
EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

Testimony of

Dr. Peter Lavoy

Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense

Asia and Pacific Security Affairs

U.S. Department of Defense

Before the

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade

February 7, 2012

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Sherman, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me today to testify alongside Assistant Secretary Kurt Campbell on the deepening of the security partnership and the long-standing alliance between the United States of America and the Republic of the Philippines. We are taking steps to strengthen our alliance partnership with the Philippines and I look forward to discussing this important topic and addressing your questions.

As Secretary Panetta recently said, "We are rebalancing our global posture and presence, [and] emphasizing the Pacific. This region is growing in importance to the future of the United States economy and our national security." Our relationship with the Philippines is an important part of achieving these national security objectives in the region.

As one of five defense treaty allies in the Asia-Pacific, the Philippines plays a critical role in our efforts to achieve important security objectives in the region, including in the areas of maritime security and counter-terrorism. Specifically, we believe that U.S. forces in the region working alongside our partners help promote stability. The evolution of our 60 year-old alliance with the Philippines has weathered a series of ups and downs, but has always moved along a positive trajectory. We currently have new opportunities to refocus our bilateral defense cooperation and

advance our mutual security interests in tangible ways. There are three reasons for this. First, the current Government of the Philippines is deeply committed to defense reform and modernizing its defense capabilities, initiatives for which it is turning to the United States for support. Second, our efforts to help the Philippines build its counterterrorist capabilities have been highly effective in reducing the operating space of known terrorist groups. Finally, the Defense Department has a new strategy that prioritizes Asia and is consistent with the President's recent remarks at the Pentagon.

Our bilateral military engagement is currently focused on assisting the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) transition from an inward focus on domestic threats to an outwardly focused military that needs to be reorganized to address external concerns. We are working to help the Philippines meet its strategic objective of establishing a credible security presence and awareness in the maritime domain. We are accomplishing this through security assistance focused on maritime security capabilities to help the Philippines play a greater role in promoting regional safety and security in that domain.

The cornerstone of our security relationship with the Philippines rests on ensuring stability in the region and providing increased capacity to jointly respond to missions such as conducting disaster relief and humanitarian operations. We continue to work with all elements of the Philippine defense establishment to further develop the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) into a modern professional military capable of defending its sovereign territory, upholding and promoting our shared values of human rights and democracy, and serving as a net contributor to regional security.

Another evolving security challenge is the increase in tension over land and maritime and territorial disputes claims in the region. We do not take a position on the competing sovereignty claims over the islands in the South China Sea, land but do believe that our partnerships in the region work towards ensuring security. In this endeavor we continue to encourage the Philippines and all nations to settle their disputes through a collaborative diplomatic process.

This renewed focus on maritime security is made possible by the great strides the Philippines has made in achieving its counter-terrorism objectives. The successes in countering terrorism in the southern Philippines provide the AFP the space and opportunity to refocus strategic security objectives from domestic threats to external concerns. We have made significant investments in countering transnational terrorist groups through. The personnel of Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) continue to work in support of the AFP to reduce potential threats to U.S. security from trans-national terrorist organizations seeking an operational safe haven in the southern Mindanao region while demonstrating to local and national leaders the importance of promoting our shared values of human rights and democracy. As a recent example, on Thursday morning (2 FEB) the AFP conducted a successful operation targeting key leaders of a terrorist network that has plagued the southern Philippines for years.

We have been working together with the AFP to develop concrete objectives and tangible measures of progress to ensure that U.S. security assistance funding for military capacity building and modernization is properly utilized and, that the results provide a return on investment. For example, we worked closely with them on developing a long-term defense budget that allocates funding for multi-year sustainment of training and equipment.

As Assistant Secretary Campbell mentions in his testimony, I recently joined him as the co-chair in the second annual Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) with the Philippines here in Washington. This meeting served to deepen our bilateral relationship and to explore areas of cooperation such as counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, disaster preparedness, border security, and human rights. We also explored the idea that our bilateral alliance could become part of a broader and more comprehensive strategy to pursue a more geographically distributed, politically sustainable, and operationally resilient U.S. force presence in the Asia-Pacific region. The meeting resulted in a mutual recognition that there is much that both nations can do together to address 21st century challenges in the region and to enhance our security cooperation for the mutual benefit of our two nations.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the strategic importance of the relationship between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States which we must continue to develop. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and with Members of this Subcommittee and Congress to seek opportunities to influence positively the future direction of this relationship. I stand by to respond to any questions you may have on this very important issue.