

Army Vision: By 2028, a world-class Army that is a source of national pride



ARMY

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13 January 2016

Wednesday

Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing the land

NEWS HEADLINES
13 JANUARY 2016

Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing th

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The Manila Times

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PANAHON TV

TODAY'S WEATHER FORECAST

JANUARY 13, 2016 | WEDNESDAY

NORTHEAST MONSOON
AFFECTING NORTHERN LUZON
(JANUARY 12, 5:00 PM)

TAIL-END OF A COLD FRONT
AFFECTING THE EASTERN SECTION
OF CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN LUZON
(JANUARY 12, 5:00 PM)

SUNRISE

SUNSET



6:24 AM

5:45 PM

MOONRISE

MOONSET



8:46 AM

8:53 PM

NEW MOON

FIRST QUARTER

JAN 10
9:30 AM

JAN 17
7:26 AM

LOW TIDE

HIGH TIDE



7:35 AM

3:59 PM

-0.24 Meter

0.27 Meter



Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers



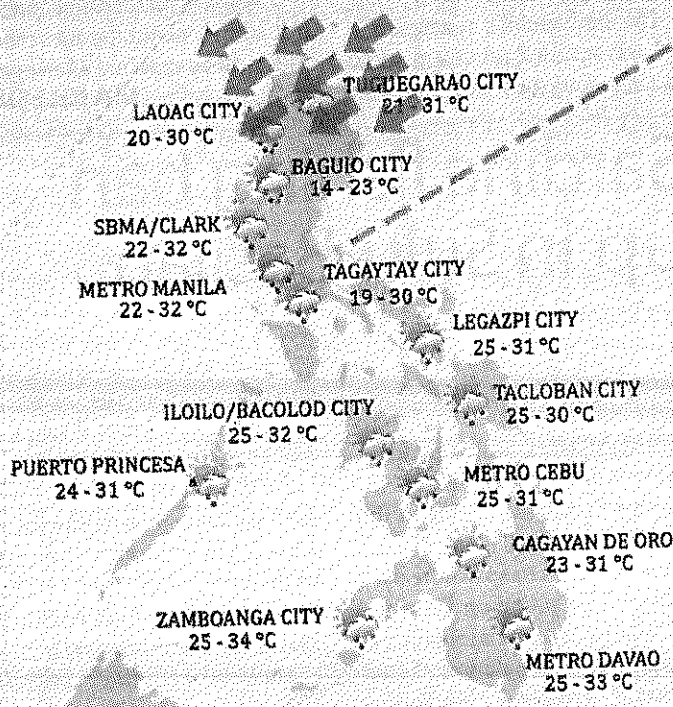
Partly cloudy to at times cloudy with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms



Cloudy skies with rainshowers and/or thunderstorms



Light rains



	JAN 14 THURSDAY	JAN 15 FRIDAY	JAN 16 SATURDAY		JAN 14 THURSDAY	JAN 15 FRIDAY	JAN 16 SATURDAY
METRO MANILA	22-32°C	22-31°C	21-32°C	BAGUIO	14-22°C	14-21°C	13-21°C
METRO CEBU	25-31°C	24-32°C	24-31°C	PUERTO PRINCESA	24-31°C	25-32°C	25-32°C
METRO DAVAO	25-34°C	26-33°C	26-33°C	BORACAY	24-34°C	25-34°C	25-34°C

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INQUIRY

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SC allows more US forces to base here

Court votes 10-4 to uphold Edca

By Tarra Quismundo

IN A RULING that allows the basing of more US military forces in the Philippines in the face of aggressive Chinese incursions in the South China Sea, the Supreme Court yesterday upheld the constitutionality of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (Edca) between Manila and Washington.

In a 10-4 vote, the court removed the legal impediment that hung over the pact for nearly two years, junking two petitions questioning Edca's constitutionality just as Philippine and US officials met in Washington to discuss China's escalating military buildup in

SC ALLOWS/A18

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the region's waters.

Coincidentally, just hours before Supreme Court spokesperson Theodore Te announced the ruling, a US attack submarine arrived at the former US naval base on Subic Bay. (See story on Page A1.)

Both the Philippines and the United States welcomed the court ruling.

"The Edca is a mutually beneficial agreement that will enhance our ability to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and help build capacity for the Armed Forces of the Philippines," the US Embassy said.

President Aquino's spokesperson, Herminio Coloma Jr., said Edca would introduce the AFP to "the most modern equipment and have a generational leap in our abilities."

China's continuing incursions and land reclamation in the resource-rich waters of the South China Sea have been a lingering security concern in the Asia-Pacific region, becoming a backdrop for the signing of the Edca as an executive agreement in April 2014 to allow greater rotational presence of American troops in Philippine military bases.

"As it is, the Edca is not constitutionally infirm. As an executive agreement, it remains consistent with existing laws and treaties that it purports to implement. Wherefore, we hereby dismiss the petitions," the high court said in its ruling, a summary of which was released yesterday.

The full decision has yet to be released. Those who dissented were Justices Teresita Leonar-

do-De Castro, Arturo Brion, Estela Perlas-Bernabe and Marvic Leonen. Associate Justice Francis Jardeleza had no part in the ruling, having handled the case during his time as Solicitor General.

One of the petitioners, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), said it would seek the court's reconsideration of the case. The group decried the ruling as a "de facto reversal of the 1991 Senate vote to boot out US bases from the Philippines." A separate plea was filed by former Senators Rene Saguisag and Wigberto Tañada, who were among 12 senators who had voted against the US bases.

The court's majority decision held that as the government had argued, the Edca was an implementing agreement of the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), ruling that the treaties already provided for the rotational presence of US troops here.

The court disagreed "that the Edca must be submitted to the Senate in the form of a treaty for concurrence by at least two-thirds of all the members of the Senate." The Senate position was submitted to the court during deliberations on the case.

The Edca falls under Article XVIII, Section 25, of the 1987 Constitution, the high tribunal said. This grants the President the power "to enter into an executive agreement on foreign military bases, troops or facilities if "it is not the instrument" that allows such military basing, and "merely aims to implement an existing law or treaty."

Through the "ponencia" by Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, the court held that "the Edca is one such executive agreement," as it is not the principal pact through which US military presence was allowed, Te said in a press briefing.

"The court ruled that the Edca is not the instrument that al-

allows US 'troops or facilities' to enter as the VFA has already done that," said Te.

"The Edca provides arrangements to implement existing treaties allowing entry of foreign military troops or facilities under the VFA and the MDT, and thus may be in the form of an executive agreement solely within the powers of the President and not requiring Senate concurrence," he said.

"The executive agreement must not go beyond the parameters, limitations, and standards set by the law and/or treaty that the former purports to implement and must not unduly expand the international obligation expressly mentioned or necessarily implied in the law or treaty," it said.

