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21 May 2018

Monday



Honor. Patriotism. Duty

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Honor. Patriotism. Duty

DUB30: PROTEST WILL ONLY MEAN TROUBLE

STORY BY THE INQUIRER STAFF

Amid prodding that he take stronger action against China's militarization of the Spratlys, President Duterte insists the Philippines does not have the military muscle to assert its sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea.

AB

FROM A1

The Philippines should condemn China's militarization of the South China Sea and strengthen its alliance with the United States for protection, a risk analyst said on Sunday.

Lawmakers and security experts have also been urging President Duterte to protest China's military actions in the disputed waterway.

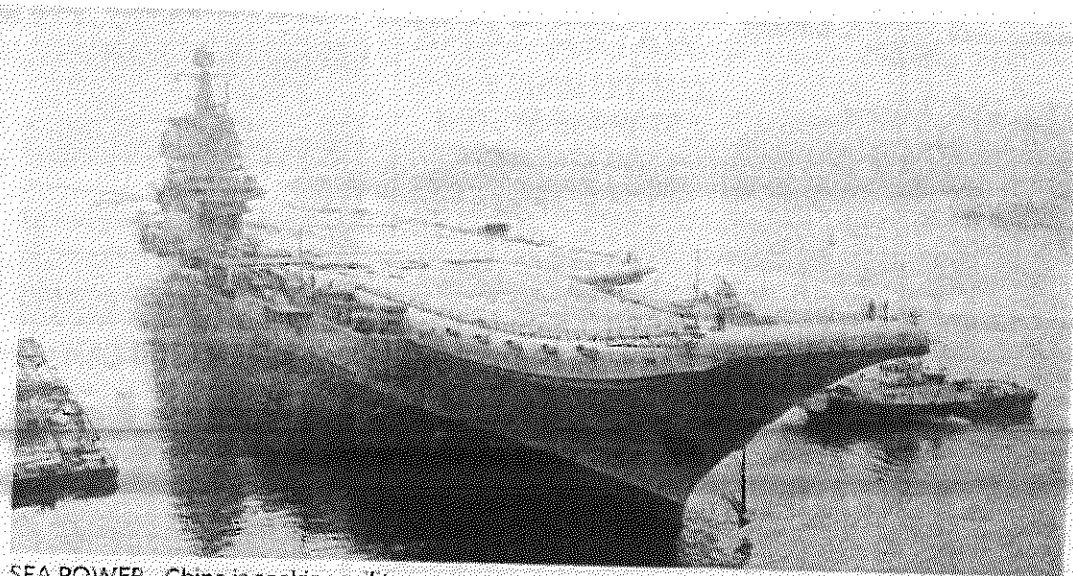
The President, however, insisted that asserting Philippine sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea—waters within the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea—meant trouble that the Filipinos could not handle.

Anders Corr, founder of the international affairs analyst Journal of Political Risk, said China's deployment of long-range bombers on artificial islands in the South China Sea was part of a "continuing process of incremental takeover," and a closer alliance with the United States would be beneficial to the Philippines.

Presidential statement

"The basic response should be a presidential statement against the bomber landings and should be a closer alliance with the US, which is the only country that can protect the Philippines right now from China," Corr said in a television interview.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force announced on Friday that it recently organized multiple bombers such as the H-6K to conduct takeoff and landing



SEA POWER China is seeking military supremacy not only in the South China Sea region but also beyond with its first home-built aircraft carrier—known only as Type 001A—completing sea trials in a landmark moment for its growing naval fleet. —AP

training on islands and reefs in the South China Sea in order to improve its ability to "reach all territory, conduct strikes at any time and strike in all directions."

The announcement, published on the PLA Air Force's Weibo microblogging account, did not provide the precise time and location of the exercise, but the Washington-based think tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AmTI) identified the location as Woody Island, the largest island in the Paracel archipelago that China, Vietnam and Taiwan are disputing.

With a combat radius of nearly 3,520 kilometers, AmTI said the H-6K bomber would put all of Southeast Asia in its range from Woody Island.

"Nearly all of the Philippines falls within the radius of the bombers, including Manila and

all five Philippines military bases earmarked for development under the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (Edca)," AmTI said on Saturday.

The Edca bases are Basa Air Base in Pampanga province, Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan, Lumbia Air Base in Cagayan de Oro City, Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base in Cebu and Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija.

Potential threat

Corr said that while it was unlikely for China, which he called "bully," to attack the Philippines at present, there was a potential threat to the country.

"You potentially have a situation where for some reason Duterte or the people of the Philippines went against what

China preferred in terms of their foreign policy, you could have a potential attack on the Philippines," Corr said.

"The threat is out there and it's not just to the Philippines," he added.

China claims nearly all of the 3.5-million-square-kilometer South China Sea in rivalry with the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.

Of the other claimants, only the Philippines has challenged China's claim in the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and won, but President Duterte has set aside the ruling in exchange for aid, loans and investments from Beijing.

China, which ignored the ruling, is nearly finished building military bases on seven Philippine-claimed reefs in the Spratly archipelago—Kagitin-

gan (internationally known as Fiery Cross), Calderon (Cuarteron), Burgos (Gaven), Mabini (Johnson South), Panganiban (Mischief), Zamora (Subi) and McKennan (Hughes)—from which the PLA can project its power throughout the South China Sea.

Weapons on PH territory

The PLA has been landing military aircraft on the reefs since last year and recently deployed antiship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems on the biggest of the seven reefs—Kagitingan, Zamora and Panganiban.

Despite prodding by lawmakers and security experts to protest China's militarization of the South China Sea, Malacañang has announced no move to assert Philippine sovereignty in the country's own waters in the hotly contested region.

In a speech in Cebu on Saturday, Mr. Duterte stressed that he would not go to war over the West Philippine Sea because the Philippines did not have the military capability to take on China.

He reiterated his openness to undertake joint exploration and development in the West Philippine Sea, a vast area believed to be rich in oil and natural gas.

Mr. Duterte said that while the arbitral ruling was announced in July 2016, two weeks after he assumed office, the Philippines actually won the arbitration against China months earlier.

"It did not come during my term," Mr. Duterte said. "But then again, if I were the President at that time, what could I have done? I can send my Marines

there. I can send every policeman there. But what will happen? They will all be massacred."

An opposition lawmaker responded on Sunday, condemning China's aggressiveness in the South China Sea.

Review ties with China

Sen. Risa Hontiveros sought a review of the Philippines' ties with China, while Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano said China's militarization of the South China Sea was "global concern."

"A review of our bilateral relationship with China is in order. We can't call a country that robs us of our islands and threatens us with nuclear war a friend," Hontiveros said in a statement.

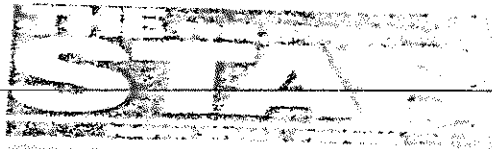
"By placing our country within striking distance of its nuclear-capable bombers, China has virtually threatened us with nuclear war over the West Philippine Sea. This is unacceptable," she said.

"With the silence and subservience of the Philippine government to China, we are placing in grave danger not only our country but also our neighboring nations," Alejano said in a separate statement.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon urged the Senate to take a strong stand and assert the Philippines' sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea.

"We must assert the Senate's role in foreign relations to condemn this creeping invasion of our territory," Drilon said in a radio interview. —REPORTS FROM

JULIE M. AURELIO, CONNIE FERNANDEZ-BROJAN, DJ YAP, ABS-CBN AND REUTERS INQ



Gaming officials face ax

Gov't corporate counsel on way out

By EDITH REGALADO

DAVAO CITY – The jig is up for gaming officials allegedly involved in corrupt activities, with President Duterte saying they are next to be shown the exit.

"I have fired and will fire tomorrow some more people," the President said during the groundbreaking ceremony of the Vista Alegre Homes in Talisay City, Negros Occidental late yesterday afternoon.

The President said among those he would fire are officials of the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR), the agency tasked to grant gam-

bling permits. "Meron pa, meron pang isang (there's one more) head of an agency. When you are granted this free port and you are beginning to abuse by issuing too many franchises of gambling," the President said.

Duterte said two gambling officials even followed him to Cebu City where he had a
Turn to Page 10

Gaming From Page 1

number of engagements over the weekend.

"Humabol sa akin sa Cebu. Sabi ko, you go. Both of you, you go," the President said he told the two yesterday.

Duterte revealed that the gambling officials tried to explain to him that whatever they have granted was only what is provided for in the franchise.

"And you said because it is in the franchise. Correct, it is in the franchise, but everything goes under a regulation. It is rightful to issue permits within your territory, but when you begin to issue gambling permits outside of your territory," he said.

The President pointed out that he has to limit gambling as he does not like it himself.

"Ako ayata ko niyan kaya (I don't like it so) as much as possible we limit it. I do not want to quarrel with anybody. And I said that when you begin to do that, you insist on something which is wrong," he said.

The President was also irked that the gambling officials granted franchise contracts to foreigners for 75 years.

"And you give these contracts for foreigners for 75

years? P... i... di ka ba gago. Hang presidente ang dadamian niyan – 75 years, you must be crazy. (Son of a... you must be crazy. How many Presidents will the franchise go through?)" Duterte said.

He cited the case of another official whom he also fired for consulting his sister about a certain matter.

"May isa dito. (There's one here). Why do you have to consult my sister? If it is a relative of mine, consider it denied," Duterte said.

The President stressed that titles such as first family or first lady are a myth and should not be given much importance.

Duterte remained on firing mode after he announced last Saturday that he would dismiss five more officials accused of corruption and is considering doing the same to the government corporate counsel.

Duterte said his decision to dismiss erring officials was in line with his campaign promise to curb corruption in government, a problem he described as "endemic."

"I'm inclined to fire somebody. I'd just want to talk to

him before I do that. One is an undersecretary... Well, of course, I'll just fire them together and they are about five in the list," Duterte told local executives in Cebu City. "I'd like to add more."

The President did not identify the five officials facing dismissal. He previously said he would not identify the officials he fired to avoid embarrassing their children.

In a separate speech in Alegria in Cebu last Saturday, Duterte said he might dismiss the government corporate counsel but did not elaborate.

"Maybe I'll fire the corporate counsel tomorrow," the President said during the ceremonial opening of the oil and gas production of the Alegria oil field.

Duterte appointed Rudolf Philip Jurado as government corporate counsel in April last year.

The President also revealed that he had asked a "law school brod" to resign last Friday.

Duterte lamented that public office has become "an opportunity to make money." He reiterated that while he is no saint, he has never extorted money from anyone.

Last week, Duterte asked assistant secretaries Moslemen

Macarambon Sr. of the Department of Justice and Tingagun Umpa of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to quit or face dismissal.

The Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission said Macarambon intervened on behalf of suspected smugglers of gold and other precious jewelry at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

Umpa, meanwhile, was accused of asking contractors from the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao for certain percentages from projects.

The President has also announced the suspension of several government prosecutors, airport customs officials and other individuals tagged in different irregularities.

Earlier this month, former tourism secretary Wanda Teo resigned after she drew flak over a contract that placed P60 million in tourism department advertisements to a media entity owned by her brother Ben Tulfo. Teo's camp has insisted that the deal was aboveboard.

As this developed, presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. released yesterday a two-page report of engineer Zenaida Tan, DPWH Region 10 director, to counter Umpa's

claims that he was a victim of a demolition job.

In her two-page confidential report, Tan said her office paid for Umpa and his companions' hotel accommodation and airfare, pegged at P28,000 and P89,452, respectively.

Umpa and his three companions visited Lanao, purportedly as a jump-off point to Marawi City.

After the meeting, Tan said the assistant secretary requested for a one-on-one meeting with her.

"In our private meeting, he gave me many instructions. Some of which (were) insinuating to earn extra income," Tan said.

Tan said she got the impression that Umpa was "asking for SOP," a term used by contractors referring to a commission or token for every transaction with a government agency for easy facilitation of projects.

"I was informed that the bad action of (Asec Umpa of asking for money and accommodations) is already known in their community and even throughout the Philippines," Tan said.

Tan claimed that Lanao del Sur 2nd district Rep. Mauyag Papandayan Jr. also expressed his apprehension that "(DPWH) and Malacañang, which Asec

Umpa used to namedrop as his shield, will be put in a bad light because of abuse of authority of Asec Umpa."

Roque released the papers after Umpa posted his sentiments on his Facebook account last May 15, denying involvement in any corrupt act as he demanded "justice."

"I want to clear my name," Umpa said in a post hours after Malacañang announced that Duterte had asked for his and Macarambon's resignation.

