



Péter Klemensits: Southeast Asia at the Crossroads of Major Power Interests. The Example of the Philippines in Light of Marcos' Foreign Policy¹

Executive Summary

- Like other Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines is caught in a balance between the United States and China. In the area of security, US protection is indispensable, while in the area of the economy there is no alternative to partnership with China.
- After former President Rodrigo Duterte's opening towards China did not bring the desired results, Marcos committed to a closer partnership with Washington as part of his "independent" foreign policy.
- The Trump administration's policy has also emphasised the risks of working with the US, but Marcos is walking a fine line, trying to combine elements of previous foreign policy strategies that have proven successful.
- China is playing a wait-and-see game, and is not interested in making concessions to Manila while maintaining its current economic position.
- Marcos clearly wants to strengthen the partnership with the USA's regional allies, and thus reduce his dependence on the two world powers.
- Marcos' room for manoeuvre is also considerably limited by domestic politics, as the rivalry between the Marcos and Duterte families in the run-up to the 2028 presidential elections is directly influencing the cabinet's foreign policy decisions.

In the Southeast Asian region, the Philippines plays an important role in the strategies of the United States and China. The Philippine government is trying to establish a balance between the two world powers and at the same time take advantage of this situation. This goal is also served by the "independent" foreign policy of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in 2022. The aim of this analysis is to briefly summarise the key elements of Marcos' foreign policy half-way through his term. It emphasises that, despite the risks, closer cooperation with the United States currently appears to be more rewarding, while geopolitical tensions with China are limiting the full development of the economic partnership.

1. Introduction

Parallel to the growing importance of the region, the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are playing an increasingly important role in the strategy of the USA and China. In geopolitical terms, the countries in the region are balancing between the United States and China, trying to avoid unilateral commitments and acting as a bridge.² The Philippines is no exception, as although it is a military ally of the US, it also seeks economic co-operation with China. Under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022), the country's foreign relations became more balanced thanks to his policy of opening up to China. However, when Ferdinand Marcos Jr. took office in the summer of 2022, a modified "independent" foreign policy began.

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² KLEMENSITS, Péter: [Délkelet-Ázsia geopolitikai jelentősége az új multipoláris világrendben](#). [The Geopolitical Significance of Southeast Asia in the New Multipolar World Order.] *Eurázsia Szemle*. 1/1. 2020. p. 100. [Online, 13 August 2025.]



The aim of this analysis is to briefly summarise the key elements and achievements of Marcos' foreign policy halfway through his term, with a particular focus on relations with the US and China. The study also sheds light on Washington's and Beijing's strategies towards the Philippines, while attempting to answer the question of what role Manila can play in the changing world order.

2. Interpreting Marcos's "independent" foreign policy

When Marcos took office in June 2022, he was expected to continue Duterte's "independent" foreign policy. This was foreshadowed not only by his previous statements, but also by the alliance between the Duterte and Marcos families (the former head of state's daughter, Sara Duterte-Carpio, was elected vice president).

According to the 1987 Constitution, which is still in force, an independent foreign policy essentially means that a country has a duty to defend itself and, to this end, must create strategic institutions that enable it to protect its national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interest, and the right to self-determination.³

During the Cold War, the President's father, the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr., advocated a flexible, pragmatic and development-oriented foreign policy, that focused on preserving the dignity and national integrity of the nation, promoting regional cooperation and reducing dependence on the great powers.⁴

During the term of Benigno Aquino (2010-2016), "independent" foreign policy was understood as the preservation of a liberal, rules-based international order that is fair and equitable to all states, "regardless of their size and relative power".⁵

From the outset, the Duterte administration has emphasised the need to pursue an "independent foreign policy" based on the principles of sovereignty, sovereign equality, non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes.⁶

The most important principle of Marcos Jr.'s "independent foreign policy" is that the country is "everyone's friend and no one's enemy," meaning that Manila seeks pragmatic cooperation with anyone willing to work with the Philippines in exchange for economic benefits.⁷ Marcos emphasised that Asian countries should refrain from taking sides in the competition between the US and China and instead take advantage of their growing interest in the region, while keeping their own interests in mind. His flexible government policy can be interpreted as trying to promote the national interests of the Philippines by avoiding armed conflict and promoting peace, while maintaining relations with both the United States and China, thereby guaranteeing security and potential economic gains. The sustainability of this policy is, of course, heavily dependent on the behaviour of the major powers.