The court ruled that the President must be accorded wider discretion in making decisions regarding external affairs, limited only by the letter of the law.

"No court can tell the Presi-

dent to desist from choosing an executive agreement over a treaty to embody an international agreement, unless the case falls squarely within Article XVIII, Section 25," Te said in summarizing the court's ruling.

"In view of the vast constitutional powers and prerogatives granted to the President in the field of foreign affairs, the task of the court is to determine whether the international agreement is consistent with the applicable limitations," he said.

New platform

The Edca provides for increased rotational presence of US troops in the Philippines, allowing more opportunities for the long-standing defense allies to undertake joint military exercises in the areas of mutual defense and disaster response.

Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin and US Ambassador to the Philippines Philip Goldberg signed the pact just before US

President Barack Obama arrived in Manila for a state visit in April 2014.

The Supreme Court ruling came amid America's continuing strategic pivot to the Asia-Pacific, and the Philippines' attempts to strengthen its defense amid the disputes in the South China Sea.

Solicitor General Florin Hilbay, who defended the Edca on the government's behalf, hailed the court decision, saying it "paves the way for an enhanced security arrangement that will respond to the current domestic and regional concerns."

"It also breathes a practical spirit into one of the oldest defense alliances, creating a new platform for cooperation between the Philippines and the United States. It reaffirms the potency of the powers of the President as Chief Executive, Commander in Chief and chief architect of foreign affairs," Hilbay said in a statement.

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SC upholds EDCA

No need for Senate ratification

By EDU PUNAY

The Supreme Court (SC) has upheld the legality of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the United States in a decision that is seen to pave the way for greater US military presence in the country.

Voting 10-4 in their first full court session for the year yesterday, the justices dismissed the consolidated petitions against EDCA filed by former senators Rene Saguisag and Wigberto Tañada and militant lawmakers led by Bayan Muna Representatives Neri Colmenares and Carlos Zarate.

The development comes at a time when the Philippines is building up its military capability and firming up regional alliances in the face of China's aggressive moves in the West Philippine Sea and South China Sea.

A primer on EDCA specifically rules out reestablishment of US bases in the Philippines or permanent deployment of American service personnel on Philippine soil.

Any pre-positioning of US military equipment, vehicles or aircraft in Philippine bases would be done with permission from local military authorities, the primer states.

Chief Justice Ma. Lourdes Sereno penned the majority

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SC From Page 1

decision rejecting the petitioners' argument that EDCA was constitutionally infirm.

The SC disputed the arguments of petitioners – supported by the Senate through its Resolution No. 105 – that the agreement was a treaty similar to the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT).

"The court disagreed with the Senate's position submitted to the court by way of Senate Resolution No. 105 expressing its view that EDCA is a form of treaty that needed concurrence by at least two-thirds of all the members of the Senate," SC spokesman Theodore Te said in a press briefing, citing key portions of the ruling.

The high court pointed out that the law requires Senate concurrence to a treaty and that

an agreement can only be considered a treaty when it serves as an "instrument that allows the presence of foreign military bases, troops or facilities."

The SC emphasized EDCA is "not the instrument that allows US troops or facilities to enter as the VFA already has done that," citing its earlier ruling that upheld the validity of the VFA.

"The EDCA provides for arrangements to implement existing treaties following entry of foreign military troops or facilities under the VFA and the MDT, and thus may be in the form of an executive agreement solely within the powers of the President and not requiring Senate concurrence under Article XVIII, Section 25 of the Constitution," Te explained.

The high tribunal also

agreed with the executive branch's position that EDCA complies with the requirement of the law not to go beyond the parameters, limitations and standards set by the treaty it purports to implement.

Instead, the high tribunal held that EDCA is a valid executive agreement that the President is allowed to enter into under Article XVIII Section 25 of the Constitution to implement the VFA and the MDT of the 1950s.

"As an executive agreement, EDCA remains consistent with existing laws and treaties that it purports to implement," stated the ruling read by Te.

"No court can tell the President to desist from choosing an executive agreement over a treaty to embody an international agreement, unless the case falls squarely within Article XVIII, Section 25," the SC

said in its decision read by Te.

"In the field of external affairs, the President must be given a larger measure of authority and wider discretion, subject only to the least amount of checks and restrictions under the Constitution," the SC stressed.

Joining Sereno in the majority ruling were nine magistrates: Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio and Associate Justices Presbitero Velasco Jr., Diosdado Peralta, Lucas Bersamin, Mariano del Castillo, Martin Villarama Jr., Jose Perez, Jose Mendoza and Bienvenido Reyes.

Associate Justices Teresita Leonardo-de Castro, Arturo Brion, Estela Perlas-Bernabe and Marvic Leonen dissented, while Associate Justice Francis Jardeleza took no part due to his previous handling of the case as solicitor general.

The main decision, as well

as the concurring opinion of Carpio and dissenting opinions of De Castro, Brion and Leonen, were not immediately released as they were still being circulated among the justices for signature.

Te explained that the ruling could still be subject to appeal as provided for under court rules.

Asked on the possible effect of the ruling on the Senate's contrary position, the SC official stressed that the high court has the mandate under the Constitution to resolve constitutional issues.

The high court had reset deliberations on the case three times in November and last month before finally coming up with its decision that was announced yesterday.

The case was heard by the high court in oral arguments in November 2014 and had been up for resolution since December 2014.

Under the EDCA, the US will be allowed to build structures, store as well as preposition weapons, defense supplies and materiel, station troops, civilian personnel and defense contractors, transit and station vehicles, vessels and aircraft for a period of 10 years.

It was signed by Philippine and US officials hours before President Obama arrived in the country for his two-day state visit on April 28 and 29, 2014.

Obama's pushing hard for EDCA was part of his so-called strategic "pivot" to Asia. He said during his visit that EDCA would give US forces "greater access to Filipino facilities, airfields and ports, which would remain under the control of the Philippines."

The Philippines hosted two of the largest overseas US military bases until 1992, following a Senate vote to end their leases.

– With AFP

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MANILA: BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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• **Ex-rebels to receive assistance**

BUTUAN CITY – Eleven former New People's Army (NPA) rebels are set to receive livelihood cash assistance from the government. They will comprise the third batch of former rebel beneficiaries under the government's Comprehensive Local Integration Program (CLIP). They are set to receive P65,000 each during the First Quarter Provincial Peace and Order Council (PPOC) meeting at the Capt. Delfin C. Rellera Hall, 36th Infantry Battalion (36th IB), in Dayoan, Tagu town, Surigao del Sur, this Friday. (Mike U. Crismundo)

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Troops, Reds clash in CamSur **By SONNY SALES**

CAMP Elias Angeles, Pili, Camarines Sur -- Army troopers belonging to the 83rd Infantry Battalion and a reconnaissance company clashed for about 20 minutes with seven New People's Army rebels in remote Bgy. Lidong, Presentation town.

