

New Roles of the Military
Perspectives from the Philippines

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The purpose of this paper is to describe the evolving role of the Philippine military from its establishment in the 1930s to the present. It shall show that the Armed Forces of the Philippines from the start was already performing non core military functions.

EDSA I and EDSA II

Two turning points in the Philippine history are marked by significant participation of the military. The February 1986 Peoples' Power event, also known as EDSA I, which toppled the Marcos regime, was led by the military through the open defiance of then Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Philippine Constabulary Chief and Director General of the Integrated

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National Police L/Gen. Fidel V. Ramos. After four days of continuous peoples' protests in the main highway linking the North and South of its capital, Manila, called Epifanio delos Santos, EDSA, the 21 year Marcos regime fell.

Fifteen years hence, on January 21, 2001, the Estrada administration suffered a similar fate when then Secretary of National Defense Orlando Mercado and then AFP Chief of Staff Angelo Reyes, withdrew its support for then President Joseph Estrada. Subsequently, Vice President Gloria Arroyo took her oath of office as the country's next President.

Muthiah Alagappa argues that the military experiences role expansion in most developing countries because it is tasked with political, social and economic roles that go beyond its traditional role of “ management of violence.”²

² Muthiah Alagappa, “Military Professionalism and the Development Role in Southeast Asia” in *Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia*. J. Soedjati Djiwandono and Yong Mun Cheong, eds. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988).

What is the legal mandate of the Armed Forces of the Philippines?

The mandate of the Armed Forces of the Philippines is to:

- Uphold the sovereignty, support the Constitution, and defend the territory of the Republic of the Philippines against all enemies, foreign and domestic;
- Promote and advance the national aims, interests, and policies;
- Plan, organize, maintain, develop and deploy its regular and citizen reserve forces for national security.³

It is quite apparent from this legal mandate that the AFP is tasked with both internal and external defense of the Philippines and that the military is a participant in nation building.

Does the Armed Forces of the Philippines perform new roles?

³ Executive order 292, The Revised Administrative Code of 1987, Title VIII, Sub-title II.

The answer is no. In fact, from the time of its establishment, the AFP has undertaken non-traditional military roles such as law enforcement activities and search and rescue operations. Of late, the AFP is involved in disaster response, anti smuggling and anti drug and human trafficking and environmental protection. In addition, the AFP participates in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

The various functions performed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines were a result of both legal and historical factors.

Immediately after its independence from the United States, the newly formed Philippine Republic faced threats from insurgents and separatist groups. While the National Defense Act of 1935 provides the external defense orientation of the AFP, the Philippine military has always been tasked to fight insurgents and separatist groups. The AFP has also been required to provide assistance in

the maintenance of law and order and has consequently been involved in development activities of the nation.⁴

The comprehensive definition of security which the Philippines adopted in the late 60's as a matter of national security policy required the AFP to perform tasks that require confronting the internal security challenges. Meanwhile, the AFP also engages in developmental activities of the country.

With the emergence of small terrorist groups like the Abu Sayyaf and the continuing problem of secessionism in Southern Philippines, the Armed Forces of the Philippines is expected to remain preoccupied with internal security concerns.

From a historical perspective, the so-called “new” or “expanding” roles of the military are not actually new to the AFP. What is new, may be the emphasis that is now being given by the AFP to these

⁴ Ibid.

non-core military roles as there is no serious challenge from the external environment.

It may be worthwhile noting that historically, the AFP has participated in several international peacekeeping operations. In the early 50's, the AFP sent the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK) and in the 60's, it sent the Philippine Airforce Contingent to Congo and the Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAG) to South Vietnam. More recently, in September 2000, the AFP sent humanitarian forces to East Timor.

Today, the AFP's education and training programs and equipment acquisitions are more oriented to the building of capabilities that will enable our Filipino soldiers to respond to an array of non-traditional security concerns such as combating terrorism, drugs and human trafficking, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, and disaster response, search and rescue operations and environmental protection. The AFP Modernization Program which

encompasses doctrine development, education and training, equipage, and force structuring is designed to bring the AFP to the same level of development as its neighboring countries. Indeed, the Armed Forces of the Philippines is aware that for it to remain relevant and effective, it has to perform functions and tasks that respond to the new challenges of the security environment.