

A Framework for Peace Negotiations

1.0 There is a multiplicity of contending forces in present day Philippine society. Forces previously united under Aquino and against Marcos are now divided. Armed conflict continues and emanates from all sides.

1.1 The military establishment has evolved into another set of elite with its own policy and power agenda.

1.1.1 This development began during martial law when its role in defining national policy was institutionalized.

1.1.2 The erosion of professionalism as a result of Marcos's patronage and discontent within has led to politicization and factionalism in the army.

1.1.3 Post-EDSA Philippine society has not lessened the influence of the military establishment in national decision-making even though the restoration of bourgeois democratic institutions has prevented its blatant assertion of power.

1.1.4 Worse, power and policy conflicts with the Aquino leadership have brought about greater factionalism within the military establishment, thereby compounding the nature of the threats to constitutional democracy. These threats were glaringly manifested in the series of coup attempts over the past five years and regional/provincial revolts led by renegade officers (Noble, Aguinaldo).

1.1.4.1 Inside the military establishment, there appear to be divisions between officers loyal to Defense Secretary Ramos and those staunchly behind President Aquino.

1.1.4.2 Outside of the official establishment, there are three major factions: Honasan's RAM, Zumel's SFP, and the Young Officers' Union.

1.2 Outside of the armed threat posed by the military factions, there are other underground armies and parties that espouse alternative programs of governance.

1.2.1 The communist insurgency led by the CPP-NPA and its political front, the NDF, has over the years of martial law spread out in some 60 out of 73 provinces of the archipelago carrying the platform of national democracy. It espouses the guerilla strategy of protracted people's war but is also present in urban areas where mass struggles and urban partisan warfare are employed.

1.2.2 Different Moro rebel groups are likewise engaged in protracted struggles against the state, advocating objectives ranging from greater autonomy to the maximum platform of secession of Mindanao. They include the MNLF, the largest of the Moro guerilla groups; the BMNLF; and the MILF.

1.3 Political parties are also witnessing realignments of yet unexplored configurations. (Note: There are at least five pairs of presidential-vice-presidential contenders being floated, each with its own political party and/or political movement.)

1.3.1 The attempt of the dominant powerbrokers (Peping Conjuanco, Paul Aquino) to consolidate a "super-administration party" did not fair well, despite the large bounty at

the LDP's disposal. One reason is the growing hesitancy of politicians to be identified with the fumbling government.

1.3.2 A considerable number of political figures have opted to maintain their organizational integrity and build their respective parties on more solid political grounds. These include the LP and PDP-LABAN which were previously under the Cory Banner in 87; and the conservative/right-wing NP, GAD which have consistently opposed Aquino.

1.4 The pervasive presence of NGOs and POs provides a third force to the political equation.

1.4.1 These groups (identifiable by the general labels of "natdem," "socdem," "demsoc," "socialists," "legal communists," "popdems," and "libdems") continue to advance a nationalist and democratic agenda.

1.4.2 However, they remain divided on many issues, from the nuances of dealing with Aquino at the present stage to differences in strategic visions and forms of struggle.

1.4.3 Nevertheless, their considerable impact on the political front makes it incumbent upon government or any power contender to get their support or cooperation.

2.0 Aquino has qualitatively eroded the radical possibilities of the immediate post-EDSA juncture by failing to act decisively against a strong, right-wing landed gentry opposed to land reform; military putschists who are recruiting more sympathizers from the ranks; proponents of the "Cold War" ideology and hardline approach to the insurgency; and upholders of international capital who insisted on harsh economic measures and the continuation of Marcos's disastrous economic policies. This failure has given rise to the current discontent, the high level of violence in Philippine society, and, consequently, the opposition faced by her government.

3.0 The confluence of events and plurality of actors have also resulted in a complex situation where the question of governance can no longer be solved singularly by traditional means, i.e., through regular electoral exercises and "horse-trading" (in what previously was a two-party electoral system before martial law), monopoly patronage (under the KBL during the Marcos regime) and the long standing practices of accommodation and sharing of spoils among the traditional economic and political elite.

