

EXECUTIVE POLICY BRIEF

A STRATEGIC VIEW OF THE WORLD IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY*

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The National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP) is the government's key educational institution for training and research on defense and security.

The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) is the NDCP's main research arm. INSS regularly conducts researches on national security issues and submits policy recommendations to the Secretary of National Defense with inputs from the Strategic Studies Group (SSG).

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The Global Strategic Environment

The global strategic environment has dramatically changed in favor of the United States of America with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. However, the world recently has been witnessing a gradual shift of political, economic and military power that tends to lead towards multipolarity. Regional powers are on the rise and new inter-state relations are beginning to emerge. These phenomena, coupled with the global war on terror, have serious implications on strategic and foreign policy thinking of states around the globe.

The Asia Pacific

Southeast Asian Regionalism and the War on Terror

Because of the collaboration of Southeast Asian countries on traditional and non-traditional concerns, Southeast Asia is slowly becoming a crucial block in the dynamics of Asia-Pacific politics. In the thrust towards a more cohesive regional community, ASEAN remains central in determining the possible mechanisms and parameters in which regional actors interact with each other, and how external powers are to be engaged at the regional level.

The presence of international terrorists and Islamic extremists in Southeast Asia would always make the region vital in US security strategy. Terrorists, transnational in nature, generally threaten Western targets (most especially those identified with the United States). This prompted Washington and Canberra (which is still generally regarded by Southeast Asians as "western") to calibrate bilateral and multilateral security relations with countries in the region. However, the support of some countries for

the US-led global war on terror has not been popular most especially among Muslim groups, making these countries more vulnerable to terrorist attacks.

China's Rise, America's Reaction and Japan's New Strategy

China's hunger for energy to sustain its economic growth (which can eventually translate into military power) instigated it to explore new areas of relations with many other countries. It has been beefing up its relations with Russia, ASEAN, India and even African states. However, US and Japan are closely monitoring China's rise. In some instances, they have registered their concern that China's resurgence is dangerous and might be inimical to their interests.

China, on its part, has been actively projecting an image of a peaceful rise and has been promoting the idea of cooperative security with its neighboring countries.

On the other hand, there has been an observed improvement on US-China relations. Both countries have found areas of cooperation and common interests that could minimize the possibility of a dangerous rivalry. Example of which is China's support to US-led war on terror and America's openness in the strategic role of China in preventing North Korea to go nuclear. US has also started to accord China the international eminence a regional heavy-weight deserves.

Japan, however, is not very optimistic. Its attempt to redefine its international role by altering its "pacifist" constitution is seen as a reaction to China's rise. Apprehension about China's military build-up and expanding economic and political strength seems to motivate Japan's shift from purely defensive to a preemptive strike capability.

This policy brief is based on the presentation by **Ambassador Rosario G. Manalo before the NDCP Strategic Studies Group on 3 July 2007. Ambassador Manalo is a Regular Fellow of the SSG and currently the Chairperson of the High Level Task Force to draft the ASEAN Charter. She is a career diplomat and former Undersecretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs.*

Also, in a global context, Japan has always been agitating for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, something that China might not welcome for they see each other as staunch rivals in almost all aspects.

North Korea and the Six-Party Talks

How we view the world determines the approaches to be adopted and the tools to be employed. Amidst increasing complexity and uncertainty, policy formulation may not be as clear and straightforward

The Six-Party talks, so far, have been on a good run in preventing North Korea from entering the “nuclear club.” Much of the credit is for China, to which North Korea is dependent for survival. China has manifested its intention for a non-nuclear North Korea and took a leadership role in putting Pyongyang back in the diplomatic table. South Korea also did its part by undertaking “creeping reconciliation” with North Korea and has consistently put premium on dialogue instead of confrontation. UN inspectors have been preparing for their return to North Korea and no less than Kim Jong-il himself has called on all parties to stay true to their respective pledges.