"I want to expose corrupt congressmen and corrupt DPWH officials. Demolition job *lawa*," Umpa said in his FB account.

In a press briefing, Roque said Duterte received reports that Umpa allegedly demanded commissions from government contractors in the ARMM.

Umpa denied the reports, claiming that he has angered the contractors for his "refusal to negotiate" with them.

The report on Umpa was among folders presented to the President in Malacañang, along with background information and updates on the case of Macarambon and his other alleged accomplices.

- With Alexis Romero, Christina Mender

PENTAGON: WASHINGTON REMAINS COMMITTED TO FREE, OPEN INDO-PACIFIC

US CRITICIZES CHINA'S MILITARIZATION OF DISPUTED SEA

BEIJING—The Pentagon criticized what it called China's "continued militarization" of island outposts in the disputed South China Sea, where the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force landed long-range bombers for the first time, putting the whole of Southeast Asia within their range.

The China Daily newspaper reported on Saturday that the PLA Air Force conducted take-off and landing training with the H-6K bomber in the South China Sea.

China is pitted against Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan in multiple disputes over islands, coral reefs and lagoons in waters crucial for global commerce and rich in fish and potential oil and gas reserves.

A statement from the Chinese defense ministry late on Friday said the exercise was conducted on an island reef, but it did not specify when or where,

saying only that it took place recently at a "southern sea area."

Simulated strike

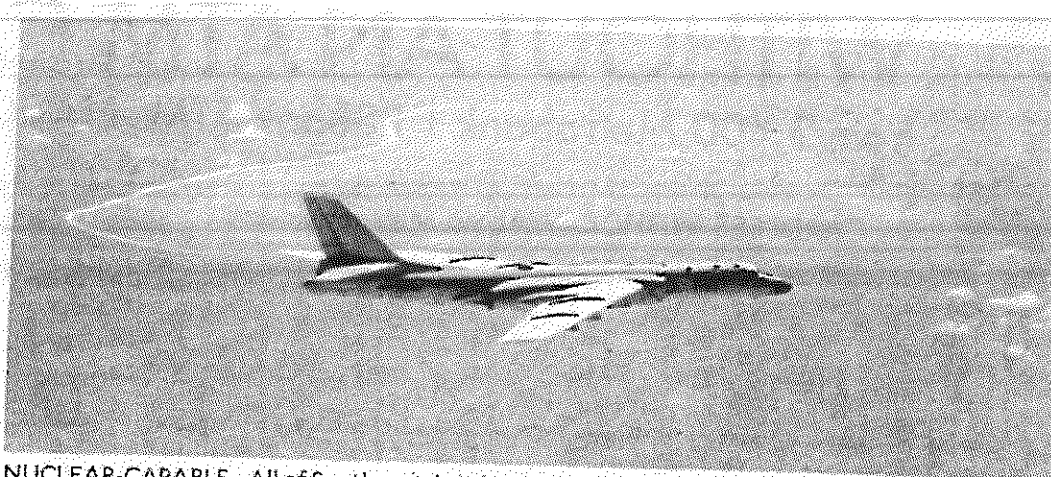
The exercise involved several H-6Ks taking off from an air base and making a simulated strike against sea targets before landing, the ministry said.

Wang Mingliang, a military expert, was quoted in the statement as saying that the exercises will help the Air Force improve its "real combat ability against all kinds of marine security threats."

The United States, which doesn't have any territorial claims in the South China Sea but insists on freedom of navigation and a peaceful resolution of the disputes without coercion or threat of force, criticized the move on Saturday.

"The United States remains committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific," Marine Lt. Col. Christopher Logan, a spokesperson for the Pentagon, said in an e-mail.

J



NUCLEAR-CAPABLE All of Southeast Asia is within the combat range of the H-6K bomber from China's military base on Woody Island in the Paracels. —AP

"We have seen these same reports and China's continued militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea only serves to raise tensions and destabilize the region," Logan said.

The Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AmTI), using Chinese social

media posts, identified the location of the exercise as Woody Island, China's largest base in the Paracels that are also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

Southeast Asia within range

With a combat radius of nearly 3,520 kilometers, the

H-6K bomber would put all of Southeast Asia in its range from Woody Island, AmTI said.

Farther south in the Spratly group of islands, China has constructed man-made islands on seven Philippine-claimed reefs and equipped them with runways, hangars, radar and mis-

sile stations, further cementing its vast territorial claims in the busy waterway.

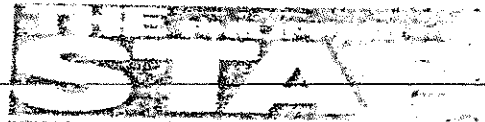
The United States and others have accused China of militarizing the region to bolster its claims.

Washington has said Beijing's actions violate a pledge by President Xi Jinping to former President Barack Obama not to militarize the area.

China insists it has a legitimate right to build up defenses on the disputed islands.

Adm. Phil Davidson, the new head of the Pacific Command, said recently that China had reached the tipping point in its control over the South China Sea.

Beijing's island bases can be used to challenge the US presence in the region, "and any forces deployed to the islands would easily overwhelm the military forces of any other South China Sea claimants," Davidson wrote in recent testimony to Congress. —AP *AB*



US: More troops needed vs China

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

With China now effectively able to control the South China Sea, the incoming chief of the US Pacific Command has called for an increase in military presence in the Indo-Pacific region to deter Chinese aggression.

Adm. Philip Davidson told the US Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing on April 26 that he would work to recalibrate US force posture in the Indo-Pacific.

He said China has built enough military infrastructure to completely control the South China Sea.

Davidson's testimony was
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US: More From Page 1

made even before the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) announced that it had landed planes, including the top-of-the-line H-6K bombers, on an outpost in the South China Sea for the first time.

Social media posts on the PLAAF's Weibo account, as well as the state-owned People's Daily Twitter account,

showed a long-range bomber landing and taking off from Woody Island—China's largest base in the Paracel Islands.

Davidson also wrote the PLA will be able to use China's South China Sea bases to challenge US presence in the region.

He said any forces deployed to the islands would easily overwhelm the military forces

of any other South China Sea claimants.

"In short, China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States," Davidson wrote.

The US gave assurances on Wednesday that it is committed and remains an interested party in the disputed territories.

During his visit to Manila, Patrick Murphy, acting principal deputy assistant secretary

for East Asia and the Pacific of the US Department of State, said the Chinese construction, reclamation and growing militarization in the South China Sea cause great concern for the US.

The militarization on the part of any and all parties would suggest that past commitments are being violated, he said.

Murphy added commitments not to militarize have been made publicly and privately to the US and other

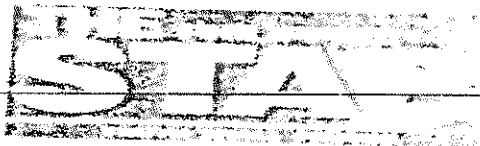
parties as he emphasized a multilateral approach in resolving the South China Sea dispute.

"We're very, very committed. As I say in the South China Sea, we're not a claimant but we're very interested party and we hope that the process to resolve disputes can be conducted transparently and in consultation with many third parties that are interested including the US," Murphy told reporters

in a press briefing.

Murphy said the Philippines is the US' most enduring defense treaty ally.

"The US has five treaty allies in the Indo-Pacific region — two right here in Southeast Asia — and the Philippines is a very enduring friend, the most enduring defense treaty ally that we have in the region and over history our two countries have worked together, collaborated together, sacrificed together," he said.



Confronting China means trouble – Rody

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Trouble would ensue if the Philippines insisted on its maritime claims in the South China Sea, President Duterte said.

Duterte stressed he is open to a joint exploration with China

to avoid conflict, instead of confronting the military giant.

He reiterated that the Philippines does not have the capability to declare war on China, adding that a conflict would only result in the massacre of Filipino soldiers.

"You know, if you insist, there

will be trouble. To the Chinese, what does it mean to you? War. What will we arm ourselves with if there's a war? Will we resort to slapping each other?" the President said during the opening of the oil and gas production of

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Confronting From Page 1

the Alegria oil field in Cebu on Saturday.

"So will we be able to win that war? If my troops are massacred, after the war, the soldiers and police will come after me next. Our troops will really be finished off there," he added.

Duterte made the remark

a day after Chinese paper *People's Daily* reported that China had deployed long-range bombers on Woody Island in the Paracels in the South China Sea.

With the deployment, the Philippines is now within the radius of Chinese bombers,

according to Washington-based think tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea while the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have overlapping claims. China's entire claim was voided by a United Nations-backed arbitral tribunal in 2016, but the Chinese government does not

recognize the ruling, which also awarded the Philippines sovereign rights over several areas in the West Philippine Sea including Panganiban or Mischief Reef off Palawan.

Analysts have stressed that the arbitral ruling allows the Philippines to assert its sovereign rights in the South China Sea, with international support, without resorting to war.

Duterte confirmed China has air assets that could reach the Philippines in minutes.

"If we go to a full-blown war, where would the Philippines end up? Why would I give away the lives of my soldiers and policemen in a battle which I cannot win?" he asked.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. said the Philippines had long

known about China's landing bombers on Woody Island.

"There is an airport there, so what do you expect? Aircraft would naturally land there," Esperon said.

Esperon explained that the country has been concerned about such activities of China and the government has a way of dealing with it.

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Confronting From Page 9

"We are doing something about it with China. We have our way of discussing it with China. And we are not noisy about what we are discussing," he said.

But Esperon was also quick to point out that if China's intention was to hit the Philippines as its target, then there is no need to use the bombers that land in Woody Island.

"China has missiles or the ICBM that could easily reach us without using the bombers," he said.

Duterte, for his part, denied allegations that he did not do anything to protect Philippine interests in the West Philippine Sea, the portion of South China Sea being claimed by Manila.

He said he informed Chinese President Xi Jinping about his plan to drill oil in the South China Sea during their meeting in 2016.

"Don't believe that I didn't do anything about the issue, that I just let it be. I told him (Xi) this straight the first time I said, 'I'm going there to dig my oil.' And then he said... 'We have just become friends and we have just begun to get to know each other. Let's not ruin

the relationship that we have,'" Duterte said, quoting the Chinese leader.

"Now, am I prepared to go to war against them? We don't have enough guns."

The President said he was open to China's offer to hold a joint exploration in the South China Sea.

"We don't have to fight. We can divide this in a joint development, joint exploration," Duterte stressed.

"And then we'll give you a bigger share rather than fight. It's only America who's worried because they lost a territory. You're the ones who came first. I was just new and then you adapted the rascal's propaganda," he added.

Duterte said he and Xi would talk about a joint exploration "someday."

The President has blamed the United States and the Aquino administration for their supposed failure to stop China's military buildup in the South China Sea.

Creeping invasion

Critics, however, claimed Duterte was just parrying allegations that he was being too

soft on China, which has been providing military and economic aid to his administration.

Lawmakers said Duterte should immediately confront China regarding the deployment of heavy bombers in the disputed region.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon described the move as "the creeping invasion of Philippine territory in the South China Sea by China."

"If we don't work on this, maybe the time will come when even the elections – the 2019 elections is near – the question at the back of people's minds is that maybe China will interfere in our elections in 2019 at the rate things are going," he said.

Drilon said there are other remedies short of going to war with China.

"We should assert our sovereignty, not by waging a war against China – we cannot do that – but in other fora, we should be able to continue our campaign in order that we can retrieve those islands that have been occupied by China," he said.

Sen. Risa Hontiveros called for a review of the country's bilateral relationship with China.

"We can't call a country that robs us of our islands

and threatens us with nuclear war a friend. This is unacceptable. This is a serious threat to the lives of our citizens, an assault on our Constitution and a direct violation of internationally recognized treaties to which we are a signatory," Hontiveros said.

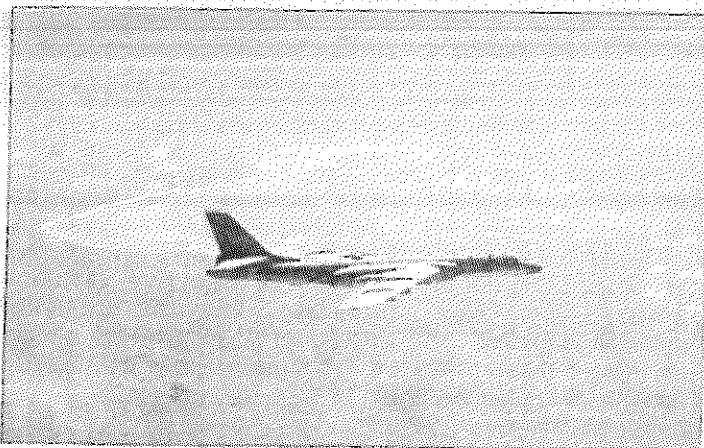
Hontiveros called on Duterte to bring China's nuclear threats before the UN General Assembly.