In essence, we can agree with the view that an "independent" foreign policy should be judged on the spectrum of effectiveness, based on the number of national security interests it has been able to assert.⁸ Although this is far from easy to achieve in practice, Marcos currently maintains his "independent" foreign policy.

³ [The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines Article XVIII. Transitory Provisions](#). *Official Gazette*. GOVPH, [Online, 2025.08.13.]

⁴ RESOS, Archie B.: [International Realities and Philippine Foreign Policy Under Ferdinand Marcos](#). *Foreign Policy Journal*, 2013.10.28. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

⁵ AMADOR, III., MERCED, J. L. D. & TEODORO, J.: [The Philippines' foreign policy and relations towards major powers](#). *Asia Centre*, [Online, 2023.07.11.]

⁶ [National Security Policy For change and well-being of the Filipino People 2017-2022](#). *National Security Council Secretariat*, 2017.07.27. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

⁷ ROCAMORA, Joyce Ann L.: [Marcos charts independent foreign policy, 'friend to all' stance](#). *Philippines News Agency*, 2022.07.25. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

⁸ BANLAOI, Rommel: [Marcos Jr fashions a flexible foreign policy for the Philippines](#). *East Asia Forum*, 2023.01.21.[Online, 2025.08.13.]



3. Closer cooperation with the United States

The biggest change compared to the Duterte era is that Marcos has openly spoken out in favour of strengthening economic ties with Washington and improving military relations. During Marcos' visit to Washington from 18-24 September 2022, President Joe Biden reaffirmed the United States' "rock-solid commitment" to the defence of the Philippines, which he reiterated in October, while the US pledged \$3.9 billion in investments.⁹

In February 2023, during a visit to Manila by US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, the Marcos government offered four additional military facilities for use by the US military, in addition to the five bases already provided for in the 2014 Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement. Above all, this shows how much the Philippines trusts the US in terms of its defence, while at the same time not shying away from China's expected reaction, i.e. they consider business with Beijing possible despite everything.¹⁰

In the spring, President Marcos travelled to Washington again, where a trilateral summit with President Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida took place on 11 April. In addition to implementing this landmark strategic cooperation, the summit announced the creation of the Luzon Economic Corridor, an initiative to promote investment and economic prosperity in Central Luzon, Subic Bay, Clark, Metro Manila and surrounding areas.¹¹

Marcos travelled to the US capital again between April 30 and May 4, 2023, where the Biden administration pledged to support the modernisation of the Philippine Armed Forces and promote regional development through military bases, in addition to expanding economic and cultural cooperation. The two countries also issued their first bilateral defence guidelines, a document that sets out key priorities in the area of defence cooperation.

In 2024, economic cooperation reached a new level alongside military cooperation. In March 2024, a presidential trade and investment delegation led by US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo arrived in Manila, resulting in more than US\$1 billion in investments and playing a key role in promoting innovation, clean energy and food security.¹² In 2024, the United States was the Philippines' top export market, accounting for nearly \$950 million, or 17 per cent of total exports.

To improve the Philippines' defence capabilities, the US deployed the state-of-the-art Typhoon medium-range missile defence system to the islands for training purposes in April, and by the end of the year, the Philippine military leadership was already discussing plans to purchase the system.¹³

In July, the strengthening of the Philippine armed forces was the central topic of the 2+2 dialogue between the foreign and defence ministers, during which, among other things, USD 500 million was made available under the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programme to expand the capabilities of the Philippine armed forces and the Philippine Coast Guard.¹⁴

The importance that the Biden administration attaches to the Philippines is highlighted by the fact that in July, on the initiative of the Republicans Congress introduced a bill entitled the "Philippines Partnership Act of 2024-Philippines Partnership Act", which aims to strengthen bilateral relations between the United States and the Philippines through increased cooperation in the areas of defence, trade, economic development and regional security.¹⁵ But there were other congressional initiatives as well.

Donald Trump's inauguration on 20 January 2025 promised harmonious cooperation, but the possible withdrawal of the US from the international arena prompted the Marcos administration to exercise caution and decide to strengthen cooperation with Washington's allies.

