

PHILIPPINE INVOLVEMENT IN THE KOREAN WAR:  
A FOOTNOTE TO R.P.-U.S. RELATIONS

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The fledging Republic of the Philippines (R.P.) was one of the sixteen United Nations-member countries that fought on the side of the U.S.-backed South Korean government in the Korean Civil War of 1950-53. Broadly, Philippine participation in the war efforts in Korea may be viewed as a decisive turning point in evolving its foreign policy during the emerging Cold War in the Fifties. Specifically, active Philippine military involvement in the Korean War reflected to a large extent, its decidedly pro-U.S. and anti-communist orientation in an international political climate that was heavily influenced by the post-World War II ideological rivalry between the so-called democratic and communist forces led by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., respectively.

Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the Philippine government under President Elpidio Quirino came close to formulating a neutralist stand in the Cold War. In 1949, for instance, when the idea of a Pacific Pact was proposed by Quirino, the Philippine government bowed to the warning of such neutralist countries as India and Indonesia, to exclude Taiwan and South Korea in the proposed Asian Conference. Hence, despite Quirino's initial plan of inviting the rigidly anti-communist governments of Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee to the conference, these two countries were dropped from the final list of participating nations.<sup>1</sup> In fact, barely four months before the Korean War erupted on June 25, 1950, Quirino expressed his neutralist attitude when he declared to the press:

Let China go communist. Let Japan go communist. We don't care.  
We will respect whatever forms of government any of our Far  
Eastern neighbors choose to have.<sup>2</sup>

The ensuing Korean War however, saw the decided hardening of the Philippine stand against communism at home and abroad.

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<sup>1</sup> Milton Meyer, *The Diplomatic History of the Philippines*, (U.S.A.: University of Hawaii Press, 1965), pp. 145-152.

See also "Quirino Memoirs," *The Sunday Times Magazine*, Vol. XII, No. 31 (March 17, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> "Quirino Will Deliver Talk at Airport," *Manila Chronicle*, February 11, 1950, p. 1.

### Philippine Decision to Fight in Korea

Initially, the Quirino administration did not perceive the Korean War as an immediate threat to Philippine external security. Quirino declared that he was more concerned with the country's internal security—that is, the Huk<sup>3</sup> raids, as well as the weak economy—than with the threats posed by the Korean War.<sup>4</sup>

On June 29, 1950, when the U.N. Secretary General transmitted the U.S.-drafted and Philippine-supported Council Resolution 27<sup>5</sup> to all U.N. member states, Quirino and his cabinet voted to confine Philippine contribution to the sending of commodities and medicines.<sup>6</sup> Quirino also confirmed the General Military Council of his country's decision not to use Filipino troops in military operations outside the country. He claimed that sending troops to a foreign land would constitute an act of war. Later, Quirino elucidated that he would not engage the Philippines in a war against communism outside the country's territory since this would be an act of intervention in the internal affairs of another country. He further explained that although the Philippines was committed to democracy, it would not attempt to intervene in the event that other countries "of their own free will choose to turn communists."<sup>7</sup>

Quirino's initial declarations and actions tended to show that he was against the commitment of the Philippines to an active participation in a foreign war which could provoke the U.S.S.R. and the People's Republic of China. Quirino also cited inadequacy of funds to support his stand. However, despite these initial official reactions, it is noteworthy that forty-five days after the outbreak of the war, the first of several Filipino battalion combat teams sailed for Korea to fight on the side of the South Korean government against the communist North.

### The Sending of Troops to Korea

At least three related factors had greatly influenced official Philippine decision to send combat troops to Korea: (1) the Philip-

<sup>3</sup> The Philippine acronym for Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon, the anti-Japanese guerilla force during the Japanese occupation. Later renamed Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan, the military arm of the Soviet-influenced Philippine Communist Party.

<sup>4</sup> "Declaration of Taruc Stirrs Hornets' Nest," *Manila Times*, July 6, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> The Resolution recommended that the U.N. members furnish such assistance to South Korea as may be necessary to repel the armed attack from the North and to restore international peace and security in the area.

<sup>6</sup> "Cabinet Votes to Send Food, Medicine, Goods," *Manila Times*, July 8, 1950, p. 1; also refer to U.N. Document 1584.

