

CHAPTER 5

Dealing (once more) with an inadequate external defense posture: The implications of the Scarborough Shoal face-off

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In the 2011 assessment, I emphasized the increasing recognition of the vulnerability of the Philippines in its ability to defend its territory from external threats, much less assert its claims to disputed territory.¹ There were initial stirrings to address these vulnerabilities, especially in terms of enhancing the capacity of the armed forces to patrol the country's maritime domain. 2012, however, showed that these efforts are increasingly becoming a case of "too little, too late." A two-month long maritime standoff with China regarding a sovereignty dispute over Scarborough Shoal, followed by more assertive Chinese action over disputed maritime territories in the South China Sea, served to emphasize not so much the disparity in capabilities between China and the Philippines, as the inadequacy of the latter's armed forces in providing a minimum level of defensive sufficiency. In a major development, the administration of President Benigno S. Aquino III made public the National Security Policy (NSP) of the Philippines, which would guide the government's policies relating to security until 2016. The document shows that the threat of external aggression against the Philippines is officially deemed to be a remote possibility. Developments in Scarborough Shoal and in other parts of the South China Sea, however, are strengthening the imperative to take more and more immediate measures to address the external security dimension. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) remains largely configured and continues to be largely responsible for counter-insurgency operations, but a shift in orientation towards external security is intensifying in discussions within the organization.

¹ Herman Joseph S. Kraft, "The Philippine Security Situation in 2011: Plugging the (very big) holes in external defense while continuing to face internal vulnerabilities," in *Security Outlook of the Asia Pacific Countries and Its Implications for the Defense Sector: NIDS Joint Research Series No. 7* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2012): 41-42

The National Security Policy

The 5-year National Security Policy of the Philippines was presented as a partner document to the Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016—a clear presentation of the dual emphasis of the Aquino Administration on security and development. The NSP is fundamentally a statement of principles intended to guide national decision-making. It presents what is supposed to be a comprehensive framework of security, recognizing the interrelatedness of issues and concerns that may affect the safety and well-being of the Filipino people, and the country in general. It lists seven broad elements of the country's national security ranging from socio-political stability, territorial integrity, economic solidarity and ecological balance, to cultural cohesiveness, moral-spiritual consensus, as well as peace and harmony. As such it opens up the idea of security and takes into account new challenges in the country's security environment.

As noted at the beginning of this article, however, the broad definition of security does not change the decades-long mind-set of giving pre-eminence to internal concerns with peace and security. In fact, it adds (rightly so) the concern for good governance as a key element in addressing these concerns. In fact the NSP identifies four key elements of priority: (1) Governance, (2) Delivery of Basic Services, (3) Economic Reconstruction and Sustainable Development, and (4) Security Sector Reform. All of these tend to show the continuing emphasis on internal security, an emphasis reinforced by developments in the continuing threats posed by armed political groups to the country's integrity as a nation and its democratic institutions.

The NSP noted the progress in developments in the ongoing talks between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). On 15 October 2012, a Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro was signed between the two parties. This agreement brought the talks to heretofore unexplored areas. At the close of the 37th GPH-MILF Formal Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur on April 11, 2013, this fact was acknowledged by the chair of GPH negotiating panel, Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, when she pointed out that:

“[We] are where the process has never been before. Never before had the negotiations between the government and the MILF come to the stage of actually defining and

listing down powers; of actually identifying sources of funds and revenues for the new political entity that we are creating. Never before has the transformation of an armed group been discussed let alone imagined in detail.”²

This is, however, in contrast to the difficulties faced by the peace talks between the Philippine government and the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). The talks are currently stalled with the Philippine government urging the CPP-NPA to stop its attacks on military, police outposts, and what they have referred to as “soft civilian targets.” A Special Track proposed by Jose Maria Sison designed to speed up the negotiations, had held an initial meeting on December 17-18, 2012 in The Netherlands. At that meeting, it was agreed that further discussions would proceed on the draft Declaration of National Unity and Just Peace prepared by Sison. This Special Track was discontinued, however, when the resumption of meetings in February 2013 saw new documents being presented by the CPP-NPA panel that backtracked from the initial draft.

