

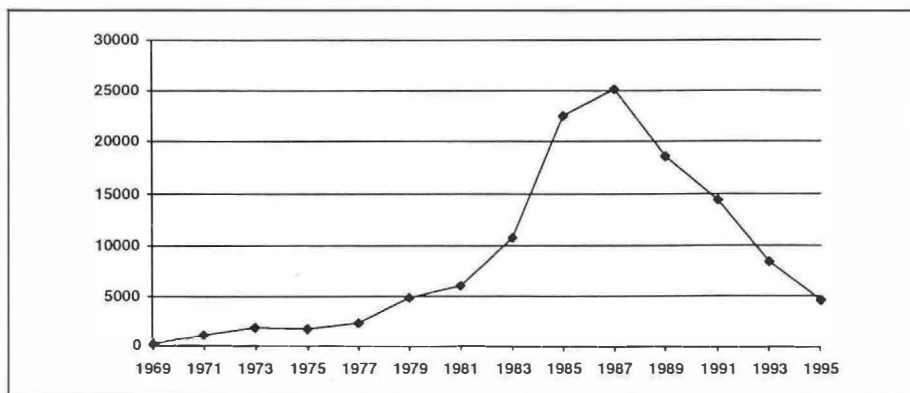
# THE PHILIPPINES

## THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

At the present time, the security outlook of the Philippines is unclear. Internal security problems continue to belie government claims of increased political stability. At the same time, there are evident possibilities for peace as talks proceed between the government and the communist insurgents and Muslim separatist groups. The uncertainty is reinforced by external factors, particularly Chinese encroachments in the Spratlys in late 1994 and early 1995. Manila's lack of a credible military option with which to deter such affronts to its territorial claims enhanced perceptions of the Philippines' insecurity and vulnerability. Given the fluid situation that now characterizes the security environment of the Asia Pacific region, the Philippine government can only continue with its present diplomatic policies while accelerating the development of its military capabilities. But the prospects of the latter lie only in the longer term.

**Internal Security.** The communist insurgency and Muslim separatist movement in Mindanao have been the principal security preoccupation of the Philippine government for the last three decades. Since 1986, however, the communist movement has suffered from political and military setbacks from which it has been unable to recover. The membership of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the number of regulars in the New People's Army (NPA), and their firearms holdings have dramatically declined. Moreover, party supporters have been disillusioned by a severe factional split in the CPP leadership.

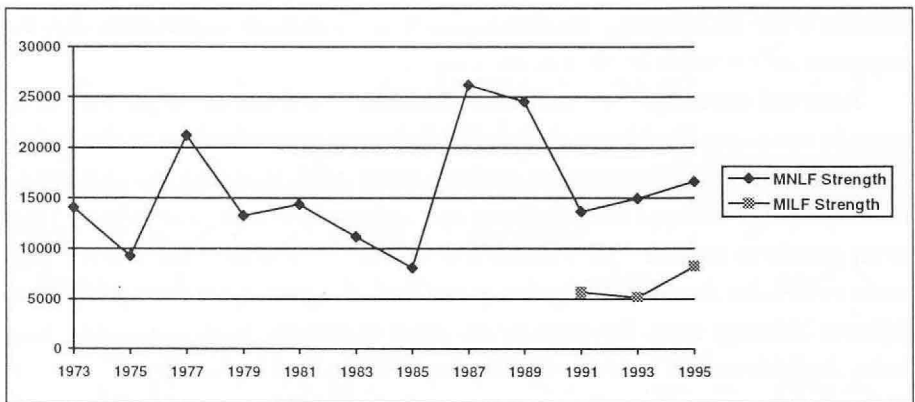
**Chart I. Trends in CPP-NPA Strength**



Source of basic data: *Armed Forces of the Philippines*

Meanwhile, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which spearheaded the Muslim separatist war causing an estimated 50,000 deaths in the past 20 years, has now split into three groups. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) estimates that the MNLF still has the largest following, with the breakaway Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) having only half the number of its regular force. Independent sources, however, believe that the Philippine military either underestimates or understates the strength of the latter with many asserting that it is actually greater than the MNLF. Even the Philippine government, however, discounts the significance of numbers as it now considers the MILF to be the principal threat to peace in the island of Mindanao. Its forces are spread out and operate over a larger area, and in recent years have been receiving regular arms shipments from Islamic fundamentalist states.

