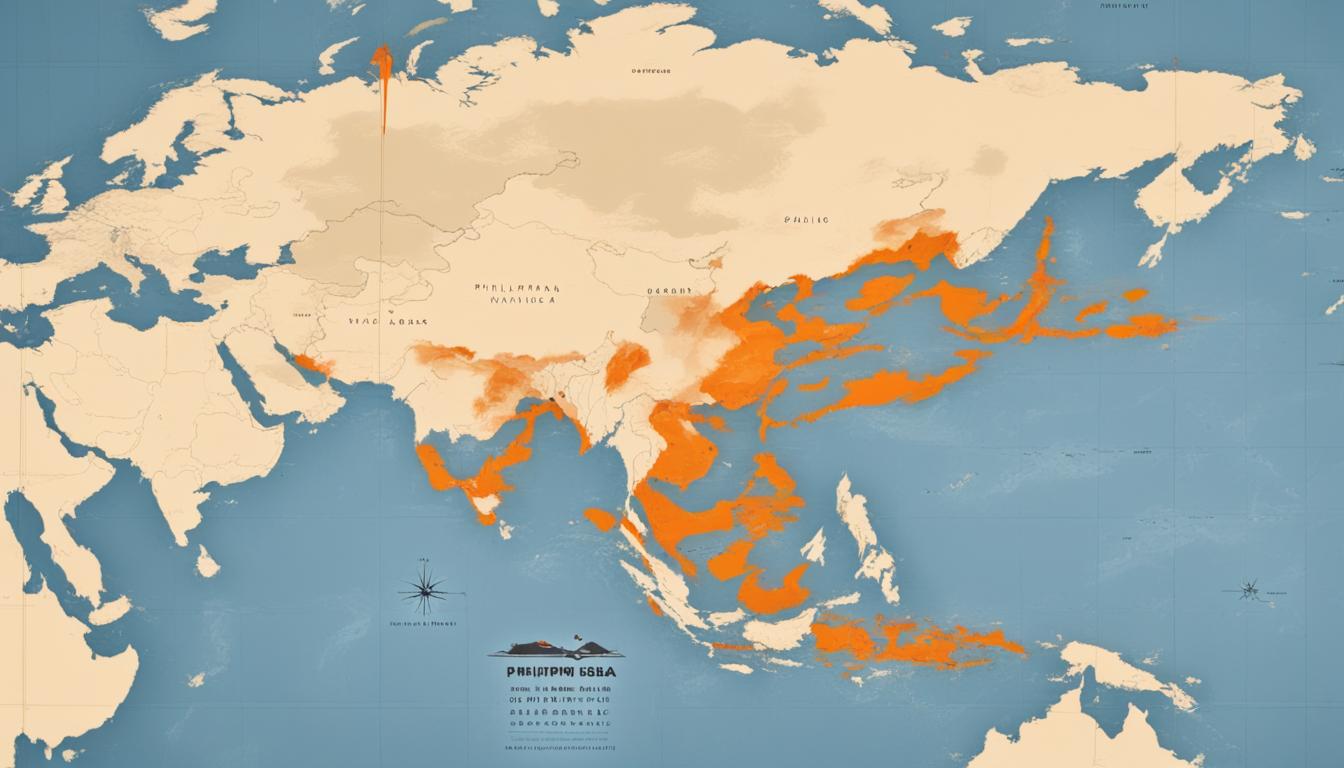
# Philippines Defies China by Strengthening Security Alliances in Contested Waters



The Philippines will continue to build security alliances and conduct joint combat drills in contested waters, despite opposition from China, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro announced on Friday. This stance comes as tensions escalate in the South China Sea. Speaking at a military ceremony in Manila, Teodoro criticized China's territorial aggressions without directly naming the country and affirmed that the Philippines will not tolerate aggressive actions.

Under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the Philippines has sought new security partnerships with various Asian and Western nations and has expanded U.S. military access to more Philippine bases, following a 2014 defense agreement. In April and May, Filipino and U.S. forces conducted annual live-fire exercises in and around disputed waters. China has condemned these activities, accusing them of provoking regional instability.

The Philippines, a longstanding U.S. treaty ally, has defense agreements allowing U.S. and Australian forces to participate in annual drills and is negotiating similar pacts with Japan and considering another with France. Recent large-scale exercises saw U.S. and Philippine forces practicing territorial defense scenarios, including retaking islands and sinking warships.

Chinese Defense spokesperson Wu Qian has labeled these drills as provocations, asserting that China will defend its territories. The Philippines maintains that its actions to protect its exclusive economic zone are constitutional duties, not provocations. Other regional players in the South China Sea disputes include Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. As China’s actions intensify, President Marcos has directed the military to prioritize external defense over domestic anti-insurgency efforts, aligning with U.S. initiatives to bolster Indo-Pacific alliances.