The mixed record of the peace talks, however, is presented in the NSP as reasons for the government to redouble efforts and emphasize finding a political resolution to these internal armed conflicts. As stated earlier, this is part of a decades-long mind-set conditioned by the continuing threat posed by armed groups to the stability of the state. This mind-set, however, was jarred by developments in the second quarter of the year in Scarborough Shoal.

² “GPH-MILF peace process reaches ‘new phase,’ says gov’t chief negotiator,” article posted on 12 April at <http://opapp.gov.ph/milf/news/gph-milf-peace-process-reaches-%E2%80%98new-phase%E2%80%99-says-govt-chief-negotiator> downloaded on 15 April 2013.

The Scarborough Shoal Face-off

The two-month stand-off that started on April 10, 2012 that took place between China and the Philippines highlighted the danger to regional peace and security of rival territorial claims over the waters and land features in the area of the South China Sea.³ For decades, this area had been identified as one of the potential “hotspots” that could trigger conflict in the region. These territorial disputes have at times led to episodes and events that raised tensions among claimants, although these have largely been managed and prevented from reaching crisis proportions. By and large, the issues were never allowed to get in the way of good (even friendly) bilateral relations among the claimants, and the maintenance of stable peaceful regional conditions. The Scarborough Shoal stand-off served as a reminder that these conditions should not be taken for granted, and that countries in the region need to continue working towards sustaining peaceful relations.

The stand-off also showed the complexity of the situation, involving not just the relationship between the Philippines and China, but also relations with (and among) other claimants, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the dynamics between China and the United States. All of these are usually framed in the context of the emergence of China as not only an economic power in the region (which has been a welcome development), but also as a political and military power (which is at the core of concerns about China as a regional hegemon). The latter in particular has been raised in terms of language that describes China’s “bullying tactics,” “increased assertiveness,” and China’s demands (as presented by a number of officials and academics) that regional states should be “sensitive” to its interests. Reports about these incidents and developments emerging from these incidents tend to emphasize China’s growing confidence as the underlying, if not direct, cause.

Chinese commentators have tended to lay the blame for the face-off on the Philippines, citing the involvement of the *BRP Gregorio del Pilar*, a *Hamilton-class* US Coast Guard cutter that had been transferred to the Philippine Navy in 2012, in the attempted arrest of Chinese fishermen reported to be harvesting rare

³ The Philippines has officially renamed parts of the South China Sea that are adjacent to areas it claims to have sovereignty over as the West Philippine Sea. For purposes of this paper, however, the more traditional reference will continue to be utilized. See Michael Lim Ubac, “It’s official: Aquino signs order on West Philippine Sea,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 September 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/50012/its-official-aquino-signs-order-on-west-philippine-sea> downloaded on 13 September 2012.

corals and protected species of marine life in the waters of Scarborough Shoal.⁴ The involvement of a Philippine Navy warship prompted two Chinese Marine Surveillance ships in the area to act to prevent the *del Pilar* from pursuing its intention. Even in the context of Philippine maritime policy the rule is “white to white, grey to grey,” i.e. Navy ships only become involved when the naval forces of other countries are involved, otherwise it would be the ships of civilian agencies such as the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) or the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) that would be utilized.⁵ While the *del Pilar* backed off from a direct confrontation with these Chinese ships, it continued to stay in the area until relieved by the PCG’s *BRP Pampanga* and surveillance ships of the BFAR. This became the start of a two-month standoff where Chinese and Philippine ships maintained a tense presence in and around the shoal to physically assert their rival claims to sovereign jurisdiction over it. The initial involvement of the *Gregorio del Pilar* became the basis of a narrative that tried to project the Philippines as being at fault for the escalation of tensions between the two countries. Yet, the Philippine Navy has in the past been deputized (due to the limited resources possessed by the Philippines in managing its maritime borders) to handle these kinds of situations. Incidents in the past (particularly from 1995 onwards) have involved the Philippine Navy in arrests of and other actions against foreign boats and ships (a number of which were from China) in the area.⁶ This was never an issue in the past and should not be brought up as a game-changer in relations between the two countries. If the Philippines could be faulted with mismanaging the Scarborough Shoal case, it was not because of the involvement of the *Gregorio del Pilar*. If anything, where the Philippines got it wrong was in the aftermath of the involvement of the *del Pilar*. Three issues in particular highlight the dangers of getting caught up in the rhetoric of nationalism that tends to accompany territorial disputes.

