

The New Asia-Pacific Security Environment and the Philippine Military

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This paper¹ aims to make a brief description of the post-cold war security situation in the Asia-Pacific region² and its impact on the Philippine military. To begin with, it is important to note that the end of the Cold War era has far-reaching effects and implications on the global, regional, and national security environments.

Changes in the Asia-Pacific Region

Although the effects of the end of the cold war in the Asia-Pacific region are not as profound as those in Eastern Europe, the end of the East-West confrontation have long-term consequences for the region.

In the Asia-Pacific, apart from the decrease of Soviet military presence, some positive signs of peace are evident. These include the establishment of diplomatic relations between and among Korea, China, and the Soviet Union, the settlement

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of the Cambodian conflict, the normalization of ties between China and the Soviet Union³, and the easing-up of the situation in the Korean peninsula concerning the nuclear issue. These developments considerably contributed to the reduction of tension in the region.

However, relics of cold war-denominated relations remain. The North-South Korea divide, China-Taiwan relations, and Japan-Russia relations could very much affect regional stability in the long run.⁴ Moreover, some issues are

emerging in the Asia-Pacific which, in one way or another, affect the security of states in the region.

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

One of the security problems in the region is the spread of military weapons of mass destruction, both nuclear and conventional. Some analysts view this trend as resulting from a confluence of two factors: (1) unrestricted diffusion of technology through arms sales, technology collaboration or transfer deals, and the increased incidence of industrial espionage; and (2) a reflection of the broader changes in the strategic environment.

Such changes include the significant reduction of American forces in the Pacific, the collapse of the Soviet Union which used to have tight control over its client-states' arms inventories, and the changing nature of alliances and security relationships.⁵ The spread of modern military technology may have profound implications on regional stability. Without an institutionalized transparency, arms transfers in the region may yet lead to another arms race.

Illegal drug trafficking

The triumph of free market economics led to the opening of national borders. However, this opening had the negative effect of providing drug traffickers more leeway in expanding their illicit markets. In Southeast Asia, the principal opium cultivation zones are in Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar – the so-called Golden Triangle.⁶ In 1991, the estimated world production of opium was approximately 4,000 metric tons which, in turn, translated into some 360 metric tons of heroin. For the past five years, the world's opium supply has doubled. Myanmar alone, the world's largest producer of opium and heroin, has doubled its cultivation since 1988.

The problem of illegal drug trafficking can impinge on the national economies of states through money laundering. More importantly, the environmental effects of drug production in the Third World, *e.g.*, deforestation, soil and water pollution, as well as its social repercussions, *e.g.*, increased addiction and health problems, make illegal drug production and trade a critical factor in the future stability and well-being not only of the global population, but also the entire global environment. Hence, no country should ignore the social, political, economic, and criminological consequences of drug production, distribution, and consumption.⁷

South China Sea dispute

The dispute over the South China Sea islands is considered as one of the most complex territorial disputes, involving no less than six claimant countries. China, Taiwan, and Vietnam claim all of the Spratlys, including the Paracels. Apart from the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia also assert sovereignty over a portion of the Spratlys.

Motivations for the Spratlys claims range from the islands' economic potential as a source of hydrocarbon resources and of high yields of fish and other marine resources to their strategic significance as a sealane of communication for international trade and military operations. The claimant countries have thus far agreed to resolve the issue peacefully, but although a number of proposals have been forwarded in

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various fora to resolve the dispute, no solution, at present, is in sight.

Rise of political Islam

Although Islam has persistently challenged the Western religion as a way of life, its politicization has not become a major threat to the security of the different regions of the world until recently. The resurgence and reassertion of the Islamic faith, in particular, of Islamic fundamentalism, has shaken not only other religious groups, but also national governments.

Fundamentalism lumps together regimes, groups, and individuals with different agenda to give rise to what is now known as the phenomenon of political Islam, whose philosophy is diametrically opposed to the primarily Western convention of the separation between religion and politics.⁹ The geographical reach of Islamic activism over the years has been transformed from local to transnational by the use of modern communications and information technology. The militant character of Islamic fundamentalism, with its penchant for pursuing political ends with religious fervor, has given rise to widespread violence. The Ramos administration, in the aftermath of the Ipil raid, recently identified the rise of Muslim extremism as a new threat to the country's internal stability.

