

Washington uses typhoon aid to push for Philippine military bases

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At a press conference with visiting US congressional delegates on Monday, Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario said the US military deployment in the country after Typhoon Haiyan revealed the need to conclude basing arrangements for US forces in the Philippines.

Del Rosario said the massive US military deployment underlined the need for the “framework agreement that we are working on with the United States for increased rotational presence.” He claimed that “humanitarian assistance and disaster relief” would be “a very major aspect of the agreement.”

US congressmen Chris Smith, Trent Franks and Al Green were visiting the Philippines, ostensibly to coordinate US relief efforts. They each spoke at the press conference on the need for a deal to allow US military bases in the country.

Smith, who headed the delegation and is a senior member of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee, baldly stated that “the calamity had a positive effect on the two countries' bilateral relations.” He added that “ongoing negotiations will all be given a positive boost as a direct result of this.”

Franks declared that the basing of US forces was needed because of “great common potential opponents,” a pointed reference to China. His remark undercut the “humanitarian” mask surrounding the reestablishment of American bases in the Philippines.

Del Rosario's insistence on concluding basing arrangements with Washington is a significant development in the preparation of a permanent US military presence in the country. This has been under negotiation for the past two years.

Washington has been aggressively pushing its pivot to Asia, and Philippine President Benigno Aquino has made Manila play a leading role as a proxy for US

interests in the region.

Negotiations over basing arrangements were nearly finalized in September, when Japan's Kyodo News Service published details of the deal released by a “senior Philippine marine officer.” The deal included the establishment of an advanced command post in Oyster Bay on the island of Palawan, just sixty miles off the disputed waters of the South China Sea. The US was also looking to establish “joint operational bases” in other parts of Palawan, including Ulugan Bay, and the city of Puerto Princesa. The return of US forces to Subic Bay was a further part of the agreement.

The basing deal would enable the US military to station, on a rotational basis, between 4,000 and 4,500 troops in the country.

There is no humanitarian agenda whatsoever in the construction of these bases. They are all proposed to be built on coasts facing China and the South China Sea, and not along the path of typhoons, which approach the Philippines from the southeast.

The basing arrangements were to be officially announced last month, during President Obama's scheduled visit to the country. When Obama cancelled his trip to the Asia Pacific amid the US government shutdown, there was political blowback throughout the region.

Political opposition to Aquino emerged and, under the guise of a corruption scandal, attacked Aquino's failure to balance between Washington and Beijing. The Philippine basing arrangements negotiating team announced that the talks had reached an impasse.

On November 6, two days before Haiyan struck the Philippines, Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin announced that Philippines disagreed with the United States over who would control the proposed bases. No further talks were scheduled.

On November 8, Haiyan slammed into the Philippines' Eastern Visayas region. It quickly became apparent that the storm had devastated entire areas, with an estimated death toll of 10,000 people announced within 24 hours of landfall. Washington said it would give an initial amount of \$100,000. No promises of further aid were made.

For three days, as hundreds of thousands struggled to find food, no more aid was forthcoming from Washington. On November 11, Aquino said bidding was going to open on the construction of basing facilities at Oyster Bay. On the same day, Washington announced that it would deploy nearly 13,000 troops on the USS George Washington aircraft carrier strike group and accompanying amphibious assault vessels, and give \$20 million in aid.

Washington seized upon the opportunity afforded it by the catastrophic typhoon. It deployed troops to the region to establish new facts on the ground, justify the basing of forces, and use its aid package to extort a resumption of negotiations.

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US Secretary of State John Kerry has now scheduled a visit to Manila in December, which is to be followed by an official state visit by Obama in April 2014. The framework for negotiating and signing the agreement for the basing of US forces is clearly central to the agenda in these trips.

The key figure for negotiating this agreement has now been sent to the Philippines. At the request of the State Department, the US Senate accelerated the approval of Philip Goldberg as the new US ambassador to the Philippines. Kerry swore Goldberg in on November 21 and the ambassador arrived in the Philippines today.

Goldberg worked as US ambassador in Bolivia in 2006-2008, when he was declared persona non grata by President Evo Morales and ordered to leave the country, having been accused of engaging in espionage and working to undermine the government by collusion with separatist organizations.

From 2009 to June 2010, Goldberg served as the US representative responsible for implementing sanctions against North Korea under UN Security Council resolution 1874, a measure introduced by the United States to escalate pressure against Beijing and

Pyongyang.

From June 2010 until last week, Goldberg was Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research (INR). Goldberg was thus the head of one of the 16 key offices of the US intelligence network. He was responsible for conveying the State Department's instructions to the National Security Agency and other spy organizations and for reporting on intelligence to the secretary of state.

Goldberg served as Clinton and Kerry's principal intelligence adviser. The INR website states that this office's mandate is to ensure "that intelligence activities support foreign policy and national security purposes."

The new ambassador to the Philippines is a man steeped in the US intelligence apparatus. His selection by Obama, and fast-tracked approval by the Senate, clearly indicates the central place that the Philippines holds in Washington's imperialist game plan.



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