PH, US wrap up second round of talks on IRP framework

Negotiators of the Philippines and the United States have agreed that the increased rotational presence (IRP) of American troops and equipment in Philippine military facilities will be temporary and comply with the country’s Constitution, according to Defense Undersecretary Pio Lorenzo Batino.

In their second round of negotiations at the US Department of Defense in the Pentagon in Washington D.C., both sides also agreed that joint exercises and activities under a framework agreement will require the approval of the Philippines and will be mutually beneficial to the individual and collective defense capabilities of the two countries in furtherance of Article II of the Mutual Defense Treaty, said Batino, chief government negotiator.

“Both the Philippines and the US panels share the understanding that the American troops will not establish a permanent military presence in our country. That was clear during the discussion,” Batino said. “From the beginning of the talks, we communicated to our counterparts that they could not establish a permanent presence in the Philippines in accordance with our Constitution.”

In the agreed minutes released by the panels, it said that all the access to and use of military facilities and areas by the US will be at the invitation of the Philippine government.

“Where and what can be prepositioned will be subject to prior approval by the Philippine government and based on mutuality of interest. Any approval will contain specific areas and time for the temporary activity,” explained Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Carlos Sorreta, panel spokesperson.

During the talks, Sorreta said, the two teams of negotiators were able to establish “specific understandings” on the following:

- Facilities used for prepositioning remain the property of the Philippines
- The Philippines maintains the primary responsibility and authority in matters of security
- Any prepositioning or activities will not violate Philippine environmental laws
- Any construction will have to be removed by the US once the approved activity is completed

- Stronger language on non-prepositioning of prohibited weapons
Sorreta said the Philippines and the US were able to flesh out some details on humanitarian aid and disaster relief, including discussions on how training, equipment and materiel for maritime domain awareness would be used for HADR efforts.

A number of provisions in the proposed framework agreement, however, are subject to further discussion, including the substantive issue of duration, he said.

“For the Americans, they typically have agreements like these that have a duration of 20 years. Right now, the Philippine delegation is looking at a much shorter duration,” Sorreta said.

The Philippines and the US began on August 14 negotiations on a framework agreement on the IRP, an arrangement that will help the country achieve a minimum credible defense amid territorial threats and bolster plans to modernize the armed forces.

Based on the agreed minutes released after the negotiations, the next round of talks will be held in the second week of September in the US.

The Philippine panel is composed of Batino, Sorreta, Justice Undersecretary Francisco Baraan III and Defense Assistant Secretary Raymund Quilop. #