

JGL Eye

By Joseph G. Lariosa

CHICAGO, Illinois (JGLi) – President Barack Obama has been trying to separate himself from his predecessor, President George W. Bush, to keep up with his campaign promise for change.

Shouldn't Mr. Obama review, if not make a clean break, from Mr. Bush designation of the Philippines as a "major non-NATO ally" under President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as the designation is not working for the interest of either country?

The designation, no doubt, has reinforced the one-sided Visiting Forces Agreement between the United States and the Philippines that is making a mockery of the Philippine justice system and is also becoming a rich source of graft and corruption.

Mr. Obama will be doing his young administration a big favor if he can just unilaterally terminate the VFA.

After all, this bilateral military agreement has now been having a long joyous ride as the residual effect of the abrogated U.S. Bases Military Treaty in 1992.

EASY TO TERMINATE

What makes this agreement easy to terminate is the fact that it is only an executive agreement that was debated before the Philippine Senate but not the U.S. Senate.

According to Mr. Bush, as a "major non-NATO ally," the Philippines will be able to work together with the United States "on military research and development and give the Philippines greater access to American defense equipment and supplies," like such other countries as Argentina, Australia,

Egypt, Israel, Japan, Jordan, New Zealand and South Korea.

It enables beneficiary nations to buy US surplus military material on a priority status, obtain US military loans, benefit from training programs and permits US forces to stockpile war material on its territory.

While it is very hard to tell if the price of "US surplus military material" is comparable to world market prices and therefore the Philippines is getting a bargain price, granting "permit to US forces to stockpile war material" in Philippine territory could violate the Philippine constitution if the war material would include nuclear arms.

And as a funding source, the VFA has become a fertile ground for some military officers to commit graft by turning it into their own piggy bank.

I am referring to the report that Lt. S. G. Nancy Gadian had accused top military officials of stealing from the 46 million pesos (US\$1-M) fund for the RP-US Balikatan joint exercise in 2007, which is part of the VFA.

Like the U.S. Bases Military Treaty, the VFA has made U.S. servicemen, who rape Filipino women, immune from arrest by Filipino police.

If the VFA can be amended in such a way that it can have teeth like the U.S.-Japan military agreement, which calls for U.S. servicemen accused of raping Japanese women to be tried by Japan courts and to be jailed in Japanese prisons, then, I don't mind keeping the VFA in the Philippines in force.

Even the Philippine Supreme Court had declared that the agreement between U.S. Ambassador the Philippines (Kenny) the Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Romulo) of keeping the erring U.S. serviceman (Lance Corporal Daniel Smith) from Philippine prison as "not in accordance with the VFA."

ABDUCTION OF FIL AM

The recent abduction and torture committed by the Philippine military on a Filipino-American citizen, Melissa Roxas, should be the strongest argument for President Obama to shred the VFA to pieces.

Filipino-American lawyer Arnedo S. Valera told me that he plans to file appropriate cases in the United States against the Philippine government and under the command responsibility of President Arroyo on behalf of activist, Melissa Roxas, who was forcibly taken by armed men in La Paz, Tarlac, in the Philippines last May 19 and was released six days later after being subjected to physical and mental torture during her captivity.

A member of BAYAN-USA, an overseas chapter of Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, Ms. Roxas who arrived in Los Angeles, California, last June 1, had filed a petition for a writ of amparo before the Philippine Supreme Court after she was blindfolded and handcuffed for six days in an area suspected of being a military camp in Nueva Ecija, possibly Fort Magsaysay, headquarters of the 7th Infantry Division, a stone's throw from La Paz, where she was abducted.

During her captivity, Ms. Roxas said she heard radio communications where people were addressed as "Sir." She also heard what she believed to be a firing range as well as the sounds of aircraft.

She named in her petition President Arroyo, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro, AFP Chief of Staff Victor Ibrado, Philippine National Police Chief and Director General Jesus Verzosa and Lt. Gen. Delfin Bangit, commanding general of the Philippine Army.

NON-COERCIVE METHODS

Granting without admitting that Ms. Roxas is a member of the New People's Army, a redesignated terrorist group by the young Bush administration, her abductors have no business denying her counsel, subjecting her to torture via asphyxiation using a plastic bag and repeatedly hitting her, and this method of "torture" that had the blessings of President Bush towards Al Qaeda "enemy combatants," is a keystone counterterrorism policy that Mr. Obama is seeking to overturn, saying that "all interrogations should follow noncoercive methods of the Army Field Manual."

Let's see if Mr. Obama will stand by his anti-torture doctrine and all other forms of human-rights violations by reviewing the VFA and his government relationship with Ms. Arroyo. (lariosa_jos@sbcglobal.net)

Fil-Am's Case to Test Obama's Anti-torture Doctrine - MabuhayRadio

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