She challenged Duterte and his officials "to end their subservience to China and muster the necessary political courage to stand up to protect our national sovereignty and the lives of our citizens."

Sen. Joseph Victor Eerito said he was supportive of Duterte's efforts to improve ties with China but this should not come at the expense of the country's sovereignty and security.

On the other hand, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) justified the diplomacy exercised by Duterte.

The DFA said the deliberate and nuanced diplomacy by the Duterte administration had lowered tensions in the region arising from South China Sea disputes and even resulted in clear economic gains for the



In this undated file photo released by Xinhua News Agency, a Chinese H-6K bomber patrols the islands and reefs in the South China Sea. The *People's Daily* newspaper reported Saturday that the People's Liberation Army Air Force conducted takeoff and landing training with the H-6K bomber in the South China Sea.

country.

The issues in the South China Sea were raised by senior Philippine officials led by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea in a meeting with the commander of the US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris Jr. at the PACOM headquarters in Hawaii on Friday. The DFA said the Philippines and the US have reaffirmed their firm resolve to bolster their enduring alliance anchored on common values and interest, ties and the Mutual Defense Treaty during discussions in Honolulu.

The high-level delegation, according to the DFA, had productive discussions on critical regional and international issues with Harris and the commanders of all PACOM service components.

"The Philippine delegation had a very substantive exchange with Admiral Harris on regional challenges and both sides agreed that the alliance remains consequential to the preservation of regional stability and development," the DFA said in a statement.

—With Paolo Romero, Edith Regalado, Pia Lee-Brago

No need to fight China; We can share – Duterte

By ARGYLL CYRUS B. GEDUCOS, ROY C. MABASA, and HANNAH L. TORREGOZA

President Duterte said that the Philippines and China do not need to go to war over the disputed West Philippine Sea when the two countries can share the resources found in the area.

Duterte made the statement in Cebu over the weekend, following China's announcement that it has landed strategic bombers on an outpost in the South China Sea.

"China has offered for a joint – someday we will talk about it. Di man ta kinahanglan mag-away. Bahin ta (We don't have to fight. We can divide this in a). ▶12

No need to fight...

joint development, joint exploration," Duterte said.

"Unya mas dako ang inatag nako sa inyo. Kaysa malig away ko (And then we'll give you a bigger share rather than fight)," he added.

Duterte reiterated that going to war against China would only result to the deaths of a lot of police and soldiers, especially now with China's different facilities and infrastructure in the disputed waters.

"Well, you know they have the planes, not stationed in Spratly but near the provinces facing – Chinese provinces facing the Spratly and the China sea. And with their hypersonic, they can reach Manila within 7 to 10 minutes. Og malig gyera gyud sila g full-blown war, asa man ta punition (If we will go to a full-blown war, where would Philippines end up in?)" he said.

"Bakit ko ipasubo ang buhay ng mga sundalo ko pati pulis ko (Why would I give away the lives of my soldiers and policemen) in a battle which I cannot win? Dili kong buang na ipasubo nako na akong mga sundalo ko. (I'm not crazy enough to let my soldiers die). And besides, China has always been conciliatory," he added.

Duterte recalled how Chinese President Xi Jinping warned him about digging oil in the disputed waters, noting the newly founded friendship between the Philippines and China.

"So man na. Mudaog ba ta? Kay og

i-massacre lang ta, pagkahuman sa gyera ang sunod na itawon sa military ug pulis ako na. I-commit nako. Hurot man gyud na (So will we be able to win that war? If my troops will be massacred, after the war, the soldiers and police will come after me next. Our troops will really be finished off there)," he said.

The President also said that the Philippines does not even have enough resources to wage a war against the Asian giant.

"Alam mo, pag piralit mo, there will be trouble. Unsa may atong itubo, magsinag-paay ta diha? (You know, if we push it, there will be trouble. What will we arm ourselves with if there's a war? Will we resort to slapping each other?)" Duterte said.

Baw-an nimo, sa kagamay nato, wa tay – wa man gani koy rifles ngadto, mipalit ko – gihatag. Unya malig gyera na hinuon ta sa Intsik (You know, based on how few we are – I couldn't even buy myself a rifle. It was given to me. So how will we even fight with the Chinese?)" he added.

China assistance

Duterte said that it was China that offered assistance to the Philippines and not America.

"Daghan nang nisulod mga projects. Kani, wala ning China, hain man ang Americano diri gasuroy-suroy aning y^o ning gyera ni? O diha ang kughan ang Intsik ra gyud? O tan-awa. Ngano tagbo-tagbo man ta karon? Tagam (But a lot of

projects have already started to come in. If China wasn't – where would the Americans be if a war did break out? The Chinese are really industrious. Just look. Why are we all colliding now?" Duterte said.

"Ang America ra may naguol nga nawad an sila g teritoryo. P^o kamo'y ga una en (And then we'll give you a bigger share rather than fight. It's only America who's worried because they lost a territory). I was just new then you adopted the rascal's propaganda," he added.

Diplomacy eases tension

Meanwhile in Hawaii, senior Philippine official told the United States that the "deliberate and nuanced diplomacy" espoused by the Duterte Administration on the South China Sea issue had helped ease tensions, resulted in economic gains and opened the potential to explore oil and gas reserves in the area.

This was the position conveyed by a delegation of senior Philippine officials during their high-level discussions with outgoing United States Pacific Command (PACOM) chief Admiral Harry Harris, Jr in Hawaii on Saturday (yesterday morning in Manila).

"On the South China Sea, the Philippine Delegation underscored that the deliberate and nuanced diplomacy by the Duterte Administration had lowered tensions in the region and resulted in clear economic gains for the Philippines in terms of access to marine resources, protection of the marine ecology and the potential to explore oil and gas resources," the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said in a statement.

It said that the high-level delegation led by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea had productive discussions on critical regional and international issues with Harris and the commanders of all PACOM service components.

PH-US mutual defense reaffirmed

Also in the meeting, officials from the two countries have reaffirmed their firm resolve to bolster their enduring alliance anchored on common values and interest, historic ties and the Mutual Defense Treaty.

"The Philippine Delegation had a very substantive exchange with Admiral Harris on regional challenges and both sides agreed that the alliance remains consequential to the preservation of regional stability and development," the foreign affairs office said.

Aside from Medialdea, also in the delegation were Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Interior and Local Government OIC-Secretary Eduardo M. Ano, Foreign Affairs chief Alan Peter Cayetano, Philippine Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez, and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Teodoro Locsin Jr.

Gratitude to US

While Harris congratulated the Philippines on its decisive victory in the Marawi siege, the Philippine Delegation expressed its gratitude for Washington's "strong support" which it said was instrumental in the successful campaign against the militants.

The DFA said both sides agreed on the need to work more closely together, including in the exchange of information, in the fight against terrorism and in countering violent extremism.

Harris has led the PACOM since May 2015 and has actively worked to strengthen Philippine-US security relations including through his role as the co-chair of the Mutual Defense Board-Security Engagement Board.

The PACOM commander visited the Philippines in August last year and met with President Duterte at Malacañang where they discussed US support to the Philippine government's efforts to end the Marawi conflict, interoperability between the Philippines-US two militaries, and other regional threats.

Senators' condemnation

However, two opposition senators urged the President yesterday to raise the issue of China's continuing militarization in the West Philippine Sea before the United Nations General Assembly to bolster the Philippines' sovereignty over the islands.

Senators Franklin Drilon and Risa Hontiveros both condemned the latest landing of the H-6k bomber on Woody Island in the Paracel group in the Spratlys, as well as China's missile deployment and building up of military assets in the disputed sea.

"I condemn the continuous violation of

the arbitration award of the international tribunal, the very aggressive stance. You know, we should be very careful here. We are asserting our sovereignty... but lately, China is there and you can already say they are occupying part of Philippine territory," Drilon said in an interview over Radio DZBB.

Sen. Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito, likewise, joined the opposition lawmakers' call and urged the Duterte government to file a protest against China's militarization on the West Philippine Sea, saying this is not consistent with their "friendly approach" to the Philippine government.

"I've been an ally of the President from the very start, but I am not in favor of what is being done to our territories. If China is truly a real friend as they claim to be, they should stop taking over territories that are ours," Ejercito said, also in a separate Radio DZBB interview.

'Campaign vs China'

"If we do not campaign against China, then we could expect them to meddle in our elections. The question at the back of peoples' minds now would be, will China now interfere with how we choose our leaders? So we should protect our sovereignty. Let us continue in asserting our sovereign rights," the Senate minority leader added.

"A review of our bilateral relationship with China is in order. We can't call a country that robs us of our islands and threatens us with nuclear war a friend," Hontiveros, on the other hand, said in a statement.

"By placing our country within striking distance of its nuclear-capable bombers, China has virtually threatened us with nuclear war over the West Philippine Sea. This is unacceptable," she further said.

"This is a serious threat to the lives of our citizens, an assault on our Constitution and a direct violation of internationally-recognized treaties to which we are a signatory," added Hontiveros.

Senate stand

And with a looming leadership change in the Senate, Drilon and Ejercito said they hope that the new Senate President, reportedly with Sen. Vicente "Tito" Sotto III at the helm, would take a firm stand on the China issue as "a foreign policy partner of the President."

"This is a challenge to the new leadership; we must assert the Senate's role in foreign relations," Drilon said.

"We should assert our sovereignty, not by waging a war against China - we cannot do that - but in other fora, we should be able to continue our campaign in order that we can retrieve those islands that have been occupied by China," the minority chief added.

"This is a challenge to the new leadership; we must assert the Senate's role in foreign relations. We must condemn this creeping invasion of our territory and sovereignty. Sa akin po, importante ito, (To me, this is very important)," he said.

Senators condemn China's invasion of disputed territories

SENATORS on Sunday condemned what they viewed as China's continuous violation of international rules governing the South China Sea (West Philippine Sea) as they raised the need for the Senate leadership to make a firm stand against it.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon said as foreign policy partner of the President, the Senate must come up with a strong stance against China's "creeping invasion" of Philippine territory and must assert its sovereignty.

Drilon noted that the Philippines has been asserting that the Kalayaan (Spratly) Islands is part of the country's territory but with the presence of China in the area, it could be said that China is already occupying a part of the Philippine territory.

"This is a challenge to the new leadership. We must assert the Senate rules on foreign relations and condemn this creeping invasion of our territory," he said.

► **CondemnAS**

■ CONDEMN FROM A1

Senators condemn

referring to Sen. Vicente Sotto 3rd taking over the Senate

The Chinese Air Force, in a statement on Friday, said bombers of various types, including the long-range, nuclear strike-capable H-6K, carried out landing and takeoff drills at an unidentified island airfield after conducting a simulated strike training on targets at sea.

The Asia Maritime Transparency Institute (AMTI) of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, in a report released on Saturday, revealed recent deployments made by Beijing in the disputed waters.

The AMTI said the location of the runway was believed to be Woody Island, China's largest base in the Paracel Islands, which is also claimed by Vietnam and Taiwan.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has not issued any statement if it would be filing a diplomatic protest in relation to the recent actions of China.

"We should assert our sovereignty, not by waging a war against China, we cannot do that, but in other fora, we should be able to continue our campaign in order that we can retrieve those islands that have been occupied by China," Drilon said.

Another opposition senator, Risa Hontiveros, raised the need for a review of the Philippines' ties with China and called on President Rodrigo Duterte and Foreign Affairs officials to bring Beijing's nuclear threats before the United Nations General Assembly.

"A review of our bilateral relationship with China is in order. We can't call a country that robs us of our islands and threatens us with nuclear war a friend," she said.

The senator added that China's landing of nuclear-capable H-6K bombers on the Paracels Islands has placed the entire Philippines within striking range of the nuclear-capable Chinese bombers.

Hontiveros said China has virtually threatened the Philippines with nuclear war over the West Philippine Sea in a move, she added, that should be viewed by the government as unacceptable.

"This is a serious threat to the lives of our citizens, an assault

on our Constitution and a direct violation of internationally-recognized treaties to which we are a signatory," she added.

The senator cited Article II, Section 8, of the Philippine Constitution, which calls for the country's adoption and pursuit of "a policy of freedom from nuclear weapons in its territory."

She reminded the Duterte administration of a legally-binding United Nations treaty that it signed in 2017 prohibiting nuclear weapons, and its obligations under the Bangkok Treaty establishing a Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone.

Even Sen. Joseph Victor Ejercito of the majority bloc decried Beijing's latest actions, saying they seriously put in question China's sincerity as a friend of the Philippines.

