



# NDCP POLICY BRIEF

A PUBLICATION SERIES ON SECURITY ISSUES AND CONCERNS  
BY THE NATIONAL DEFENSE COLLEGE OF THE PHILIPPINES

18 September 2014  
No. 6

## A Post-Modernist Glance at the AFP Modernization

Fermin R De Leon Jr, PhD, MNSA

*This article is condensed partly from the interview of the writer by the Asahi Shimbun Senior International Correspondent in Manila, Mr. Naoji Shibata, together with Ms. Arlene Espiritu last June 4, 2014. It is an academic/Track II perspective which may or may not reflect the official position of NDCP or the government.*

What is the direction of the AFP Modernization Program (AFPMP)? Are we on the right direction? What is the ideal direction of the AFPMP? (What do we need to modernize in the Army, Navy, and Air Force? Should we buy more tanks, ships, and fighter planes?) What is the ideal budget? (Is the budget for the modernization program of the government now enough? How much of the national budget should be given to the modernization program?) These are some of the questions which this article attempts to address.

If by "**direction**" is meant "management and control," or "where one is heading to," then the AFPMP's direction is in accordance with RA 7898 or the AFP Modernization Act (AFPMA) approved on February 23, 1995, which serves as the Program's legal basis and mandate. RA 7898's Section 2: Declaration of Policy states that "It is hereby declared the policy of **the state to modernize** the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to a level where it can effectively and **fully perform** its constitutional mandate to uphold the sovereignty and preserve the patrimony of the Republic of the Philippines...". Based on the legal mandate, this writer emphasizes that **it is the State that is responsible for modernizing its Armed Forces, and not the Armed Forces**

**modernizing itself.** The AFP is simply a recipient of the Program. It can only be modernized if the State implements its own policy to do so, and grants the wherewithal or the budget for the AFP to "**fully** perform its constitutional mandate."

In the DND's "Notional Levels of Capability" as contained in the Philippine Defense Transformation White Paper (PDTWP; 2012), there are 4 levels of capability: (1) not mission capable; (2) partially mission capable; (3) mission capable; and (4) fully mission capable. Under Section 6 of RA 7898 (AFPMA): Period of Implementation – "The modernization of the AFP shall be implemented over the period of 15 years." Since RA 7898 was approved in 1995 and the implementing AFPMP was approved in 1996, the mandated period of implementation for the State to modernize its Armed Forces **ended in 2011 without the State implementing its own policy.** To be fully mission capable, the Modernization Program required a total of P332B to fully realize the envisioned capabilities, but only P33.9B was provided **up to the end of 2010** (PDTWP, p.7), or **only a pathetic and wretched 10%**. Hence, the PDTWP states that the **funds allocated by the State** (through the DBM, House of Representatives, and the Senate, which "holds the purse") were in some areas 'just enough' to perform 2010 defense missions but **not to modernize**; hence, only barely 'mission capable.' "Often times, there are even shortfalls" in many areas; therefore, **only 'partially mission capable'** (PDTWP, p. 6).

Section 2-(a) of RA 7898 mandates “the development of a **self-reliant** and credible strategic armed forces...”. By “self-reliant,” it is meant that our Armed Forces is not dependent on other states to fully perform its constitutional mandate of internal and external defense in terms of: (a) active regular military human resources or troop strength; (b) firepower assets on land, sea, and air; (c) munitions; (d) mobility and communication assets (under the “move-shoot-communicate” doctrine); and (e) education and training at all levels. By “self-reliant,” it is also meant that the State operates its own Defense Industry which manufactures its own planes, ships, tanks, firearms, munitions, mobility, and communication hardware, as other fully mission capable armed forces have been provided by their states.

On the basic variable of active regular military human resources or troop strength, which is generally considered to be the most fundamental variable of any armed forces, Steven M. Goode’s “Historical Basis for Force Requirements” (2009) can serve as a global model. Citing history and analyzing the needed force requirements, **Goode** concluded with **2.8 soldiers per 1,000 residents** as the **ideal** military-to-population ratio, **or 1 soldier to defend 357.2** members of the population (**1:358**). With a 125,000 AFP troop strength (2012-13) and 97.904M Philippine population (2013), both official government figures, the **actual Philippine soldier-to-population-ratio is 1:782**; or **1.28** AFP regular soldiers per 1,000 population. Compared with Goode’s, the current AFP troop strength is 1.52 soldiers **deficient** per 1,000 population; or **the AFP troop strength should be 148,000 for the 2013 Philippine population of 97.9M**; or **a shortfall of at least 23,510 for the 2013 population**. If one will consider John J. McGrath’s 2006 study, it will be 13.26 troops/ 1,000 population, or 4.735 x Goode’s. If one will consider James Quinlivan’s 1995 study, it will be 20 troops/1,000 pop, or 7.142 x Goode’s. Goode appears to be the more conservative model.