Army's 9th Infantry Division spokesman Capt. Arthur Viamiguel said the rebels were led by a certain Francisco Mendoza, alias "Ka Oming," of Larangang Guerilla II.

Viamiguel said government troopers recovered after the firefight a World War II M-14 Garand rifle, several improvised explosive devices (IEDs), detonating wires, assorted ammunition, propaganda documents and backpacks containing personal effects of the rebels.

He said the incident is the first encounter with communist rebels for 2016.

Sonny Sales

Troops, ASG brigands clash in Patikul, Sulu

From the Philippine News Agency (Jan 12): Troops, ASG brigands clash in Patikul, Sulu

Government forces are hot on trail of an Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) brigands that figured in a firefight Tuesday with troops in Patikul, Sulu.

Brig. Gen. Alan Arrojado, Joint Task Group Sulu commander, said target of the pursuit operations is the group of Ninok Sapari and of a certain Abu Alkam.

Arrojado said the troops were conducting focused military operations when they clashed with the group of Sapari and Alkam around 3 p.m. Tuesday in Sitio Buanbuan, Barangay Latih, Patikul.

Arrojado said the firefight lasted for about five minutes after which the ASG brigands ran towards Barangay Bungkaong, also in Patikul town.

He said there was no casualty on the government side "while it is still undetermined on the enemy side."

He said the troops from the Army's 35th Infantry Battalion have recovered at the clash site three backpacks, assorted police and military uniforms, foodstuffs and one motorcycle.

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High court vote vindicates me, says Trillanes

SEN. ANTONIO Trillanes IV felt vindicated

"The Supreme Court ruling validated my vote against the Senate resolution saying the Edca (Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement) needed to be ratified by the Senate," Trillanes told reporters.

The Philippines now has the chance to take advantage of the security opportunities being offered by the Edca, he said.

Trillanes cast the lone vote against the Senate resolution filed by Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago who contended that the Edca needed to be ratified by the Senate. Fourteen senators, including Santiago, adopted the resolution in November last year.

"With this development that builds upon our mutual defense treaty, we look forward to advancing our defense modernization, and strengthening maritime security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities," said Department of National Defense spokesperson Peter Paul Galvez.

Gen. Hernando Iriberry, chief of staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, said the ruling "bodes well for deepening defense cooperation with a key ally."

He said the Edca would help "maintain maritime security and maritime domain awareness, and develop humanitarian assistance and disaster response capabilities" in the face of an in-

creasingly aggressive Chinese moves to enforce its claim to the entire South China Sea.

"These will redound to improving our capacity to perform our mandate to protect our people and secure the state," Iriberry said.

The US Embassy and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) hailed the ruling.

"The Edca is a mutually beneficial agreement that will enhance our ability to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and help build capacity for the Armed Forces of the Philippines," the embassy said. "We look forward to working closely with our Philippine partners on the implementation of this agreement."

The DFA spokesperson, Assistant Secretary Charles Jose, said that with the ruling "the Philippine and the US governments can now proceed in finalizing the arrangement for its full implementation."

The decision was issued as Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin and Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario were in the United States to meet with US Secretary of State John Kerry and Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

The high-level talks in Washington are expected to discuss a range of bilateral issues including defense and security cooperation and significant developments in the economic engagement of the two countries.

The agenda will also cover regional and global issues that impact on both countries, in particular, the recent developments in the South China Sea, the upcoming Special Asean-US Summit in California, and cooperation on climate change, the DFA said.

Olongapo City Mayor Rolan Paulino hailed the court decision as a boon to the local economy. "We're hoping that the US troops will be allowed to have their liberty (rest and recreation) activities in Olongapo City," he said.

'Biggest magnet'

A senatorial aspirant, Rep. Neri Colmenares, said the court had made the country a "bigger magnet" for attacks by US enemies.

Kabataan Rep. Terry Ridon said the Supreme Court missed a historic opportunity to defend the country's sovereignty.

"The decision will set the stage for the return of the US bases in the country, albeit disguised as Philippine bases under US control and supervision," Ridon said.

Said activist Renato Reyes: "This is another sad day for Philippine sovereignty. We maintain that the Edca is not the solution to the problems of China's incursions." *Reports from Christine O. Avendaño, Julie M. Aurelio, Niña Calleja and Gil C. Cabacungan in Manila; and Allan Macatuno and Tonette Orejas, Inquirer Central Luzon*

13 January 2015

'Ruling to boost Phl defense amid China assertiveness'

By PIA LEE-BRAGO and AUREA CALICA

Malacañang and the United States hailed yesterday the Supreme Court (SC) decision declaring the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the US and the Philippines constitutional.

The EDCA will help strengthen the country's overall national defense posture amid China's assertiveness in the West Philippine Sea, a Palace official said.

The US government also hailed the ruling.

In a statement, the US em-

bassy said, "The US welcomes the SC decision to uphold the agreement, which will further strengthen the US-Philippine bilateral relationship."

"The EDCA is a mutually beneficial agreement that will enhance our ability to provide rapid humanitarian assistance and help build capacity for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)," it said.

"We look forward to working closely with our Philippine partners on the implementation of this agreement," the

embassy added.

Presidential Communications Operations Office Secretary Herminio Coloma Jr. said the pact could help in the AFP modernization program.

Quoting President Aquino, Coloma said the EDCA would introduce the AFP to the "most modern military equipment" and allow "a generational leap in our abilities" to operate the defense materiel.

Aside from upgrading military equipment and capability

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Ruling From Page 1

on maritime and territorial defense, Coloma said the agreement would enhance the country's humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

"The SC ruling on EDCA strengthens the strategic partnership between the Philippines and the US that is founded on two important building blocks - the Mutual Defense Treaty and the Visiting Forces Agreement," Coloma said.

Aquino earlier said the EDCA was not meant to strengthen the country's defense against China but was merely a refinement of a long-standing defense treaty between the Philippines and the

US.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) also welcomed the SC decision upholding the constitutionality of the EDCA.

"The EDCA is a critical component of our efforts to enhance and strengthen national security and improve our humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities," the DFA said.

"With the high court's decision, the Philippine and US governments can now proceed in finalizing the arrangements for full implementation of the agreement," it added.

US Ambassador Philip Goldberg had said EDCA is

not directly tied to the West Philippine Sea issue.

Under the EDCA, Goldberg said there would be more cooperation in terms of maritime security between the US and the Philippines.

During the hearing of the Senate committee on foreign relations in December 2014, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario said the EDCA contains provisions on strengthening the country's maritime security, which are not contained in the Visiting Forces Agreement.

