

INTERVIEW WITH COL. RICARDO BAYHON
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Philippines and Thailand defense relations started actually in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding which was signed in 20 December 1997, so that Memorandum of Understanding or MOU started the relations between the— it's like bilateral relations between the Philippines and Thailand on the defense side and it covers also exchanges in training and education, exchange of visits and bilateral exercises which enhance the defense cooperation between the two countries.

Based on that MOU, it started the exchanges between the different branches of service, the first was the Royal Thai Navy and the Philippine Navy which signed a terms of reference in 2012 which was the first, aside from that 1997 MOU.

So after that signing of that terms of reference, it started the exchange of— like intelligence exchange, training exchange, exchange of students between the Royal Thai Navy and the Philippine Navy.

The next was the Philippine Army, the terms of reference between the Royal Thai Army and the Philippine Army was signed in April 2015. It was during the time of General Iriberrri when he was the Commanding General of the Philippine Army. And right now, the Air Force to Air Force talks which will cover the terms of reference for the Royal Thai Air Force and our Philippine Air Force is on the process of drafting a terms of reference. But aside from that, we have already continued exchanges between the Armed Forces of Thailand, the Royal Thai Armed Forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, like exchanges of information through intellects, we call it intellects, intelligence exchange especially on topics of counter terrorism.

Because we in the Philippines, in Southern Philippines, we have the counter terrorism problem, the same is true in Southern Thailand, they have terrorism problem. So the exchanges of experiences between that terrorism issues are beneficial to both countries.

We always assist our Philippine Embassy here as part of the “one country team” approach. We are in charge of giving advice to our embassy personnel and to the ambassador especially on security matters, especially when situation in Thailand will become unstable, we have to advise our ambassador and the—most of the Filipinos on the security aspects of what is presently happening and is happening in Thailand as part of our mandate.

In the same manner, being the Defense and Armed Forces Attache in Thailand, I am the official representative of our Secretary of National Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. So any official engagement which our Defense Department is being tap into, I am representing our Secretary of National Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The visit of the President Rodrigo Duterte in the Kingdom of Thailand, we have been preparing and assisting the embassy on security preparations. We are in close coordination with the Royal Thai Armed Forces and the Royal Thai Police special branch who will take charge of the security of our President and the Cabinet.

Like this morning, we just conducted a dry run of the movement, we timed the movement from the arrival to the hotel, hotel to the Government House, and from the Government House to the venue of the Filipino community meeting which will be in March 22, on the last day of the President's stay here in Thailand.

We always course through the issues to the embassy, to the Philippine Embassy. They are the one working out on issues like for the issues on defense, that will be the concern of the President's visit, they are consulting me, the Philippine Embassy are consulting me on what are the—say—the important points that the President might discuss in relation with the defense of the Kingdom of Thailand.

That's why, we have reviewed the defense cooperation, and of course, we have actually— one of the highlights will be the supposed signing of the JCMC or the Joint Committee on Military Cooperation which really enhanced the 1997 MOU.

This time, if the JCMC will be signed, both the defense of the defense department of the Republic of the Philippines and the Ministry of Defense of the Kingdom of Thailand could have already programmed or designed a bilateral exercises involving both armed forces.

With the President's visit here in Thailand, it is very timely also because this year, the Philippines is the chairman for the ASEAN and considering that ASEAN is in its 50th year from its founding; for Thailand, we have a very big gathering in November because the Royal Thai Navy or the Defense Department of the Kingdom of Thailand, they asked the Philippines to host the Navy to Navy— the chief of the navy talks.. meeting here in Thailand because Thailand will be having the International Fleet Review to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of ASEAN.

So the Navy will be here, our Flag Officer in Command of the Philippine Navy has promised to send one Philippine Navy ship to participate in the International Fleet Review which does not only includes the ASEAN but the ASEAN plus, the plus eight countries, the dialogue partners of ASEAN. So it includes US, Russia, China, Japan...

The Joint Committee on Military Cooperation will be signed in April in Manila; because in April, we will have a ASEAN Defense Senior Officials' Meeting which is part of the ASEAN, under the Defense Multilateral Meeting, so we had the ADSOM. We called it ADSOM (ASEAN Defense Senior Officials' Meeting) which will be held in Manila in April 5 to 7.

So the signatory for that Joint Committee on Military Cooperation on the Ministry of Defense of the Kingdom of Thailand will be going to the Philippines and just in time also for our Undersecretary of Defense which is the signatory of that JCMC on the Philippine side, it will be signed this April in Manila. So that we are looking forward also.

With the visit of the President here in the Kingdom of Thailand, it is really a milestone especially on the defense cooperation. It will strengthen the long standing close ties between both countries; and on the defense level, it will increase more the defense engagement between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Philippines.

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