<sup>7</sup> "EQ Will Not Embark PI on War Against Red Outside Country," *Manila Times*, July 18, 1950, p. 1.

piners' alliance with the United States; (2) Romulo's presidency in the United Nation's General Assembly; (3) the war scare and public pressure.

### *The American Factor*

In view of the dominant role of the U.S. in the Korean conflict, the attitudes and reactions of other countries vis-a-vis the Korean War reflected their policy toward Washington, D.C. At the same time, it is also safe to assume that the extent of these countries' reaction to and involvement in the Korean conflict, reflected the degree of the U.S. government's influence on them. Obviously, the greatest contributory factor which influenced active Philippine military involvement in the Korean War, was the Philippines' alliance with the U.S.

As previously cited, the Quirino administration was initially against the sending of troops to Korea. As a member of the U.N. however, the Philippines actively supported all the important U.S.-drafted resolutions of the U.N. Security Council and the General Assembly in defense of South Korea against the North, and later, against Communist China. As a gesture of strong support for the U.S.-backed South Korean government, the Philippines, in accordance with the Security Council Resolution of June 27, 1950, gave contributions consisting of war tanks and other commodities like vaccines, fresh blood, soap and rice,<sup>8</sup> despite its own precarious economic situation. Quirino's attempt to express Philippine support through such contributions while maintaining a policy of military non-intervention, however, failed to achieve its purpose. This was mainly due to pressure from the predominantly pro-U.S. Filipino legislators as well as from the U.S. government itself.

In a speech supporting Concurrent Resolution 16<sup>9</sup> before the Philippine Senate, Senator Camilo Osias described Quirino's opposition to extending military assistance to Korea on the grounds that it would be a provocative act, as an "effeminate foreign policy."<sup>10</sup> Senator Osias went on to declare:

We are drawn into the present conflict for reasons varied and sundry. But the most important is that this has clearly become a struggle between communism and democracy... we are on the side of the democratic forces of the world.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *United Nations Yearbook, 1950*, (New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations, 1951), p. 227.

<sup>9</sup> This Resolution called for the extension of Philippine military assistance to South Korea.

<sup>10</sup> Camilo Osias, *Philippine Support of United Nations Forces Against Communist Aggression*, (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1950), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Among the reasons cited by Philippine legislators for sending Filipino troops to Korea, emphasis was placed on showing "our sincerity in fulfilling our part of the bargain in the military assistance pact and military bases agreement entered into by the Philippines and the United States."<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, U.S. pressure toward a more active Philippine participation in the American war efforts in Korea took the form of increased aid incentive. After the outbreak of the Korean War, President Truman requested the U.S. Congress for an additional \$30 million for military aid to the Philippines and other "friendly countries."<sup>13</sup> While the Philippine Senate was debating on the Korean issue, Filipino Colonel Andres Soriano clearly stated to the press upon his arrival from the U.S., that a favorable outcome in that special Senate session would influence American decision to grant economic aid to the Philippines.<sup>14</sup>

In a cable to Senator Jose Yulo on August 2, 1950, Miguel Elizalde, the Philippine Ambassador to Washington, underscored the advisability of Philippine military assistance to Korea. Elizalde said that the U.S. government was "extremely anxious and would welcome an offer [from you] of even one battalion totally equipped with whatever equipment we now have there, given to us under the military assistance agreement."<sup>15</sup> He further explained that despite the disadvantages of sending "poorly prepared and badly equipped soldiers to be overrun and possibly suffer defeat" it would be "obviously advantageous in our relationship with the United States and to bring about a more friendly atmosphere in the Congress if you could see your way to go even a little beyond what you consider wise at this time and offer at once even two thousand men and officers to be ready in the shortest time possible to embark for Korea."<sup>16</sup> Elizalde then assured Yulo that such move "would be more than appreciated here."<sup>17</sup>

The approval of the said Resolution on Korea was passed on August 10, 1950.<sup>18</sup> The formal announcement by President Quirino of the Philippine decision to send troops to Korea was received with relief by Filipino officials in Washington, D.C. In a congratulatory cable to Quirino, Elizalde stressed the satisfactory reaction in Washing-

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-14.