3.1 In a way, these new conditions offer greater potential for the weakening of elite rule and the strengthening of people's representation as well as direct participation in the exercise of political power.

3.2 On the other hand, the same complexity allows for the rise of a more authoritarian rule that can claim capacity to "take charge" and "put order" to the nation.

3.3 At the same time, Aquino's predisposition to the traditional means and balancing act seek to salvage traditional elite rule even though such has only generated further opposition and discontent.

4.0 The spiral of violence resulting from government's "total war" policy, destabilization attempts from the underground armed groups, and the largely unaddressed social inequities have generated calls for peace, policy demands to address the basic issues, as well as appeals to all warring camps to reconsider their respective "war" strategies. As such, the warring groups have hesitantly declared their willingness to reopen political negotiations.

5.0 Such a reconsideration is necessary not only in response to public reaction against the violence and gross damage wrought by war/bombing/coups on the economy, human life and nature. It is also urgent in view of the apparent "stalemate" in the current political situation. Despite the huge resources channelled into war or other militarist designs, no single force is emerging as the decisive winner in the present conflict.

- 5.1 In the same way that the massive military might of the Marcos state machinery has failed to quench the communist and Muslim insurgency, so is Aquino's "total war" policy proving unable to eradicate the underground armed conflict, made more complex with the existence of other right-wing armed groups.
- 5.2 On the other hand, no decisive victory is on hand for any of the insurgent groups. For one, they have failed to generate enough support for the means whereby they have sought to undertake a change of rule. They can opt to continue with their preferred methodologies but for how more and at what expense can they continue engaging in protracted/adventurist struggle?
- 5.3 At the same time, there is a felt need to explore other avenues that can provide conditions that will minimize conflict and its gross consequences to human life and nature, change the current practices of governance, and make favorable the resolution of basic issues.
- 6.0 Political negotiations stand out as one possible alternative. Beyond offering a mere respite from the conflict, political negotiations can provide one such avenue that can alter/transform the contours of the current conflict and open up new possibilities for the advancement of the people's agenda.
- 7.0 Changes in the international scene (thawing of the cold war, growing role of international peace keeping forces and conflict mediators, rethinking of the orthodox socialist paradigm) contribute to this thinking/sentiment favoring the political resolution of conflict over military means.
- 8.0 One key realizable goal of political negotiations is the enhancement of a pluralist, democratic order where all sectors and opposing parties are assured of their right to participate freely in the political arena, politics is increasingly demilitarized, democratic institutions are reformed and strengthened, or new ones developed, and new modes of governance (from elite to popular rule) are qualitatively established.
- 9.0 Simultaneously, such a situation will provide the democratic space for the organizing, educating and mobilizing activities of conscious, progressive forces and the maximum use of all parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means that will lead to the greater empowerment of the people and the advancement of their interests.
- 10.0 While the feasibility of such a project demands the cooperation of the major contending actors, POs and NGOs can play a positive role in (a) pushing the warring parties to the negotiating table thereby enhancing the feasibility; (b) defining the agenda of such negotiations over and beyond the respective interests of the major contenders; and (c) monitoring and ensuring the success of such efforts.
- 11.0 Since the conflict cannot be expected to be satisfactorily resolved given the current predispositions operating in both government's and insurgents' ranks, political negotiations will therefore remain in the national agenda even in the advent of a new administration (whether via the 1992 elections, a coup, or other extraordinary means).
- 11.1 Political negotiations, therefore, is not a tactical concern directed for/against the Aquino government or any one insurgent group, nor a ploy/means that aims to serve a specific tactical campaign.
- 11.2 Rather, it is a process that employs democratic means to achieve democratic ends and stresses the indispensable role of NGOs and non-political party entities. As such, it is a strategic concern that necessitates a more comprehensive elaboration and long standing commitment among people's organizations.