

## AN AGENDA FOR AN ADVOCACY-ORIENTED FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING STRUCTURE

*Segundo Eclar Romero*

### I. TOWARDS AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY

This paper is part of a larger effort to study how an independent and coherent Philippine foreign policy as mandated in the 1987 Constitution can be formulated and implemented. The paper will evaluate the existing government foreign policy structures and suggest how they may be fashioned into a Foreign Affairs Community (FAC) designed for the conduct of an independent and coherent Philippine Foreign Policy. The scope of the paper will be limited to outlining the idea and basic features of the FAC.

Before discussing the FAC it is necessary to provide a brief perspective on previous efforts to formulate and implement an independent and coherent Philippine foreign policy, and on the other components of the current effort. Every major polity change in the Philippines—the end of Spanish colonization (1898), American colonization (1946), postwar liberal democracy (1972) and the Marcos authoritarian regime (1986)—has been followed by efforts to re-examine and re-shape the basic orientation of the country's relations with the outside world. This tendency has also been manifested following changes in administration during the liberal democratic phase, especially in the Garcia, Macapagal, and Marcos administrations.

Generally, the re-orientation sought a more independent Philippine foreign policy through:

- (1) a conscious partiality to native products, services, and ideas ("Filipino First") as against imported ones;
- (2) an attempt to dilute the vestiges of the Philippines colonial ties with the United States ("the close and special ties are too close for comfort and too special for self-respect");
- (3) a "return" to Asia manifested in the active promotion of regional organization and bilateral relations with neighboring countries; and
- (4) the "opening of more windows to the world" particularly to the socialist countries that the Philippines previously

shunned as an active partisan in the Cold War era. It also applied to the Third World countries with which the Philippines did not have mutual interest for bilateral relations, but which shared its underdevelopedness and represented its hopes that, with solidarity and common action, the international environment could be made more hospitable to its aspirations for development.

To be sure, there has been progress in the drive for greater independence in foreign relations. The efforts, however, have been sissiphian. Early in an administration or regime, fighting rhetorics are enunciated by government, only to slowly but surely give way to pragmatic accommodations to the familiarity with and security of existing arrangements. This has been most tellingly demonstrated in the Philippines relations with the United States.

The accession of the Aquino Government after the People Power Revolution of 1986 has spawned yet another effort at formulating an independent foreign policy. The present efforts to fashion an independent foreign policy may well fall short of the target as has been the historical trend.

However, there are a few opportunities in the present situation for the conduct of a more independent foreign policy.

First, elite and popular attitudes in the Philippines appear to have changed, as reflected in the increasing opposition to the presence of US bases (and perhaps nuclear weapons) in the Philippines.

Second, there are new democratic political structures, notably the Philippine Congress, that could exercise initiative in foreign policy.

Third, while President Aquino has not been predisposed to push an independent foreign policy all that much, the formulation and conduct of foreign policy remains primarily a presidential prerogative. She remains immensely popular, and expectations remain high that she will uphold and advance Philippine sovereignty and interests.

Last, and most important, the 1987 Constitution, in explicitly calling for an independent foreign policy, elevates external sovereignty as a goal that needs no justification in reference to any other component of national interest. It is also rather clear on the immediate operational requirements of "an independent Philippine for

eign policy." Its references to the removal of foreign military bases and the ban on nuclear weapons on Philippine territory constitute a re-commitment to independence, essentially from United States control and influence over Philippine affairs.

As constitutional provisions, the removal of foreign bases and the ban on nuclear weapons are meant to be accepted as given, the base of a more fully-articulated long term foreign policy framework. (However, the Aquino Government's position on military bases and nuclear weapons as reflected in the 1988 renegotiated RP-US Military Bases Agreement suggests that the removal of the bases and the ban on nuclear weapons remain open for reconsideration.)

## II. ENDS AND MEANS

With the Constitutional provisions on foreign policy as basis and starting point, the formulation of an independent Philippine foreign policy must proceed with (1) imaging the alternative Philippine futures, (2) choosing the preferred future, and (3) fashioning the deliberate strategy and operational plan for attaining that future.

The conduct of an independent foreign policy rests on the operationalization of the national interest ("ends") and the mobilization of national resources ("means") for attaining them.

The first task involves the formulation of substantive foreign policy components of national development plans. These plans are elaborations, extensions, specifications, and even extrapolations of the goals and principles embedded in the Constitution, as adapted to changed conditions and times. These plans must cover the short, medium term, and long term futures, and consist of, perhaps:

- (1) the present medium-term national development plan (1987-1992);
- (2) an indicative foreign policy plan for 1992-2004 (a period equivalent to two presidential terms); and
- (3) a perspective plan for the year 2046 (a century since Philippine independence in 1946, over half a century from the present).

