



# LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SERVICE

## QUICK NOTES

Second Regular Session, 19<sup>th</sup> Congress

### **2nd Public Hearing of the Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones joint with the Committee on Finance**

**Chairperson: Sen. Francis “Tol” N. Tolentino**

**3 April 2024, Wednesday, 10:00 AM, Sen. Recto Room, Senate**

**Re: Philippine Navy Archipelagic Defense Act**

- **S. No. 654—Sen. Francis “Tol” N. Tolentino**

#### **Background**

- The Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones will be convening for its second public hearing to resume its discussion on Senate Bill No. 654, or the Philippine Navy Archipelagic Defense Act, filed by Sen. Francis “Tol” N. Tolentino.
- Senate Bill No. 654 seeks to establish forward operating bases (FOBs) in 12 sites specified in the Strategic Basing Plan 2040 for bases and installations, where the Philippine Navy can carry out its basic functions and duties.
- The inaugural hearing was conducted last March 18, 2024 and was presided over by Senator Tolentino as chairperson of the Special Committee. Representatives from the Department of National Defense (DND), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), including the Philippine Navy (PN) and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and other stakeholders shared their positions on the proposed legislation.

#### **Highlights of the 1<sup>st</sup> Public Hearing**

- Preliminarily, *Senator Tolentino* explained that the PN FOBs would:
  - ⇒ Enhance the country’s maritime capabilities, enabling the PN’s effective patrol and protection of the maritime domain;
  - ⇒ Serve as strategic outposts, allowing the PN to respond swiftly to any threats or challenges that may arise in Philippine waters, including calamities; and
  - ⇒ Contribute to maritime security efforts in the region.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from the TSN of the Public Hearing of the Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones, March 18, 2024, p. 6

- In relation to interoperability, Senator Tolentino asked whether the Philippine Air Force would be included or the PCG would be an adjunct of whatever facility that would be constructed should the proposal be approved. In reply, *Capt. Emilio Orio Jr. of the Philippine Navy* said that the PN could accommodate other members of the AFP, and even the PCG, as long as they would submit their required facility in advance for it to be included in the concept and master development plan.

Furthermore, *BGen. Rommel Cordova of the AFP* stated that the current thrust is for a joint-use facility to optimize resources, and that the best option is to develop only one base and a joint-use facility.

- *Capt. Emilio Orio Jr. of the Philippine Navy* informed the Committee that they proposed three possible FOB sites: Pag-asa, Fuga, and Santa Ana. On the other hand, the FOB in Divilacan, Isabela, was proposed to be replaced by an FOB in Dinagat Islands, Surigao, since there were no utilities in Divilacan.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the Strategic Basing Plan, Captain Orio said they determined 15 FOBs and 6 main operating bases (MOBs) in their 2023 edition; however, it would have to be revised because of the comprehensive archipelagic defense concept (CADC) that will be implemented soon.

- *Mr. Raphael Hermoso of the Department of Foreign Affairs* stated that the DFA:
  - ⇒ Supports the establishment of FOBs in strategic locations as determined by the DND and AFP;
  - ⇒ Defers to the DND and AFP in the operationalization of AFP's CADC; and
  - ⇒ Notes that none of the sites identified in the bill are in disputed territory. Hence, it is unlikely to elicit a reaction from most states with which the Philippines has territorial disputes except China and Malaysia.

Mr. Hermoso explained that Malaysia may likely lodge a protest through diplomatic channels, given its overlapping claims with the Philippines in the South China Sea in the area near the proposed FOB site of Balabac, Palawan. Further, DFA also anticipates that China will raise concerns regarding establishing FOBs, given its sensitivity to Philippine actions that aim to safeguard Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, according to Mr. Hermoso, the planned FOB in Mavulis Island, Batanes is likely to elicit a reaction from China due to its proximity to Taiwan.<sup>4</sup>

- *VAdm. Emilio Marayag Jr. of the Maritime League, Inc.* posited that FOB sites should only be temporary since the security environment changes every now and then, and FOBs are there to support mobile forces; hence, they should not be permanent in nature. He suggested that if the Committee opts for permanency,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-12

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29s

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 31

a naval base or a naval detachment could support the base with necessary facilities and be part of the regular budgeting process.<sup>5</sup>

- *Cdre. Peter Jempsun De Guzman of the AFP* agreed that the nature of the usage of the FOB is temporary in terms of operations, but it could be elevated into an MOB. For now, they support the establishment of FOBs, considering the available budget. Had there been an available budget for MOB, he said, they would have gladly welcomed MOB.<sup>6</sup>

### **Possible Points for Discussions**

- Continuation of the discussions on the importance of FOBs;
- Factors considered in identifying the strategic locations for the establishment of FOBs;
- Building and maintaining positive relationships with local communities and authorities near FOBs as they are critical for operational success;
- Issues such as cultural sensitivities, land use rights, and employment opportunities for locals, which must be carefully managed to foster cooperation and mitigate potential friction; and
- Estimated budgetary requirement and sources of funds necessary to implement the proposed legislation.

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<sup>5</sup> Paraphrased from the TSN of the Public Hearing of the Special Committee on Philippine Maritime and Admiralty Zones, March 18, 2024, p. 37

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 40