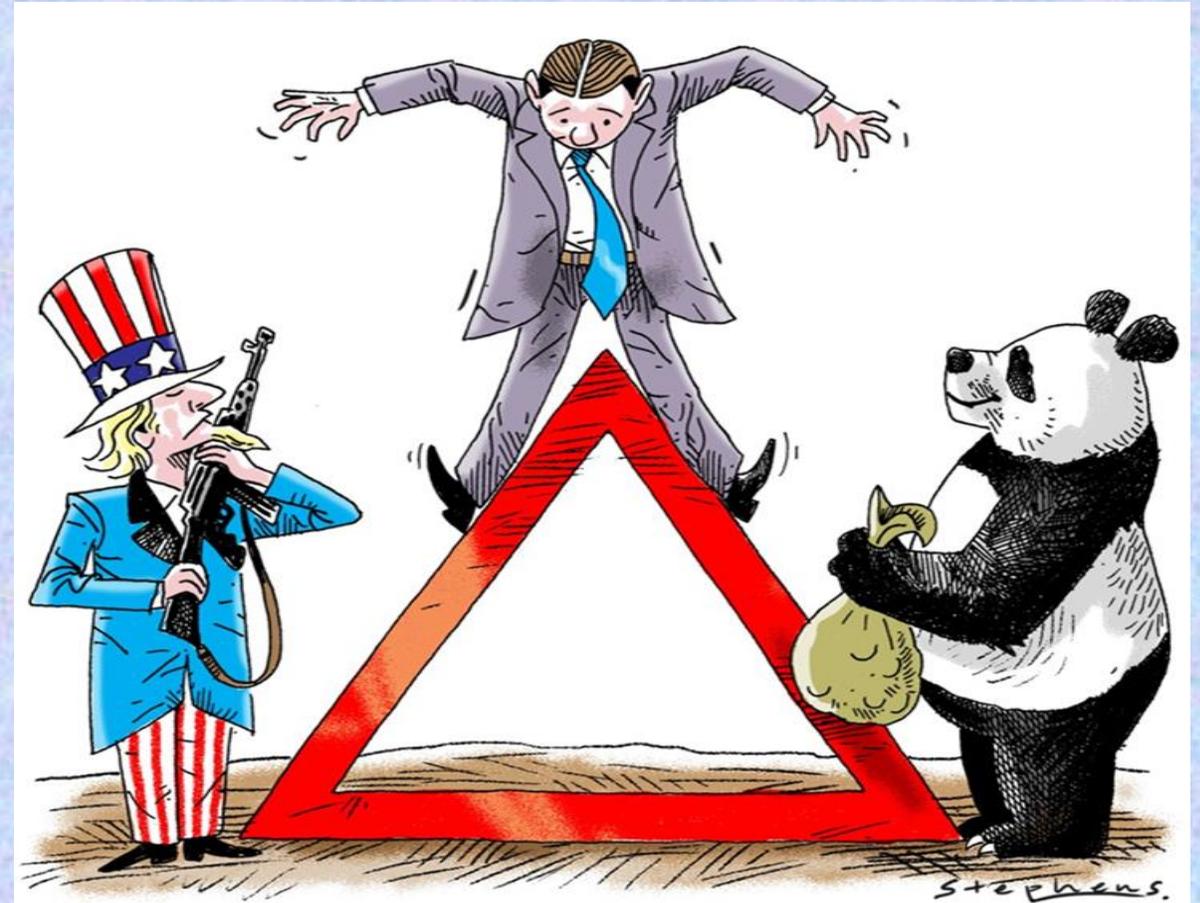
Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

In the face of the Philippine-China rapprochement; during the Trump Administration, the management of the U.S.-Philippine alliance depended on two key security issues—the South China Sea dispute and the growing ISIS threat in Mindanao.



Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

During the Trump Administration, the Philippine-U.S. alliance has been kept intact despite Duterte's keenness to boost Philippine economic and diplomatic ties with China irrespective of the U.S.-China strategic competition.

