PHL, US resume talks on IRP framework in Washington

The second round of negotiations between the Philippines and the United States for the framework agreement on the increased rotational presence (IRP) of American troops and military equipment in the country will be held on Friday, August 30 (Manila time) at the US Department of Defense in Pentagon in Washington, DC.

Both sides are expected to build on the progress made in their initial meeting on August 14 held in the Department of National Defense in Camp Aguinaldo, on the proposed framework agreement seen to bolster the country’s external defense, improve disaster response and increase joint military training and exercises, said Defense Undersecretary Pio Lorenzo Batino, chair of the Philippine panel of negotiators.

In the first round of consultations and negotiations, the two sides discussed salient features, such as the working title, preamble, objectives and scope of the discussions that will give US troops and defense equipment temporary access to Philippine military camps—an arrangement that will help the Philippines achieve a minimum credible defense amid territorial threats and boost plans to modernize the armed forces.

Other main elements of the negotiations, which both sides agreed to include in the framework agreement, are the implementing arrangements, prepositioning of supplies and materiel, security, ownership, protection of the environment, utilities and communications, procedures, resolution of disputes, and duration and termination.

According to Batino, the Philippine panel hopes to have a general discussion on the types of activities which both Filipino and American troops can undertake together.

“The types of activities that we want to do with the US will be threshed out in our talks,” Batino said. “As we discuss these, we want to stress again to our counterparts that any framework agreement must be consistent with our Constitution and there should be mutuality in benefits.”

He added that each activity of the US military troops and the AFP camp they will be given access to will require the specific permission of the Philippine government.
The Philippine panel had said it would push for joint activities with the US that will boost maritime security and maritime domain awareness, and improve humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

The Philippine panel is composed of Batino, Justice Undersecretary Francisco Baraan III, Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Carlos Sorreta and Defense Assistant Secretary Raymund Quiñop.