⁴ Scarborough Shoal is named after the East India Company trade ship *Scarborough* which sank after grounding on the shoal in 1784. It is also referred to in the Philippines as Panatag Shoal and *Bajo de Masinloc*, a reference to the locality of Masinloc in the province of Zambales in the Philippines. The Chinese have argued that it is the *Huangyan Dao* referred to in some of their ancient maps and scrolls.

⁵ This was revealed by Senator Antonio Trillanes IV in the course of explanations about his “backchannel” diplomacy at the behest of President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III’s Executive Secretary Paquito Ochoa. See Ellen Tordesillas, “The back channels: Trillanes, the US and the Pangilinan connection,” *Malaya* (21 September 2012) available at <http://www.malaya.com.ph/index.php/news/nation/13609-the-back-channels-trillanes-us-and-the-pangilinan-connection> downloaded on 4 October 2012.

⁶ See the history of Scarborough Shoal incidents recorded in <http://www.inquirer.net/west-philippine-sea?coronanav=infographics>. Philippine Navy officers have also confirmed the routine involvement of Navy ships in arrests of foreign fishermen and others in the Scarborough Shoal area in conversations with the author.

The first issue has to do with turning the situation into a question of sovereignty, and challenging China to having it settled through the International Tribunal on the Law of the Seas (ITLOS). Just to be clear, the issue is ultimately about sovereignty, and, in the case of Scarborough Shoal, this will have to be resolved by the Philippines and China at some point through an agreed upon mechanism. At the time of the incident involving the *del Pilar*, the issue should have been about making sure that the situation did not escalate into anything worse. Turning the issue into an opportunity to assert the Philippine claim, however, had this precise outcome. The very next day, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario declared in a press briefing that “[i]f the Philippines is challenged, we are prepared to secure our sovereignty.”⁷ An article outlining the legal basis of the Philippine claim in comparison with that of China’s was published under his byline in Philippine newspapers.⁸ Shortly after, he proposed the idea that the issue be brought to the ITLOS for settlement—a position that became the standard call of the Philippine government for most of the period of the standoff. This was rebuffed by China, who called on the Philippines “not to complicate or aggravate this incident so that peace and stability in that area can be reached.”⁹ The very strong position emphasizing the question of sovereignty taken by Secretary del Rosario however, was supported by President Benigno S. C. Aquino III himself, who underscored the Philippine’s jurisdiction over the shoal.¹⁰ Even as Aquino emphasized the need to seek a diplomatic solution, he affirmed the line taken by del Rosario, and squarely placed the question of sovereignty front and center as the immediate issue behind the faceoff.

The situation was further aggravated on the Philippine side by the approach of raising the specter of US involvement in the issue. For the most part, the United States had taken a passive position on the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. In fact, it was noteworthy that even several days into the faceoff, the

⁷ “Philippines to ‘secure sovereignty’ if challenged by China,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (11 April 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/32387/philippines-to-secure-sovereignty-if-challenged-by-china> downloaded on 4 October 2012.

⁸ See Albert Del Rosario, “PH position on China’s claim on Panatag Shoal,” *Manila Standard Today* (20 April 2012) available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/90145905/Manila-Standard-Today-April-20-2012-Issue> downloaded on 4 October 2012.

⁹ Jerry E. Esplanada, “Beijing won’t go to court over shoal, says Chinese embassy,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (25 April 2012) available at <http://ph.news.yahoo.com/beijing-wont-court-over-shoal-says-chinese-embassy-041002822.html> downloaded on 3 May 2012.

¹⁰ Christine O. Avendaño and DJ Yap, “Aquino: These are our waters,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (24 April 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/34503/aquino-these-are-our-waters> downloaded on 4 October 2012.