He said that while he supports the President's policy toward China, he is not in favor of what the latter has been doing in the West Philippine Sea.

"We have to protect our territory and fight for our sovereignty. We could start maybe by filing a protest," said Ejercito, a member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

The reported landing of Chi-

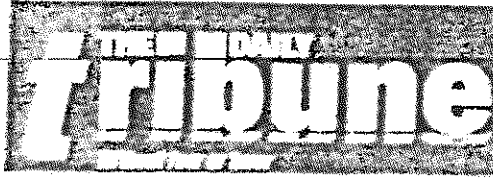
nese bombers happened a few weeks after reports came out about the deployment of missiles on some parts of the Spratly Islands by China.

Beijing's recent actions were contrary to a statement issued last year by Yao Wen, foreign ministry deputy director general for policy planning of the Department of Asian Affairs, that they would remain supportive of joint efforts between China and other sovereign nations to bring peace and stability to the disputed sea.

Meanwhile, the Philippines and the United States, in a high-level meeting in Honolulu, have reaffirmed their firm resolve to bolster their alliance through the Mutual Defense Treaty, common values and interest and historic ties.

Among those at the meeting were Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, US Pacific Command chief Admiral Harry Harris Jr., Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, Philippine Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Teodoro Locsin Jr.

JEFFERSON ANTIPORDA



Duterte nixes moves to antagonize China

By Angie M. Rosales

President Duterte reiterated his position not to cause problems with China over its recent aggressive moves in the contested South China Sea region that included a reported deployment of the Chinese air force's nuclear-capable aircraft bombers.

In a speech in Cebu city, Mr.

Duterte said the Philippines is "caught in a limbo" since it does not "have the assurance that America will remain by our side if a war breaks out."

"What will we arm ourselves with if there's a war? Will we resort to slapping each other?" Duterte said.

He added Chinese aircraft could reach the country within minutes and that the Philippines did not stand a

chance against China if war broke out.

"You know they have the planes, not stationed in Spratly but near Chinese provinces facing the Spratly and the China Sea. And with their hypersonic, they can reach Manila within seven to 10 minutes," Duterte said.

"So will we be able to win that war? If my troops will be massacred,

after the war, the soldiers and police will come after me next. Our troops will really be finished off," Mr. Duterte said.

Duterte said he had raised the territorial dispute with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who had told him "not to ruin the relationship."

Duterte quoted Xi as telling him:

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"We have just become friends and we have just begun to get to know each other. Let's not ruin the relationship that we have."

"You know how Chinese talk so if you force your position, there will be trouble," said Duterte.

"That is why when (Senator Antonio) Trillanes and the opposition said that we insist on the issue ... why would I give away the lives of my soldiers and policemen in a battle which I cannot win?" he added.

The reports on the Chinese bombers came shortly after think-tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) said China had installed anti-ship cruise missile and surface-to-air missile systems on three islands in the Spratlys. The mineral-rich region is also contested by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan.

AMTI published satellite photos of Chinese military intelligence aircraft in one of the islands that Beijing controls and that lies 12 nautical miles (22.2 km) from Pagasa Island (Thitu Island), where the Philippines maintains a small contingent that includes about 100 civilians.

Drilon wants Senate action

The Minority Leader, meanwhile, said the Senate should assert its role into taking a stand on what has been described by one of the opposition senators as a creeping invasion in the country's territory in the South China Sea by China.

"This is a challenge to the new leadership; we must assert the Senate's role in foreign relations," Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon said.

The new leadership in the Senate [under Sen. Tito Sotto] should be able to assert the Senate's role as a foreign policy partner of President Duterte, he said.

Drilon made the call as he expressed alarm over the reported landing of Chinese bomber planes on an island in the South China Sea.

"We should assert our sovereignty, not by waging a war against China - we cannot do that - but in other fora, we should be able to continue our campaign in order that we can retrieve those islands that have been occupied by China," Drilon said on radio.

"We must condemn this creeping

invasion of our territory and sovereignty," he added.

"I condemn the continuous violation of the arbitration award, of the international rules," Drilon said.

"If we do not assert our right on this, time may come when even the elections, since 2019 is approaching, the question at the back of people's mind, China might intrude into the elections in 2019 at the rate things are going," Drilon warned.

Drilon's fellow minority member, Sen. Risa Hontiveros urged the Executive to immediately review the country's bilateral relations with China and check if they are still faithful to the Constitution and existing treaties entered into by the Philippines.

"A review of our bilateral relationship with China is in order. We can't call a country that robs us of our islands and threatens us with nuclear war a friend," she said.

"By placing our country within striking distance of its nuclear-capable bombers, China has virtually threatened us with nuclear war over the West Philippine Sea. This is unacceptable. This is a serious threat to the lives of our citizens, an assault on our Constitution and a direct violation of internationally recognized treaties to which we are a signatory," Hontiveros said.

The senator pointed to Article II, Section 8 of the Philippine Constitution which calls for the country's adoption and pursuance of "a policy of freedom from nuclear weapons in its territory."

The opposition Senator also reminded the Duterte government of a legally-binding United Nations treaty it signed in 2017 prohibiting nuclear weapons, and its obligations under the Bangkok Treaty establishing a Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.

Hontiveros called on the Duterte government to bring China's nuclear threats before the United Nations General Assembly.

"As a country with a Constitution that renounces war as an instrument of national policy and the use of nuclear weapons, the Philippines must sponsor a resolution before the UN condemning China's threat of nuclear war against the Philippines and demand that it comply with the ruling of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) arbitral tribunal," she advised.

"I challenge President Duterte

RP, US reaffirms MDT

The Philippine and United States governments, in a high-level discussion, have reaffirmed firm resolve to bolster their enduring alliance anchored on common interest and the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said.

The MDT, signed in 1951, contains eight articles stipulating that both parties would provide each other aid in case of an armed attack against either Washington or Manila by an external party.

The agency said a high-level delegation led by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea had "productive discussions" on critical regional and international issues with US Pacific Command (PACOM) chief Admiral Harry Harris Jr. and the commanders of all PACOM service components in Honolulu Sunday.

"The Philippine Delegation had a very substantive exchange with Admiral Harris on regional challenges and both sides agreed that the alliance remains consequential to the preservation of regional stability and development," the DFA, through Acting Assistant Secretary Elmer Cato said.

At the meeting, Medialdea was joined by Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, Interior and Local Government OIC-Secretary Eduardo Año, Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez, and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Teodoro Locsin Jr.

On the South China Sea issue, the Philippine delegation underscored that the "deliberate and nuanced diplomacy" of the current administration had lowered tensions in the region and resulted in clear economic gains for the country.

This, in terms of access to marine resources, protection of the marine ecology, and the potential to explore oil and gas resources.

On Saturday, People's Daily, the official news organization of the Communist Party of China, posted a video on its Twitter account showing Chinese bombers, including a long-range H-6K bomber, landing and taking off on an island reef in a "southern sea area."

Meanwhile, on counter-terrorism cooperation between Washington and Manila, both sides agreed on the need to work closer, including in the exchange of information.

and his foreign affairs officials to end their subservience to China and muster the necessary political courage to stand up to protect our national sovereignty and the lives of our citizens," Hontiveros said.

Critic says Asean under threat

The Duterte administration is putting the Philippines and its neighboring countries in danger with its silence on China's massive militarization.

Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano made the statement following the landing of Chinese bombers in the Spratly Islands.

"The issue of China's militarization in the South China Sea is not a concern of one country alone. This is a global concern. Right now, the Philippine government is acting selfishly and foolishly, by dismissing the installation of military-grade weapons as something not to be concerned about," Alejano said.

"With the silence and subservience of the Philippine government to China, we are placing in grave danger not only our country, but also our neighboring nations," Alejano added.

Alejano, a former Marine officer, said that it is now clear that China is strengthening its militarization of the South China Sea, having deployed an H-6K bomber aircraft after setting up a missiles system just last month," the lawmaker said.

The former Marine officer described the H-6K as a strategic bomber with combat radius of 3,500 kilometers (km).

He said that the range of the bomber practically covers the entire Philippine territory and should definitely cause alarm.

"I condemn the recent actions of China as this further erodes peace and stability in the region," he said.

"We are seeing a clear and present danger. Until when will the Duterte administration keep its silence on this issue?" Alejano said.

Alejano questioned whether the Duterte government is indeed kowtowing to China and on whether he has compromised our territory in exchange for huge loans that would sink the country deeper into debt.

"It is a shame and utter disappointment that we have a President who only thinks of protecting his reins to power, instead of protecting his people," Alejano said.

Gov't agencies remain mum on Chinese bombers

BY ASHZEL HACHERO and VICTOR REYES

THE Department of Foreign Affairs, the Armed Forces, and the Department of National Defense remained mum yesterday on the landing of Chinese bomber aircraft on disputed islands in the South China Sea.

The Washington-based think tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative has said the Chinese bomber aircraft, including the top-of-the-line H-6K, landed on Woody Island, part of the Paracel group of islands in the South China Sea.

The Paracel islands are being claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

The three countries, together with the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, have competing claims in the South China Sea.

China said the bombers are part of a training exercise in the disputed region.

President Duterte on Saturday night defended his position not to confront China and reiterated his openness to undertake joint exploration and development in waters believed to be rich in oil and natural gas. But it was not clear if he was aware of the news about China's bombers landing on islands and reefs in the South China Sea.

"You know they have the planes, not stationed in Spratlys but near the provinces facing -- Chinese provinces facing the Spratlys and the China Sea," he said in a speech late on Saturday.

"And with their hypersonic, they can reach Manila within 7 to 10 minutes. If we will go to a full-blown war, where would the Philippines end up?" Duterte said.

The President, at the launching of a housing program in Talisay City in Negros Occidental yesterday, reiterated he is not crazy to gamble with the lives of his soldiers and policemen in a war which the Philippines cannot win. He also reiterated he would raise the territorial dispute issue with China within his term but at the proper time.

The Washington-based think tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, in its website, said: "The base H-6 aircraft's combat radius of nearly 1,000 nautical miles means even China's basic bombers taking off from Woody Island could cover the entire South China Sea."

"Nearly all of the Philippines falls within the radius of the bombers, including Manila and all five Philippine military bases earmarked for development under the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," it also said.

AMTI said the upgraded H-6K, which it said has a combat radius of nearly 1,900 nautical miles, "would dwarf this radius (of the base H-6), putting all of Southeast Asia in range of flights from Woody Island."

It said future deployment of Chinese aircraft on the "Big 3" in the Spratly Islands "would

GOV'T

bring Singapore and much of Indonesia within range of even China's lower-end bombers, while the H-6Ks could reach northern Australia or US defense facilities on Guam."

"Big 3" refers to the Mischief (local name Panganiban), Fiery Cross (Kagitingan), and Subi (Zamora) reefs which were subjected to land reclamation by China in the past year. The three reefs are occupied by China but are being claimed by the Philippines.

China has deployed transport planes and recently installed missile systems on the three reefs. The defense and military establishment said it was still

verifying China's installation of the missile system on the reefs.

The DFA issued a statement about a meeting in Hawaii between Philippine officials led by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Interior officer-in-charge Eduardo Año, and Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, and US Pacific Command chief, Admiral Harry Harris Jr.

Harris is set to retire next month and will be appointed as US ambassador to South Korea.

In the statement, the DFA said that on the South China Sea issue, the Philippine delegation underscored that the "deliberate and nuanced diplomacy

by the Duterte administration had lowered tensions in the region and resulted in clear economic gains for the Philippines in terms of access to marine resources, protection of the marine ecology and the potential to explore oil and gas resources."

Senate minority leader Franklin Drilon said the Senate should take a stand on the "creeping invasion" of Philippine territory in the South China Sea by China, adding the matter will be a challenge to the new leadership of the Senate.

He said the Senate leadership should be able to assert the chamber's role as "a foreign policy partner of the President." - *With Jocelyn Montemayor and JP Lopez*

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PH Rise now a protected area—Duterte

PRESIDENT Rodrigo Duterte has signed a presidential proclamation to protect 50,000 hectares of the Philippine Rise including the pristine Benham Bank, where some areas have 100-percent coral cover, as a "strict protection zone."

Duterte in a media briefing aboard BRP Davao Del Sur off the coast in Aurora, which is the nearest port to Benham Bank, said the protected area includes Benham Bank which is around 17,000 hectares declared as a no-take zone, and will be closed to any human activities except for scientific research.

An additional 300,000 hectares will also be declared as a fisheries management area. Fishing using active gears is banned in FMAs under RA 10654 which amended the Fisheries Code. A fisheries management area is subject to protective measures to ensure that there will be no illegal fishing and overexploitation of the marine resources.