He said the agreement does not actually allow the establishment of foreign military bases in the Philippines.

The AFP welcomed the SC ruling on the EDCA, saying it would improve the country's maritime security and territorial defense.

"The SC decision boosts our defense cooperation with a key ally," AFP chief Gen. Hernando Iriberry told reporters.

The Department of National Defense (DND) believes the high court ruling will enhance the capabilities of the military.

"With this development, we look forward to advancing our defense modernization and strengthening maritime security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities," DND spokesman Peter Galvez said.

"This puts us in a better position to improve our interoperability with the US and increase our Armed Forces' capacities," Galvez added.

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV, chairman of the Senate committee on national defense and security, said the SC ruling validated his vote against a resolution filed by Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago stating that the EDCA has to be ratified by the Senate.

Trillanes said it is merely an executive agreement to implement the US-Philippine obligations under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.

Santiago has yet to issue a statement on the SC decision.

According to her staff, Santiago wants to go over the high court's ruling first.

The senators who signed the resolution were Juan Edgardo Angara, Nancy Binay, Joseph Victor Ejercito, Francis Escudero, Teofisto Guingona III, Manuel Lapid, Loren Legarda, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Sergio Osmeña III, Aquilino Pimentel III, Grace Poe, Cynthia Villar, Ralph Recto and Pia Cayetano.

Senate President Franklin Drilon, Minority Leader Juan Ponce Enrile and Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV abstained in the voting.

– With Jaime Laude, Alexis Romero, Marvin Sy

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Anti-EDCA groups eye appeal

By GHIO ONG

Militant groups yesterday maintained the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the United States violates the sovereignty of the

Philippines.

Renato Reyes of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan) said they are considering

the possibility of filing a motion for reconsideration of the Supreme Court (SC) decision upholding the EDCA.

"We shall immediately consult with our lawyers regarding a possible motion for reconsideration, especially

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Anti-EDCA From Page 1

since the SC vote was not unanimous. We shall continue to expose and oppose US intervention in the Philippines," Reyes said.

Bayan maintained that EDCA is not the solution to the problem of China's incursions, not when the EDCA also violates the country's sovereignty.

Reyes claimed the EDCA would allow construction of US military facilities on Philippine soil and free use of the country's military bases by US troops.

He said the US would use the Philippines as a launching pad to exercise power over the Pacific region.

Reyes added the Supreme Court must have considered in its decision how the Senate resolved to reject the US bases

in the Philippines in 1991.

The League of Filipino Students also criticized the government for using the maritime issue against China as pretext for pushing the EDCA.

It also claimed the agreement, signed by the US and Philippine governments hours before the state visit of US President Barack Obama in 2014, violates Article XXIII Section 25 of the 1987 Constitution, stating that foreign military bases and troops "shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate."

The women's group Gabriela expressed concern over the proliferation of cases against women after the EDCA was upheld by the SC.

Joms Salvador of Gabriela said 800 cases of violence against women were filed against US servicemen, with at least nine other US military men, both active and retired, slapping cases from abandonment to domestic violence received by Gabriela.

Kabataan party-list Rep. Terry Ridon lamented the decision of the SC declaring the EDCA as constitutional.

He said the SC missed an historic opportunity to stand for sovereignty.

"The decision will set the stage for the return of the US bases in the country albeit disguised as Philippine bases under US control and supervision," Ridon said.

— With Jaime Laude, Paolo Romero



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US fast-attack nuke sub arrives in Subic

By Allan Macatuno
Inquirer Central Luzon

Agreement (Edca) between the Philippines and the United States.

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—An American submarine arrived at Subic Bay yesterday, hours before the Supreme Court ruling upholding the legality of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation

Carrying a crew of 160 sailors, the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Topeka (SSN 754) docked at the Alava Pier at 10 a.m. for the

US FAST-ATTACK/A18

From page A1

Philippine stage of its Indo-Asia-Pacific deployment routine, according to the US Embassy in Manila.

The submarine was welcomed by a marching band composed of local students.

The Topeka will conduct a multitude of missions and maintain proficiency of the latest capabilities of the submarine fleet, according to the US Embassy.

The US Navy continues to enjoy a close relationship with the Philippines, said Cmdr. David P.

Lammers, commanding officer of the submarine.

"Through port visits such as this one, we strengthen our ties and foster valuable cultural exchange. The more we interact, the better we will understand one another and the stronger our alliance will become. I appreciate the efforts that make us feel so welcome when we visit Subic Bay," Lammers added.

He said Filipino-American sailors aboard the submarine would also have an opportunity to connect with their heritage.

Having moved from the

Philippines and raised in California from the age of 3, I never really had a chance to experience true Filipino culture outside of my own family, Machinist Mate 1st Class Juan Paulo Reyes said in the statement.

For many crew members, this is their first Philippine visit.

Measuring more than 91 meters long and weighing more than 6,000 tons, Topeka is a marvel of modern engineering, capable of operating at depths greater than 243 meters at speeds up to 46 kilometers per hour, according to the US Embassy.

On Jan. 5, Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Texas arrived here as part of the Indo-Asia-Pacific deployment.

Texas measures 114 meters long and weighs more than 7,800 tons when submerged. It is capable of executing missions including antisubmarine warfare, anti-surface ship warfare, strike, surveillance and reconnaissance, irregular warfare, mine warfare and shallow water operations, according to a US military fact sheet.

Topeka was commissioned on Oct. 21, 1989, with Cmdr. Timothy M. Richert as her first

commanding officer.

It is the fourth ship of the "improved" Los Angeles Class, the Navy's newest and world's best nuclear powered attack submarines. These ships are the most advanced undersea vessels of their type in the world.

Faster than her predecessors and equipped with a highly accurate sonar and weapon control system, the ship can be armed with sophisticated Mark 48 and ADCAP torpedoes, as well as Harpoon land/antiship missiles.

It can also launch multipurpose Tomahawk cruise missiles

from vertical tubes located in the bow or from her torpedo tubes. Other significant improvements include: full under-ice operational capability, improved ship quieting, onboard over-the-horizon targeting capability, two towed sonar arrays, and retractable bow planes.

The Edca, signed between the US and Philippine militaries last year, allows the United States to expand its presence in the country by building its own facilities. The document also allows the US military to store military assets in selected Philippine military bases.

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Police, military allowed to carry guns during election period

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE

Police officers and military personnel in uniform as well as law enforcement agents with exemption from the Commission on Elections (Comelec) can carry firearms during the gun ban.

Chief Supt. Wilben Mayor, spokesman for the Philippine National Police (PNP), issued the clarification after a member of the Philippine Coast Guard was apprehended for possession of a 9 mm automatic, in violation of the gun ban.

Mayor said only policemen and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), including

blue guards and other security government agencies are allowed to carry firearms during work hours in their areas of responsibility.