On the other hand, harnessing national resources must begin with the creation of a system, a "Foreign Affairs Community," out of the various government agencies, academic institutions and private sector groups that participate in the formulation, implementa-

tion, and evaluation of foreign policy. The design of the FAC must (1) define the roles of and relationships among these component structures, (2) place the FAC squarely behind the President and the Congress which are the structures constitutionally charged with the conduct of the nation's foreign policy, and (3) specify the advocacy role of the FAC within the context of domestic politics, and in relation to the Filipino people who traditionally have neither been knowledgeable nor supportive of government on foreign policy matters.

In evaluating the existing government foreign policy structures, the paper begins with a discussion of the "step backward" the Aquino Government has taken as far as the capability for the conduct of foreign policy is concerned.

### III. ONE STEP BACKWARD IN THE CONDUCT OF FOREIGN POLICY

In the aftermath of the 1986 February Revolution, the capacity of the Philippines for strategic foreign policy planning and implementation was drastically, if inadvertently, reduced. It is not that the previous administration had a remarkably coherent foreign policy than the present one, but that the foreign policy then was less confused, and foreign policy statements less ambiguous, perhaps as an artifact of the authoritarian form of government.

The reduction in capacity has been the result of the abolition of then existing foreign policy monitoring and planning structures and the absence of equivalent structures in the present government. These structures include the President's Center for Special Studies and the International Affairs Division which used to exist in the Office of the Prime Minister.

The present administration has yet to remedy the weaknesses in the structure for the conduct of foreign relations it inherited from the previous administration. Among these are:

First, absence of an independent capacity of the President for coordinating and supervising the foreign affairs community in a coherent manner, using staff work and advisory bodies to do so. This reference is to the low state of capability in the office of the National Security Adviser, the National Security Council, and the Foreign Policy Council.

Second, the absence of a foreign policy component of national development plans. Absence of long-term perspective plans that would serve as the framework of foreign policy. Similarly, there seems to be the official attitude of keeping foreign policy issues that may have been definitively addressed by the Constitution as ever and continuously open issues that can be reconsidered.

Third, lack of a concept of a foreign affairs community among the various government agencies and instrumentalities which in fact constitute a bureaucratic and information system for the conduct of Philippine foreign relations. In turn, there is an absence of a conscious attempt to coordinate these agencies and build teamwork.

Fourth, lack of effective presidential control and supervision over the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) since it had been assigned and treated the DFA as the personal turf of (both recalcitrant and loyal) presidential political allies.

Fifth and finally, the incomplete return of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) to full professional status, after it had been privatized to boost the political fortunes of a succession of DFA officials who served as its directors. The FSI is the sole institutional advocate of professional training and organizational development in the area of foreign policy and diplomacy, working against the personalism and internal bickerings that have been the hallmark of the Philippine foreign service. Without political backing and support, the FSI's existence simply creates the illusion that something is being done about the organizational weaknesses it has been mandated to help address.

#### IV. FOCUS ON A KEY STRUCTURE: THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

It has been the misfortune of the Department of Foreign Affairs that since 1969, it has not had an organization-minded head.

General Carlos P. Romulo served as Foreign Minister from 1969 to 1984, the longest serving minister of foreign affairs in the country's history. His long tenure largely coincided with the Marcos regime. Between General Romulo, President Marcos and Imelda Marcos, Philippine foreign policy attained a rare coherence, and the Philippines was personally represented at many an international fora.

The long-established international stature and personal accomplishments of General Romulo as foreign minister masked the organizational decay in the Ministry. For instance, despite his personal influence, the Ministry was unable to transfer from its decrepit and overcrowded offices at Padre Faura to a dignified office befitting the foreign office of a nation. New ministries such as the Ministry of Human Settlements obtained better offices. The advent of inexpensive computer technology in the 1970s and 1980s passed the Ministry by, despite the fact that by the nature of its informational and communicational tasks, it stood to benefit the most from the technology.

Development diplomacy had been the by-word of the Marcos era, but the Department was unable to beef up its organizational competence in trade, economic, financial, and technological matters. Philippine embassies abroad were only loosely controlled or coordinated by the Home Office, in the conscious pursuance of national objectives. Philippine embassies were required to submit no less than 64 different kinds of periodic reports, with no evident processing, distillation, and action on the results.

