



U.S. Boosting Military Presence in South China Sea



Washington, April 28 (RHC)-- U.S. forces will gain access to at least eight military bases in the Philippines following a new bilateral agreement, reports say. The eight bases would give the U.S. military the most access since it evacuated forces from its Philippine bases in 1990s.

Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gregorio Catapang told Manila's ABS-CBN News on Monday that the bases, which will not necessarily be limited to eight, were specified during an October meeting with the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Samuel Locklear.

The decision was made based on the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, a bilateral document signed last year, whose constitutionality is yet to be approved by a Philippine court.

According to the website of the American newspaper Stars and Stripes, two of the bases, Antonio Bautista Air Base and Naval Station Carlito Cunanan in Palawan, would provide the U.S. military with rapid access to the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

The announcement followed a joint military drill by the U.S. and the Philippines in the region, gripped by historical disputes involving China, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam over the islands.