"The penalty for election violation is not less than one year to six years and perpetual disqualification from government service. If you are a government employee, the penalty carries disqualification from re-employment and you cannot vote," he added.

The Comelec declared the start of the election period last Sunday and set up checkpoints

nationwide to implement the gun ban.

As of 8 a.m. yesterday, the PNP reported a total of 24 people arrested for violation of the gun ban, indicating there were 10 apprehended over the last 24 hours.

The PNP said there were 14 persons arrested during the first two days of gun ban.

Of the 24 arrested for violation of the gun ban, 21 were civilians, two security guards and a personnel of the Coast Guard.

Police also confiscated 15 firearms, seven deadly weapons, a firearm replica and 39 pieces of ammunition.

Mayor asked for understanding over the inconvenience caused by checkpoints.

"We are asking the public for understanding. There will be some inconvenience but this is for the welfare of the general public to ensure secure and fair elections," Mayor added.

The Comelec also issued guidelines for the PNP and the AFP in implementing

checkpoints.

Under the Comelec guidelines, police officers manning the checkpoint should be in complete service uniform and should conduct inspections in a courteous manner.

The police officers could only perform visual searches and ask routine questions.

The checkpoints should be well lighted and properly identified through a prescribed signboard containing the names of the designated election officer and the commanding officer of the

checkpoint.

Any search at any Comelec checkpoint must be done in a manner that will impose minimum inconvenience to the person or persons searched without violating their constitutional rights.

The police and military personnel manning the checkpoints should coordinate their efforts with an election officer to establish at least one checkpoint in each city/municipality to enforce the firearms ban during the election period.

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NPA still a threat to May polls – AFP

By Mario J. Mallari

The communist New People's Army (NPA) remains the number one threat to the May national elections, the military said yesterday.

Col. Noel Detoyato, chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Public Affairs Office (AFP-PAO), said that the presence of armed communist rebels in different parts of the country poses threat to the peaceful conduct of the May 9 presidential polls.

"NPA is still the threat because of their propensity to conduct extortion activities," Detoyato said.

"Unlike other armed threat groups that are confined in certain areas only, the NPAs maintain presence in various parts of the country," he added.

According to Detoyato, the military has been receiving reports that the NPA has already started collecting permits to campaign and permits to win in their areas of operation.

He said that the money collected by the NPAs through "extortion" is used for more violence.

Detoyato said that the military,

in coordination with the Philippine National Police (PNP), is taking solid action to thwart the communist activities.

"We urge those targeted by these NPA activities not to give in to extortion," Detoyato said.

Meanwhile, the military also claimed that the videos showing Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) bandits claiming affiliation with jihadist group Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) are nothing but propaganda.

"Our reaction remains consistent, that this is a continuing attempt by local terrorists to attract attention. There remains no credible, verified and direct connection to the bigger group in the Middle East up to this time," AFP spokesman Col. Restituto Padilla said.

Earlier, a video showing ASG high-ranking leader Isnilon Hapilon and other ranking bandit leaders pledging allegiance to ISIS circulated online.

"The AFP is already taking proactive measures in preventing the spread of extremist ideology and terrorist activities in the country," he added. **With PNA**

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Malaya

The National Newspaper

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AFP: ISIS province in Mindanao unlikely

BY VICTOR REYES

THERE is no direct link between Philippine Islamist groups and Islamic State militants and an ISIS province in Mindanao is not possible, Armed Forces spokesman Col. Restituto Padilla said yesterday.

Padilla was reacting to the analysis of Rohan Gunaratna, authority of the Inside al-Qaeda and the head of the International Center for Political Violence

and Terrorism Research in Singapore, that the next likely step of ISIS in the Philippines "is the proclamation of wilayat (Islamist province) Mindanao."

Gunaratna has said the "ISIS-initiated merger of the fighting formations and unifications of the leaders present an unprecedented challenge to the Manila government."

Also, a new video was circu-

See AFP > Page B2

AFP

lated in a jihadi forum last Jan. 4, showing Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon and Ansar al-Khilafa leader Abu Sharifa, marching with other extremist leaders and pledging allegiance with ISIS.

"To date, there is no credible, verified and direct link established and the possibility of establishing of a satellite is unlikely. There remains no credible, and direction connection to the bigger group in the Middle East up to this time," said Padilla.

Padilla said the video was not new, noting that some of

the personalities shown were killed during a military offensive against the Abu Sayyaf in Al Barka town in Basilan last December.

The Abu Sayyaf, the Ansar al-Khilafa and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters have pledged their allegiance to ISIS last year. The BIFF is composed of former leaders and members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front that signed a peace accord with government in March 2014.

"The recent pronouncement of ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon is part of their propaganda and does not necessarily reflect the

existence of an ISIS-directed terror operation in the country," Padilla said.

Nevertheless, Padilla said the military is taking "proactive measures in preventing the spread of extremist ideology and activities in the country."

Also, he said the military is "all out in its intelligence monitoring and focused military operations against terror groups in the country." The Abu Sayyaf is holding several foreign and Filipino hostages in Sulu.

"Our intensified operations will catch up to them whether or not they have pledged their allegiance to the Daesh," Padilla also said.

Hapilon, who has a \$5-million bounty on his head, is the Abu Sayyaf leader left alive of five who kidnapped 20 hostages, mostly Western tourists, from Sipadan island in eastern Malaysia in 2000.

An army intelligence official also disputed the likelihood of a "wilayat" being set up in the southern Philippines. - With Reuters

13 January 2016



Pahina. 2

Sundalo inalis na bilang bodyguard ng mga politiko

TINANGGAL na ng pamunuan ng Armed Forces of the Philippines ang mga sundalong nagtatrabaho sa mga politiko at ginagawang bodyguard o close-in-bodyguard.

Ayon Col. Noel Detoyato, AFP Public Affairs Office chief, noong Disyembre, 2015 pa nag-isyu ng recall order ang AFP sa mga tropa ng gobyerno, upang bumalik ang mga sundalong nagtatrabaho sa mga politiko at maging sa civilian personalities.

Sinabi nito na nasa 100 sundalo ang bilang na nanilbihan bilang close-in security ng mga mambabatas at iba pang government officials ang na-

kabalik na sa Special Detailed Unit sa Camp Aguinaldo.

Dagdag pa nito, kaya tinanggal na ang mga sundalo sa mga politiko ay bilang paghahanda na rin sa maayos at mapayapang halalan ngayong taon.

Kaugnay, ang lalawigan ng Masbate ang bubuhusan ng puwersa mula PNP at AFP sa darating na eleksyon na kung saan darating ang higit sa 150 miyembro ng Special Action Force sa nasabing lalawigan.