In the absence of clear performance criteria and the spirit of professionalism, many foreign service officers dedicated themselves to the service of the Marcos regime, over and above what was called for by their profession.

When President Aquino took over, the younger and more idealistic officers of the Ministry hoped for organizational reforms that have been overdue. Having abolished the Office of the Prime Minister to which Vice-President Salvador Laurel had been appointed, the President virtually left the Department entirely to Vice-President Laurel as his personal turf. In the face of the Vice-President's oft-repeated demand to his "share" in the powers of the Presidency which, he claimed, was promised him by Mrs. Aquino, the Department was a modest concession.

Vice-President Laurel, however, did not appear to be interested in leading the Department towards fulfilling its mission, although he relished the national and international fora the position created for him. In the first three months as Minister, Vice-President Laurel rarely, if ever, met with the senior officers of the Ministry. It was evident that he was consistent in his focus on the powers and responsibilities of the Presidency.

The resignation of Vice-President Laurel as foreign minister and the take-over of Senator Manglapus certainly removed the inconsistencies and contradictions in the positions taken by the President and her Foreign Minister, as had happened during the tenure of Vice-President Laurel as minister. Boosted, by a previous stint in the same position in the 1960s, Secretary Manglapus has better rapport with the MFA staff. However, the radical measures necessary to upgrade the capabilities of the Department have yet to be taken. For instance, the confusion that attaches to the two-deputy secretary situation continues.

The failure of the DFA to build its internal organizational strength had coincided with the rise in importance of trade and economic matters in international relations, and with these the importance of economic, trade and finance ministries worldwide.

In the Philippines, the National Economic and Development Authority, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Finance, the Department of Tourism, the Department of National Defense, the Department of Agriculture, and the now defunct Ministry of Public Information, all became participants in the conduct of foreign relations, as their domestic concerns developed significant international linkages. These linkages, in the form of international commodity and loan agreements, ministerial meetings, international conferences multiplied so fast and without any guiding framework that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was alarmed by the loss of its much vaunted primacy in the conduct of foreign relations.

Today, the conduct of Philippine foreign relations is clearly multi-agency, yet this is a matter of *de facto* reality. Without much rationalization, there is no consensus on the proper role of each participant, leading to unnecessary overlaps and gaps, rivalry and lack of cooperation even in the face of negotiations with foreigners. This situation is clearly manifested in the unwillingness to share data and integrate outputs among the participants.

#### V. FOCUS ON A KEY ISSUE:

##### THE RP-US MILITARY BASES AGREEMENT

The renegotiation of the RP-US Military Bases Agreement points to the absence of a Foreign Affairs Community approach to decision-making. Regardless of its substantive merits, it may be a good illustration of how not to make foreign policy.

In a situation where there has been endless debate and no consensus on what the position of the country should be on aspects of the agreement, such as the issue of sovereignty, the matter of compensation, the presence or absence of nuclear weapons, the most important aspect of the agreement was the process by which the Philippines determined its national interest. Only a deliberate process, legally and politically perceived as having fairly provided adequate (not endless) opportunity for the presentation of different views and arguments on the matter, would have ended the debate without continuing acrimony. The ultimate decision remained with the President, but the decision must have been the result of Congress, and key private organizations.

This is important, especially where the Constitution specifically declares a ban on nuclear weapons in Philippine territory "consistent with the national interest." Even if this were considered a qualifier that allows exceptions to the rule, still the exceptions must be argued, and argued convincingly by the executive. In the case of the renegotiated military bases agreement, President Aquino has allowed the "transit" of nuclear-equipped ships and aircraft in Philippine territory according to the so-called Spanish formula, without benefit of a visible Philippine process by which such a provision is determined to be in the national interest.

Similarly, the Constitutional call for an independent foreign policy and principle of sovereignty is derogated by the provisions of the revised agreement regarding the continued unhampered use of US facilities for US military operations, and the lack of jurisdiction over criminal cases involving American servicemen who are considered on official duty. The justification of these as being in the national interest has yet to be offered in any public manner.

The hard and soft compensation aspects of the revised agreement may have been sufficient in the Presidential calculation to offset the intangible costs to sovereignty and the Constitution. Yet, there are a myriad other implications that may have been unforeseen from a single vantage point, no matter how high. It is precisely the process of sharing perspectives and information on matters that is within the respective expertise of each participant that a Foreign Affairs Community is argued for.

Among the implications that the new agreement has may be:

- 1) it creates an argument for the continuation of the bases after 1991 under the same conditions that are exceptions



to the Constitution, despite the expressed effort to dissociate the current agreement from the decision on the fate of the bases after the termination of the agreement in 1991. Having been tolerated for two years, despite the expressed Constitutional provisions against them, how does one argue for the ban on nuclear weapons and the removal of the bases in 1991 as a matter of principle, and not as a matter of compensation?

