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THE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY, 2011-2016: Unraveling the Arguments Behind Its Contents*

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Introduction

Security is thought about as the condition of being free from fear and sure of the future, a subject that is of much concern in scholarly discourses and policy decisions. But the concept of security is subject to perceptions, deliberations, and even tensions in the academe and the political realm. What security actually means to individuals, institutions, and nations is determined by differing interpretations and situations which bespeak of security administration as essentially political and culture-bound.¹

In international efforts towards security sector development, discussions on its principles and priorities in different political and cultural settings make the subject of security naturally contestable.² Multiple perspectives on the “contested concept”³ of security generate arguable policy imperatives on how security is to be seen, satisfied, and strengthened by government.

Notably, two different worldviews on the focus and scope of security arise from its classic and contemporary studies. One sets a limited standpoint of defending the state and its institutional apparatuses. The other proposes a broadened vista of protecting and enhancing human lives in all dimensions.⁴ Owing to its popular appeal, the latter perspective became the normative theme in the academe, and the policy advocacy in international diplomacy.

The Human Development Report (HDR) in 1994 redefined “security” as a concept and as a guiding policy with a human face. Specifically, the HDR identified threats to human security under seven categories, which include: (1) economic security; (2) food security; (3) health security; (4) environmental security; (5) personal security; (6) community security; and, (7) political security.⁵

* This policy brief is the first of the two-part series on the content and context analysis of the National Security Policy, 2011-2016 by the author.

In accord with the advocacy for human security, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in 1999 defined “security” as a subject that can be understood meaningfully in non-military terms. According to him, security in democratic nations “must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.”⁶

Despite the reinvention of the concept of security in the approach of the 21st century, critical thinkers warned against its obscure meanings and leanings if this is to be translated in actual policy, especially by a conservative country.⁷ Understanding the subject of security is thus crucial in defining a security problem and devising appropriate policies to address it. In principle, the desired definition must be one which points to people as the fundamental focus of security in the new century, instead of the state as the traditional locus of defense in the bygone era of real and imagined war.⁸ Whether this holds true for all democratic nations today is a rhetorical question that, nonetheless, calls for serious attention by security thinkers and practitioners.

In a modest attempt to contribute to the security debate, this article looks into the ideological contents of the 2011-2016 National Security Policy (NSP) in the Philippines, as well as the arguments behind its political pronouncements. Specifically, it discusses the principles, promises, and politics of the NSP that shall guide decisions and actions of government in administering national security.

In a developing country whose government professes to secure the gains of a hard-fought democracy, the promulgation of the NSP was hailed as a landmark policy to attain national development. How government plans to execute the overarching goals of securing the nation and the people is a policy issue that needs to be unraveled in the Philippine discourse on security.

The Contents of the NSP

The National Security Policy or NSP was issued in 2011 as a political statement that binds the year-old presidential administration to fulfill its 'Social Contract' with the people until the end of its term in 2016. Promulgated through Memorandum Order No. 6 by President Benigno S Aquino III, the NSP was said to be a reaffirmation of his campaign promise to promote the people's welfare through democratic governance. The NSP, with the title of "Securing the Gains of Democracy," presents four focal areas of concern by the current administration, which are as follows: (1) good governance; (2) delivery of basic services; (3) economic reconstruction; and, (4) security sector reforms.⁹

Taking the NSP as his personal legacy, President Aquino promised to bring forth the "ways of democracy" by laying down a "people centered document" that shall provide a conducive environment for peace and security in the country. Notably, this is in line with the principle reinforced in the 2010 United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR) with the theme of "The Real Wealth of the Nations: Pathways to Human Development."¹⁰ In accord with this international advocacy, President Aquino emphasized in the NSP that the Filipino people deserve the best from government as they are the "greatest resource for a progressive and prosperous Philippines."¹¹

The focus on the people as the center of national security and development is substantiated by the President's "Social Contract with the People." Presented under the topic of "Foundations of National Security" in the NSP, the Social Contract outlines a plethora of objectives, which include the following: (1) transformational leadership; (2) job generation; (3) education; (4) reproductive health care; (5) impartial justice system; (6) execution of the rule of law; (7) food security; (8) capacity-building for the poor; (9) economic competition; (10) protection for overseas Filipino Workers; (11) merit and fitness in government service; (12) professional bureaucracy; (13) gender equality; (14) peace and development in Mindanao; (15) urban development and welfare development; and, (16) sustainable use of resources.¹²

The NSP states that the objectives of the Social Contract are in line with the seven elements of national security. The elements include: (1) socio-political stability; (2) territorial integrity; (3) economic solidarity; (4) ecological balance; (5) cultural-cohesiveness; (6) moral-spiritual consensus; and, (7) peace and harmony.