Philippine government had noticed that the United States had not indicated a position supporting the Philippines. Nonetheless Secretary Ricky Carandang, head of the Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office, said the Palace believed that the Philippines had enough support from the United States despite its silence.¹¹ While the United States was very careful about its involvement in the dispute,¹² the US strategy of rebalancing its forces in the Asia Pacific became a card that the Philippine government used extensively during the faceoff with China.¹³ In doing so, it effectively contextualized the faceoff in terms of the strategic relations between China and the United States. It also, however, compromised what some commentators have referred to as the Philippines hedging strategy in its relations with both China and the US, and more clearly moved it towards the latter.¹⁴ Fundamentally, it made it even more difficult to open direct dialogue channels with China because of the suspicions this course created in China's strategic calculations.

Finally, the issue of an exit strategy (or the absence of one) became paramount. As the faceoff continued, it was no longer clear what the objective of the approach taken by the Philippines was, especially as China refused to compete on the playing field the Philippines insisted on (i.e. the idea of a rules-based process of dispute settlement). By challenging China on sovereignty grounds and bringing the United States into the issue (no matter how indirectly it was involved), the Philippines presented China with a situation that made it difficult for the latter to withdraw

¹¹ Norman Bordadora, "PH not intimidated, says Malacañang," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (21 April 2012) available at <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/180037/ph-not-intimidated-says-malacanang> downloaded on 4 October 2012.

¹² The American concern was succinctly expressed by an analyst at the Center of New American Security who warned that "[t]hrough the United States must prevent China from dominating the South China Sea, it must be careful not to be drawn into a conflict with China at the behest of countries like the Philippines and Vietnam." See Jose Katigbak, "'China should not test US resolve in South China Sea,'" *The Philippine Star* (7 September 2012) available at <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=846137&publicationSubCategoryId=> downloaded on 1 October 2012. Nonetheless, the port visit of the fast attack submarine North Carolina did indicate American support for the Philippines in its faceoff with China, if not for its claim to sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal. See Frances Mangosing, "Nuclear-powered 'fast-attack' US submarine docks in Subic," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (15 May 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/36997/nuclear-powered-fast-attack-us-submarine-docks-in-subic> downloaded on 22 May 2012.

¹³ See for example Jerry E. Esplanada, "Greater number of US warships to visit Philippines," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (3 June 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/38725/%E2%80%98greater-number%E2%80%99-of-us-warships-to-visit-philippines> downloaded on 4 October 2012; and "US deploys most advanced warships, jets to Asia," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 June 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/39773/us-deploys-most-advanced-warships-jets-to-asia> downloaded on 16 August 2012.

¹⁴ See Renato C. de Castro, "Between the Clawing Eagle and Ascendant Dragon: The Demise of the Philippines' Policy of Hedging," *Snapshot 7* (January 2011); and Evan S. Medeiros, "Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia Pacific Stability," *Washington Quarterly* 29:1 (Winter 2005/2006), pp. 145-167.

its ships from Scarborough Shoal without giving the impression of having been intimidated into ceding ground to the former. It should be noted that China's equally strident claims of "undisputed sovereignty," and the presence of increasing numbers and varieties of ships (even if these were mostly fishery patrol, marine surveillance, and fishing vessels) placed the Philippines in a similar position.¹⁵ The issue was largely reduced to a question of power and intimidation, something that neither the Philippines nor China could come out of unscathed.

Despite some diplomatic hiccups, the faceoff ended when Chinese ships left the lagoon in Scarborough Shoal on June 25, 2012.¹⁶ President Aquino had earlier ordered the withdrawal of Philippine ships on June 15, ostensibly because of storm warnings. According to statements from the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs, this was a mutually agreed upon course of action—which the Chinese Embassy in Manila denied. Since then, the two countries have tried to normalize relations even as both sides remained adamant about their claims of sovereignty over the shoal. This was precisely the situation prior to April 10. The two-month face-off has emphasized, however, how much diplomacy on issues involving disputed territory needs to be finely tuned, precisely because of how sensitive they are. For the Philippines, however, it again emphasized the need to address the inadequate capacity of the AFP in responding to external security developments.

