

Philippines-US in military talks in response to China rise, says report
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MANILLA, Jan 26 — The Philippines is in talks with the US government on expanding its military presence in the southeast Asian country in response to the growing assertiveness of China, the Washington Post reported today.

In recent months, the United States has announced plans to set up a Marine base in northern Australia and station warships in Singapore, moves seen in China as a part of a broader US attempt to encircle it as it grows into a major power in the region.

The newspaper said that negotiations were in the early stages but quoted officials from both governments as saying they were favourably inclined towards a deal.

It said more talks were scheduled for today and tomorrow in Washington before higher-level meetings in March.

"We can point to other countries: Australia, Japan, Singapore," said a senior Philippine official involved in the talks.

"We're not the only one doing this, and for good reason. We all want to see a peaceful and stable region. Nobody wants to have to face China or confront China."

The Philippines used to host major US military bases until about 20 years ago.

More recently, its relations with China have been strained by conflicting claims to islands in the South China Sea — an issue which has also tested China's ties with other countries in the region.

Among the options under consideration are operating Navy ships from the Philippines, deploying troops on a rotational basis and staging more frequent joint exercises, the Post said.

Officials in the Philippines were quoted as saying their priority is to strengthen maritime defences, especially near the South China Sea. They indicated a willingness to host US ships and surveillance aircraft. — Reuters

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