- 2) the manner in which the new agreement has been negotiated makes clear the peculiarities and weaknesses of the negotiating behavior. The Foreign Secretary virtually admits to bluff and bluster, but only in abandoning the wide public support that his hard-line stance had received.

We do not have adequate information on the details of the process, but the following seems to have been the case:

- 1) There has been no single structure or coordinated set of structures that have monitored and studied the military bases issue, gathered the perspective, suggestions, and information from relevant groups and individuals, defined the options open for the Philippines, and recommended the preferred courses of action for the Philippines in the negotiations, as well as in advocating that position in the domestic political arena.
- 2) Elements of the Philippine Congress, particularly the Senate as a body charged with the ratification of international treaties and agreements, and the Senate and House Committees on Foreign Relations, either as bodies or their individual members, were not consulted as closely as they should have been.
- 3) There has been a lack of anticipation of the strategic linkage of the military bases issue with other foreign policy issues facing the country, such as the foreign debt, foreign aid and investments, and the so-called Philippine Aid Plan. The urgency of the hard-cash requirement of the Philippines and the hopes pinned on the Philippine Aid Plan in October 1988 induced a marked amenability of the Philippines to sign the bases agreement. The Philippines may have succumbed to the backdrops to, rather than the chips in, the negotiations.

## VI. THE CASE FOR AN ADVOCACY-ORIENTED FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING STRUCTURE

Advocacy-oriented is contrasted with reaction-oriented and means that the government:

- (1) has a coherent independent foreign policy that is based on the principles of the Constitution, and an operational definition of the present and future national interest;

- (2) has a process for deliberating on options and aggregating inputs across government, arrives at a consensus and understanding across government of such a policy, and achieves a high degree of coordination and integration of government efforts to pursue and implement such a policy;
- (3) continuously advocates and upgrades the organizational effectiveness of the structure for the conduct of foreign policy;
- (4) as part of the conduct of foreign policy, generates and obtains popular support and understanding of such policy; and
- (5) in its relations with other nations, secures and advances the Filipino national interest so as to engender satisfaction domestically and respect internationally, that the results obtained are commensurate to the efforts expended and the status of the Philippines as a medium-sized nation in the world.

Why is an advocacy-oriented foreign policy-making structure necessary or desirable at this time?

- (1) The capability for the conduct of foreign policy is easier to upgrade than that for domestic policy. This is because the level of knowledge and the orientation of the people give the government greater independence in the conduct of foreign policy. Foreign policy is more amenable to technocratic skill than to political capabilities.
- (2) The participation of Congress in the foreign policy-making process requires that the Government has density of research, well-defined options, and a principled position on all foreign policy issues, and on the general direction of foreign policy.
- (3) The democratic space that has been created allows representatives of other nations, and other external actors such as multinational corporations, to operate as actors in domestic political processes. The government must be able to operate effectively vis-a-vis these actors, at least in terms of arriving at a coherent, strategic position, and winning domestic support for those positions. The government must be a capable actor in the domestic marketplace of ideas.
- (4) Many of the crucial issues on which national development and survival depends are foreign policy issues: the military bases, the foreign debt, nuclear weapons, secessionist movements, foreign support for the insurgency movement, foreign assistance for development projects, trade protectionism that adversely affect our principal exports.
- (5) There is an unprecedented number of Filipinos (about three million) who are abroad as contract workers or immigrants. The continuing domestic economic difficulties

will heighten the role of overseas employment as an escape valve to ease poverty, unemployment, and despair. The foreign policy of the Philippines has a direct bearing on the personal safety and welfare of these Filipinos and their families. The *bahala na* attitude of these overseas workers must be matched by an increased capacity of the government to protect and advocate their welfare abroad.

## VII. TWO STEPS FORWARD: ORGANIZING AND MOBILIZING AN ADVOCACY-ORIENTED FOREIGN POLICY MAKING STRUCTURE

What must be done to organize an advocacy-oriented foreign policy making structure?