International terrorism

The increased severity and incidence of terrorist attacks make terrorism the most persistent and probably the deadliest issue in the region. Terrorism is a politically perpetrated act against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence a political audience.¹⁰ It becomes internationalized when the act involves citizens of more than one country.

Highjacking, bombings, and shootings have been the popular strategy of terrorists to catch publicity.¹¹ These campaigns of terror are used to publicize the terrorists' cause, both as a propaganda for their actions and as means to coerce a wider target group to accede to their demands.¹² Terrorism has just become more alarming with the increased access of terrorists to conventional, biological, and even nuclear weapons. Tracking down terrorists is, at present, even more difficult due to the extensive networks they have established.

Given the abovementioned conditions, there are indeed emerging security issues and concerns which are potential threats to the stability and security of the Asia-Pacific region, in general, and the country, in particular. It cannot be gainsaid that we are now confronted with a less stable security environment, pregnant with uncertainty and unpredictability, than what stared us in the face in the highly demarcated, bipolar world of the cold war era. In this regard, the country must maintain a credible armed force which can readily respond to the requirements of peace, stability, and progress.

The AFP in the New Order¹³

The foundation of the security of a nation lies in the determination of the people to defend themselves and their capability to meet the challenges of the future. The maintenance and operation of a reliable and efficient self-defense capability is the concrete expression of a country's desire to maintain national security and address crisis situations. It is along this line that the Armed Forces of the Philippines seeks a reliable self-defense capability necessary for the protection of our national interest and complementary to regional security, stability, and harmony.

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The AFP modernization program

The modernization of the Armed Forces is the country's response to current changes in the strategic environment, the requirements of national defense, and the military's role in national development. Spread over a 15-year period, the program is not only confined to the upgrading of equipment. It has five components: (1) force restructuring and organizational development; (2) capability, *materiel*, and technology development; (3) bases and support development; (4) human resource development; and (5) doctrines development.

To bolster its defense capability, the AFP will reconfigure its force structure and streamline its forces to meet the external defense needs of the country. Ground forces will be downgraded to devote more resources to the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Air Force. The current size of the Army will be reduced by 30 percent to establish a regular and self-reliant 'citizen armed force.'

Secondly, the acquisition of appropriate technology and upgrading of weapons will be given the importance it deserves. With the high cost of military hardware and equipment, existing ones will just be upgraded, and fighter aircraft and ships either leased or purchased.

Thirdly, bases and support systems will either be relocated or enhanced as required by our national defense strategy. Defense facilities, therefore, will assume a duality of roles or purposes – military and civilian.

Fourthly, reforms in the recruitment, training, employment, and management of AFP personnel will be conducted towards the professionalization of the force. Attrite AFP personnel will be retrained for possible employment in civilian establishments.

Finally, doctrines will be developed, validated or modified to suit the deployment requirements of our defense forces according to the country's geographical qualities, strengths, and traditions.

A modern AFP, therefore, is envisioned to fully utilize its resources, assets (such as lands in military and naval reservations and engineering and construction equipment and facilities), and manpower in support of the socio-economic projects of the government. Areas where the AFP can contribute its resources include environmental protection and natural resource conservation, disaster, relief and rehabilitation operations, and infrastructure development.

The AFP in nation-building

The National Security Council subscribes to the view that national security is not merely the protection of our people and territory. Beyond national defense, the security of the nation extends to the "protection of vital economic and political interests, the loss of which could threaten fundamental values and the vitality of the state itself."¹⁴ Thus, national security is defined as "the state or condition wherein the people's way of life and institutions, their territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as their welfare and well-being are protected and enhanced."¹⁵

In this regard, the AFP does not merely ensure national security in terms of traditional defense, *i.e.*, protection against physical assault on the people and the territory; rather, it functions as an equally viable partner of the government in nation-building. Thus, in support of the national leadership's vision of development by the year 2000, the AFP launched '*Unlad-Bayan*' or AFP for Peace, Development, and Progress program as its coherent and systematic guideline for performing its role in national development.