**Chart II. Official Estimated Trends in MNLF and MILF Strength**



*Source of basic data: Armed Forces of the Philippines*

However, an even more potentially dangerous outgrowth of Muslim secessionism is emergence of the Abu Sayyaf. Since 1992 this group has engaged in terrorist activities primarily involving the kidnapping and killing of Christians, and the bombing of Christian places of worship in Western Mindanao. Their actions reached a high point with a raid on the commercial center of the town of Ipil in the Zamboanga peninsula in April 1995. The attack resulted in 53 deaths and the destruction of a large part of the town. By early 1996, the Abu Sayyaf was estimated to have between 700–750 regulars, a small number of whom are alleged to be veterans of the war in Afghanistan. It is believed, however, that it also draws from the forces of other Muslim rebel groups at need. Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, extradited from Pakistan to the United States to face charges of

complicity in the World Trade Center bombing, was believed to have been helped by the Abu Sayyaf to move in and out of the Philippines. This possible tie-in of Abu Sayyaf with international terrorism adds a completely different and highly dangerous dimension to the internal struggle for peace and stability in the Philippines.

The Philippine government has tried to put an end to the long conflict by seeking a political solution through peace negotiations with both the Communist Party and the MNLF. Both talks are currently bogged down, though neither the CPP-NPA nor the MNLF is in any position to successfully challenge government forces because of their respective internal problems. Since the start of 1996, however, government forces have been engaged in a series of encounters with the MILF. At the same time, it is widely feared that the inability of the AFP to completely neutralize the Abu Sayyaf could lead to the reemergence of Christian vigilante groups and a return to sectarian violence in Mindanao. Overall, the increasing strength of the MILF, its non-inclusion in the peace talks, and the terrorist campaign of the Abu Sayyaf do not bode well for the prospects of achieving lasting peace, particularly in Mindanao.

**External Security.** While the domestic security situation has continued to remain fluid, a major shift has taken place in the Philippine outlook on and reaction to the external environment. China's emergence as a major economic and military power in the region is now seen to be very significant. The public revelation on 8 February 1995 of the presence of Chinese-occupied structures on Panganiban Reef, less than 200 kilometers from the coast of Palawan Island, shook the complacency of the Philippines about its international environment. Since then, reports of skirmishes between Philippine Navy patrol vessels and foreign ships (in most cases identified as Chinese) engaged in smuggling and piracy just outside of Subic Bay and Manila Bay, and along the coasts of the province of Zambales, have increasingly been made public. A Philippine Navy briefing early in 1996 indicated that at least nine such incidents have taken place in the area since August 1994. However, the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority has reported that 10 incidents had taken place in its environs in the second half of 1995 alone. These are just the latest in a series of events that since 1992 have prompted gradual adjustments in the country's security outlook. The withdrawal of United States forces from Subic Bay and Clark Air Force Base, the drawing down of the communist insurgency and the split within the ranks of the communist movement itself, together with moderate increases in economic performance (since 1993) have been instrumental in shaping recent policies and perceptions about the state of the republic's national security.

The Chinese occupation of Panganiban Reef demonstrated the inadequacy of military options available to the Philippines to respond to international crises, a point underlined by the Philippines' effort to counter only with boatloads of journalists. In fact, well prior to this incident, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) had warned repeatedly that it lacks the ability to sustain a conflict in the South China Sea should it become necessary to use force to support Philippine claims to the Kalayaan Group of Islands. Moreover, the withdrawal of the United States Navy and Air Force from the Philippines in December 1992 deprived the AFP of its most important assets for long-range patrol and surveillance operations, as well as removing the country's strongest military deterrent.

Thus, self-evident truths about the inadequacy of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and its limited ability to respond to military contingencies were affirmed at the expense of a long-held belief that the country did not face any major external threat. Chinese military action prompted a change in perceptions and policy. The Philippine Congress passed the AFP Modernization Act a few weeks after the discovery of Chinese structures on Panganiban Reef.