The conspicuous omission of the military dimension in the elements of national security in the NSP can be taken either as a novelty in reframing security thought, or as a controversy in renaming traditional practice of security in the Philippines.

Following the presentations of the ideological foundations of national security in the first part of the NSP, the latter scans the security landscape in the region and identifies external and internal threats to the Philippines. Among others, the NSP identifies tensions with China in the West Philippine Sea, transnational crimes, terrorism, and arms build-up in Asia as external threats to the Philippines. The internal security environment, on the other hand, is described as being confronted by a host of complex threats against the government and the people. Foremost among these threats are the long drawn armed conflicts with communist insurgents and Muslim separatists. Other internal threats to national security include terrorism, criminality, graft and corruption, political violence, natural disasters, pandemics, and poverty. To address all of these, the NSP outlines general courses of action to strengthen public institutions, protect the environment, combat terrorism, engage in regional cooperation, and modernize the armed forces.

The Arguments on the NSP

The NSP purports to uphold a re-founding of the concept of national security, and the use of non-traditional approach for human security. It must be taken into account that the latter calls for a reorientation of traditional policies that proved to be unworkable in neutralizing complex threats to sustainable human development.

At the outset, the apparent shift in security thought in the NSP can be construed in the conspicuous omission of the military dimension in the enumerated elements of national security. The absence of this core element appears to be interesting, or rather intriguing, as military defense is essentially and explicitly included in contemporary study and praxis of national security administration. With this, the non-military characteristics of national security in the NSP can be taken either as a novelty in reframing

security thought, or as a controversy in renaming traditional practice of national security in the Philippines.

The promotion of human security has not been without misgivings in the face of internal instabilities that result from poor governance. Owing to the all-inclusive panorama of human security, a dilemma may arise in pushing for traditional military strategy to justify the goals of human development. It must be noted that “human security” even took on a different meaning in the 2007 Philippine Human Security Law, or Republic Act 9372, which provides the legal framework for anti-terrorism strategy by the forces of government. Human security, in this case, pertains to securitizing the state and protecting the people by criminalizing terrorism—an act that refocuses the traditional role of government to ensure normalcy in society.

Human security in a democracy must be sought in the NSP not only as a popular ideology, but as a strategic and operational plan of action with budgetary priorities as well as accountabilities. Thus, there is a need for concrete and coherent policy actions that will deconstruct a problematic status quo, and put the welfare of the people at the center of the security agenda for real. The NSP, to be more than a political banner of the President, must be able to build a solid foundation for a sustainable human development beyond the terminal year in 2016.

The adoption of the human security framework in the NSP, as a fad for democratic governments in the world, demands for good governance to fulfill the Social Contract of the President with the people. How the current administration, with its limited time and capacity, can address a wide range of internal as well as external security threats is the challenge behind the principles and politics of the NSP. This is even more crucial when corruption, weak institutions, and political violence in the realm of government itself are acknowledged in the NSP as major threats to internal security, aside from chronic insurgency and poverty.¹³ To note, poverty incidence in the Philippines remained 27.9% in the first quarter of 2012, a condition which showed that the “jobless economic growth” in the country did not trickle down to the poor. Provinces affected by armed conflicts scored the highest incidences of 41.5-68.9 % extreme poverty.¹⁴

The challenge for the NSP is how to actualize in the present state of affairs the principles of human security, and how to sustain these beyond the President’s term should they work out today. Continuing with the status quo may appear to be convenient for an administrative leadership with limited time, as revolutionizing systemic practices engenders high political risk. One reason why a government may not take the risk for policy change could

be the stark reality of scarce resources. This is especially true when allocations of limited national budget already incite high political tension and corruption; and when massive debt servicing, which is tucked in the black box of legislation, eats up the largest chunk of public revenues.

Albeit competing budgetary demands for human security needs, the President as the chief agenda setter was able to muster congressional support for the new Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Modernization Act in 2012. The legislation of the extended military modernization act was said to respond to international demand for security sector reform (SSR) in democratic governments in Asia. It must be taken into account, however, that contemporary literature on SSR posits that the effectiveness of the security sector is not defined by arms capability; but by the quality, transparency, and accountability of political institutions and democratic mechanisms under which the armed forces operate.¹⁵

The democratic control of the armed forces and the promotion of human security are the primary themes of the SSR. To ensure that human development is realized, SSR advocates for realignment of expenditures from military hardware to social and economic services. It guards against excessive military expenditures that reduce resources for development needs.¹⁶ To note, this desired policy principle is what is known in past political messages in the Philippines as “social bias.” The latter, which is synonymous to “social justice,” pertains to equitable economic growth that is biased towards agricultural development, safeguards for the environment, and safety-nets for the poor. But to realize social equity and human development, these are securitized by government through defense modernization—a course of action justified in the name of national security.