⁹ GEDUCOS, Argyll Cyrus: [Marcos US trip nets \\$3.9-billion in investment pledges](#). *Manila Bulletin*, 2022.09.29. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹⁰ [Marcos: Increased US access to bases not meant to worsen tensions](#). *Business World*, 2023.02.23. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹¹ CABALLERO-REYNOLDS, Andrew: [A 'New Trilateral Chapter' for the United States, Japan, and the Philippines](#). *CSIS. Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 2024.04.15. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹² [Secretary Raimondo Leads Successful Presidential Trade and Investment Mission to the Philippines, President's Export Council Trip to Thailand](#). *U. S. Department of Commerce*, 2024.03.19. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹³ [China slams Philippines' decision to acquire US Typhon missile system](#). *Aljazeera*, 2024.12.23. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹⁴ [FACT SHEET U.S.- PHILIPPINES 2+2 MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE JULY 30, 2024](#). *media.defense.gov* 2024.07.30. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹⁵ [S.4703 - United States-Philippines Partnership Act of 2024](#). *Congress.gov* [Online, 2025.08.13.]

In February, at the Munich Security Conference, Foreign Ministers Marco Rubio and Eduardo Manalo emphasised to each other the importance of maintaining a rules-based world order in Asia. (It was encouraging for Manila that Rubio, who had proposed the 2024 Partnership Act, became head of the Department of Foreign Affairs. In the context of tensions in the South China Sea, the Trump administration also worked to strengthen the alliance between the two countries.¹⁶

However, the suspension of USAID raised questions about Trump's intentions. The Southeast Asian country was a major beneficiary of aid: the Americans had provided the country with more than 5 billion dollars in aid since 1961, including 2.81 billion dollars between 2001 and 2023.¹⁷ In the Philippines, the temporary suspension of 500 million dollars in military aid raised concerns about possible changes in US foreign policy, despite official statements that the measure would not affect security cooperation.

To allay the concerns of the government in Manila, Defence Minister Peter Hegseth visited the Philippines at the end of March, where he held talks with his Philippine counterpart Gilberto Teodoro. He reaffirmed both countries' commitment to the 1951 US-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty, and emphasised that it covers armed attacks on the armed forces, aircraft and ships of both countries, including their coast guards, anywhere in the South China Sea. Agreement was also reached on the launch of several new initiatives to improve the Philippines' defence capabilities.

The first face-to-face meeting between the two leaders took place during Marcos' visit to Washington from 20 to 22 July. Significantly, Marcos was the first Southeast Asian head of state to be received by Trump at the White House. President Marcos also held talks with Secretary of Defence Peter Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA Director John Ratcliffe, who reaffirmed America's commitment to the defence of the island nation. The Trump administration also pledged its support for the Luzon Economic Corridor.¹⁸

The trade negotiations were an important part of Marcos' trip, after Trump had previously threatened to impose 20 per cent tariffs on Philippine imports. As a result of the negotiations, US tariffs were lowered from 20% to 19%, which is higher than the 17% "retaliatory" tariff that was briefly in effect in April.¹⁹ Marcos agreed to remove all tariffs and other restrictions on imports from the United States, including quotas and import licence requirements, and to strengthen intellectual property protection.²⁰ With this move, the Philippines can encourage US investment, that could benefit key sectors of the Philippine economy and strengthen supply chain diversification in the long run. The agreement appears to be a win-win situation for both countries, even if concrete results will only be visible in the second half of Marcos' presidency.

4. Ambivalent relations with China

Originally, successful economic cooperation with China also played an important role in President Marcos' foreign policy plans. Between 3 and 6 January 2023, the head of state held talks in Beijing with the aim of opening a new chapter in strategic cooperation between the two countries. Marcos and Xi Jinping eventually signed 14 bilateral agreements in areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, development cooperation, maritime security and tourism. In total, China pledged investments worth USD 22.8 billion. During the talks, it was also agreed to resume joint oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea and to establish a direct communication channel to resolve contentious issues.²¹ Like his predecessor, Marcos hoped to