The Philippine Rise is a 244 million hectare undersea region located east of Luzon, which includes a 13.4 million hec-

tare outer section that was validated by the United Nations' Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS) as part of the Philippine territory in 2012.

In 2016, Oceana joined an expedition in Benham Bank, the shallowest portion of the Philippine Rise with a depth of 40 meters. The team documented 100% coral cover in the surveyed areas with at least 170 species of fish recorded. The protection of Benham Bank and the greater Philippine Rise means that this national heritage will be preserved for the present and future generations.

Plates of foliose corals look like terraces in Benham Bank. This is a common sight on a bank, and a characteristic of mesophotic or "twilight" reefs, which are found at depths from 30 meters to 150 meters.

The Presidential proclamation is expected to set the legal framework for the protection and sustainable management of the Philippine Rise as it is automatically subject to the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act, RA 7586.

According to Senator Loren Legarda, President Duterte is likewise expected to sign soon into law the bill amending RA 7586, the proposed Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act, which seeks to increase the number of Congress-declared protected areas. The bill has been approved by the bicameral conference committee. 13

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'Clear, present danger exists'

Ex-NSA pushes action vs China deployment of bombers

By Rio N. Araja and Macon Ramos-Araneta

A FORMER national security adviser and lawmakers on Sunday warned that China's deployment of long-range H-6K bombers with nuclear strike capability on a disputed island in the South China Sea was a threat to the Philippines and urged the administration to file a diplomatic protest.

"This is a clear and present danger to the Philippines and our friends in the area," said former national security adviser Rollo Golez, in an interview with the ANC news channel.

He said the move should prompt President Rodrigo Duterte to convene the Na-

tional Security Council and for Manila to file a diplomatic protest.

Golez, the national security adviser during the Arroyo administration, said the landing of the bombers on the disputed Woody Island was too big an escalation in the South China Sea for the

Philippines to ignore and predicted that China would land more bombers on the Spratly islands next.

"I strongly recommend for the Philippines finally to lodge a very strong diplomatic protest because this development is very serious," Golez told ANC in a mix of English and Filipino.

Magdalo Rep. Gary Alejano condemned the Chinese move.

"It is crystal clear that China is strengthening its militarization of the South China Sea, having deployed an H-6K bomber aircraft after setting up a missiles system just last month," he said. "I condemn the recent actions of China as this further erodes peace and stability in the region."

China earlier had put up military structures on the disputed islands, and on May 18, its defense ministry brought in the

Next page

Actress...

From A1

Spike Lee accepted the runner-up Grand Prix for *BlackKkKlansman*, a searing broadside against racism with the stranger-than-fiction true story of an African-American police officer who manages to infiltrate the highest levels of the Ku Klux Klan.

Jury president Cate Blanchett said the film, which explicitly links the 1970s tale and white nationalism in the Trump era, "blew us out of the cinema".

But the most stunning moment of the night came when Italian star Asia Argento, who has said she was raped by Weinstein at Cannes in 1997, took the microphone and vowed to fight for justice for other victims.

"This festival was his hunting ground," said Argento, who says she was 21 when Weinstein attacked her in his hotel room.

"Even tonight sitting among you there are those who still have to be held accountable for their conduct against women. We know who you are and we are not going to allow you to get away with it any longer," she said to cheers from the audience.

Minutes before the actress took the stage police in Paris said they had opened a criminal probe against one of France's best-known directors, *The Fifth Element* maker Luc Besson, for allegedly raping an actress.

Lebanese actress-director Nadine Labaki, one of three female filmmakers among the 21 contenders, earned the third-place Jury Prize for *Capernaum*, which is set among the poorest of the poor in Beirut and featuring a devastating performance by a 13-year-old Syrian refugee boy.

Kazakhstan's Samal Yeslyamova nabbed best actress for *Ayka* by director

Sergey Dvortsevov for her moving portrayal of a young jobless immigrant from post-Soviet Central Asia who abandons her baby in Moscow.

Polish Oscar winner Pawel Pawlikowski took the prize for best director for *Cold War*, a tragic love story set against the backdrop of the Iron Curtain.

Pawlikowski, who won the foreign-language movie Oscar for *Ida* in 2015, caused a scandal at home when he told AFP at the festival that the film had been "blacklisted" by the nationalist government. Warsaw denied the claim.

He said his award was "a rare piece of good news" for his country.

Italy's Marcello Fonte—who was working as a caretaker when he was discovered—was the night's fairytale winner. He clinched best actor for his much-loved performance as a soft-spoken pet groomer who stands up to a heavy in Matteo Garrone's *Dogman*.

Three Faces by Iran's Jafar Panahi, who was barred by Tehran from attending the festival, shared the best screenplay prize with Italian director Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro*.

The Belgian transgender ballerina drama *Girl* won the Camera d'Or prize for best first film. It had earlier scooped the Queer Palm prize for LGBT-themed cinema and the best actor award for Victor Polster in the *Un Certain Regard* sidebar section.

French-Swiss legend Jean-Luc Godard also got a special prize for *The Image Book*, a bold, sometimes baffling meditation on the big questions of our time—war, migration and the survival of the planet.

Shoplifters was an early favorite at the 71st Cannes festival.

It depicts a couple who rescue two abused and neglected children, providing the first love the youngsters have ex-

perienced even as they groom the kids to steal.

US movie website IndieWire hailed it as "miraculous" while *The Guardian* called it "a rich, satisfying film".

Spike Lee called his own movie, which many critics hailed as a return to form for the *Do the Right Thing* director, a "wake-up call" against extremism around the world.

"It's a very, very scary time we live in," he told reporters.

"There is a lot of change but there is a lot of stuff that needs to happen... and with the present [Trump] administration they're doing many things to roll back the clock which I feel is dangerous."

Beyond the prize winners, this year's festival will linger for its off-screen moments.

Hollywood stars including Blanchett, Kristen Stewart, Helen Mirren and Salma Hayek and directors Ava DuVernay and Patty Jenkins joined a red-carpet protest to demand equal opportunities for women and a "safe workplace".

Two days later, festival organizers signed a pledge to encourage more diversity in its selection by 2020.

Despite being one of the most sought-after tickets, the premiere of Danish bad boy Lars von Trier's *The House That Jack Built* saw audience members walk out in droves from what they called a misogynistic orgy of violence.

Both its female stars, Uma Thurman and Riley Keough, were conspicuously absent from the red carpet, where Stewart on another night staged a protest of her own by slipping off her high heels and climbing the vaunted Cannes stairs barefoot.

In 2017, the top prize went to Ruben Ostlund's *The Square*, an art world send-up that went on to bag an Oscar nomination. AFP

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY MEDIALDEA MEETS WITH PACIFIC COMMAND CHIEF

PH OFFICIALS EXPLAIN TO US COMMANDER DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY IN ROW WITH CHINA

By Marlon Ramos
@MRamosINQ

Senior government officials met with the commander of the US forces in the Pacific on Friday to explain the Duterte administration's "deliberate and nuanced" diplomatic strategy in the territorial row with China that had secured "clear economic gains for the Philippines."

The Filipino officials, led by Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea, sat down with Adm. Harry Harris Jr., chief of the US Pacific Command (Pacom), in Honolulu, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said on Sunday.

The meeting came amid re-

ports that China had deployed nuclear strike-capable bomber planes on a disputed island in the South China Sea.

Pacom has the command and control of all US military units in the Indo-Pacific region, including the US Pacific Fleet and the US Special Operations Command Pacific. It is believed to have 375,000 personnel.

Ties reaffirmed

Despite President Duterte's public remarks denouncing Washington's expressions of concern over human rights in the Philippines and his preference for Beijing as an ally, the United States remains the

Philippines' biggest military ally.

In a statement, the DFA said the Philippines and the United States both "reaffirmed their firm resolve to bolster their enduring alliance anchored on common values and interest, historic ties and the Mutual Defense Treaty" during the meeting.

"The Philippine delegation had a very substantive exchange with Admiral Harris on regional challenges and both sides agreed that the alliance remains consequential to the preservation of regional stability and development," the DFA said without providing details.

"On the South China Sea (issue), the Philippine delegation

underscored that the deliberate and nuanced diplomacy by the Duterte administration had lowered tensions in the region and resulted in clear economic gains for the Philippines in terms of access to marine resources, protection of the marine ecology and the potential to explore oil and gas resources," it said.

With Medialdea in the Philippine delegation were Foreign Secretary Alan Peter Cayetano, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, acting Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez and Philippine Perina-

ment Representative to the United Nations Teodoro Locsin Jr.

On its website, Pacom said the US and Philippine officials reiterated "their countries' commitments to their shared interests and to each other, as longstanding friends, partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific region."

Marawi crisis

According to the DFA, Harris lauded the Philippines for its handling of the attack of Islamic State group-linked local terrorists on Marawi City last year.

"The Philippine delegation expressed gratitude for Washington's strong support in this

effort, which was instrumental in the successful [military] campaign," it said.

"Both sides agreed on the need to work more closely together, including in the exchange of information, in the fight against terrorism and in countering violent extremism," it added.

Harris, US President Donald Trump's nominee to be the next American ambassador to South Korea, has been awarded with the Legion of Honor, the order of defense merit of the Philippines, for his efforts to improve the defense cooperation between Washington and Manila. INQ

House bill eyes similar police, military rank nomenclature

By **DELON PORCALLA**

The House of Representatives has approved on third and final reading a bill that seeks to return the rank classification of Philippine National Police (PNP) members equivalent to their counterparts in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

Voting 166-6, congressmen gave their imprimatur to House Bill 5236, authored by retired police general and now Antipolo Rep. Romeo Acop.

Acop wanted to modify the PNP personnel's rank classification by adopting those used in the military, which he said is for purposes of clarity of position and responsibility.

Acop heads the House committee on public order and safety. The bill is co-authored by Pangasinan Rep. Leopoldo Bataoil and Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejano.

Bataoil is a former police general while Alejano is a former Marine captain.

The administration measure also foresees effective and efficient ad-

ministration and supervision in the PNP through modification of the rank classification of the organization's uniformed personnel.

Acop said the bill aims to address public confusion on the present rank of PNP officers with the use of such terms as "superintendent" and "inspector" which were borrowed primarily from Western and European jurisdictions. "Despite the usage of such terms for the last 20 years, the public seems to have been more accustomed to the use of rank classification using military terminologies such as 'general', 'colonel', or 'sergeant' as previously used in the police force," he said.

The bill provides for the amendment of Section 28 of Republic Act 6975, otherwise known as the Department of the Interior and Local Government Act of 1990, so that the PNP rank classification would be from director general to police general.

The rank of deputy director general would be police lieutenant general, a director would be police major general and chief superintendent would be police

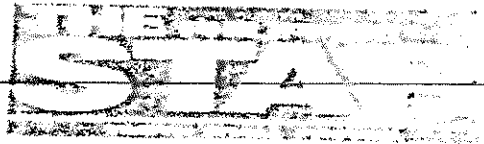
brigadier general.

A senior superintendent would be police colonel; superintendent to police lieutenant colonel; chief inspector to police major; senior inspector to police captain and inspector to police lieutenant.

Non-commissioned police ranks like senior police officer 4 would be police master sergeant; senior police officer 3 to police technical sergeant; senior police officer 2 to police staff sergeant and senior police officer 1 to police sergeant.

A police officer 3 would be renamed police corporal; police officer 2 to patrolman first class and police officer 1 would be patrolman.

The remaining provisions of RA 6975, as amended by RA 8551 (PNP Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998) that have reference to the rank classification of the uniformed PNP personnel and all other laws, EOs, rules and regulations inconsistent with the provisions of the proposed act shall be deemed modified or repealed accordingly. 7



Rody: Loot's house flooded with drugs

By ALEXIS ROMERO

Mayor Vicente Loot of Daanbantayan, Cebu has a room in his house filled with illegal drugs, President Duterte said yesterday, a week after Loot survived an ambush.

Duterte said he was ready to prove Loot's alleged involvement in the illegal drug trade, a problem he said could destroy the country.

"Remember, General Loot, your house was flooded with drugs. Let's not fool each other," the President said in Cebu City on Saturday. "I will prove to you that you're dead. Do not fool me. I am not a decent person. *Hihiritan kita* (I will expose you)."

The President said Loot's being a former police general does not scare him.

"Either we understand each other or just tell me what you want to happen," he said.

Duterte said the illegal drug trade in Cebu remains strong.

"*Kaya kayong nandito, Cebu malakas pa rin ha. So kung babagsak ka* (To those of you who are here, it is still strong here in Cebu. If you fall), sorry," he said.