## DEFENSE POLICIES AND ISSUES

**Defense Objectives.** The importance of military modernization was first publicly broached in 1989 when it appeared that the United States would reduce its presence in the Philippines when the Military Bases Agreement expired in 1991. However, it was not until after the actual complete withdrawal of the U.S. Navy from Subic Bay in 1992 that serious discussions took place. When the Modernization Act was finally passed in its final form on 20 February 1995, it included five components:

1. Force restructuring and organizational development;
2. Capability, material and technology development;
3. Bases/support systems development;
4. Human resources development; and
5. Doctrines development.

Changing the AFP from an internal security-oriented force to an external security-oriented force is a key point in the AFP Modernization Program. It emphasizes the development of sufficient strategic capabilities to support a "Defense-In-Depth" policy. That means extending the AFP's capability to protect the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and to provide a "credible deterrent" against outside threats to its territorial claims. The country's overall national

defense policy, however, continues to be based on the concept of “Total Defense” involving the mobilization of citizens in the event of conflict.

The AFP Modernization Act mandates studies that would lead to the development and formalization of defense doctrines. Historically, such doctrines have been an under-appreciated aspect of Philippine defense policy. Preoccupation with counter-insurgency field operations tended to focus the efforts of the AFP towards the development of tactical and operational concepts and procedures rather than strategic doctrines. Few resources were available for doctrinal development. Moreover, it was easy to adapt foreign, principally American, doctrines. This has now begun to change.

In August 1992, the National Security Council (NSC) officially defined national security as:

a state or condition wherein the people’s way of life and institutions, their territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as their welfare and well-being are protected and enhanced.

This people-oriented security perspective is largely based on the work of a multisectoral group of concerned citizens who came together after the 1986 EDSA Revolution in an attempt to stimulate public discussion on, and to draw the attention of policy planners to, the need for a national security strategy. The significance of both the NSC definition and the work of the multisectoral group lies principally in identifying national unity and public consensus as the foremost national interest underlying security. All other interests become subordinate to this primordial need to maintain solidarity as the basis for national survival.

This theme has become central to Philippine thinking about security. In his inaugural address, President Fidel Ramos declared that Filipinos have always found unity difficult, but the Philippines cannot remain divided. Within this context the NSC adopted a framework of national security that contained seven elements revolving around the goal of national unity and applied to broad areas of concern. Organized in descending order of importance, these are:

- Moral/spiritual consensus
- Cultural cohesiveness
- Economic solidarity
- Socio-political stability

- Ecological integrity
- Territorial integrity
- External peace

Though the security policy described in the NSC framework does not identify tangible sources of threats, the clear emphasis is on internal unity as the basis for countering threats, whether from within or abroad.

**Defense Spending.** The AFP Modernization Act provides P50 billion for the first five years of a projected 15 year program. This is less than 20 percent of the total cost estimated at P330.055 billion by the AFP. This outlay was estimated over and above its annual budget for the duration of the program. Due to sourcing problems, however, the proposed total amount will have to be disbursed over a period of 22 years broken down as follows (in billion pesos):

Years	1 to 5	6 to 10	11 to 15	16 to 22
Amount	50	111.14	124.93	43.985

*Source of basic data: Armed Forces of the Philippines*

These totals represent, on the average, an increment of nearly double the annual budget of the military for the next twenty-two years. Even with the increases denoted in the AFP Modernization Program, however, defense spending will continue to be relatively modest in both absolute terms and as a share of GNP. At present, the annual allocation of the AFP remains at around 2.3 percent of the country's GNP. It is unlikely that this will increase to above 4 percent, especially with current uptrends in economic growth.