¹⁵ At one point, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs reported that there were 92 Chinese ships and boats around the area of Scarborough Shoal. See Tina G. Santos, "92 ships now in Panatag Shoal; tensions up," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (24 May 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/37711/92-china-ships-now-in-panatag-shoal-tensions-up> downloaded on 15 July 2012.

¹⁶ See Evelyn Macairan, "China has pulled out boats from lagoon – DFA," *The Philippine Star* (26 June 2012) available at <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?publicationSubCategoryId=63&articleId=821068> downloaded on 4 October 2012.

The National Security Policy and Responding to External Security Concerns

In the wake of the Scarborough Shoal experience, the estimate of the remoteness of external security threats presented in the NSP seems ironic.¹⁷ Yet, this has been the assumption that has guided Philippine security policy since the years immediately preceding President Ferdinand Marcos' declaration of Martial Law in 1972. To a large extent, it was an assumption that held true even in the face of multiple foreign policy concerns emanating from disputed territorial claims. Consequently, it contributed to the lack of attention given to, and eventual deterioration of, the external defense capabilities of the AFP. The NSP's affirmation of this guiding principle is, however, balanced by the emphasis on the development of a defense capability more in line with the geopolitical condition of an archipelagic state.¹⁸ Thus, it points to the need for an "approach toward reinforcing border security [that] focuses on a comprehensive border protection program anchored on the establishment and enhancement of surveillance, deterrence and border patrol capabilities of the Philippine Air Force, Philippine Navy and Philippine Coast Guard."¹⁹

At the time of the face-off with China over Scarborough Shoal, the AFP sought to keep simmering tensions at a manageable level by adopting what was described as a "do-nothing policy,"²⁰ while at the same time trying to build a "modest deterrent capability" by deploying enhanced surveillance equipment in tandem with aircraft and helicopters.²¹ There is a sense, however, that what happened at Scarborough Shoal together with subsequently reported Chinese actions that were deemed provocative by the Philippine government, has "reawakened" the Philippine government to the need to pay attention to geopolitics. At the same time, however, there does not seem to be any sense of urgency within the Philippine public to support any form of

¹⁷ See "National Security Policy 2011-2016: Security the Gains of Democracy," (Quezon City: National Security Council, 2011), p. 11

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Jaime Laude, "AFP avoiding escalation of tension in dispute seas," *The Philippine Star* (18 July 2012) available at <http://www.philstar.com/nation/article.aspx?publicationssubcategoryid=200&articleid=828840> downloaded on 19 July 2012.

²¹ Redempto D. Anda, "AFP building 'modest deterrent capability' in West Philippine Sea," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (17 May 2012) available at <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/194991/afp-building-%E2%80%98modest-deterrent-capability%E2%80%99-in-west-philippine-sea> downloaded on 22 May 2012. See also Maila Ager, "Philippines must buy armaments, says Enrile," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (9 May 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/36063/philippines-must-buy-armaments-says-enrile> downloaded on 12 May 2012.

Philippine government response.²² Consequently, the issue of modernizing the AFP continues to be mired in domestic politics.²³

Nonetheless, the Aquino administration has sought help from its friends in the provision of newer weapons systems. Japan, South Korea, and the United States have received requests for hardware that would augment the limited capability of the AFP and the Philippine Coast Guard.²⁴ The emphasis is on air and maritime capability.²⁵ Developing the Philippine Air Force and Philippine Navy to be more capable of defending the sovereignty and maritime territory of the Philippines, however, will take time. In the meantime, there are efforts to institute more immediate measures including the arming of the *del Pilar* with anti-ship missiles.²⁶ A more obvious step is the increased involvement of the US with more US Navy ships making port calls in the Philippines, and the prospect of a rotational deployment of US forces being banded by Philippine officials.²⁷ There have also been reports of joint naval/

²² Nikko Dizon, "Row with China a 'reawakening' for PH defense," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2 December 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/58487/row-with-china-a-reawakening-for-ph-defense> downloaded on 3 December 2012.

²³ Despite Scarborough Shoal, opposition lawmakers remain opposed to providing the AFP with the funds to acquire more modern weapons. See "Lawmaker bucks AFP fund hike," *The Philippine Star* (18 July 2012) available at <http://www.philstar.com/Article.aspx?articleId=828801&publicationSubCategoryId=200> downloaded on 19 July 2012.