<sup>13</sup> "More Defense Funds to SEA and the Philippines," *Manila Times*, August 3, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> "PI Aid to Korea to Influence U.S. Economic Help," *Manila Times*, August 6, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Cable to Hon. Jose Yulo from Hon. J. M. Elizalde, dated August 2, 1950, in Quirino Presidential Papers File, Ayala Museum and Library, Metro Manila, Philippines.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "Quirino Advises Washington of Decision to Send Soldiers," *Manila Times*, August 11, 1950, p. 1.

ton to the Philippine decision, and he assured the President that the U.S. "will recognize our sincere efforts and problems."<sup>19</sup>

*Romulo's Presidency in the  
U.N. General Assembly*

Among the arguments given in support of the Philippine Congress resolution to send troops to Korea was:

the duty of the Philippines to fulfill its obligations to the U.N. is accentuated by the fact that the Philippine chief delegate to the U.N., Secretary Carlos Romulo, is the president of the U.N. General Assembly.<sup>20</sup>

In his dual role as the concurrent Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs and President of the fourth session of the U.N. General Assembly, Carlos P. Romulo was caught between two courses of diplomatic actions regarding Philippine participation in the Korean War. On the one hand, as Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs, he had to inform U.N. Secretary General Trygve Lie of the Philippine policy not to send combat troops except on a voluntary basis, due to the pressing demands of domestic peace and order. On the other hand, as chief Filipino U.N. delegate actively supporting U.S.-drafted resolutions on Korea, and more so as President of the fourth session of the General Assembly, Romulo exerted effort to work for full Philippine cooperation in the U.S.-led military efforts in South Korea. It was in his latter capacity that Romulo spearheaded the movement for Philippine military participation in Korea. In so doing, he carried his bid to the Philippine Senate. Romulo campaigned vigorously to convince the government and the public that the war against communism must be conducted not only within the Philippine territory but also in the international arena.

In his speech before a public hearing of the joint Senate committees on Foreign Affairs and the Army regarding the Korean issue, Romulo stressed:

We have a stake in that struggle by virtue of our membership in the international community. But our stake rests upon a more intimate, and in a sense, a more compelling consideration. It was inevitable that the United States of America, in its role as a leader of the Free World, would assume the major responsibility in the field for any enforcement measures that may be taken in accordance with the charter of the United Nations. Our country is similarly bound as a member of the U.N. to offer such assistance. But our

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<sup>19</sup> Cable to President Quirino from Ambassador J. M. Elizalde, August 7, 1950, in Quirino Presidential...

<sup>20</sup> See Resolution No. 16, Second Congress of the Philippines, Second Special Session, Manila: August 1, 1950.

special relations with the United States, which have sprung from a common love of liberty, a shared allegiance to democracy and a battle-tested comradeship, contribute an element of urgency in our obligation. Pervasive and powerful in peace, these relations exert an even more potent influence in times of war.<sup>21</sup>

Thus it is obvious that Romulo's arguments were reflective of a decidedly pro-U.S. stand in a conflict which indicated the growing rivalry of the superpowers in an international Cold War environment. Later, in a letter to Quirino dated December 19, 1950, Romulo wrote from New York:

The pledge of American protection has been given repeatedly by President Truman and Secretary Acheson. We have responded loyally and gratefully in kind. We have supported the American policy in Korea, and it should be stated for the record that our government decided to send Filipino troops there not only as a faithful member of the United Nations but as a loyal ally of the United States. We did what no other Asian country, with the exception of Thailand, dared to do...<sup>22</sup>

#### *The War Scare and Public Pressure*

The news of a war in Korea barely five years after the trauma of World War II came as a surprise to the Filipinos. The relative geographic proximity of Korea to the Philippines—Manila being approximately three and a half hours away by plane from the South Korean capital city of Seoul—precipitated a war scare among the Filipinos. There was also the gnawing fear that if Korea turned communist, the Philippines might follow suit, especially in view of the escalation of the Huk raids in the countryside after the outbreak of the Korean War.

As Romulo pointed out in his speech before the public hearing of the Joint Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Army:

Korea is next door to us and the outcome of the struggle there will have immediate and unavoidable influences, for good or for evil, upon our country. What has happened in Korea can happen here.<sup>23</sup>

The immediate general reaction of the Filipino public was to rally behind the United States' Korean war efforts rather than behind their own government. This sentiment was expressed nationwide.

