PH panel: No agreement yet on duration, joint use of US equipment

The Philippines and the United States have yet to agree on the duration of the framework agreement on the increased rotational presence (IRP) of American troops in the country and the arrangement for the joint use of equipment and materiel, Foreign Assistant Secretary Carlos Sorreta said today.

According to Sorreta, spokesperson of the Philippine panel, these are issues that government negotiators will thresh out with their American counterparts when they continue with the talks in Washington D.C. on Thursday (Friday morning in Manila, September 13, 2013).

“Duration and joint use are among the issues that are still under discussion. Hopefully the two sides will be able to come to an understanding with regard to these important aspects of the framework agreement,” Sorreta said.

The Philippines is looking at a “much shorter duration” as opposed to the 20 years that characterize similar agreements of the US with other countries.

Another key issue up for discussion, Sorreta added, is the mechanism for the monitoring of military equipment that the US will bring into the country.

Manila and Washington are negotiating a framework agreement for a larger presence of American soldiers and defense equipment, a deal that is expected to bolster the Philippines’ external defense, increase training of its troops and improve response to disasters.

During the second round of negotiations held at the US Department of Defense in the Pentagon last month, both sides agreed that American troops will not establish a permanent military presence in the country in compliance with the Constitution and that any joint training or exercise needs the approval of the Philippines.

“It is clear to both sides that there will no basing for US troops and defense equipment. What we will see is a minimal support of personnel and as such, no dependents will be allowed,” Sorreta explained.

In the previous negotiations, Sorreta said, there was an understanding that where and what can be prepositioned will be subject to the prior consent of the Philippine government. “Any approval will contain specific areas and time for the temporary activity,” he added.

There were also “specific understandings” on ownership of the facilities where US troops and defense equipment will be prepositioned, non-prepositioning of prohibited weapons, security, compliance with Philippine environmental laws, contracting procedures and dispute resolution, among others, in the last negotiations. #