"You want to file charges against me? Go ahead. You want to file charges against the police, go ahead," he said.

The President reiterated he would not allow any soldier or policeman involved in the war against drugs to go to jail.

On May 13, Loot survived an ambush by unidentified gunmen at the Maya Port. The attack wounded his two drivers and the nanny of his grandchild.

Duterte first accused Loot of involvement in the illegal drug trade in 2016.

But the trauma continues

'The kids cry whenever they hear the sound of airplanes'

By YAS D. GOANPO

DAVAO CITY – Mental health issues continue to hound residents who survived the months-long skirmishes between government troops and terrorists in Marawi City.

This, as stakeholders reviewed the imposition of Martial Law a year later, since the siege started in May last year.

Trauma, for example, has affected children as young as toddlers who now fear airplanes.

Fr. Chito Soganub, who has worked alongside survivors of the Marawi siege, said they have received reports that these children who now cry whenever they hear airplanes.

"They saw it happen," Soganub said, referring to the bombardment

of targets in Marawi City during the skirmishes between government troops and Maute Group members.

At first, the kids made fun of airplanes as if these were defecating.

Until the bombs exploded next to their homes.

Soganub said that, in one area, a huge crater lies as a grim reminder of that bombing run.

"Dumb bombs," or unguided

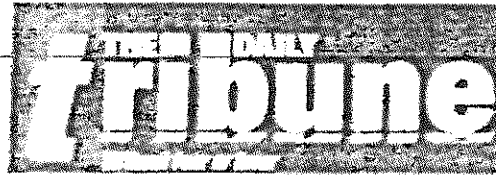
ordnance were dropped in hundreds of spots in Marawi City by the Philippine Air Force (PAF) which provided air cover for ground troops in the fierce fighting starting May 2017.

Various aircraft coming from various PAF units were deployed in Marawi City, with the most notable aircraft being the FA50 Bulldogs fitted with bombs, as well as OV10 Broncos.

As early as the first months of the siege, residents were already traumatized by the fighting, as some of them had to walk in between the crossfire between both sides. "You can imagine the trauma on the children," Soganub said.

Dr. Gail Hagan, who represents the Philippine Association of Psychologists, said that mental health workers were ready to provide psychosocial care for those who were affected by the Marawi Siege.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) said, to date, the explosives and ordnance teams are still scouring for bombs that could still be on the ground even months after the government declared the site clear of terrorists. 4



'AFP now more capable of defeating terrorists'

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is now more capable of defeating and neutralizing terrorists following the conclusion of this year's Balikatan exercises.

AFP chief-of-staff Gen. Carlito Galvez attributes this capability to the added learning and experiences obtained by Filipino troops to decisively address terrorism.

He made this point during the closing ceremonies of the two-week "Balikatan" exercises last Friday at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

"It can be said that this year's culmination is very timely and relevant to the AFP as we also near the first year commemoration of the Marawi Siege and its eventual liberation from the hands of the Maute and the ISIS terrorists. Through an event such as this, the AFP is now more ready and more capable to defeat enemies of the state," Galvez stressed.

The fighting in Marawi City started May 23 and ended on October 23.

Over 1,000 Maute-ISIS terrorists were killed in the fighting, including ISIS Emir in Southeast Asia, Isnilon Hapilon, and Omar Maute, the founder of the



GALVEZ

terror organization. Around 200 soldiers and civilians died in the fighting.

This year's "Balikatan" exercises gave special focus on counter-terrorism operations, disaster relief and mutual defense.

Around 5,000 Filipino and 3,000 American soldiers participated in this year's Balikatan activities that started mid-April, prior to the opening ceremony last May 7.

Troops from the Australian Defense Force and Japan Self-Defense Force also joined some of the exercises. Their participation was under the ambit of the US alliance system. PNA

PH, Russia hold high-level talks on security

By Francisco Tuyay

NATIONAL Security Adviser and Director General of the National Security Council Hermogenes C. Esperon Jr. led a high-level interagency delegation in talks with top Russian security officials held Friday in Moscow.

Esperon and his Russian counterpart, Secretary Nikolay P. Patrushev of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, noted that the Philippines-Russia security relations are moving on the right track following the conclusion last year of key framework agreements on security, defense, military-technical, law enforcement, and legal cooperation.

"Our security relations have indeed grown since President Rodrigo Roa Duterte decided to elevate Russia to become one of our important bilateral partners. Much has been achieved in the past two years, but there is still so much room for growth. We see more avenues for enhanced security cooperation between our military and law enforcement agencies," Esperon stressed.

At the second NSC-SCRF consultations, the Philippines and Russia reaffirmed their mutual interest in strengthening cooperation in the fight against international terrorism, drug-trafficking, transnational crimes, and cybercrimes, among others.

Both countries, Esperon said, are committed to pursue regular dialogue at the senior official and technical level, information and database-sharing, as well as training and other capacity-building activities. They likewise exchanged views on regional and international issues. 13

"The Philippines is interested in looking at Russian defense technologies for its security agencies. Russia is known for its high quality yet relatively affordable equipment. It can be a reliable partner in this regard," Esperon added.

**• NPA firearms
 seized in Quirino**

CAMP ADDURU, Cagayan – Police and military combat patrollers seized over the weekend high-powered firearms and ammunition believed belonging to communist rebel forces in Barangay Disimungai, Nagtipunan, Quirino. The teams, led by Senior Inspector Anthony C. Ayungo and 1st Lt. Joliet Angeles, stumbled over the firearms at 5 a.m. Saturday. They consisted of two M-14 rifles; five M-16 rifle; one M663 baby armalite, assorted ammunition, fourteen pairs of combat boots and 15 sets of PNP uniforms. Brig. Gen. Bartolome Vicente Bacarro, army's 502nd Infantry Brigade commander, said the cache belongs to the New People's Army's Kilusang Larangang Guerilla Quirino-Nueva Vizcaya. (Lizle Basa Inigo and Freddie G. Lazaro)

NPA flexes muscles in Negros and Bohol

THE encounter between government forces and the New People's Army in Bilar, Bohol on May 15 caught many by unpleasant surprise as the island province has long been insurgency-free. However, in a way, the NPA never left Bohol. The political grassroots organizations remained when the armed struggle waned and NPA fighters lay low or left for Negros.

The armed group that clashed with troops from the 47th Infantry Battalion in Brgy. Campagao was reportedly led by Dominic Compoc. Compoc, 52, is a native of the adjacent barangay of Dagohoy and was spotted in Bilar about a year ago with his wife Marilyn Badayos. He is a veteran NPA fighter who has survived countless battles in Bohol and, more recently, Negros. Compoc is one of the most wanted outlaws in the country with a reward of P2.6 million on his head for the crimes of murder, direct assault against person in authority, and rebellion (*Bohol Chronicle*, May 15 2018). Badayos, arrested in 2011 and 2016, was the secretary of the NPA's Central Visayas region committee's Southeast Front.

The May 15 encounter in Bilar was indeed the first encounter between the army and the NPA in Bohol in about a decade. In recent years, a few NPA fighters have been roaming Bohol. A year ago, they fired shots at an army detachment in Inabanga - the NPA's "punishment" for the military's accidental killing of an elderly couple during an airstrike against the Abu Sayyaf group members who had infiltrated Inabanga. On May 15, 2015, the NPA claims to have fired at an army detachment in Brgy. San Roque, Mabini (NDFP Visayas, July 7, 2015).

As mentioned, the political organizations remained even after the NPA had been neutralized. In Brgy. San Vicente, Trinidad, the red banner is hoisted, courtesy of a local peasant organization. This is just one of the local organizations under Hugbong sa mga Mag-uunang Bol-anon (Humabon), the Bohol chapter of Kilusang Maghubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP). However, irrespective of the presence of active militant organizations and the NDPP Bohol's claim that many Boholanos are asking the NPA to go to their areas (NDPP Bohol, May 18 2018), the armed struggle doesn't seem to have gained steam.

The situation in Negros is different. According to local media, the NPA recently established a new command - the Mt. Cansermon Command - which operates in Central Negros. The Leonardo Panaligan Comminal, the most active NPA command in Negros, operates in Central Negros too but further northeast. The Mt. Cansermon Command claimed responsibility for the May 7 burning of backhoe, bulldozer and generator of the National Irrigation Administration dam

project in Brgy. Tan-awan, Kabankalan City. On May 12, the command clashed with 62nd Infantry Battalion and CAFGU also in Tan-awan. The encounter cost the lives of two soldiers and - according to the NPA - one NPA fighter, with eight and two wounded on government and NPA side, respectively.

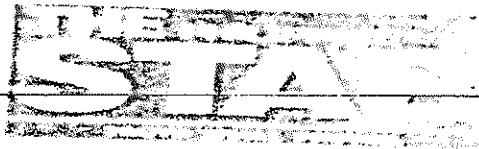
The attack on the NIA dam project site in Brgy. Tan-awan may have been motivated by failed attempts to make the contractor pay "revolutionary tax." However, the Mt. Cansermon

Command in a statement called the Ilog-Hilabangan River Basin Project anti-people. The project's three dams will cause displacement of local communities. Extortion or not, the dam projects have motivated the NPA to increase its presence in the area.

The six persons known collectively as the Mabinay 6 who were arrested by the 62nd Infantry Battalion last March assert that they are organizers of KMP and not members of the NPA. The lack of gunpowder residues on them negates the claim of the military that there was an exchange of fire. Mylee Albasin is obviously a political organizer rather than an NPA combatant. However, her companions in going to Mabinay's hinterlands were armed escorts from the NPA. The presence of these armed men alarmed local residents who reported it to authorities. The NPA and affiliated political organizers are not necessarily welcome just because they preach the cause of the toiling masses. Reaching out to marginalized farmers is praiseworthy, but bringing the NPA exposes the community to armed conflict.

Incidentally, one of the Mabinay 6 was reported to be a native of Sitio Lapyahan in Brgy. Labogon, Mandau City, Cebu. Sitio Lapyahan is a high-congested sitio of majority urban poor population in a barangay that once was suspected of being a safe haven for NPA members. The AFP used to keep a close eye on the barangay.

The recent encounter in Bilar, Bohol, is in itself not reason to conclude that the NPA has once again gained a foothold in Bohol. However, the military and the police must step up intelligence-gathering in order to prevent any possible further strengthening of enemy forces in the region. NPA fighters and organizers move freely between Negros, Cebu and Bohol islands, and their movements should be closely monitored to prevent more unpleasant surprises. *AT*



'Release of 2 female cops averted clashes'

Clashes would have erupted and things could have gone out of control if two policewomen were not released by their captors, President Duterte said yesterday.

He said government security forces would have clashed with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) if the policewomen had not been freed by the Abu Sayyaf bandit group.

"I pleaded with Misuari. I told him to deliver them here, not just the women because that would heat things up. The police would fight back and take revenge against the members of the M^I and M^N,

then it goes out of control," Duterte said, referring to MNLF founder Nur Misuari.

"I said, 'don't harm the women because that would cause a lot of trouble. Their sentiments are deep. Don't even touch them because - my God,'" he added during the the opening of the oil and gas production of the Alegria oil field in Cebu on Saturday.

Police Officer 2 Benierose Alvarez and PO1 Dinaly Gumahad were seized by the bandits in Patikul, Sulu on April 29.

They were released to the MNLF in Indanan town over the weekend, police said.

- Alexis Romero

Abducted policewomen presented to Duterte

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The two policewomen, who were abducted some two weeks ago in Sulu by suspected Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) members and were recovered recently by authorities, were formally turned over to President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in Davao City on Saturday.

The policewomen were recovered with the assistance of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) chair Nur Misuari, who was reportedly personally requested earlier by the President to help in their safe return.

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Secretary Jesus G. Dureza was accompanied by Misuari when they fetched the two PNP officers in Jolo on Saturday and turned them over to President Duterte.

Also present during the hand over were AFP Chief of Staff General Carlito Galvez, PNP Chief Director General Oscar Albayalde, and Sulu Task Force head Brig Gen. Cirilito Sobejana.

"Since day one, President Duterte instructed us to work on the safe release of the victims," he said.

PO2 Benierose Alvarez and PO1 Dinah Gumahad, along with two civilians, were abducted by armed men on April 29 in the town of Patikul.

They had just come from Camp Teofilo Bautista near the Jolo Airport when their tricycle was waylaid by suspected members of the Abu Sayyaf Group.

Authorities in Sulu said the two police officers underwent medical examination and debriefing from the military.

Sobejana said military operations have been heightened to rescue the remaining kidnap victims in the island.

Last week, a number of Abu Sayyaf members were killed following a rescue attempt by the military.