Sinabi ni Chief Supt. Augusto Marquez Jr., pinuno ng Police Regional Office, nagkasundo na ang kanilang hanay at ang Armed Forces of the

Philippines para sa mga ideploy na tropa sa lugar na inaasahan na magsisimula ngayong linggo hanggang sa matapos ang eleksyon.

Aniya, ang SAF company, AFP at dagdag na tauhan ng PNP na ipadadala sa Masbate ay para mahigpit na mabantayan ang mga Private Armed Group na siya umangon nasa likod ng mga krimen sa lalawigan base na rin sa records sa nagdaang mga eleksyon.

Isa ang Masbate sa listahan kabilang sa mga election hotspot o riasa areas of concern ng Commission on Elections.

MARY ANNE SAPICO

13 January 2016



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AFP personnel, bawal makisawsaw sa pulitika sa social media

Pinaalalahanan ng isang opisyal ng Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) ang lahat ng sundalo na hindi sila maaaring makisawsaw sa pulitika, maging sa social media, habang papalapit ang eleksiyon.

Binalaan ni Col. Noel Detoyato, hepe ng AFP Public Affairs Office (PAO), ang mga sundalo laban sa pagpapaskil ng komento, pagla-like, o pagse-share sa Facebook at sa iba pang social networking site ng mga artikulong may kinalaman sa mga kandidato.

"There are very harsh repercussions on what soldiers click and share on social media, especially when the post is about a candidate in the upcoming polls," ayon kay Detoyato.

"The orders given to them (troops) by the Chief of Staff (Gen. Hernando Iriberry) is very strict and very specific.

The AFP has to remain non-partisan during elections," dagdag niya.

Maganda man o hindi ang kamilang ipapaskil na komento sa isang pulitiko, sinabi ni Detoyato na maituturing itong pamumuhitika para sa mga tauhan ng AFP.

"That is an expression... that is considered a violation," ayon sa opisyal. "May mga specifics kasi dun sa proper use of social media."

Hinikayat din ng AFP spokesman ang publiko na ipagbigay-alam sa kanilang tanggapan ang mga sundalong lalabag sa naturang kautusan.

Elena L. Aben

3 January 2016



Page. 3

Retail bond para sa modernong militar

Hiniling ng Kongreso sa gobyerno ng Pilipinas na pag-aralan ang panukalang mag-isyu ng P150 bilyong (\$3.2 billion) retail bond para pondohan ang long-term military modernization plan upang matiyak ang strategic reserves ng bansa sa West Philippines Sea (South China Sea).

Sinabi noong Lunes ni Rep. Amel Ty, deputy minority leader sa Mababang Kapulungan, na hihilingin ng Kongreso sa Treasury na ikonsidera ang bond na inisyu upang makapag-impok ang mga Pilipino habang nakatutulong din na maprotektahan ang maritime borders ng Pilipinas laban sa mabilis na pagpapalawak ng lugar ng China sa West Philippine Sea.

"The bulk of the additional funds raised from the bond offering may be set aside to acquire new warships, like frigates and corvettes, for deployment to the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea)," ani Ty sa mga mamamahayag.

"We have to invest in new warships to secure the potential huge oil and gas deposits in the West Philippine Sea, which are the key to our energy independence."

Reuters

17 JANUARY 2016

Sketches

By ANA MARIE PAMINTUAN

Enhanced cooperation

With the Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement or EDCA between the Philippines and United States, a common question is whether Uncle Sam will now be more inclined to stop Chinese expansionist activities in disputed waters.

Among expats from several countries with whom I have chatted recently, the betting is that there will be little change, especially while the Philippines' arbitration case is pending in The Hague.

The 10-year period started running when the agreement was signed, so EDCA is now nearing two years old. During that period, China rapidly built artificial islands on reefs we are claiming in the South China Sea. Recently, it began landing civilian planes on its newly completed airstrip on Fiery Cross or Kagitingan Reef. Beijing is said to be building a submarine station in one of the artificial islands.

Uncle Sam didn't need access to anybody's military base to stop all that Chinese reef reclamation. But the US didn't do anything to stop the activities, except to regularly issue statements about freedom of navigation and behaving by international rules.

Even with the passage of EDCA, it's doubtful that Washington will do anything to stop the Chinese reclamation while waiting for the ruling of the Arbitral Tribunal on the Philippines' maritime entitlements.

Based on previous cases involving Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, the betting is that the tribunal will rule in our favor. Whether China will abide by the ruling is anybody's guess. I don't think even the Chinese leadership is sure of its course at this point. We like to joke that the Philippines will end up owning that airstrip on Kagitingan, which is starting to look better than the NALIA.

But we can't count on EDCA to, so to speak, deliver us from evil. It's good to have a powerful ally, but we must also work on our self-reliance for long-term credible defense and survival. We need to invest in developing our own self-defense capability. Filipinos have the brains, the innovation, and we can have the resources if we work hard enough. Japan did it after the war; China is doing it now.

With 10 justices voting to uphold the validity of EDCA as an executive agreement, the Supreme Court is unlikely to reverse its ruling, so the deal is expected to finally be implemented.

EDCA strengthens security cooperation between the two countries, and allows the US to station more troops here and position military hardware for operations within the region.

The access to Philippine facilities that the US will enjoy under EDCA boosts Washington's pivot to Asia and enhances its presence in a region where China is moving aggressively to assert dominance.



But EDCA is not like the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the US and Japan. That one specifically binds the US to come to Japan's defense in case of external attack. In 2012, Washington said the treaty covered the Senkaku Islands, which are being claimed by China. And in April 2014, US President Barack Obama categorically declared that the US would defend the Senkakus from armed attack. In our case, the US has merely said it is not a party to territorial disputes in the South China Sea and would prefer a peaceful settlement. Washington has mainly expressed support for the arbitration case that we have brought before the Arbitral Court in the Netherlands.

EDCA specifically states that the US will not set up permanent military bases here, won't bring in nukes, and will give the Philippine military full control over facilities that US forces will use.

Ticklish issues during the negotiations may still bedevil the implementation of the EDCA, which the Supreme Court deemed an executive agreement requiring no ratification by our Senate.

One issue is financing for facilities that will be set up for the "increased rotational presence" of US troops within Philippine military installations. Will Uncle Sam provide the funds, expected to be substantial, and how will this affect Philippine control over the facilities? US taxpayers want accountability for the use of their money by their government.

Another is the command structure within the facilities where US troops will be stationed on rotation, possibly for three to six months. While the EDCA provides that the Philippines will have full control over the facilities, members of different armed forces have their own dynamics.

US troops were in fact stationed on rotation at Camp Navarro / Edwin Andrews Air Base in Zamboanga City for 13 years, from January 2002. I don't remember any command problems being reported. The Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF)-Philippines was comprised of special forces from all the major US military services: the Army Green Berets, Navy SEALs, Marine Special Operations Forces and Air Force Commandos.

