

Japan signs new defense agreements with the Philippines

John Malvar**21 January 2026**

On January 15, Japan and the Philippines signed two new defense agreements in Manila, deepening the integration of Japanese forces into the US-led alliance system preparing for war with China in the Asia-Pacific. Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi met with Philippine Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro to conclude an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) and an Official Security Assistance pact.

The ACSA enables the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to provide each other with ammunition, fuel, food and other supplies on a tax-free basis during training, joint operations, disaster response and related activities. The parallel \$US6 million security assistance arrangement commits Tokyo to funding construction of storage facilities and boathouses for Japanese-donated patrol craft.

Both governments framed the agreements as responses to “increasingly severe” security conditions and “unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force” in the East and South China Seas—diplomatic language aimed squarely at China.

The January agreements build directly on the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement signed in July 2024 and ratified by the Philippine Senate in December 2024. The Philippines is the first country in Asia to sign such a pact with Tokyo.

The spectacle of Japanese forces preparing to operate from Philippine soil has profound historical significance. Both the United States and Japan subjected the Philippines to brutal colonial rule in the twentieth century. Washington conquered the Philippines in a bloody war that killed hundreds of thousands. Japan’s wartime occupation ravaged the archipelago. Manila was one of the most devastated

capital cities of World War II, along with Berlin and Warsaw. Now, the two former rulers are back, in tandem, embedding their militaries in Philippine bases in preparation for a new and even more catastrophic war.

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun responded to the new military deal between Tokyo and Manila, stating, “All peace-loving countries and peoples should firmly oppose the revival of Japanese militarism and its ‘re-militarisation.’”

The new Japan-Philippines pacts form part of a rapidly thickening web of Status of Visiting Forces Agreements (SOVFAs) binding Manila to Washington and its allies. Australia already has an SOVFA with the Philippines, signed in 2007 and ratified in 2012. In August 2025, Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles and Philippine Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro announced plans to sign a new, upgraded defense agreement in 2026 that will include the construction, upgrade and maintenance of eight defense infrastructure projects at five locations on Luzon, modeled on the framework established by the US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).

Over the past two years, the Philippines concluded or advanced SOVFA-type accords with New Zealand and Canada. In April 2025, the Marcos administration signed an SOVFA with New Zealand; by November 2025, Canada became the fifth country with a visiting-forces agreement, explicitly presented as a response to “rising tensions” in the South China Sea. Negotiations are underway with France and other nations as Philippine officials openly tout building an “alliance network” against China.

These agreements dovetail with EDCA, which grants American forces military basing facilities at numerous locations throughout the country, particularly in

Palawan and northern Luzon. EDCA is an executive agreement presenting the basing of US troops as a “rotational presence” that bypassed legislative ratification. The terms authorize unlimited US troops to “agreed locations” governed entirely by the United States. Filipinos are not allowed entry. The facilities are rent-free and US troops are immune from Philippine law.

In August 2025, US Indo-Pacific Command and the AFP approved an “8-Star” plan for over 500 joint military activities in 2026. At the center stands Balikatan 2026, the largest combat exercise staged in Southeast Asia, prepared as a multi-domain war rehearsal involving land, sea, air, cyber and space operations.

Recent iterations of Balikatan have taken place in the northernmost Batanes islands, just across the Bashi Channel from Taiwan. There, US and Philippine forces have deployed anti-ship missile systems and rehearsed amphibious landings.

It was in the context of Balikatan 2024 that the US first deployed its Typhon missile system—capable of firing SM-6 and Tomahawk missiles—to the Philippines, marking a major step in the integration of the archipelago into US war plans. Ostensibly brought into the country for training exercises, the missile batteries have remained in the Philippines.

From northern Luzon, Typhon can strike targets across the South China Sea, the Luzon Strait and deep into mainland China, including coastal provinces such as Guangdong and Fujian, and with the capacity to reach as far as Beijing.

What is being created is a layered offensive network: land-based missiles, naval and air forces, and island bases from Japan through Taiwan to the Philippines, all linked by joint command structures and logistics pacts. The re-emergence of Japanese militarism is an integral part of these preparations.

The entire alliance structure is cloaked in the rhetoric of a “rules-based” or “law-governed” world order supervised and protected by Washington. At a press conference on December 31, 2025, Defense Secretary Teodoro denounced China’s “aggression,” and stated that the Philippines sought to uphold a “free, open, stable and rules-based Indo-Pacific where differences are resolved through peaceful means without deception, coercion or intimidation.”

The hypocrisy of such claims is staggering. The lynchpin to these whirling claims of “rules,” “freedom” and “peace” is Washington, the White House and Donald Trump.

While Japan and the Philippines inked the military deals claiming to uphold law, Trump ordered airstrikes on Venezuela and a special forces raid that abducted President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, flying them to the United States to face drug-trafficking charges—a flagrant act of imperialist banditry. He openly threatened to seize Greenland “the hard way” if Denmark refuses to hand over the territory, declaring that the US can “do what we want on Greenland whether they like it or not.” ?

Washington asserts a limitless right to bomb other countries, abduct the head of a sovereign state, annex vast territories by force, and yet it lectures China on respect for international law and demands that its allies “deter” Beijing in the name of a “rules-based order.”



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