Conclusion

The critical review of the intents and components of the National Security Policy or NSP for 2011-2016 defines and outlines critical issues and concerns in promoting national security in the Philippines. The catch-all concept of national security in the said policy document, for whatever principle and purpose it may serve, evades capture in real, concrete terms. But the fact that “security” is qualified as “national security” in the NSP already set out its meaning and leaning in policy formulation and implementation.

Security, from a national perspective, is geared towards protecting and enhancing the welfare of the nation state, the latter of which comprises the essential elements of governmental entity, territorial integrity, and

citizenry. This viewpoint on national security, one that is confined to an independent country, is fundamental for traditional leaders at the helm of nation-building. This is especially warranted in a country whose insecurities stem primarily from a protracted insurgency, political rifts, and brewing tensions with neighboring countries on territorial claims.

But for countries that take pride in truly enjoying the gains of democracy, the focus of security is turned towards promoting individual rights and sustaining human development in all its dimensions. The human security policy entails giving greater value to social welfare through increased expenditures on education, health, and economic opportunities; rather than to military modernization through arms build-up.¹⁷ These are the concerns of human security as the popular demand in democratic nations that long transitioned from threat-oriented and state-centered security especially of defunct autocratic regimes.

In the Philippines, the political theme of “securing the gains of democracy” in the NSP means securitizing human development through security sector reform, particularly military modernization. With this, the professed reorientation of national security appears as a false impression in a country that continues to fight chronic insurgency in the midst of problematic socio-economic and political realities. The complications resemble vicious causal loops of underdevelopment, the model of which characterizes the case of Philippine security.¹⁸

For an administrative leadership that operates in this context, the propaganda of human security is perceived to become a reality by building up the institutional mechanism that will deliver development outcomes. In this case, capacity building and modernization of government bureaucracy, particularly of the military, is earnestly sought. The disposition of the Philippine government to strengthen its national defense defines in policy the meaning of “national security” that is coated in the academic fad of human security in the NSP.

No doubt, the general principles of democracy and human security, which the NSP upholds for the Filipino people, are undisputable. But the reality and complexity of how government will go about taking courses of action, allocating resources, and administering programs to achieve human security are controvertible.

Moreover, an understanding of idiosyncratic issues and problems in the enduring state of affairs in the country is needed in order for a comprehensive policy framework on national security to be well-grounded, credible, and convincing. The analysis of the policy document only

unravels inherent arguments behind the incontestable intents of attaining national development in the Philippines.

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Endnotes

¹ See Lester Edwin J Ruiz, “The Subject of Security is the Subject of Security: APEC and the Globalization of Capital,” *Pacifica Review* 9, no. 2 (1997), 3-17.

² Heiner Hanggi, “Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Contexts,” *Transformation: A Security Sector Reform Reader* (Pasig City, Philippines: INCITEGov, 2012), 12.

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⁵ Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme, *1994 Human Development Report: New Dimensions of Human Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 24-25.

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⁸ Richard Jolly and Deepayan Basu Ray, “The Human Security Framework and National Human Development Reports: A Review of Experiences and Current Debates” (occasional paper, Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme, New York, USA, April 2006), 3.

⁹ President, Policy Statement, “National Security Policy, 2011-2016: Securing the Gains of Democracy,” (7 July 2011), i.

¹⁰ Human Development Report Office, United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2010 20th Anniversary Edition* (New York, USA: UNDP, 2010), 1.

¹¹ See Message of President Benigno S Aquino III in National Security Policy, 2011-2016, p. 11.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹³ See “Internal Environment” in National Security Policy 2011-2016, pp. 15-18.

¹⁴ Riza T Olchondra, “PH poverty unchanged,” *Inquirer* (Manila) 24 April 2013, p. A1.

¹⁵ Mark Sedra, *The Future of Security Sector Reform* (Ontario, Canada: The Center for International Governance in Innovation, 2010), 16.

¹⁶ Nicole Ball, “The Evolution of the Security Sector Reform Agenda,” in Mark Sedra (ed) *The Future of Security Sector Reform* (Ontario, Canada: The Center for International Governance in Innovation, 2010), 30.

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¹⁷ Jolly and Ray, “The Human Security Framework,” 8, 9, 12.

¹⁸ See discussions on the crisis of armed insurgency in the Philippines in Rodel A Cruz, “Security Sector Reform: Philippine Perspectives on Defense Transformation,” *Transformation: A Security Sector Reform Reader* (Pasig City, Philippines: INCITEGov, 2012), 50, 54-55.