¹⁶ HEYDARIAN, Richard Javad: [Philippines hopeful but openly hedging on Trump](#). *Asia Times*, 2025.02.26. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹⁷ BACLIG, Chistina Eloisa: [Impact of US aid freeze on PH: It's small anyway](#). *Inquirer.net*, 2025.02.07. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹⁸ [United States-Philippines Joint Statement on Secretary Hegseth's Inaugural Visit to the Philippines](#). *U. S. Department of Defense*, 2025.03.28. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

¹⁹ BUCHWALD, Elisabeth: [Trump announces trade agreement with the Philippines and terms of deal with Indonesia](#). *CNN*, 2025.07.23. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²⁰ STRANGIO, Sebastian: [Trump Announces Trade Deal With Philippines, Small Reduction in Tariff Rate](#). *The Diplomat*, 2025.07.23. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²¹ HEYDARIAN, Richard Javad: [Marcos Jr returns from China with a pocketful of promises](#). *Asia Times*, 2023.01.06. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

count on Chinese assistance in the form of loans, grants and investments. In this context, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in the Philippines were also an important part of the discussions. However, the desire to strengthen economic ties did not prevent Marcos from staunchly defending Philippine interests in the South China Sea, as an important part of his foreign policy was to raise public awareness of what he considered China's unlawful actions, while at the same time airing his grievances bilaterally.

Despite Marcos' hopes, geopolitical tensions soon prevented economic co-operation from reaching its full potential. On 22 October, a Philippine and a Chinese ship collided near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal, with both sides blaming each other for the incident.²² A week later, the Philippines accused China of firing water cannons at a supply ship.²³

The cooling of relations between Manila and Beijing was undoubtedly exacerbated by President Marcos not only not travelling to Beijing for the third Belt and Road Forum, but also announcing the cancellation of three major railway construction projects worth \$4.9 billion, that were part of the BRI, because the desired Chinese financial support had not arrived.²⁴ The Marcos administration thus made the delicate strategic decision to withdraw from the Chinese initiative in order to achieve its goal of diversifying its funding sources and reducing its dependence on Beijing. The reason for this decision was undoubtedly the fact that only a fraction of the projects promised by China would be completed by 2023 and there was little prospect of significant progress. As a result, public-private partnerships (PPPs) and multilateral institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank played a much greater role in Marcos' strategy.

While China did not look favourably on the ever-closer military partnership with the US, particularly the relocation of bases, the Marcos administration had significantly lowered its expectations of economic cooperation with Beijing by this time.

On 23 March 2024, the Chinese Coast Guard deployed water cannons to prevent a Philippine supply ship from reaching the Sierra Madre shipwreck, which was serving as a garrison on the Ayungin sandbank, leading to renewed tensions.²⁵ In the meantime, it became known that the Duterte government had previously tried to prevent similar incidents by concluding a kind of "gentleman's agreement". The agreement allowed the Philippines to carry out supply missions, provided they gave prior notice, delivered only essential goods and limited their operations to one coast guard vessel and one civilian ship. According to China, these conditions were violated in February 2023 when a Philippine Navy ship, delivered construction materials to the wreck.²⁶ Marcos rejected the conclusion of a similar secret agreement, and instead called for public diplomacy.

After the Chinese Coast Guard repeatedly rammed Philippine warships with motorboats and then seized two Philippine warships on 17 June to prevent Filipino personnel from delivering food and other supplies, including firearms, to a ship stationed in shallow waters near Second Thomas Shoal, the incident threatened to escalate seriously. Eventually, a temporary agreement was reached, – which China did not comment on, – but which in principle does not violate the national position of either party. Essentially, China allows delivery missions after prior notification and "on-site inspection", but rejects the delivery of "large quantities" of building materials needed for the construction of "permanent structures".²⁷

Although tensions between the two countries have persisted, after Donald Trump took office in early 2025, Marcos offered China closer cooperation and even agreed to withdraw the US Typhoon missile system from the Philippines on the condition that Beijing cease its violent maritime provocations and give