Two Abu Sayyaf bandits fall

GOVERNMENT security forces have captured two Abu Sayyaf bandits in separate operations in Zamboanga City and Sulu on Saturday.

Chief Insp. Helen Galvez, spokesman of the Western Mindanao Police Regional Office, identified one of the bandits arrested in a house in Purok 1B, Barangay Recondo as Hadji Gahis, a resident of Sumisip, Basilan, who was under the leadership of killed terrorist leader Isnilon Hapilon.

Galvez said Gahis was arrested based on a warrant of arrest issued by Judge Leo Principe of the Regional Trial Court Branch 9 for kidnapping and serious illegal detention in connection with the Golden Harvest Plantation kidnapping in 2001.

Hapilon forged an alliance with the Maute terrorist group in the May 2017 attack in Marawi City that prompted President Duterte to declare martial law in the entire Mindanao region which will be in

effect until December 31.

In Sulu, combined police operatives arrested another ASG bandit in Serrantes street, Barangay Walled City in Jolo town on Saturday night.

Chief Supt. Graciano Mijares, Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao police regional chief, identified the suspect as Hashim Abtaib aka Abu Imam. **B2**

Police said Abtaib was involved in the spate of kidnappings by the bandit group. -- *Raymond Africa*

House to hold key BBL caucus today

By ELLSON A. QUISMORIO

The all-important, all-member caucus by congressmen on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) will take place on Monday afternoon, House Majority Floor Leader Rudy Fariñas said.

"On behalf of Speaker Behot D. Alvarez, I am inviting all House Members to an All-Member Caucus on Monday, May 21, 2018, 1pm, at the Aquino/Makalintal Halls,

2nd Floor, South Wing Annex," Fariñas messaged House reporters Sunday.

He said the agenda will be on House Bill (HB) No. 6475, which is Alvarez's version of the proposed BBL. Three other BBL measures were filed in the current 17th Congress.

"All Committee Hearings that coincide with the said Caucus may proceed. Provided, that attendance thereto will be limited to those

whose attendance in said meetings is indispensable. Provided, Further, that those attending such hearings shall keep themselves abreast on the Caucus proceedings and results. Provided, Finally, that they should first be present at the Caucus at 1 p.m. before going to the Committee Hearings," said Fariñas, who chairs the powerful Committee on Rules.

In a rather uneventful hearing last May 15, a three-committee joint panel approved its committee report saying it is adopting Alvarez's bill in efforts to pass the controversial BBL.

The House leadership has promised members of the 292-member Chamber that they will get to voice out their concerns on the BBL during the caucus and again during the plenary vote.

This means the caucus could be a long and winded affair since the congressmen—especially those opposing the BBL—were somewhat told to hold their horses for the sake of expediting the measure.

The three panels that were given equal jurisdiction to handle BBL-related bills are the House Committees on Local Government, Muslim Affairs, and the Special Committee on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity.

A year after 5-month war

Marawi returning to normal

By FRANCIS T. WAKEFIELD

The spokesman of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Joint Task Force (AFP-JTF) Ranao yesterday said that a large portion of Marawi has returned to normalcy almost a year since members of the terrorist Maute Group terrorized the city.

In an interview, Col. Romeo Brawner said that almost all areas in the city have already been accessed by civilians, except 24 barangays which are considered the most affected areas or the so-called "ground zero."

"Right now the situation here in Marawi is peaceful and we have lots of kababayans who have already returned to their homes. We can say that a big portion of Marawi is back to normal," Brawner said in Filipino.

Brawner said they were still not allowing civilians to return to their homes in the 24 barangays which are part of ground zero due to the possible presence of unexploded ordnance or bombs.

However, residents were allowed to enter their barangays from April 1 to May 10 to salvage some of the belongings which they could still use.

"We allowed them (residents) per barangay three days to salvage some of their belongings. This started on April 1 up to May 10 and we can say that almost all residents have seen their homes and now we are again closing the most affected areas so

that the clearing operations of unexploded bombs can continue," Brawner said.

Brawner said, based on the latest reports, they received from their engineers, about 85 percent of unexploded ordnance have already been recovered.

"According to our engineers, about 85 percent of the affected areas have been cleared from the bombs that were dropped by our planes that did not explode," Brawner said.

"There are still many to be retrieved, there are about 70 bombs dropped that did not explode and so far we only recovered 19 of them. So there are still many yet to be found," he added.

Brawner said members of the AFP's Engineering Brigade and Explosive

Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Unit are task to find it.

AFP Chief of Staff General Carlito Galvez earlier said that the full rehabilitation of Marawi City which was devastated by war last year will go on full swing on June 15.

Galvez said he recently went to the war-torn city to prepare the commanders for the rehabilitation of the city and to ensure that the projects there will not be impeded.

"We have to make sure that it (rehabilitation efforts) will be unimpeded, it will be safe, and our contractors will not be hampered by any threat of kidnapping or any aggressions from the Maute-ISIS," Galvez said. ♡

Military still sees threats in Marawi

THE military acknowledges threats from terrorist groups in Marawi City ahead of the first anniversary of the attack on the city by the Islamic State-inspired Maute group in May last year.

Col. Romeo Brawner Jr., spokesman for the Joint Task Force Ranao, on Sunday said they still foresee threats within the main battle area of Marawi, especially in the vicinity of Lanao Lake.

"We receive reports that they [Maute] are recruiting but we have a positive, very good development

► ThreatA2

THREAT FROM A1

Military still sees threats in Marawi

because of the latest surrender of the Maute-ISIS members," Brawner added in an interview with dzBB radio, using another acronym for IS or the Islamic State.

He mentioned the 27 surrenderers from the Maute group who were presented to President Rodrigo Duterte earlier this month in Malacañang.

On May 23, 2017, the group attacked Marawi City and its members were holed up there for five months, causing the death of more than 1,000 persons including soldiers, civilians and terrorists.

Brawner said compared to the surrenderers of a number of Maute terrorists last year or during the first weeks of the fighting, recent surrenders were "pure" members of the group.

"The surrenders during the war [opted for] survival but since the war has ended, they [Maute terrorists] are

just in places recruiting yet we still manage to [make] some [of them surrender]," he added.

"These are not just supporters, these are pure members of the Maute group and they are the same ones who fought during the first weeks of the war," Brawner said.

One of the latest surrenders was the 15-year-old son of Ortoh Maute and his wife.

Brawner, however, refused to identify the boy.

Ortoh was the eldest among the Maute brothers, the most prominent of whom were Abdulrah, Maddle and Omarkhayam, who were all killed during the siege.

Brawner said additional troops from the Philippine Army's Special Force will be deployed to Marawi City to help in the "healing process" of internally displaced persons within the war zone.

He added that the government's week-long commemoration of the siege started on May 17.

The President is expected to visit Marawi City on May 24, the end of the commemoration.

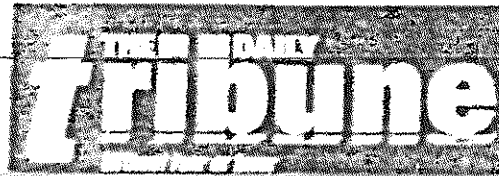
Brawner said 83 percent of the unexploded ordnances and bombs in the Islamic city had been cleared.

"These were bombs dropped by (Air Force) planes that did not explode," Brawner said.

The official said it is important to recover all the explosives so that construction and rehabilitation efforts can go on unhindered.

"We are again closing the most affected areas so that our clearing operations of unexploded bombs can continue," Brawner said, referring to the 24 villages greatly affected by the war last year.

DEMPSEY REYES



Unexploded IEDs still hinder Marawi clearing

By Mario J. Mallari

Almost a year after the Marawi City siege erupted and seven months following its liberation from the Islamic State (IS)-inspired terrorists, government security forces have yet to totally clear the "ground zero" of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), including bombs dropped by Air Force planes.

Col. Romeo Brawner, deputy commander of the military's Joint Task Force Bangon, said 24 barangays, which comprised the so-called "ground zero" or the center of the five-month armed conflict, are still not open to civilians due to ongoing clearing operations.

He added government authorities have already cleared 85 percent of the area.

But the military official said most of the unexploded bombs dropped by Air Force planes are yet to be located.

According to Brawner, only 19 of the estimated 70 unexploded bombs dropped by military planes at the height of the crisis have been located so far.

"We still have a lot to dig and locate," said Brawner during a broadcast interview.

Turn to page 7

Unexploded IEDs still hinder Marawi clearing

From page 1

"Up to now, there are areas where civilians are not allowed to enter and stay because of the danger. There are still a lot of unexploded bombs, unexploded ordnance," he said.

But Brawner said the residents were previously given three days for each of the 24 barangays at the "ground zero" to salvage whatever they can from their residences.

"We are now again closing the most affected areas so that the clearing operations can continue," he explained.

The clearing operations would also paved the way for the massive rehabilitation works led by Task Force Bangon Marawi.

Brawner said military engineer's and Explosives and Ordnance

Disposal (EOD) teams are leading the ongoing clearing operations to ensure safety.

He also stressed that most parts of Marawi City are now back to normal - where residents have returned to their homes and start a new life, including those in Barangay Mapandi where intense firefights happened at the height of the conflict.

During the clearing operations, Brawner said authorities found nine skeletal remains which are now undergoing DNA examinations for cross matching.

Meanwhile, Brawner said the IS-inspired Maute group continued to conduct recruitment at areas around Lake Lanao.

"The threat remains especially around the Lake Lanao where we received reports of recruitment,"

he noted.

The official, however, cited the surrender of 27 Maute group members recently and the recovery of more than 2,600 loose firearms in Lanao del Sur province.

Brawner particularly noted that among the Maute surrenderees were the wife of Otloh Maute, the eldest among the four dreaded Maute brothers that led their group during the Marawi City siege, and his 16-year-old son.

Otloh, along with his brothers Abdullah, Omarkhayam and Matti, led hundreds of their fighters in laying siege on Marawi City on May 23, 2017 with the group of Abu Syyaf leader Isnilon Hapilon, tagged as the emir or leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Southeast

Asia.

The government declared Marawi City liberated from the terrorists after Hapilon was killed, along with the four Maute brothers and the plot to establish an ISIS caliphate of a province in Marawi City was nipped.

The siege resulted in the killing of more than 1,100 terrorists, government troops and civilians. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were also displaced by the five-month conflict.

Brawner said activities have been lined up by the military to commemorate the first anniversary of the Marawi City siege - including medical, dental missions, food and trade fairs.

President Rodrigo Duterte is expected to honor the fallen government troops during the event.

Mayor survives ambush that killed 4 in Lanao Norte

FOUR men were killed and three others were wounded after unidentified men ambushed the vehicle in which Mayor Lacson Lantud of Pantao Ragat, Lanao del Norte was riding while travelling on a road in Barangay Cabasagan also in Pantao Ragat town yesterday morning.

Reports reaching Chief Supt. Timoteo Pacleb, Northern Mind-

anao police regional chief, said Lantud was unhurt in the incident as he and his companions were cruising a road aboard his Toyota Hi-lux pick-up at around 8 a.m.

The fatalities were identified as Kalic Disamburun, a barangay chairman, and a certain Tarapas, one PO1 Macalaba, and Casanuding Hasim. Reports said Disam-

burun and Tarapas died on the spot, while Macalaba and Hasim died at a hospital.

The wounded were identified as a certain PO1 Mangonte, Parmon Macarimbang, and Sangguniang Bayan member Acmad Magumnang, who were taken to Iligan Hospital.

Earlier reports said the younger brother of Lantud later identi-

fied as Hattah Lantud was among those killed along with members of the Maute group during the height of the Marawi siege in September last year.

The Marawi siege started May 2017 and lasted for five months which led to the killing of 974 terrorists, 168 government troops, and 47 civilians. — *Raymond Africa* 12

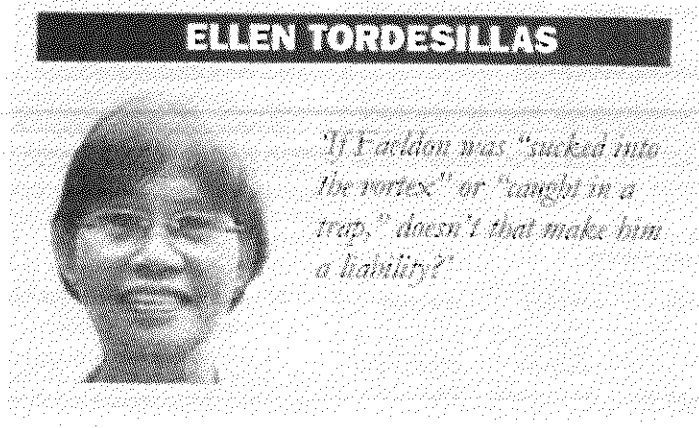
Why Duterte cuddles Faeldon

PRESIDENT Duterte's undiminished confidence on former Customs Chief Nicanor Faeldon even after 604 kilos of shabu worth P6.4 billion got past his bureau's watch and ended up in a Bulacan warehouse has been a puzzle to many.

