

Part One of "Reinventing the Philippine Military" Series

An alumnus of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) asked hypothetically this writer the possible reaction of the United States government if a military junta were to take over the Philippine government? He asked me also the probable reaction of the Filipino-American community to the rule by the Philippine military?

I answered also hypothetically. I said that the United States and Filipino Americans would not support a military takeover of the Philippine Government. But . . .

Overseas Filipinos, especially American citizens of Philippine descent, are fed up with the apparent inability of Filipino civilian leaders and the top brass of the Philippine military to eradicate corruption in the Philippine bureaucracy and provide the basic needs of the people (housing, employment, security, economic opportunities, etc.)

The Overseas-Filipino World (OFW) may not offer much resistance to the imposition of military

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rule in the Philippines. I said that if the OFW, especially Filipino Americans, will not protest vehemently military rule in the homeland, American politicians might probably take a wait-and-see attitude before it “recognizes” the new Philippine government.

I said that this would be so, especially if the three PMA alumni who ran in yesterday's election for the Philippine Senate (Sen. Panfilo Lacson, and alleged coup leaders Gregorio Honasan III and Antonio Trillanes IV) were to win or even make a very strong showing. The political mandate generated by these three PMayer-candidates would be tantamount to an argument that the military has the support of the people in moving for reforms.

But I said that a military junta is not the solution to the pressing problems of the Philippines. I opined that it would be better if the soldiers would stay in the barracks and a “reinvention” of the Philippine military were to take place in an orderly and constitutional process.

The Lesson of “Black Jack” Pershing

In reality, making the Philippines into a huge military camp would not solve the country's problems. Military solutions have not worked in defusing the Moro rebellion in Mindanao and eliminating the threat of the New People's Army (NPA) communist cadres. Why? Even during the American occupation of the Philippines, some of West Point's best and brightest graduates could not defeat the Moro warriors. Gen. John J. “Black Jack” Pershing, with his training in West Point and in the Indian Wars, became the top leader of the American forces in Mindanao (actually the island's military governor) in the 1910s during the Muslim phase of the Filipino-American War. (The Christian phase of the Filipino-American War that started on Feb. 4, 1899, ended on July 4, 1902.) But he failed. General “Black Jack” could not earn a 21-gun salute and defeat the native Filipino-Muslim warriors. And there was no way of turning the pacification campaign into genocide. General Pershing failed to make a name in Mindanao. He became, however, the celebrated American hero in Europe during World War I, where he was sent after his undistinguished career in Mindanao.

Yes, General Pershing and his soldiers could defeat the Prussian and the Ottoman empires but they could not win against the Sultanate of Sulu and other Moro tribes in Mindanao.

On the other hand, President Ramon Magsaysay was able to defeat the Hukbalahap (communist) rebellion in the early 1950s by winning the hearts and minds of the rebels. Starting as the Defense Secretary of President Elpidio Quirino, Mr. Magsaysay won the psychological warfare (psy war) and brought the rebels who surrendered to Mindanao, which was then made into a Filipino version of the Biblical Promised Land. In Mindanao, the former rebels were given agricultural land and opportunities to lead new productive but peaceful lives. (Unfortunately after President Magsaysay died in a plane accident on March 17, 1957, Mindanao slowly became the Land of Broken Promises, or at least the land of promising politicians who never delivered on their promises of socioeconomic reforms.)

With due respect to the armed-forces leadership of the Philippines and to retired Gens. Fidel V. Ramos (a former Philippine President) and Panfilo Lacson and Honasan (a former senator), Trillanes and Company, military solutions have never worked in Mindanao.

Resort to military formulae has not worked either in the barrios in LuzonVisayan Islands where the communist rebels operate. The Spanish and American colonizers tried but failed to subdue the Moro Filipino freedom fighters for almost 400 years.

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According to Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Jr., the Moro leadership had assured him that one of two workable solutions is the adoption of a Federal System of Government (FSG). The other solution is to grant outright independence to the secessionist movement in Mindanao.

The civilian leaders of the Philippines may wish to address the reforms needed for the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP). If I were a top legislator of the homeland, I will file several urgent bills to “reinvent” the Philippine military. The first bill needed in reinventing the military is to change the Philippine criminal-justice system (please go to <http://www.mabuhayradio.com/content/view/34/90/> if you have not read it yet).

[\(Click here to read Part 2 . . .\)](#)

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