**Personnel.** A key feature of the Modernization Program is the downsizing of the AFP. The AFP has an allowed establishment of 126,686, though it currently has only around 112,000 uniformed personnel. In accordance with the plan, troop strength will be reduced to 95,000 over the next ten years. The Philippine Army will be the most affected by this planned restructuring, though any decrease in the strength of the ground forces will be phased with the decline of threats to internal stability. It will also be dependent on the capability of the Philippine National Police to increasingly handle counter-insurgency operations as this task is gradually transferred to them. Projected reductions are as follows:

Branch of Service	AFP Strength, 1995	AFP Strength, 2005	Total Reductions
GHQ and AFPWSSUs	12,356	7,000	<b>5,356</b>
Army	70,293	47,458	<b>22,835</b>
Air Force	18,223	16,006	<b>2,217</b>
Navy	25,814	24,536	<b>1,278</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>126,686</b>	<b>95,000</b>	<b>31,686</b>

Source of basic data: Frank G. Longid, Jr., "Shopping Time for the Military," *Politik* (August 1995): 48-49

**Equipment and Procurement.** The greater part of the amount proposed by the AFP for its Modernization Program is intended to be spent for the acquisition of new equipment. With the increasing recognition of a less than benign international environment, the military has to be able to project naval and air capability over those areas where the Philippines has interests that need to be protected or asserted. In this context, the AFP's capabilities are arguably the weakest among the larger ASEAN countries.

At the time of confrontation with China over Panganiban Reef, the Philippines reportedly sent a significant part of its air defense capability to Palawan—five of its remaining fighter planes, only two of which were considered really airworthy. The Philippine Air Force has only seven F5A and B fighters for air defense and the airframes of most of these are suspected to be suffering from metal fatigue. The Philippine Navy is in no better shape, with its major naval combat ships having an average age of 40 years.

The military is focusing its equipment and capability development on the procurement of new ships and aircraft. Already the Navy has prepared a "generic" list which includes three frigates, six corvettes, six patrol boats, 12 fast patrol crafts, four mine counter-measure ships, six logistic vessels, and 16 amphibious vehicles. The frigates, corvettes, and the patrol boats are to be fitted with surface-to-surface missiles. These will be the first missile-capable vessels in the Philippine Navy. The Philippine Air Force is asking for 36 multi-role fighters and 24 attack aircraft. Six air defense radars will also be installed, optimistically within five years of the program's final approval.

While the United States continues to be the preferred source of equipment and technology for the AFP, the Philippines is seeking to lessen its dependence on U.S. equipment and diversify its sources of defense technology and hardware. Italy has

already supplied the Philippines with the S-211 basic jet trainers and SF-260 turbo-prop trainers, and its arms manufacturers have been lobbying the AFP very aggressively. France and South Korea have already signed memoranda of agreement with the Philippines for the provision of defense technology, and similar discussions are currently being pursued with Great Britain.

Within a month following the passage of the AFP Modernization Act, reports indicated that the AFP had not yet determined what kind of equipment would have priority because it was still updating its defense strategy. Given the elapsed time since planning started six years ago, this revelation raised a number of questions regarding the planning processes utilized by the AFP. Clearly, even if procurement planning is accelerated, it will be years before the Modernization Program will have enhanced the AFP's external defense capabilities.

**Alliance with the United States.** The inadequacy of the external defense capability of the Philippines emphasized the benefits of its security arrangement with the United States. Despite the expiration of the Military Bases Agreement in December 1992, the Philippines maintains a special military relationship with the United States through the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). Many Filipinos believe that under the MDT the United States should support the Philippines in the event of conflict in the South China Sea. Most security policymakers and analysts, however, regard it unlikely that the United States will become involved in a conflict over the disputed Spratlys unless the dispute threatens its own vital interest in the free use of sealanes in the area. Even then, it would not necessarily support Manila's claims.

Nationalists in the Philippines continue to criticize the government's security linkage with the United States, arguing that both governments are still seeking ways by which to restore the American presence in the Philippines. Nonetheless, maintaining, and even enhancing, security links with the United States is believed to carry certain advantages, especially in connection with training and the acquisition of modern equipment for the AFP. Annual joint exercises continue to be held, although the two parties have yet to accept the provisions of a proposed Status of Forces Agreement. Furthermore, an Acquisitions and Cross-Servicing Agreement is currently being discussed by technical committees on both sides.