Duterte's lack of outrage over the incompetence of Faeldon and his men rendered his war against drugs which has claimed the lives of some 20,000 suspected drug addicts and pushers a farce.

Duterte also re-appointed two BOC officials accused of allegedly accepting bribes from smugglers Ariel Nepomuceno and Teddy Raval as customs deputy commissioners.

Former military officers Gerardo Gambala, whom Faeldon recruited as deputy customs commissioners and Milo Maestrecampo, custom's import assessment services director were recycled to the Department of Transportation as Office of Transportation Security Director and as assistant director general of the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines, respectively.



Duterte also re-appointed two BOC officials accused of allegedly accepting bribes from smugglers Ariel Nepomuceno and Teddy Raval as customs deputy commissioners.

Faeldon was cleared of charges, not even negligence by the Department of Justice under then Vitaliano Aguirre II. (But earlier this month the Office of the Ombudsman's special fact-finding

team recommended graft and illegal drug charges against Faeldon over the smuggling of P6.4 billion shabu shipment into the country.)

Not only was Faeldon cleared by Malacañang. He was appointed deputy administrator of the Office of Civil Defense under the Department of National Defense.

People wonder what's Faeldon's hold on Duterte that makes him valuable to the strongman?

Last Saturday in his speech at the opening ceremony of the 2018 Philippine National Games in Cebu City, Duterte addressed the issue of his coddling of Faeldon. "Mao nakaniba. Akong hisgutan man nini... Nganong... I'd like to make it public. Nganongsi Faeldon, naagihaponsaako, ingonnila may kasona? You know, Faeldon was responsible for the recovery of smuggled cigarettes nga fake stamp gami; and si Dominguez, insisted sagi-compute niya'g pila. Si Faeldon tungoaghanghongsaakong 'Sir, uruhon ra na, billion pa.' And we earned P40 billion. (Let's talk about Faeldon. I'd like to make it public. Why did I keep Faeldon in my administration? They say that he already has a case filed against him. You know, Faeldon was responsible for the recovery of smuggled cigarettes with fake stamps. And Dominguez insisted that they computed how much it's worth. Faeldon was the one who

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WHY

told me that it's worth billions. And we earned 40 billion.) “

He cleared Faeldon of involvement in illegal drugs: “Mao nang di ko mutuongasi Faeldon involved sadroga. Naisahanlangsiya. He was sucked into the vortex of Maonanghangtodkaron, naako'y --- sa Magdalo. Nag-away away man nasilasaMagdalo. Pero kaningsi Faeldon, maonanghangtodkaron, gi-appoint napudnakosa Department of Defense sa... (That's why I don't believe that Faeldon is involved in drugs. He was just sucked into the vortex of --- that's why until now I --- Oh, Magdalo. He had a fight with Magdalo. But now I appointed Faeldon in the Department of Defense.) “

Duterte continued his defense of Faeldon: “Di ko mutuo eh. Siya ra man pudtungnahibawogasang... And to say nga “Sir, meronakong raid ngayon. Peraito. Kikita ang gobyerno.” So giingnannakotung Mighty, giingnannako “P***, kung di mubayad, presuhon. T*** j**.” Ingonnako, “Presuhana, ayawnapagawasa. Patyanadahasasulod.” Eh, alangan. (I don't believe that he's involved. He's the only one who knows where... And to say, “Sir, meronakong raid ngayon. Peraito. Kikita ang gobyerno.” So I told Mighty, “P*** if you refuse to pay, you'll go to jail. T*** j**.” I said, “Jail them and don't ever let them out. Kill them there.”)

Naangarinanikasog... Maski 50 million, ah ihawon ta mo. Wamo'y bayadbayad. Earned 40 billion. Unyaog gusto siyamangwarta, eh 'di nitiklopnalangsiya, wanasiyamanabi. Kato klarogud to maonang--- ako di ko magtuo. Nasabitsiya. Naisahansiyaditito. Anyway, istoryalang man na. (There are people here who attempted to cheat us of... 50 million. You never paid anything. Earned 40 billion. If they still want to make more money -- So that's what we believe here. Faeldon was just caught in a trap.)

If Faeldon was “sucked into the vortex” or “caught in a trap” doesn't that make him a liability?

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Incremental militarization



WHEN news broke out that anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missile systems had been installed on Philippine-claimed reefs on the West Philippine Sea, many were outraged but few were surprised. In many ways the latest development, while truly infuriating, only represents a culmination of virtually unchallenged Chinese militarization of the important sea lane.

Last year marked the beginning of frequent sightings of Chinese warships and aircraft in the Spratly archipelago, which had since been transformed into artificial islands. These include a Jiangkai II-class missile frigate and a Louyang III-class guided-missile destroyer at Panganiban Reef in January, a Type 056 Jiangdao-class missile frigate, the Luzhou 592, also at Panganiban, in June, then finally a Luoyang Jiangwei II-class frigate in November.

Clearly, something was afoot, and it didn't take a lot of guesswork to conclude that the Chinese were indeed developing a firm and long-term military presence on the islands, most probably in the form of bases. Also

“ There are more options beyond the simplistic war-versus-appeasement line ”

frequently sighted are Coast Guard ships, amphibious and sea transport vessels, and combat ships.

And so whenever new satellite images, whether of military transport aircraft or military planes, would be released, they only confirmed what many had long suspected: nearly two years since the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague legally shattered Beijing's claims over nearly the entirety of the West Philippine Sea, the area's militarization nevertheless proceeded, and it proceeded with barely a whimper from the Duterte administration.

For instance, asked about the latest and so far most alarming development—the deployment of high-tech weaponry on Philippine territory by the Chinese—both Malacañang and the Department of Foreign Affairs reacted with what can only be described, for all intents and purposes, as an absolutely feeble response: the Palace said it was still trying to verify the report and DFA said it took it seriously but stopped short of actually doing anything.

In stark contrast, Vietnam's Foreign Ministry reacted immediately and directly by asking Beijing to remove military equipment from South China Sea to maintain peace and responsibility.

Indonesia's President Joko Widodo in a bold move to send their strongest message to China sailed aboard a warship in waters near the Natuna chain which similar to the West Philippine Sea, has overlapping interests with China.

Most hit—perhaps because it sends the worst signal—is President Rodrigo Duterte's chronic refusal to issue any substantial protest “out of fear that it might elicit an adverse reaction from China.” Time and again, he justified his inaction by citing

the outsized disparity between Beijing and Manila's military capabilities, enforcing the false dichotomy that the only possible responses are a declaration of war and absolute silence.

The Duterte administration has notoriously failed to leverage on the 2016 PCA ruling, ostensibly as a sign of goodwill, in exchange for Chinese aid, loans, and investments. (A quick look at the first quarter investment figures already belies this direction, with investment from countries like Japan outweighing Chinese investments by a very wide margin.)

That the missiles are currently not trained toward the direction of the Philippines shouldn't also be used as an excuse. Collin Koh, a research fellow at Rajaratnam School of International Studies' Maritime Security Program, said China may eventually use its capabilities for offensive operations.

"Manila may say that when ties are rosy. But when ties turn sour, which can [happen] overnight without warning, those missiles would still remain there to threaten Philippine interests in the South China Sea," Koh said.

Some senators were similarly aghast at the apparent kowtowing from Manila. Sen. Francis Pangilinan said it would be a "fatal mistake" for the administration to think China or any other country would look after Philippine interests.

It would be a fatal mistake and detrimental to our sovereignty to think our interests will be defended by other nations," he was quoted as saying.

Senator Loren Legarda said the latest development should be met "with grave concern." The militarization of the region—"no matter the perpetrator"—only serves to heighten the risk of hostilities eventually breaking out in the region. Sen. Leila de Lima called on the military to "explain to the people its position on China's move to put Palawan under the threat of missiles launched from the Spratlys."

In a recent paper published by independent think tank Stratbase Albert del Rosario Institute, political science expert Renato de Castro cited the revival of a loose security association called the QUAD—composed of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—as a possible "equi-balancing gambit" that can counter Beijing's so-far unchallenged influence.

This way, instead of outright war, minor powers can foster its diplomatic linkages and economic activities with two or more competing major powers in such a way that influences policy but not enough to suffer any undue external influence. This provides the small state not only the ability to survive but to even advance its own political and strategic interests. Concretely, this provides a strong push back mechanism and a viable alternative to a potentially damaging policy of kowtowing to China.

Whatever track this administration pursues, what is clear is that there are more options beyond the simplistic war-versus-appeasement. At a time when the geopolitical situation in the world is becoming more and more complicated, the kind of diplomacy expected from governments need to be as complex and thoughtful as well.

ONLINE NEWS

21 MAY 2018

AFP ready to defeat terrorism intentions

By Priam Nepomuceno May 20, 2018, 12:33 pm

MANILA – The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is determined to frustrate and defeat efforts of all terror groups planning to launch attacks that can disrupt the peace and stability of the country.

This was disclosed Saturday by AFP spokesperson Edgard Arevalo after Prof. Rommel Banlaoi, of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research, claimed that extremist groups in Central Mindanao are conducting recruitment activities that are "massive, discreet, and decisive" among displaced Marawi City residents.

"Prof. Banlaoi may have drawn his conclusions from his sources. But in so far as the AFP is concerned there may be discreet and serious efforts to recruit but not 'massive' that it cannot be monitored by the AFP," he added.

Arevalo also noted that the above-mentioned recruitment is also an indication of the severe defeat suffered by the Maute-ISIS Group in Marawi City during last year's bloody fighting which started May 23, 2017 and ended on Oct. 23, of the same year.

"As we have said in the past, we were not surprised to hear reports of recruitment. The Maute-ISIS Group has suffered a serious defeat in Marawi. And certainly, they will recruit, re-organize and regroup to stage a comeback," he added.

Over 1,000 Maute-ISIS terrorists were killed in the fighting including ISIS emir in Southeast Asia, Isnilon Hapilon, and Omar Maute, one of the founders of the terror organization, while around 200 soldiers and civilians died in the fighting.

"But the AFP under the leadership of Gen. Carlito Galvez, Jr., is determined to frustrate and defeat the terrorist group and that is the assurance we give our people as we work closely with other relevant agencies of the government," Arevalo added.

"We do not have any disagreement to the recommendation of Prof. Banlaoi that 'the government must not only focus on restoring Marawi City folks' devastated homes but also rebuild their spirit and sense of hope," he stressed.

The AFP spokesperson emphasized that the military is doing everything it can through programs that are designed to prevent and counter-radicalism and extremism.

"We are aware that the issues raised by our brothers and sisters at the relocation/evacuation sites cannot be addressed by military solution alone. That is why the AFP is working in close coordination with other agencies of the government like Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Health, Department of Interior and Local Government, National Economic Development Authority, among others to address the issues of IDPs (internally displaced persons) and terrorism," Arevalo stressed. (PNA) www.pna.gov.ph

Balikatan improved AFP ability to counter terror threats: Galvez

By Priam Nepomuceno May 20, 2018, 12:29 pm

MANILA -- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is now more capable of defeating and neutralizing terrorists following the conclusion of this year's Balikatan exercises.

AFP chief-of-staff Gen. Carlito Galvez attributes this capability to the added learning and experiences obtained by Filipino troops to decisively address terrorism.

He made this point during the closing ceremonies of the two-week "Balikatan" exercises last Friday in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

"It can be said that this year's culmination is very timely and relevant to the AFP as we also near the first year commemoration of the Marawi Siege and its eventual liberation from the hands of the Maute and the ISIS terrorists. Through (an) event such as this, the AFP is now more ready and more capable to defeat enemies of the state," Galvez stressed.

The fighting in Marawi City started May 23 and ended on Oct. 23.

Over 1,000 Maute-ISIS terrorists were killed in the fighting including ISIS Emir in Southeast Asia, Isnilon Hapilon, and Omar Maute, the founder of the terror organization. Around 200 soldiers and civilians died in the fighting.

This year's "Balikatan" exercises gave special focus on counter-terrorism operations, disaster relief and mutual defense.

Around 5,000 Filipino and 3,000 American soldiers participated in this year's 'Balikatan' activities that started mid-April, prior to the opening ceremony last May 7.

Troops from the Australian Defense Force and Japan Self-Defense Force also joined some of the exercises. Their participation was under the ambit of the US alliance system. **(PNA)**

www.pna.gov.ph