In the course of counterterrorism training and intel activities in Mindanao, JSOTF-P lost 17 men, 10 of them when a Chinook helicopter (call sign "Wild 42") went down in the Bohol Sea while returning from a mission in Basilan on Feb. 22, 2002.

In February last year, JSOTF-P was deactivated, although some of its personnel continued to provide assistance to Philippine security forces.

At its peak, JSOTF-P had only about 600 men. The rotational structure envisioned under EDCA is likely to be a much larger deployment and the command structure more complicated.

Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin signed the EDCA with US Ambassador Philip Goldberg on April 28, 2014, when Obama was visiting Manila. Legal challenges were expected by both parties, but these were complicated by the killing of transgender Jeffrey Laude by visiting US Marine Joseph Scott Pemberton in October of the same year.

The Americans had hoped for a Supreme Court ruling when Obama returned for the leaders' summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum last November, but the SC had too many other items on its plate, mostly election-related.

While waiting for the SC to act, the Americans scouted around for facilities where they want access for their troops: their former naval base in Subic Bay, their former air base in Clark Field, and Philippine military bases in Palawan and Cebu.

With the uncertainty hanging over EDCA, little has moved since then. Now that the uncertainty is lifted, we should avoid looking at the treaty as the answer to all our security needs.

While we need all the help we can get in dealing with an aggressive neighbor, we cannot revive a mindset of heavy dependence on others for our own defense.

SNAIL MAIL: Christmas cards, letters to the editor and invitations sent to me by snail mail as far back as November from various parts of Metro Manila finally reached our office yesterday. A colleague also received a letter yesterday greeting him on his birthday, which was in May 2015. The envelopes bore stamp marks dated Jan. 6, 2016.

We're only a few blocks away from the main office of the Philippine Postal Corp. PhilPost cannot use the holiday rush as an excuse for this atrocious service, since the digital age has drastically reduced the number of people still using snail mail. PhilPost has more responsibilities than merely manufacturing cute commemorative stamps.



13 January 2016

BULGAR

Pahina. 3

ROSES NG HUGA NGAT NG BAYAN

Maigi nang may 'military aid' ang 'Pinas kaysa nganga!

PAGDATING sa usaping pandigma, nananatiling kulelat ang 'Pinas.

Di man sabihin, alam natin ito.

Walang binatang ang ating mga kagamitang kasintanda pa ng ating mga ninuno.

Kung may moderno man, ito ay maaaring biniling second hand o donasyon mula ibang bansa.

Ganito lang lagi ang senaryo.

Paulit-ulit at nababahiran lagi ng kontrobersiya. Kulang na sa sundalo, kulang pa sa kagamitan.

Kaya naman pumasok ang bansa sa isang kasunduan sa pagitan ni 'Uncle Sam' na Philippine-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).

Ang kasunduang ito ay para magkaroon ng pagsasanay ang ating mga sundalo at mapanatili ang masiglang relasyon ng 'Pinas at U.S. pagdating sa depensa ng soberaniya.

Ngunit, 'di ito pinaboran ng mga senador at sinasabing nilagpasan lamang ang Senado sa pagpapatupad ng EDCA.

Kasama sa mga naghain ng reklamo laban dito ay si Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago.

Ayon sa senadora, unconstitutional ang nasabing kasunduan dahil 'di ito idinaan sa Senado na naturingang may kaugnayan sa military na pagsasanay at presensiya ng foreign troops.

Mayorya man sa sektor ng Lehislatura ang sumang-ayon kay Santiago, wala na rin itong magagawa dahil Supreme Court na ngayon ang humatol at batay sa botong 10-4, maituturing na constitutional ang EDCA.

Nagmistulang repleksiyon lang ng nakaraang talumpati ni U.S. President Barack Obama ang desisyong ito ng SC na ayon sa kanya ay walang dudang papaboran ito ng Kataas-taasang Hukuman!

Gayunman, marami pa rin ang umaalma dahil nangangahulugan umano ito na kontrolado ng U.S. ang 'Pinas.

Matagal naman nang nasa likod ng anino ng U.S. ang 'Pinas dahil tayo ay naging kolonya ng Amerika, gayunman, marami naman talagang bagay na dependent ang 'Pinas tulad ng sa ekonomiya. Ang ekonomiya ng bansa ay nakakiling lang o nakabase din lang sa malalaking bansa tulad ng U.S at China, kumbaga, wala pa talagang masasabing independent ang 'Pinas.

Maigi nang mayroon tayong masasandalan pagdating sa 'military defense, 'ika nga.

Ang tanging dapat isipin ni 'Juan' at ng kanyang gobyerno ay kung paano matutularan ang pagpapatakbo ng ibang bansa nang sa gayun, maaaring sa mga susunod pang henerasyon, kasing tataag na rin ng bansang U.S. ang 'Pinas pagdating sa pagdepensa sa soberaniya ng bansa.

Ngunit, sa ngayon, samantalahin na ito at matuto!

13 January 2016



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EDITORIAL

For a minimum defense posture for our country

FOR months, world attention was focused on the war in the Middle East, with the Islamic State at the core of the fighting in Syria. Terrorist attacks in France and in the United States were carried out by armed groups inspired by the jihadists in the Mideast.

Last week, world attention shifted to our part of the world after North Korea announced that it had exploded a hydrogen bomb, causing international alarm. A hydrogen bomb in the hands of North Korea would pose a direct threat to its neighbors, particularly South Korea and Japan, but also China and the US because of North Korea's missile capability. That same missile capability is a matter of great concern to us in the Philippines.

The US response was to fly a B52 Stratofortress heavy bomber just south of the North-South border, escorted by American and South Korean jet fighters. The B52 has long been known to be capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Its well-publicized flight within 70 kilometers of North Korea was a warning that any nuclear attack from that country could be quickly and massively countered by American nuclear power.

Against this background of a seeming nuclear threat, on top of the long-simmering dispute involving China, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and several other countries in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, the US and the Philippines held a "2 + 2 Ministerial Meeting" in Washington, DC, yesterday. Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin met with Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter.

The hydrogen bomb test was probably taken up as part of a general assessment of the security situation in this part of the world but more likely the talks of the two nations' foreign affairs and defense secretaries focused on the growing unease in the South China Sea. In the last "2 + 2 Ministerial Meeting" of the two nations in 2012, the Philippines asked for US assistance in the form of two military ships and a squadron of jet fighters to upgrade our defenses. The need for such upgrading continues to this day.

The Philippines has scrupulously followed established international procedures in any dispute with any nation. Through all these years, it has relied heavily on its bilateral alliance with the US. Still it needs to achieve, at the very least, a "minimum credible defense posture" – a fundamental attribute of any sovereign country.