Taiwan Issue

The move for formal independence of Taiwan is slowly on the ebb as the presidency of Chen Shui-Bian—the primary icon and proponent of Taiwan’s independence drive—expires next year. Taiwan is also slowly being drawn into mainland China’s economy as Taiwanese investors are increasingly taking advantage of the cheap Chinese labor market. This makes any attempt for formal independence more costly and impractical for Taiwan. China, on its part, took a remarkably softer tone on Taiwan in its recent defense white paper. This signals a good chance for a more peaceful approach to the issue.

Australia and Its Regional Role

Realizing that combating terrorism also entails a regional approach, Australia has been working very hard, especially with its Southeast Asian neighbors, in order to safeguard its borders and thwart any attempt by terrorists to target Australian nationals and interests.

Recently, Australia has signed security-related agreements with Japan and the Philippines (countries associated with the United States). Although the Australian Prime Minister tried to allay suspicions on its recent regional

engagements, it is expected that China would pay very close attention towards Australia’s East Asian presence via Philippines and Japan.

Europe and Central Asia

Post Cold-War US- EU Relations

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 signified the disappearance of a major threat to European security but did not immediately diminish the importance of the US in Europe, particularly in the NATO alliance. The next challenge to European Security was brought on by the breakdown of Yugoslavia into separate independent states. The US and NATO were instrumental in the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, which led to the cessation of hostilities between the former Yugoslavian states of Bosnia and Croatia, and later, the military action against Serbian military forces in response to the ethnic conflict in Kosovo in 1999. At present, Kosovo is being administered by the UN, while US and the EU push for independence of the province from Serbian rule.

Post 9/11

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US signaled a shift in American security policy in Europe and Central Asia. The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 in search of al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was supported by NATO, and the EU was quick to implement anti-terrorism measures of its own.

The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a turning point in US security relations with Europe. The invasion was opposed by NATO members France and Germany but was supported by former Eastern Bloc states Poland and the Czech Republic. Further contributing to this rift is the global realignment of US forces, characterized by the withdrawal of large number of US troops from its Cold War bases in Central Europe to areas closer to flashpoints in the Middle East, and North Asia. The European Defense Policy of the European Union, which could supersede NATO’s functions and exclude the US, also contributed to the decline of US-European relations.

US- Russia Relations

The improvement of US relations with countries from Eastern Europe has created concerns within the Russian leadership in recent years. Strained US- Russian relations can be attrib-

uted to the recent US initiative to construct a Missile Defense System (MDS) to safeguard the US and its allies from nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea.

According to Russia, the MDS, based in Poland and the Czech Republic, is a threat to its national security. To consolidate its influence in the Central Asian region, Russia, along with China, established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) composed of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The SCO is seen to be an organization of growing influence as countries such as Iran, India and Pakistan have been given observer status. Expansion of the SCO will create a formidable bloc of oil and nuclear powers in the region.

The Middle East

The Israeli-Islamist Conflict

The existence of the Jewish nation-state of Israel has been challenged by its Arab neighbors since its creation in 1948 – an uneasy condition caused by its unique geo-cultural situation.

The 2006 Lebanon War marked the beginning of the third stage in the conflict over Israel. The first was the Arab-Israeli Conflict fought in the guise of Pan-Arab nationalism and which ended with the signing of the Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979. The second stage was the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, which highlighted the role of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and narrowed the focus to the Palestinian opposition to Israel. The present stage, the Israeli-Islamist Conflict, supersedes the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and is marked by the emergence of new role players.

The Islamist Coalition

The Palestinian elections held in 2006 brought Hamas to power in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, Iran's nuclear drive poses a threat to Israel inasmuch as it strengthens the idea among the Islamists that Israel once again can be confronted on the external front.

One strength of the coalition is its very flexible mix of assets, comprised of a state actor (Iran), a quasi-state actor (Hamas), and a sub-state actor (Hezbollah). Still, the biggest development in the region is the growth of Islam.

Despite the growth, internal factions remain to be one of the greatest weaknesses of the coalition. With its backbone being Shiite (Iran), the Sunnis see the coalition as a threat to their supremacy, which has been the tradition in the region.

Recent developments

Recent developments in the Israeli-Islamist Conflict include US and Israel's offer of strong support for Mahmoud Abbas, the new president of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Egypt plans to move its ambassador and diplomats from Gaza to the West Bank where Abbas' government sits. Moreover, US and EU have also announced the lifting of financial and diplomatic embargo on the PA.