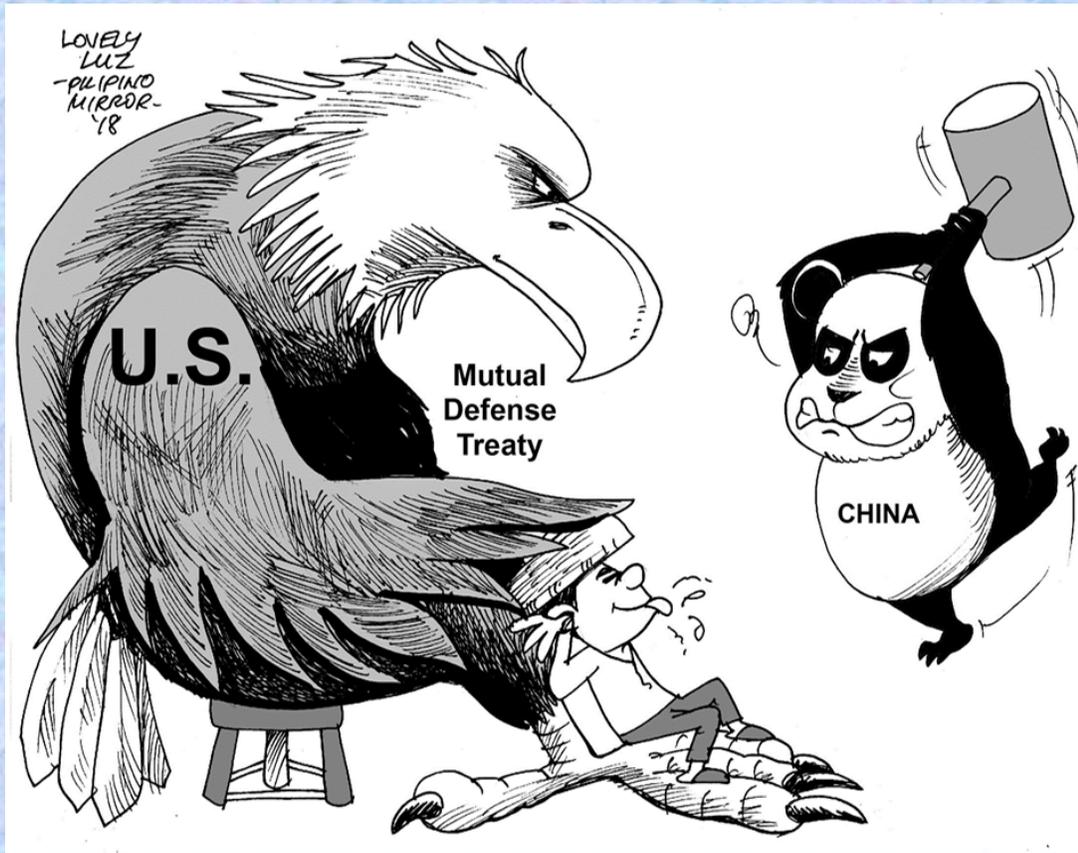


Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

- **The reaffirmation of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.**



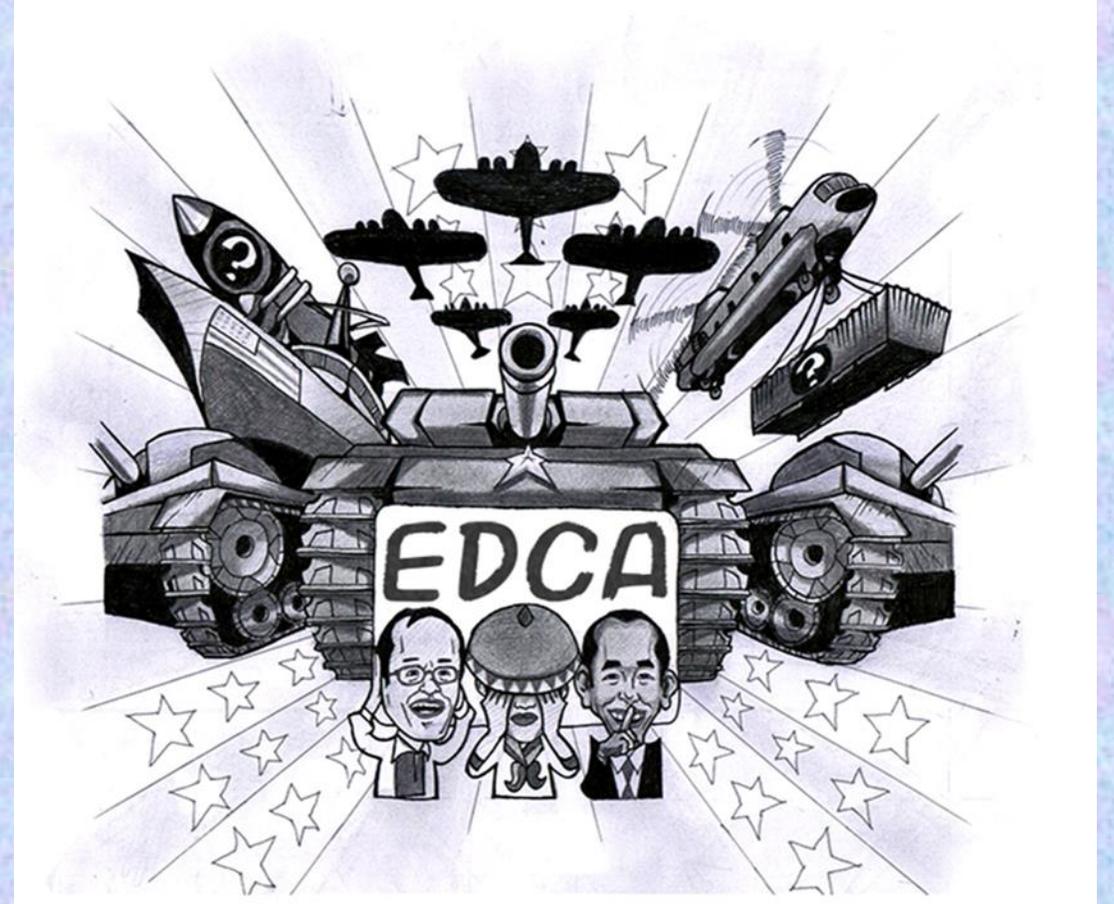
Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance



- Deployment of more advanced military capabilities in the Philippines.

Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance

- **The conduct of advanced and full battle-stimulated military exercises between the U.S., the Philippines, and, recently Japan.**



Implications on the Philippine-U.S. Alliance



- **Development of defense industrial cooperation between the U.S. and the Philippines.**

Conclusion



Conclusion

- The U.S. will encourage and support the Philippines in its efforts to develop its deterrence capabilities vis-à-vis China through reaffirming the U.S. treaty obligation under the MDT, deployment of more American strategic weapon system in the country, joint military training, and arms transfers.



Conclusion



- A more intense and closer Philippine-U.S. alliance will facilitate the Philippines' implementation of the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Concept (CADC).

Conclusion

- **Closer Philippine-U.S. relations will lead to further deterioration in Philippine-China relations.**



Conclusion



- This, in turn, will further isolate the Philippines from most of the ASEAN member-states, all of which maintain close economic and diplomatic relations with China.

Thank you
very much
for your
attention!