²² [Philippines says Chinese vessels hit two of its boats near disputed shoal](#). NPR, 2023.10.22. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²³ [China deploys water cannon vs Philippines in new Ayungin resupply mission](#). Rappler, 2023.11.10. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²⁴ HEYDARIAN, Richard Javad: [Why the Philippines is exiting the Belt and Road](#). Asia Times, 2023.11.02. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²⁵ CUPIN, Bea: [China causes 'heavy damage' on Philippine resupply ship in Ayungin Shoal – AFP](#). Rappler, 2024.03.23. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²⁶ RABENA, Aaron Jed: [The Philippines navigates shifting political currents in the South China Sea](#). East Asia Forum, 2025.04.25. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²⁷ [Philippines says reached deal with China to avoid disputed shoal clashes](#). Aljazeera, 2024.07.21. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

up its territorial claims in the region.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, no real negotiations began between the parties, while the incidents in the South China Sea continued.

Despite the conflicts with Beijing, the economic partnership with China remains crucial for Manila. In 2023, China was the country's largest trading partner, exporting goods worth 52.4 billion dollars to the Philippines. The Philippines, which was China's 20th largest trading partner, exported \$10.65 billion worth of goods.²⁹ In 2024, China was Manila's third largest export market, behind the United States and Japan. However, between June 2024 and June 2025, Philippine exports decreased by \$135 million (15.5%), from \$869 million to \$734 million, while imports increased by \$509 million (18.6%), from \$2.73 billion to \$3.24 billion.³⁰

While China provided \$30.5bn in official development finance between 2015 and 2023, only \$700m of this was actually disbursed.³¹ In terms of investments, projects worth more than 1 billion pesos (approximately \$18 million) from Chinese sources were approved by September 2024, an increase of 237% from the same period last year, and also exceeding the total amount of Chinese investments in the Philippines in 2023.³² The trend of significant Chinese investments on paper in the Southeast Asian country is evident, but their practical realisation remains uncertain.

5. Other key partners

Duterte's foreign policy was already characterised by the government's efforts to balance its dependence on China through closer cooperation with other Indo-Pacific powers. Under Marcos, these fruitful relationships with America's partners have continued, with Japan being a perfect example. The East Asian country is a key partner of the East, with a strong interest in strengthening Manila's defence capabilities while providing an alternative to Chinese funding through its investments and aid.

It was a significant event when Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met President Marcos in Manila in early November 2023. He not only announced the first official security assistance to the Philippines, but also began negotiations on a Reciprocal Access Agreement that would allow Japanese soldiers to be temporarily stationed on the islands. In July 2024, an agreement was finally concluded that will come into force on 11 September 2025 and is considered a milestone in the partnership between the two nations in many respects.³³

In economic terms, it is significant that Japan remains the largest source of official development assistance (ODA) for the Philippines in 2024, at 13.23 billion dollars, accounting for around a third of the country's total ODA.³⁴ Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba last visited the Philippines in April 2025, and President Marcos visited Japan in June, with both sides discussing a number of economic and security initiatives during the high-level visits.

South Korea is also interested in strengthening Manila's defence capabilities, and the Marcos administration is seeking to capitalise on this opportunity. On 7 October 2024, during President Yoon Suk Yeol's visit to Manila, a strategic partnership was forged between the two countries, covering the areas of security, economy and culture.³⁵ The South Korean defence industry plays an active role in the development of the Armed Forces of the Philippines – from the mid-2010s until today, the East Asian country has

²⁸ CUPIN, Bea: [Marcos offers China a 'deal': Want US missiles out? Leave West Philippine Sea](#). *Rappler*, 2025.01.30. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

²⁹ REINSCH, William Allan: [Rocking the Boat: The Philippines Trade Strategy Amid Rising Geoeconomic Tensions](#). *CSIS*, 2025.01.31. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³⁰ [Philippines/China](#). *OEC*, [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³¹ CHI, Christina: [China pledged more to Philippines than any SEA country but spent the least](#). *Philstar*, 2025.07.22. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³² [Against all odds: Chinese investments in the Philippines soar despite ongoing maritime row](#). *BILYONARYO.COM*, 2024. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³³ [Exchange of Diplomatic Notes for Entry into Force of the Japan-Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement](#). *Embassy of Japan in the Philippines*, 2025.08.12. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³⁴ [Japan Remains PH Top Development Partner](#). *JICA*, 2025.08.08. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³⁵ BAJO, Anna Felicia: [PH, South Korea elevate ties to strategic partnership](#). *GMA News Online*, 2024.10.07. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

become the source of the Philippine Navy's most valuable acquisitions.³⁶ South Korean companies also have considerable potential in the area of infrastructure investment.