Analysis and Recommendations

How we view the world around us certainly determines the approaches we will adopt and the tools we will employ. Amidst an environment that is characterized by increasing complexity and uncertainty, strategic assessment and policy formulation may not be as clear and straightforward. How then do we as a nation prepare for the future? To help policy makers navigate their way through the rough waters of international relations, three fundamental questions are being posed as guide points.

How do we prepare for the challenges ahead?

Prioritize our national interests. As with all things, our actions as a nation are defined by our national interest. However, the hierarchy of interests varies with context and circumstance. When applied in particular situations, various national interests can pull us in opposing directions. As such, astute balancing of interests will be required of policy makers, especially in the absence of a national strategic framework, which then brings us to the next point.

Formulate a “whole-of-government” strategic blueprint. It has been said before and it shall be reiterated here anew: a national security and foreign policy blueprint is indispensable. The “whole-of-government” approach is not only limited to internal security. It should, likewise, apply to our foreign policy, to how we should link security and diplomacy together, and to relate these two areas

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with our other interests such as development, trade, culture and governance. While getting policy-makers to agree on a common strategy may be difficult and lengthy, not doing so would result to more expensive consequences. Security is more than the sum of the parts. The key, therefore, is not to prioritize one at the expense of the other components, but to find the right blend of policies where features reinforce one another.

Develop strategic thinking in the country.

In the years ahead, policy formulation will increasingly require mature and developed disciplines of Strategic Studies and Policy Science in the Philippines to provide our policy makers with the necessary analytical tools, and our policies with solid grounding on research.

Adopting coherent international and local policies.

Our priorities cannot be confined within the metes and bounds of proximity. Two particular interests—the presence of OFWs in various parts of the world and addressing international terrorism—require us to adopt a strategic, if not global, view. In a sense, our interests go wherever they go. We thus need to have a coherent policy in our engagements at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, and tie this with our internal priorities and national policies.

What should our foreign policy priorities be?

Upholding multilateral institutions and adherence to international agreements. The UN as an institution should remain as a cornerstone of our foreign policy. Despite its shortcomings, the UN still remains as the only credible instrument of world order and global governance.

In much the same way, ASEAN should continue to be a priority agenda in our diplomatic relations, especially now that an ASEAN Charter is being drafted. The Charter would institutionalize norms towards a more defined and cohesive pattern of relations among members, and would provide the needed venue for dialogue to reduce the chances of open conflict.

Our shared experience has led us to the realization that strength does indeed come with numbers. Through the ASEAN, we have successfully dealt with regional actors such as in the case of the South China Sea Code of Conduct. And through the ASEAN, we hope to constructively engage rising powers like China and India alongside key players Japan, South Korea, US, Australia and the European Union in shaping the emerging security order in the region.

Engendering strategic dialogue between peoples. Strategic predicaments such as international terrorism are not always remedied through hard power alone. Our security and foreign policy strategies, therefore, must emphasize the cultivation of relations between governments and peoples, especially between Muslims and the West. Mechanisms such as cultural exchanges, inter-faith dialogues, academic symposia and civil society forums promote not just tolerance of differences but, more importantly, greater understanding and respect for diversity—a form of “winning the hearts and minds” of peoples.

What role should we play?

Armed with the full realization of our strengths, potentials and limitations, the Philippines will do well to assume a moderate and constructive position. While some things like geography cannot be changed, we can work to strengthen our security and diplomatic relationships with regional as well as global powers. In dealing with rivalries, for instance, we must be adept in balancing our relations, such that we do not become closely associated with anyone, except to the abiding interests of our nation.

By understanding the changing strategic and security environment, our policies become better informed. And when given the focus and supported with the proper resources, we assure our country and our people of surviving and enduring the changes in an ever dynamic world at the dawn of the 21st century and beyond.



About the Executive Policy Brief

The Executive Policy Brief is intended to provide strategic assessment on specific current issues on national security. It aims to contribute to strategic thinking in the defense community as well as provide alternative policy inputs.

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