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Ranking officials of the Philippines and the United States concluded their two-day dialogue in Washington on Friday with a renewed commitment to help each other on a broad range of concerns, including defense and security. Further talks will continue in March with no less than the secretaries of foreign affairs and defense of the two countries cementing what's shaping up as a new form of cooperation between the two allies.

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*DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON*

**Philippines, US Commit to 'Expanded Alliance'**

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TORONTO - The Philippines and the United States reaffirmed their commitment to an "invigorated and expanded alliance" at the conclusion of their two-day strategic dialogue in Washington, the White House said Friday.

Coming in the wake of China's military posturing and the renewed interest in the contested Spratly Islands, the restatement of the countries' position on defense, security, law enforcement and maritime security, among others, could be seen as an indication of Washington's earnest attempt to reestablish itself in the Asia Pacific region.

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The US presence had been practically nil when its military bases in the Philippines were rendered useless by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, prompting their permanent closure in the early 90s. Besides, the Philippine Senate voted to terminate the bases agreement with the US.

The White House said the talks between the two countries will continue in March between Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and their Philippine counterparts, Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario and Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin.

A joint press statement released by the White House to The Filipino Web Channel said the coming together of the two allies is "capable of addressing 21st century challenges". This could be a veiled reference to the situation in Asia where China is taking a significant military posture.

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"The dialogue provided an opportunity to consult and exchange views on a broad range of bilateral, regional, and global issues, reflecting our common values and interests," the statement said.

It was co-chaired by Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Lavoy for the United States, and Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Erlinda Basilio and Defense Undersecretary Pio Lorenzo Batino for the Philippines. Justice Undersecretary Francisco Baraan chaired the working group on Rule of Law and Law Enforcement.

"We reinforced the significance of our Mutual Defense Treaty as the basis for the alliance and the treaty's continued relevance to the peace, security, and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific," the statement said.

It continued: "We committed to further enhance cooperation, including in security, defense, commerce, law enforcement, human rights, and disaster relief. We agreed to deepen and broaden our maritime security cooperation". # # #

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