<sup>21</sup> Text of Romulo's speech before a Public Hearing of the Joint Senate Committees on Foreign Affairs and the Army, August 3, 1950, *Manila Times*, August 4, 1950 p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> EQ Correspondence: "Quirino-Romulo Letters," in Quirino Presidential...

<sup>23</sup> Text of Romulo's Speech before a Public Hearing of the Joint Senate Committees on Foreign Affairs and the Army, August 3, 1950, *Manila Times*, August 4, 1950, p. 1.

In Laoag, the nearness of Ilocos Norte to Taiwan and Korea resulted in great fear among the people. They expressed hope that the U.S. will succeed in averting further conflicts in the region.<sup>24</sup> In Iloilo, the president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, William Yotoko, urged all Jaycees to rally behind the United Nations and be ready "to spill their blood in defense of democracy."<sup>25</sup> In Batangas, Congressman Numeriano Babao had to reassure the people against fears of any Red invasion in the country during his Independence Day address;<sup>26</sup> while in neighboring Cavite, a resolution supporting U.S. efforts in Korea was unanimously passed by the retired civilian employees of the U.S. navy in that province.<sup>27</sup>

In Manila, five days after the start of the Korean War, an anti-communist league was formed by the members of the Committee on Un-Filipino Activities (CUFA), the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), and several Filipino-American civic organizations. The members of the American Legion in the Ermita district endorsed the league, and the Philippine press described it as the "first tangible proof here of a popular movement against communism."<sup>28</sup> Also in Manila, the directorate of the National Federation of Philippine Scout Veterans representing some 31,000 veterans offered "to fight once more for the democracies headed by America" and unanimously passed a resolution reaffirming their loyalty to both the Philippines and the United States.<sup>29</sup>

The Korean conflict also elicited reactions from Filipinos residing in the United States. A radiogram was sent to President Quirino by the Filipino community in Los Angeles through its president, Paul Vidal, informing him that the Filipinos there were prepared to volunteer their services in the United States Army as an "indirect way of reaffirming [their] loyalty to the Philippines."<sup>30</sup>

Such was the war scare among the Filipinos that measures had to be taken to avoid undue national alarm. The National Emergency Committee of the Civilian Emergency Administration decided to put up a nationwide information service to advise the people on the actual war situation and at the same time inform them what had to

<sup>24</sup> "Anti-Communist League Formed," *Manila Times*, July 1, 1950.

<sup>25</sup> "Jaycees to Rally Behind the U.N.," *Manila Times*, July 3, 1950, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> "PI Committed to World Force," *Manila Times*, July 4, 1950, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> "Ex-U.S. Navy Employees Offer to Serve Anew," *Manila Times*, August 7, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Anti-Communist League Formed," *Manila Times*, July 1, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> "31,000 Scout Vets Pledge Loyalty, Offer Services," *Manila Times*, July 7, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> "Filipinos in States Ready to Join USA," *Manila Times*, July 6, 1950, p. 1.

be done in case of emergency. This service was given particularly in the provinces through mass media and the community councils.<sup>31</sup>

A public hearing sponsored by the Senate Committees on Foreign Relations and the Army sounded off public opinion on the question of Philippine implementation of the U.N. decision with respect to the Korean War. On this particular issue, public opinion was predominantly for the move to send Philippine forces to South Korea. In Iloilo, the provincial board passed a resolution urging the President to send a token force to Korea "to assist American forces there who are fighting under the U.N. Banner";<sup>32</sup> while in Manila, the councilors expressed disappointment over the delay of the national government in sending troops "while the allies' U.N. forces were already in a critical situation."<sup>33</sup> In a letter to Quirino, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) endorsed the same move and even suggested the creation of a committee composed of representatives from civic and welfare organizations in the country to campaign for voluntary contributions for the U.N. forces and civilians in South Korea.<sup>34</sup>

The approval by the House of Representatives of a resolution for Philippine military participation in the War, plus Quirino's affirmation that the Philippines was ready to dispatch 5,000 to 6,000 men to Korea, elicited widespread public support. The Supreme Council of the National Confederation of Trade Union (NACTU), for instance, passed a resolution pledging full support for the President's decision.<sup>35</sup>

