

US urged to back RP in Spratlys claim

by PIA LEE-BRAGO
Philstar.com

MANILA—The United States should “unequivocally support” the right of the Philippines to stake its claims in the South China Sea as well as point out the “aggressive, unreasonable nature” of China’s territorial claim in the area, a US-based think tank has said.

Walter Lohman, director of the Heritage Foundation Asian Studies Center, said that while the US does not support any particular claim, it should “bring attention to the responsible, deliberative, legal nature” of the Philippines’ claim. Lohman’s observation is contained in a policy research paper titled “Spratly Islands: The Challenge to US Leadership in the South China Sea.”

Lohman said that legality aside, any territorial claim should pass a common sense test. “Claiming sovereignty over 648,000 square miles of sea bordering on eight countries is absolutely untenable. And the US ought to say so,” Lohman said of China’s claim.

“The Philippines has done the world a great favor by reminding it of Chinese ambitions,” he said.

He cited China’s use of 2,000-year-old maps as reference as well as its “imaginative reading” of the Law of the Sea Treaty.

“Ultimately, the US cannot remain neutral in a dispute between an ally and its competition for regional influence - China,” he said.

“If an alliance does not at least mean dispensing with neutrality in choosing your friends, then what does it mean?”

He said the Chinese appeared to be playing on the “ambiguities” in the American position.

“Left unchallenged, the Chinese claim to the South China Sea could one day leave the American Pacific Fleet asking Chinese permission to conduct routine operations,” Lohman warned. “If the Chinese claims calcify at a pace similar to the development of their navy, in another 10 years, the US will have a real crisis on its hands,” he said.

The Spratly Islands dispute, Lohman said, is not

just the Philippines’ problem and that it is an even bigger problem for the US and all who rely on its leadership in the Asia Pacific.

The old issue of conflicting claims over the Spratly Islands resurfaced on the eve of the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit in Thailand last week.

“There is nothing simple about this dispute. Taiwan and Vietnam claim all of the Spratly Islands. And the specific Bruneian and Malaysian claims overlap those of the Philippines,” Lohman said. “But it is the Chinese claim—because of its aggressive scope, the history behind it, and China’s growing military capacity to back it up - that poses the real problem to regional stability,” he said.

He called the Chinese claim “expansive,” noting that the Kalayaan Islands are 1,000 nautical miles from China. By contrast, Lohman said, Palawan is roughly 230 miles away.

“Incidentally, the Kalayaans are a municipality of Palawan. Yet China also claims territory even closer to Palawan Island: Mischief Reef, the source of so much diplomatic scuffling 10 years ago, is only 135 miles away,” he said.

He added that the Chinese claim not only the Spratlys but 80 percent of the South China Sea.

“Critically, the claim is passively supported by China’s growing military prowess (double-digit annual growth in military spending and an expanding fleet of sophisticated warships and submarines) and what increasingly appears to be deliberate ambiguity about the intentions behind this buildup,” he said.

“This is a diplomatic problem,” Lohman said. “The possibility that this dispute could escalate to a point where the US could be called to invoke its treaty obligations to the Philippines is remote,” he said referring to the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty.

“It did not reach that point in the mid-1990s—a much more contentious environment than today. But the risk of serious conflict only increases with time,” Lohman said. ■

Senate sets up P50-million excuse for absenteeism

by AUREA CALICA
Philstar.com

ALL it long distance legislation, or law-making by remote control, or institutionalized absenteeism.

The Senate has allocated P50 million for a video conferencing system that would allow senators to participate in the chamber’s deliberations without actually having to be present in the Senate.

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV, who is currently detained in Camp Crame facing rebellion charges, Quezon City, is expected to benefit from the video conferencing system that the Senate would soon install.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson, chairman of the Senate accounts

committee, said they also plan to provide each senator with a laptop computer for paperless references that could be readily available when needed during hearings or plenary sessions.

He said the P50 million would come from the e-government fund and that there would be a bidding for the proper technology under the Government Procurement Reform Act.

Lacson explained that the majority, under Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, decided to allow Trillanes to participate in the Senate proceedings although he still would not be allowed to vote under Senate rules.

Trillanes is one of the leaders of the Magdalo group charged with rebellion in connection with the takeover of the Oakwood building in Makati in July 2003.

He is also facing another case for the siege of The Peninsula Manila hotel in November 2007.

“Allowing him to participate is a foregone conclusion that has already been decided in the committee of rules. And in my capacity as chairman of the Senate committee on accounts I was tasked by the Senate President to look for suitable technology to allow such proceedings to include Senator Trillanes,” Lacson said.