To see where the AFP troop strength stands in the region, the following is the

comparative ASEAN Troop Density or Military-to-Population Ratio (MTPR), i.e., active military per 1,000 capita, from highest to lowest (“List of Countries by Number of Military Personnel, 2009): 1<sup>st</sup>- Brunei: 18 (1:56); 2<sup>nd</sup> - Singapore: 15.6; 3<sup>rd</sup> - Cambodia: 8.6; 4<sup>th</sup> - Vietnam: 5.1; 5<sup>th</sup> - Thailand: 4.6; 6<sup>th</sup>- Laos: 4.3; 7<sup>th</sup> - Malaysia: 4.2; 8<sup>th</sup>- Indonesia: 1.8; **9<sup>th</sup> (or 10<sup>th</sup>?/last)- Philippines: 1.28 (1:782)**; Myanmar- no data. Ironically, while Philippine population is 227 times bigger than Brunei’s (which has no external or internal threats), Brunei’s military-to-population ratio is 14 times bigger than the Philippines, and tops the list! Who is saying that the AFP has more troops than necessary? **Our AFP has practically the least troop density in ASEAN!** The following are Non-ASEAN Troop Density Comparisons: 1<sup>st</sup> - North Korea: 45; 2<sup>nd</sup>- South Korea: 13.7 (Mc Grath’s 13.26/1000 pop); 3<sup>rd</sup> - USA: 4.5; 4<sup>th</sup> - UK: 3.4; 5<sup>th</sup>- Australia: 2.8 (Goode’s model); 6<sup>th</sup> - Germany: 2.2; 7<sup>th</sup>- Japan: 1.8 (due to pacifist Constitution); 8<sup>th</sup>- China: 1.7 (Even with a lower troop density but considering its largest population, China’s 2009 active regular troops was still the biggest in the world at 2.263M!); and the 9<sup>th</sup>- India: 1.1.

What would be an ideal military budget? Per current global practice, military budgets worldwide are generally seen in terms of military expenditure as a percentage of GDP. In a past online study of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (**SIPRI**), **an observable military expenditure as a percentage of GDP for countries without threats is 2% of GDP**. On one hand, IMF used to limit military expenditure to 2% of GDP as a condition for IMF loans. On the other hand, NATO recommends for its members at least 2% of GDP. The 2013 world military expenditure as a percentage of world GDP is 2.4%. The following is a comparative data of **ASEAN Military Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP for 2013 (SIPRI)**: 1<sup>st</sup> – Myanmar: 4.5%; 2<sup>nd</sup> – Singapore: 3.4%; 3<sup>rd</sup> – Brunei: 2.5%; 4<sup>th</sup> – Vietnam: 2.3%; 5<sup>th</sup> – Cambodia: 1.6%; 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> – Malaysia: 1.5%; 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> – Thailand: 1.5%; **8<sup>th</sup> – Philippines: 1.3%**; 9<sup>th</sup> – Indonesia: 0.9%; Laos – no data. Based on the above, **the Philippines is second to the last in ASEAN** in terms of military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, and hence,

may be said to be **under-spending** if based on the average 2% and compared with its ASEAN neighbours, and **below the world average**. Since the Philippines has several internal and external threats, the percentage should even be higher than 2%. While Indonesia appears to be the last with 0.9%, it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in actual 2013 Defense Spending in Asia-Pacific after Vietnam, as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> – Vietnam: \$70T; 2<sup>nd</sup> – Indonesia: \$64T; 3<sup>rd</sup> – South Korea: \$35T; 4<sup>th</sup> – Japan: \$4.7T; 5<sup>th</sup> – India: \$2.4T; 6<sup>th</sup> – Myanmar: \$1.8T; 7<sup>th</sup> – China: \$1.05T. The US spent \$682B, while the Philippines, \$125B, with the bulk practically spent on personal services (salaries) and operations.

On the other hand, if one will look into Philippine military expenditure **as a percentage of the current 2014 Philippine National Budget** of P2.264T **by sector** (DBM March 2014 People's Budget Report), it is as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> – Social Services (Education, health...): 37.2%; 2<sup>nd</sup> – Economic Services (agriculture, infrastructure...): 26.2%; 3<sup>rd</sup> - Debt Burden: 16.7%; 4<sup>th</sup> – General Public Services (fiscal management, lawmaking...): 16.0%; and **5<sup>th</sup>, last, and the only single-digit – Defense: 4.0%**(P89.4B). Whether across ASEAN, or compared with the world average, or in the Asia-Pacific, or in the 2014 National Budget, the **Philippine military expenditure is at the bottom**. Who says that the Philippine State is overspending for its military?

“Are we on the right direction?” The “we” should be in reference to the State, particularly DBM, the House of Representatives, and the Senate, which allocate the budget. If by intention, on account of RA 7898 and the AFPMP, yes “we” are on the right direction. However, if by actual implementation of the State's own policy and commitment, it is **an obvious “NO” for the period 1995-2010. The State during that period reneged on its own commitment**. Nonetheless, beginning with the present administration since mid-2010 up to the present, milestone attempts at modernization have been observed.