President Marcos also attaches great importance to the partnership with India. Between 4 and 8 August 2025, the Philippine head of state was received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi to mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The event marked the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The relationship has been upgraded to a strategic partnership, and a total of 18 agreements have been signed. The partnership covers the areas of defence, maritime cooperation, trade, digital technologies, tourism, space exploration, culture and science. The defence and security partnership is considered a central pillar, as evidenced by the Philippines' purchase of BrahMos cruise missiles from India in 2024-25, which will significantly strengthen Manila's coastal defence capabilities.³⁷

Australia is also an important partner. In September 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited the Philippines and a strategic partnership agreement was signed between the two countries. On 28 and 29 February 2024, Prime Minister Albanese received President Marcos in Canberra for his first official visit to Australia. During the talks, agreements were reached on cooperation in the area of cyber security and a partnership in the area of maritime security, among other things.³⁸

6. Conclusion

President Marcos' "independent" foreign policy is not without precedent. Like other Southeast Asian countries, the island nation is fundamentally forced to draw a cautious line between the US and China, and adapt to the changing world order.

Since former President Duterte's opening towards China did not bring the results the Philippine government had hoped for, Marcos' desire for a closer partnership with the United States is understandable. During Joe Biden's presidency, the stable relationship between the US and the Philippines promised significant results, but with the inauguration of Donald Trump, the situation is no longer so clear, as the Trump administration expects more from the Philippines, as evidenced by the trade agreement. The importance of the island nation to Washington is obvious, and it seems that the US is willing to demonstrate this in environmental terms as well.

Although Marcos initially had high hopes for economic cooperation with China, he was prepared to accept the negative consequences due to geopolitical differences. China seems to be taking a wait-and-see approach for now, anticipating that Trump's unexpected moves might alienate even its allies, and that it might even strike a more favourable deal with a president who is more sympathetic to China after Marcos. For all these reasons, no significant improvement in Sino-Philippine political relations can be expected in the short term, even if the current level of economic partnership is likely to remain unchanged.

In fact, Marcos is walking a tightrope where it is very difficult to maintain the independence of his foreign policy, and where, he is trying to combine elements of previous strategies that were considered successful, based on the experiences of the two previous presidencies - Aquino and Duterte.

The last three years have also made it clear that Marcos wants to strengthen partnerships with the US's regional allies and reduce its dependence on the two world powers. So far, this endeavour has been successful and, although it does not fundamentally affect the dynamics of relations with the US and China, it may improve the Philippines' negotiating position with them.

However, Marcos' foreign policy can only be fully understood in the context of domestic political developments. Relations between the Marcos and Duterte families deteriorated rapidly after the elections, and they are now open rivals. Although the Marcos appear to be the stronger side, the 2025 Senate

³⁶ HÁDA, Béla: A Fülöp-szigetek haderőfejlesztésének tengeri dimenziója – eredmények és kilátások. [The Maritime Dimension of the Philippines' Military Development – Results and Prospects.] *NKE, John Lukacs Stratégiai Védelmi Kutatási Elemzések*, 2025/13. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³⁷ CABATO, Luisa: [18 business deals between PH, India signed during Marcos' state visit](#). *Inquirer.net*, 2025.08.07. [Online, 2025.08.13.]

³⁸ MATEO, Janvic – ROMEO, Alexis: ['More robust' Philippines-Australia ties seen in Marcos Jr. visit](#). *Philstar*, 2024.02.29. [Online, 2025.08.13.]



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elections have shown that the Duterte clan also enjoys significant support. Although interest groups and much of society support the Marcos' pro-American policies, the Duterte family is backed by the Chinese lobby, so the president must also consider their interests when thinking about his next moves. He also has a controversial relationship with his Vice President Sara Duterte, who has made no secret of her intention to run for president in 2028.³⁹

³⁹ OMBAY, Giselle: [Sara Duterte 'seriously considering' 2028 presidential bid](#). *GMA News Online*, 2025.01.15. [Online, 2025.08.13.]



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