- (1) Foreign policy must be the combined output of the President and Congress. It is the result of mutually supportive effort to enact a foreign policy legislative agenda.
  - (2) Periodic foreign policy statements must build on or on strategies in the national development plans, a vision of the preferred Filipino future, and be with the fundamental law.
  - (3) No government department or agency has an exclusive mandate in foreign policy formulation and implementation. Government and private sector actors have unique contributions to make: together they constitute a foreign affairs community that maximizes coordination rather than bureaucratic rivalry in performing their tasks.
  - (4) The Department of Foreign Affairs must be strengthened as the lead department in assisting the President in planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and evaluating the total national effort in the field of foreign relations. Among others, the Department of Foreign Affairs shall undertake an annual Policy Planning Process through which the Ministry shall produce an annual Foreign Affairs Program of Action, together with a five-year perspective plan. A planning conference participated in by the key department officials in the Home Office and the Foreign Service shall be the culmination in a process of consolidation, integration, and rationalization of the individual office and unit plans across the whole Department, from both the Home Office and Foreign Service components. The plan document shall serve as the control and evaluation document for and within the entire Department.
- The Foreign Affairs Program of Action shall be consistent with and supportive of the National Economic Recovery Program.
- (5) The president is primarily responsible for the conduct of foreign policy. The executive office must independently be

capable of evaluating, coordinating, and integrating the total foreign policy formulation and implementation effort.

- (6) The National Security and the Foreign Policy Staffs under a Foreign Affairs Adviser/Director and the National Security Director must coordinate the foreign policy inputs of the Foreign Affairs Community for the President, and for the National Security Council and the Foreign Policy Councils that provide the president with ultimate counsel on national security and foreign policy. Among others, the NSC/FPC Staff must organize, maintain, and develop the single most authoritative database on all aspects of Philippine national security and foreign relations.
- (7) The membership of the Foreign Policy Council and the National Security Council must be left to the discretion of the President, in order that these bodies can actually perform their advisory roles.
- (8) The organizational soundness of the foreign affairs community as an information collecting, processing, and evaluating system with feedback and feedforward capabilities must be consciously developed for it to be truly meaningful. The development of teamwork and technical capabilities must extend to what may be the weakest links in the chain—the diplomatic and consular outposts abroad.
- (9) The Foreign Affairs Community must have the national and international reputation of knowing what it is doing. Filipino citizens and its foreign counterparts must sense its confidence and know without doubt the foreign policy it pursues and the course of action it advocates.

The Key Result Areas (KRA) of the Foreign Affairs Community must follow from the statement of foreign policy by the Government. However, the following may be generally desirable results that could be added to the substantive KRAs (adapted from the draft executive order of the Presidential Commission for Government Reorganization (PCGR) Task Force on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 1986) :

- (1) Presidential decision-making on all key problems, issues, events, and conditions involving the country's foreign relations is consistently supported with reliable information and competent analyses and recommendations.
- (2) The participation of all government departments and agencies involved in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies and programs is consistent, mutually supportive, and cost-effective.

- (3) The country's foreign relations are increasingly people-oriented, beneficial not only to the nation as a whole and its component sectors, but also to Filipino groups and individuals, at home or abroad.
- (4) The country's beneficial and cooperative transactions with foreign countries and international organizations increase in volume and quality.
- (5) The countries and international organizations with which the country maintains mutually advantageous relationships increase in number.
- (6) The country's foreign relations in the political, security, economic, cultural, and technological fields are given due emphasis.
- (7) The country's foreign relations are conducted with conscious reference to medium- and long-term plans which embody a strategic perspective of the national interest.
- (8) The country's foreign relations are participated in and supported by an increasing number of the people.
- (9) The total government resources applied to relations with specific regions and countries is consistent with a consciously determined set of priorities.
- (10) The country's image as a democratic, free, and peaceful nation is perceived and recognized by an increasing number of governments and peoples in the world.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

The diagnosis of the current Philippine maladies has variously ended with the labels "a damaged culture," "a lack of moral consensus," and "a failure of nationalism." In other words, the flaws are in Filipino society and culture themselves.

The alternative diagnosis is not as radical: it points to identifiable individuals, government structures, and social institutions as the culprits. (For instance, blame has been variously assigned to the Marcos regime, the continuing oligarchy, or to the "lack of a program of government" of the Aquino administration.)

Subscribing to the latter diagnosis may appear shallow, but subscribing to the first means paralysis, for one has to turn the society and culture on its head in order to solve its problems.

In the area of foreign policy, more so than in domestic policy, greater effectiveness may result from efforts to increase the quality of decision-making, the quality of government, and the quality of diplomacy. Presidential and Congressional initiative to put together a Foreign Affairs Community operating as a system, pur-

suings a strategic national purpose will significantly improve our foreign policy capabilities. With only some deliberate organization and coordination of the efforts of government instrumentalities and cooperating private organizations, the foreign policy process in the Philippines can be less haphazard and alienating to the people.