Moreover, as a manifestation of the country's commitment to

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regional stability and global peace, the AFP will continue to contribute positively to the United Nations through its peace-keeping operations. It will also seek to promote closer relations with ASEAN-member countries through the conduct of joint military training exercises, exchanges of research and information, and agreements on defense cooperation.

With the implementation of the modernization program, under the aegis of a new consciousness regarding its role in nation-building, the AFP is envisioned to be a lean, self-reliant, reservist-based, and technology-oriented armed organization sufficiently responsive to the challenges of national defense and national development.

Concluding Remarks

The end of the Cold War has prompted many nations to reassess their respective security environments and policies. The Philippines is no exception. With the emergence of the new security environment, the country has reexamined its strategic environment and reconceptualized its security policies. The modernization of the AFP, therefore, is a timely and appropriate, if not inevitable, response to the changes occurring in our security environment. As a credible armed force in the new millenium, the AFP should be able to effectively and fully perform its mission to defend our sovereignty, protect and preserve our national patrimony, and assist the government in its development goals and objectives.

Notes

¹The opinions expressed in this paper are the writer's own and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Office of Strategic and Special Studies or that of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

²Countries that can claim geographical affiliation with the Asia-Pacific basin are considered. These include states in the Asia mainland, the archipelagos of Southeast Asia, and those which border and circle the Pacific ocean, such as Russia, China, the two Koreas, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Taiwan and Hongkong are also included, together with Myanmar, Laos, and Mongolia by reason of their geographical proximity and historical connections. For further discussion, see Heng Hiang Khng, "Security

Studies in non-ASEAN Southeast Asia" in *Studying Asia-Pacific Security* (Canada: University of Toronto-York University, 1994), pp. 197-217.

³Satoshi Morimoto and Tsutomu Kikuchi, "Security Issues and Studies in Japan" in *Studying Asia-Pacific Security* (Canada: University of Toronto-York University, 1994), pp. 146.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Jacquelyn K. Davis, "Missile Proliferation and Regional Security" in *Conflicts, Options, Strategies in a Threatened World: Papers Presented at the 1991 International Summer Course on National Security*, Werner Kaltefleiter and Ulrike Schumacher eds. (Kiel: Christian-Albrechts University, 1992), p. 93.

⁶In Southwest Asia, the principal cultivation zones are found in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, or the Golden Crescent. Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia produce most of the world's cocaine.

⁷In some instances, to combat this problem, economic aid was unavoidably linked to the efforts of such countries to address the drug menace, like in the case of Latin American countries struggling to pay off their debts. For further discussion, see Jamieson Alison, "The Drug War" in *Conflicts, Options, Strategies in a Threatened World: Papers Presented at the 1993 International Summer Course on National Security*, Werner Kaltefleiter and Ulrike Schumacher eds. (Kiel: Christian-Albrechts University, 1994), p. 61.

⁸See *The Philippines and South China Sea Islands: Overview and Documents*, CIRRS Papers I (Manila: Foreign Service Institute, 1993), p. 16.

⁹In Egypt, it was reiterated by a government appointee that "religion and state are indivisible." For the past 20 years, Islam has been a key feature of Middle Eastern politics, particularly in bolstering political legitimacy.

¹⁰The US Department of State reported that in 1993, there were 427 terrorist attacks compared to 364 incidents in 1992. It was stated that this increase was primarily brought about by the accelerated campaign waged by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) against Turkish interests. The most recent spectacular bombings were those of the World Trade Center in New York and a federal building in Oklahoma. These incidents proved that the US is not immune from such terroristic attacks.

¹¹Paul Wilkinson, "Terrorism: International Dimensions" in *Contemporary Terrorism*, William Gutteridge ed. (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1986), p. 29.

¹²_____, "The Challenge of Terrorism" in *Conflicts, Options, Strategies in a Threatened World: Papers Presented at the 1992 International Summer Course on National Security*, Werner Kaltefleiter and Ulrike Schumacher eds. (Kiel: Christian-Albrechts University, 1993), p. 50.

¹³Materials and data for this portion were gathered mostly from the articles of the *Digest*, the official publication of the Office of Strategic and Special Studies and the policy pronouncements of the AFP Chief of Staff.

¹⁴See *The National Security Council and the Organization for National Security* (National Security Council, 1993).

¹⁵Ibid.