We have begun to acquire, on our own, some of our defense needs, such as the jet fighters we recently purchased from South Korea. But we still have a long way to go, considering how our island territory is so open to intrusions from outside interests attracted by our rich maritime resources. We hope that the "2 + 2 Ministerial Meeting" in Washington, DC, will help us in our efforts for a credible defense posture, but apart from that, we hope that our government, with our own resources, will be able to step up our own efforts to this end.

ONLINE NEWS

13 JANUARY 2016

AFP personnel told to comply with COMELEC gun ban

From the Philippine News Agency (Jan 12): AFP personnel told to comply with COMELEC gun ban

With the COMELEC gun ban now in effect, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) reminded all of its personnel not to bring their weapons outside when not on official duty or without permission from the poll body.

This is to avoid sanctions for violators of the electoral order, said AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato.

"As early as December, we told all of our troops of the impending COMELEC gun ban and told them of the consequences. The Chief-of-Staff (Gen. Hernando DCA Iriberry) also told all our senior commanders to frequently remind their troops on what to do and not to do during the prohibition period," he said in Filipino.

The COMELEC gun ban which started January 10 and will last until June 8, is part of the preparations to ensure that peaceful and orderly national elections on May 9.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph/index.php?idn=1&sid=&nid=1&rid=845612>

DND-GA to purchase PhP84-M worth of 7.62mm 'finished components'

From the Philippine News Agency (Jan 12): DND-GA to purchase PhP84-M worth of 7.62mm 'finished components'

The Department of National Defense-Government Arsenal (DND-GA) is in the market for PhP84 million worth of 7.62mm "finished components," which refers to the primer, heads, powder and shells.

The 7.62mm bullet is used to arm light machine guns and sniper rifles of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The money will be sourced from the FY 2016 General Appropriations Act, according to the bid bulletin posted at the Philippine Government Electronic Procurement System.

Winning bidders are required to deliver the items within 120 calendar days from notice to proceed.

They must also have completed a similar project within the last five years.

The DND-GA will hold a pre-bid conference on Jan. 21, 1:30 p.m. at DND-Bids and Awards Committee Conference Room, Basement, Left Wing, DND Building, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

Bid opening is on Feb. 4, 10 a.m. at the same venue.

<http://www.pna.gov.ph/index.php?idn=1&sid=&nid=1&rid=845643>

Army Core Purpose: Serving the people. Securing the land.

AFP to conduct 'focused-military operations' vs rebels extorting from pols

From the Philippine News Agency (Jan 12): AFP to conduct 'focused-military operations' vs rebels extorting from pols

In line with efforts to safeguard the May 2016 polls, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) announced it will conduct "focused-military operations" against rebel groups conducting extortion missions against politicians.

"We (will) conduct focused-military operations after those (rebels)," AFP public affairs office chief Col. Noel Detoyato said.

He added this is part of the AFP's action plan to prevent rebels and lawless groups from interfering in the incoming elections.

Aside from this, Detoyato urged politicians not to give to the New People's Army (NPA) election extortion scheme.

"The NPAs call it 'permit-to-campaign' and 'permit-to-win' but we simply call it extortion, so if it extortion, don't give in to extortionists," he added.

Detoyato said they are constantly monitoring the situation on the field.

"We are (encouraging) them to report it to the Commission on Elections, to the police, to the nearest military (unit) so that we can take proper action," Detoyato said.

The military official said the AFP, while doing everything to counter the NPA extortion threat, is dependent on the information provided by the public.

Detoyato added that giving in to the rebels' extortion threat means additional funds for the latter's violent activities

<http://www.pna.gov.ph/index.php?idn=1&sid=&nid=1&rid=845523>

AFP downplays 'ISIS province' in Mindanao

From ABS-CBN (Jan 12): AFP downplays 'ISIS province' in Mindanao

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) on Tuesday downplayed the assessment of a Singapore-based terror expert that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) may soon establish a "wilayat" or province in Mindanao.

"To date, there is no credible, verified and direct link established, and the possibility of establishing of a satellite is unlikely. There remains no credible and direct connection to the bigger group in the Middle East up to this time," AFP spokesperson Col. Restituto Padilla said.

Padilla was pertaining to the statement of analyst Rohan Gunaratna, author of Inside al-Qaeda and head of the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research in Singapore, that the next step ISIS is likely to take in the Philippines is the declaration of wilayat in Mindanao.

On January 4, a video circulated in a jihadi forum, showing Abu Sayyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon and Ansar al-Khilafa leader Abu Sharifa marching with other extremist leaders and pledging allegiance with the ISIS.

But according to Padilla, the video was not that new, noting that some of the personalities shown had been killed during a military offensive in Basilan in December.

Padilla also reiterated that there is no proof that there is a direct connection between the ISIS and local terrorist groups.

"The recent pronouncement of ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon is part of their propaganda and does not necessarily reflect the existence of an ISIS-directed terror operation in the country," he said.

<http://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/regions/01/12/16/afp-downplays-isis-province-in-mindanao>

AFP insists NPA strength down to 3,900

From the Philippine Star (Jan 12): AFP insists NPA strength down to 3,900

The military stands by the communist insurgency figures reported by Armed Forces chief Gen. Hernando Iriberry last week, virtually rejecting its own press release distributed last year.

"We stand by the figures we reported. These are based on the briefing of our officials involved in operations and intelligence," Armed Forces public affairs Col. Noel Detoyato said.

Detoyato stressed that all data released to the media had undergone validation. He, however, declined to comment on the military press release issued last year, which claimed that the rebels' strength has dwindled to less than 3,000.

Last week, Iriberry announced that the number of New People's Army (NPA) members dropped to 3,926 as of the end of 2015 from 4,443 in 2014.

The figure, however, is not consistent with those issued by the military last year.

According to a military press release dated July 3, 2015, there were 3,200 NPA members as of the end of 2014. The press release also claimed that the number of armed rebels has decreased to less than 3,000 in the first three months of 2015.

"Based on the 2014 Yearend report, there were 3,200 armed members (NPA). In the first quarter of 2015, the AFP has recorded the neutralization of 340 armed members," the press release read.

"Neutralized" pertains to rebels who were killed, arrested or captured by security forces.

If the armed forces press release issued last year is accurate, then the number of NPA members increased to 3,926 last year from 3,200 in 2014. Such figure would refute the military's often repeated claim that the NPA is on a decline.

On the other hand, if Iriberry is correct in saying that the NPA's strength was at 4,443 in 2014, then the 2015 press release was inaccurate and the military merely exaggerated its accomplishments.

It also means that the military has failed to significantly reduce the number of NPA members as the figure has been at around 4,000 since 2010.

<http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/01/12/1541823/afp-insists-npa-strength-down-3900>