Lacson said he was satisfied with the demonstration last March 6, but the procurement processes must be followed.

“There is no collusive practice here and (the bidders) have to compete,” Lacson said, adding they would choose the most efficient, and technologically capable system. ■

Oxford group says RP recorded its best economic performance in 30 years under Arroyo

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it managed to avoid slipping into recession and maintained steady growth in 2008, which was driven in part by the strong performance of many sectors in the first half of the year.”

Still on the economic front, the OBG noted that “despite

external challenges, on balance, the Philippine economy had one of its best year in decades and by far the strongest headline performance on record since the Asian financial crisis in 1997.”

“The government’s policy has been to address previous structural failures through the liberalisation of selected markets, increasing government spending on infrastructure, and broadening economic support for the poorer segments of the society.

“These shifts in policy, in addition to fiscal consolidation through the improvement of tax receipts and the move towards greater privatisation, have been instrumental in attracting a record amount of Foreign Direct Investment,” said the OBG as it pointed out that “these economic developments have led to an unprecedented rise in GDP of 7.2 percent in 2007.”

“This rise in GDP can also be attributed to both increased supply and demand as a result of steady exports of electronics and a sharp hike of 17.1 percent in remittance

inflows from overseas workers.”

On the political front, the OBG advised possible investors that “it is likely that Arroyo will retain power until the upcoming elections due to support of the lower house of congress, local governments and the military establishment.”

This is true, even as “this administration has seen its fair share of challenges since coming to power in 2004, including calls for impeachment and an attempted coup”

“The Arroyo administration has faced much opposition but as a result of tangible progress it remains hopeful for both economic prosperity and national peace,” the OBG added.

The OBG reviews countries’ taxation systems, “examining the environment for investors,” and also guides investors about “hotel, government and other listings, alongside useful tips for visitors on topics like currency, visas, language, communications, dress, business hours and electricity.” ■

GMA: Gov’t will continue to invest in economy, environment and education

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skills training and retraining.

On education, the President said milestones have actually been achieved since the Philippines now tops in gender equality in terms of literacy rate and is among several countries leading in female enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary schools.

“The Philippines we see today is very different than the Philippines I inherited eight years ago. We now have a country that is safer and more secure. We have an economy that is stronger and able to withstand shocks such as what the global financial crisis is throwing at us,” President Arroyo said.

Today, she added, Filipino women have already made great contributions and have more to contribute to government efforts at addressing the global economic crisis and the threats of climate change.

Women can do a lot in our fight against the present global economic crisis and climate change, she intoned as she expressed hope the Filipino women will continue to be partners in development and progress.”

International Women’s day is observed March 8 every year throughout the world. It is meant to pay special recognition for the economic, political and social achievements and contributions of women to the further enhancement of human welfare. ■

House approves P100 million for new Bataan Nuclear Power Plant study

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feasibility study,” he said.

Protests continue opposed to the activation of the BNPP vowed to launch more protest actions.

“From now on, the public and the broad social movement against the revival of the BNPP will keep tabs on each legislator’s position, action and/or inaction on the said issue. However, special attention will be given to the 184 legislators who have rendered their support to the bill,” said Emman Hizon of the Freedom from Debt Coalition. Members of the group as well as of the Network Opposed to BNPP or No to BNPP picketed yesterday outside the Batasang Pambansa complex.

“Those who have put their signatures to the Cojuangco bill, their reasons notwithstanding, are now under the watchful eyes of the Filipino public,” Hizon said.

FDC appealed to the pro-BNPP lawmakers to withdraw their signatures, citing the “gross disadvantages” and “monumental folly” of operating the BNPP.

“Like the mothballed BNPP, we appeal to the highest sense of our legislators to also mothball Rep. Cojuangco’s bill. We believe

such a detrimental legislative measure has no place in the halls of responsible lawmaking,” Hizon said.

NO to BNPP described the mothballed plant as “tremendously dangerous, economically disadvantageous and utterly defective.”

“The protest parade symbolizes the many reasons why the BNPP revival will bring death to the Filipino people if the bill is not put to a close once and for all,” Dr. Giovanni Tapang, spokesman of NO to BNPP said.

“The Arroyo administration and Cong. Mark Cojuangco are running out of reasons to justify the revival of the Bataan nuke plant. The majority of the people of Bataan and their provincial government have already signified their opposition to the plant revival. Even if it passed legislation, the people of Bataan are sure not to allow it,” Tapang said.

“Moreover, the Catholic Church has taken an anti-BNPP revival position and the general public is against this nuclear scheme of the Arroyo administration.” Tapang added. (Philstar.com)

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