RA 10349 amending the unimplemented RA 7898 was approved on December 11, 2012,

where “the Revised AFPMP... shall be implemented over a period of 15 years.” Even before the approval of the new Act and implementation of the new Program, the current administration acquired a decommissioned former USCG WHEC ship, renamed BRP Gregorio del Pilar (PF-15) for \$9.4M/P800M which arrived on August 23, 2011. The much-criticized acquisition was just an immediate interim response given the meager funds released while a more appropriate medium to long-term defense capability is being worked out, which may take around 3-12 years. A second 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand ship was acquired for \$15.2M/P1B, which arrived on August 6, 2013, and was renamed BRP Ramon Alcaraz (PF-16). A third 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand ship, awaiting funds (P1.2B), is projected to arrive in 2016. Three (3) Augusta-109 Naval helicopters (P400M each) arrived on November 13, 2013, with another two (2) more scheduled to arrive in December 2014. Another two (2) helicopters are targeted to arrive by 2016. For external air defense capability, the AFP has already signed a contract last March 21, 2014 with the Korean Aerospace Industries Inc (KAI) for the purchase of twelve (12) FA-50 fighter jets with an allocation of P18.976B (or P1.58B each). The expected initial delivery will be in 2015. DND has also signed an P882M/\$19.7M contract with the Israel-based firm, Elbit Systems, for the purchase of 28 armored infantry vehicles to be delivered also by 2015 (Phil Star; Jan 16, 2014).

Never before was so much procured with so little funds in so little time. On the other hand, **the estimated P10B PDAF scam loss from 2003-13** (PDI Jul 12, 2013) **could have already bought easily at least six (6) FA-50 fighter jets**, and the estimated P900M Malampaya scam loss (PDI Jul 16, 2013) could have also easily bought earlier in the past decade a refurbished WHEC ship, both **before the recent incursions in the Philippine EEZ**. We must keep in mind that since the Philippine Air Force retired its last F-5 fighter jet in 2005, **the Philippines has practically zero external air defense capability**.

What is the ideal direction of the Revised AFP Modernization Program? The ideal direction of the RAFPMP can be seen in its objectives (Para 1.1.2), and in its components (Para 1.1.3). Its first objective aims “to develop the capability of the AFP to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic and secure the national territory from all forms of intrusion and encroachment.” In more layman’s terms, that would mean having all the necessary wherewithal to defend our airspace, maritime domain (and its resources), and land territories. Under “components,” the RAFPMP needs to develop the AFP in terms of: (a) force restructuring and organizational development; (b) capability, materiel, and technology development; (c) bases/support-systems development; (d) human resource development; and (e) doctrines development. However, in addition to the inclusion of the Government Arsenal for modernization (Chap. 7, DC No.3; Apr 11, 2013), ***the National Defense College of the Philippines should also be included in the modernization program since NDCP’s principal beneficiary on strategic-level national security education and Reserve Force development (on account of the MNSA reserve commissions) is the AFP.*** There is yet no legal/ official provision for NDCP Modernization.

Since the modernization of the AFP can only be made possible by an appropriate percentage of the GDP, and which cannot match (for example) the military capability of a possible external national security threat within the Philippine EEZ having a GDP among the world’s largest economies, would that make the ***AFP modernization meaningless?*** If that logic will be pursued to the fullest, then the AFP should no longer be armed at all. However, an armed forces without arms is an oxymoron. That would really mean the abolition of the AFP. Is that what the entire Filipino people really like? There are at least 15 states without any armed forces, but are relatively very small peaceful states, with no armed local communist movements, secessionist movements, and terrorist groups such as in the Philippines. Also, in lieu of a standing army, they have defense/ protection agreements with other military

powers such as Australia, France, New Zealand, Spain, and the US. That makes them fully dependent on world powers. Hence, the AFP modernization is not about matching this or that external threat, ***not an arms race***, but it is about eventually becoming independent in terms of protecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and patrimony of the Philippines. It is also about having just enough capability to give ourselves ***national dignity*** without having to suffer helplessness and national humiliation in the face of persistent aggressors who refuse the rule of law but instead use size (Ps 33:16), force, coercion, and intimidation. If our means can equip us with only a razor blade to fight with to keep our national honor, then let no one deprive us of that.

External threats do not refer only to belligerent militaries. Equipping our AFP with the necessary aircraft, ships, and military land vehicles increases the entire nation’s much needed resilience in coping with (projected to be) more frequent and more intense natural disasters such as Super Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan, and many other emergent non-traditional human security concerns.

I am not really fond of arms. I almost never carry mine. I look forward to the day when nations “will beat their swords into plowshares” (Is 2:4). However, that day has not yet come. Until that day comes, until the Philippines has internal and external actors in belligerent or ***armed*** pursuit of their respective beliefs, the State has committed and is mandated “to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines” until (at least) 2027. Is modernization still possible in this age of post-modernity? If post-modernity abhors so-called “irrefutable” grand meta-narratives, then AFP modernization is possible.

###

---

*The views expressed in the policy brief are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of NDCP. The readers are free to reproduce copies or quote any part provided proper citations are made. For comments and suggestions, please email [fri@ndcp.edu.ph](mailto:fri@ndcp.edu.ph)*

---