The significance, however, of the United States to the stability of the regional order remains unambiguous from the perspective of the Philippines. This was shown by President Ramos' statement in October 1995 that "the United States must continue to be the main prop of the East Asian balance of power." The renewal of the U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration of April 1996 and the sending of two carrier battle groups to the Taiwan Straits during the height of tensions between China and



Taiwan in March 1996 were quietly welcomed as affirmations of U.S. commitments to the security of the region.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS TO REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY**

Because of its own internal security problems, weak military capabilities, and limited resources, the main contributions the Philippines can make to regional and global security come principally in the form of maintaining cohesion at home and contributing diplomatically to the discourse on international security issues. The stabilization of Philippine political life during the Ramos Administration, the dampening of internal insurgencies, and the long-overdue strengthening of its economy have removed the Philippines from the list of significant Southeast Asian security concerns.

Diplomatically, the Philippine government has sought to ensure a benevolent international environment. It has thus supported ASEAN's Manila Declaration on the South China Sea and the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum. It has supported the creation of a nuclear free zone in Southeast Asia and voted for the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It believed its diplomatic efforts were vindicated when China sought to accommodate the ASEAN countries on the Spratlys at the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in August 1995. The Philippines also initiated the concept of Southeast Asia-10 (SEA-10), thus bringing Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar into the mainstream of Southeast Asian international relations. SEA-10 is part of the groundwork towards the establishment of a unified Southeast Asia—perhaps a federation of Southeast Asian states—in ten year's time. According to Director General Jose T. Almonte of the National Security Council, "only unification gives [Southeast Asians] a fighting chance to resist external pressures and play a role in influencing the development of our region."

The Philippines has also begun to diversify its security relations. It entered into Memoranda of Agreement with Singapore—regarding the conduct of joint training and exercises—and with Malaysia—on military training and cooperation, information exchange, and equipment and technology cooperation. These MOAs at one level serve to enhance levels of security cooperation between the Philippines and its ASEAN neighbors. At another, they serve as another confidence-building measure intended to deepen ties and further the process of community building among Southeast Asian states. While it is accepted, however, that these mechanisms contribute to regional understanding, they should not be construed as alliance relationships.

**UN Peacekeeping and The Philippines.** It is only recently that the Philippines has once again become active in UN peacekeeping efforts. Political, and

economic reasons combined to prevent the Philippine government from committing the country's resources to international peacekeeping activities. Even at present, there is still a lack of a clear policy on Philippine participation in UN peacekeeping, leading to a generally ad hoc system of decision-making. The clear policy, however, to support the maintenance of a stable and peaceful external environment conducive to economic growth and development has opened the way for the decision to participate more.

### Philippine Participation in UN and UN-Sanctioned Operations

Operation/Location	Contingent	Other Contributions
Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK) 1950-53	10th, 20th, 19th, 14th and 2nd Battalion Combat Teams	17 Sherman tanks 1 tank destroyer
UN Operations in the Congo (ONUC) 1963 (four months)	Philippine Air Force Contingent (PAFCON also known as the Limbas Squadron)	Medical-dental team, maintenance crew, messng unit, ground security force
UN Guards Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI) September 1991-June 1992	50 AFP (4 officers and 46 enlisted personnel from the Army, Navy and Air Force)	
UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) March 1992-1993	371 Police personnel in seven batches (113 officers and 259 non-officers) 43 Naval observers and 84 Marines in five batches 13 Military observers Two Marine platoons, five Navy officers and 10 enlisted personnel	Eight International polling station officers—civilians from NAMFREL and COMELEC P4,199,000 in financial assistance (1994)
UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) December 1992	One Observer from the UNTAC contingent	Election observers
UN Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) 1994	50 Police personnel to UN sanctioned multinational force (MNF) later turned over to the UNMIH	

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Service Institute, and Armed Forces of the Philippines

The Department of Foreign Affairs, nonetheless, recognizes that there are still several issues that need to be addressed before Philippine participation in UN peacekeeping can proceed on a more regular basis. These issues include:

- The need for a stricter screening process for peacekeeping personnel.
- Since the Philippines as a policy refuses to send combat personnel for peacekeeping operations, the lack of likely candidates from the police force for participation in peacekeeping operations.
- The need to improve training of personnel in accordance with UN rule of engagement and standard operating procedures.
- The question of how to facilitate payment of troops and reimbursement of Philippine government's expenses.
- The problem of sub-standard equipment, and clarification of criteria for withdrawal of Philippine contingents.