Amidst public approval of the Philippine decision to send troops to Korea, there were a few dissenting voices. In Congress, Representative Arsenio Lacson spoke against the resolution, saying that it would be "silly" for the Philippines to fight communism on foreign soil when the country could not even contain communism, like the Huk problem, locally.<sup>36</sup> Another vocal oppositionist was the Congress of Labor Organization (CLO), an organization of workers' unions which was against the Philippine decision on the ground of "non-intervention."<sup>37</sup> These dissenters, however, especially the CLO, were branded by the media as radicals.

<sup>31</sup> "Filipinos Free to Volunteer for Korea War, Say EQ," *Manila Times*, July 11, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> "U.S.-PI Unity is Pledged Anew," *Manila Times*, August 4, 1950, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> "Councilors Urge PI Troops to Korea," *Manila Times*, August 4, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> "Y's Men Suggest Korea War Fund," *Manila Times*, August 7, 1950, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> "Korea Force Decision Lauded," "Labor Supports EQ Stand on Korea," *Manila Times*, August 23, 1950, p. 1 and p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> "Solon Urges Aid to Korea," *Manila Times*, August 4, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> "CLO Will Oppose PI Action in Korea," *Manila Times*, August 8, 1950, p. 2.



### The Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK)

As one of the sixteen U.N.-member countries that sent troops to the Korean War, the Philippines sent, in the course of the three-year war, a total of four battalion combat teams (BCT) and lost about a hundred Filipino lives.<sup>38</sup> Each combat team consisted of approximately 1,200 men from the Armed Forces supposedly recruited on a voluntary basis.<sup>39</sup> As an incentive to the PEFTOK members, a bill submitted to Congress by the AFP stipulated that officers sent to Korea were to receive twice the amount of their base pay plus allowances and longevity pay. The enlisted men were to have a higher ratio rate to be computed on the basis of the following formula: the sum of the base pay plus subsistence and quarter allowances times two plus fifty percent of the product.<sup>40</sup> This bill on PEFTOK salary was obviously designed to encourage "volunteers" from the enlisted men.

The initial military equipment for the Filipino troops in Korea was furnished from the mutual security funds appropriated to the Philippines by the United States. Subsequent equipment was on a reimbursable basis through the U.S. Eighth Army in Korea.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

The preceding factual discussion strongly indicates that Philippine military involvement in the Korean War of 1950-53 was primarily a function of its pro-U.S. orientation, both in the domestic and the international levels. Viewed against the backdrop of the emerging bipolarized Cold War politics in the Fifties, this involvement in a basically ideological conflict on the Korean Peninsula, irrevocably aligned the fledgling Republic with the anti-communist camp under the leadership of the U.S.

As noted earlier, the Philippine government under Quirino made attempts to explore alternate ties with other Asian neighbors of varying ideologies prior to the Korean War. This was clearly shown in the composition of participant nations to the Baguio Conference held on May 26, 1950. Such neutralist countries as India, Indonesia and Pakistan were present while rigidly anti-communist countries like Taiwan and South Korea were not invited to the Conference. The

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<sup>38</sup> "PEFTOK War Activities." Armed Forces of the Philippines. Office of the Chief of Historical Activities, Camp General E. Aguinaldo, Quezon City.

<sup>39</sup> For personal impressions of the members of the first BCT to Korea, see the press interview by Amante Bigornia, "PI Force Girds for Korea War," *Manila Daily Bulletin*, August 2, 1950, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> "10th BCT to be First in Korea," *Manila Times*, August 24, 1950, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings on Mutual Security Act of 1953, 83rd Congress, 1st Session, pp. 775-76, in Meyer, *Diplomatic History . . . .*, p. 131.

outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, however, created constraints that compelled the Philippines into making a decision which necessarily aligned her with the anti-communist forces in a Cold War environment. Thus, when the Philippines finally sent troops to Korea on September 19, 1950, it decisively signified its international commitment to the democratic forces under the U.S. banner. Within such framework then, it was not surprising that in the sixties, the Philippines (along with South Korea) was one of the few Asian states that directly supported another American war effort in divided Vietnam.



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