²⁴ See for example "Aquino asks South Korea for military hardware," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (22 November 2011) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/19121/aquino-asks-south-korea-for-military-hardware> downloaded on 6 April 2012; Frances Mangosing, "Philippines to receive 10 new patrol ships from Japan," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (18 May 2012) downloaded from <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/37265/philippines-to-receive-10-new-patrol-ships-from-japan> on 22 May 2012; "Philippines asks US for radar, patrol boats and aircraft," Yahoo! News Philippines (3 May 2012) available at <http://ph.news.yahoo.com/philippines-asks-us-radar-patrol-boats-aircraft-195616548.html> downloaded on 3 May 2012.

²⁵ Frances Mangosing, "Defense wants Air Force that isn't 'all air and devoid of force' in 5 years," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (22 June 2012) available at <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/217077/defense-wants-air-force-that-isn%E2%80%99t-%E2%80%98all-air-and-devoid-of-force%E2%80%99-in-5-years> downloaded on 16 August 2012; "Philippine Air Force to get new warplanes by 2014," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (6 July 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/43297/philippine-air-force-to-get-new-warplanes-by-2014> downloaded on 13 July 2012; Kate Evangelista, "Philippine Air Force to buy 6 fighter jets," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (1 July 2011) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/5162/philippine-air-force-to-buy-6-fighter-jets> downloaded on 23 July 2012; Philip C. Tubeza, "A first: Philippines to buy 2 missile warships from Italy—DND," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (3 August 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/46263/a-first-philippines-to-buy-2-missile-warships-from-italy-dnd> downloaded on 10 August 2012.

²⁶ See "Philippine Navy to arm US-acquired ships," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (19 September 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/49676/philippine-navy-to-arm-us-acquired-ships> downloaded on 22 September 2012.

²⁷ At the height of the confrontation over Scarborough Shoal, the USS North Carolina, a fast attack nuclear submarine, docked at Subic Bay. Since then a number of US Navy warships have visited the Philippines. Frances Mangosing, "Nuclear-powered 'fast-attack' US submarine docks in Subic," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (15 May 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/36997/nuclear-powered-fast-attack-us-submarine-docks-in-subic> downloaded on 22 May 2012.

military exercises with Vietnam.²⁸ Overall, the Philippines has taken steps that are identifiable as traditional geopolitical measures open to weak states. Its attempt to bring the issue to ASEAN in order to take a more diplomatic approach was frustrated by the unwillingness of Cambodia (then chair of ASEAN Coordinating Council) to include the face-off at Scarborough Shoal in the Joint Communique as a matter of importance to ASEAN. The danger of tensions over developments in the South China Sea driving the region into a crisis, however, is an issue that concerns the United States. Its support for the Philippines on these matters remains circumspect.²⁹

Some Observations

The Philippines has traditionally eschewed paying attention to external defense, because of the greater importance of internal security considerations and the domestic factors that contribute to them (such as grinding poverty and injustice). Consequently, the AFP has increasingly been responding to the needs of addressing these internal security issues. The Philippines is paying the cost of having ignored external defense. Officially, internal security remains more important, though the signing of the Framework for Peace with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has given the government cause to think more about the external side of security especially with the developments in Scarborough Shoal. Whereas in the past, the defense sector was internally oriented, there is now a scramble to improve the external defense capability of the AFP. Unfortunately, this process is being done in response to the immediate situation, rather than based on a thought-out process where external defense capability development is based on strategic considerations and calculations. In this context, the Philippine defense sector will still be responding to ad hoc appreciations of the defense needs of the country.

²⁸ Donna Z. Pazzibugan, "Philippines, Vietnam eye Spratlys 'war games'," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (28 March 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/30683/philippines-vietnam-eye-spratlys-%E2%80%98war-games%E2%80%99> downloaded on 13 July 2012.

²⁹ "US Pacific fleet chief concerned about West Philippine Sea," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (18 January 2012) available at <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/23195/us-pacific-fleet-chief-concerned-about-west-philippine-sea> downloaded on 13 July 2012.