
The nature of future conflict and its potential impact on the Philippine Army

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Every age has had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions.

Carl von Clausewitz¹

Introduction

1. Predicting the future is always a risky exercise since crystal-gazing is not an exact science. However, forecasting is one of the major functions of any defence organisation because without going through the estimation and situation appreciation process, one is unable to make workable and achievable plans.² While delving into future scenarios, use is made of past precedents, trends, events, theories and a degree of intuition before arriving at a possible vision of the future.

2. The current strategic security environment is characterised by fluidity, uncertainty, and variety. The strategic security landscape shifted from ideological struggle to different forms, whilst an array of state and non-state actors, political and economic blocs and forces dotting the global landscape also surfaced. Greater interdependence brought about by globalisation and the revolution in information and communications technology (ICT) transcends this security environment.

3. Post-Cold War developments brought profound changes in the way countries view their national security interests. Whereas before, national security was seen as simply a defence/military issue, today there is a growing realisation that other factors such as economic, environmental and socio-cultural factors can affect a country's well-being. This comprehensive perspective presents challenges to defence and military leaders as regards their vision and thinking in the likely nature of future conflict to make the armed forces responsive and relevant instruments of national policies not only in the contemporary but also in future times.³

4. This paper aims to determine the potential impact of the likely nature of future conflict on the Philippine Army (PA) in order to maintain its responsiveness and relevance in the 2015–2020 timeframe. This will be achieved by analysing and assessing the strategic security environment and trends in the global, regional and Philippine internal arena, determining the likely nature of future conflict and determining their implications on the PA.

Key trends and strategic security developments

Global trends

5. A look into the 21st century reveals two key global trends, which impact directly on the likely nature of future conflict and will shape the face of war: globalisation of world economy and global diffusion of technology.⁴

6. **Globalisation of world economy.** Economics often drives changes in the conduct of war, and success in it cuts as a double-edged sword in the sense that both security and insecurity are a function

of prosperity.⁵ Economic growth can be destabilising if it occurs very rapidly over a short period of time, creates power shifts and thereby upsets the balance of power in the international system.

7. **Global diffusion of technology.** Unlike in the past, technology is now transferred at its most advanced level and there is nothing to stop its diffusion. During the 2015–2020 timeframe, several states will have acquired weapons of increasing range, accuracy, and destructiveness.⁶ No arms control agreement or non-proliferation regime can prevent the proliferation of the technological means of war.

Global security developments

8. Significant global developments in the 1990s have 21st century implications. The demise of the Soviet Union has led to the drawdown of forces in the Asia–Pacific leading the US to shift its operational emphasis on access rather than permanent basing. It was projected that the intense politico-military rivalry that marked international relations during the Cold War era would give way to more peaceful cooperation.⁷ In the light of developments in recent years, this premise would have to be reassessed.

9. The events of 11 September 2001 highlighted the use of asymmetric warfare by non-state actors.⁸ Instead of crippling the US, the world has seen its emergence as a more powerful, more assertive, and a more determined nation to maintain its dominant role in world affairs in the 21st century. The US-led ‘global war on terrorism’ saw the use of high-technology superior weapons in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Regional security developments

10. **Northeast Asia.** The regional security situation will likely become increasingly unpredictable. A crisis involving religious, territorial, economic, political, or social conflicts in one area could have contagion effects throughout the region. First, in the Korean Peninsula, Kim Jong-Il’s regime continues to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD) despite massive economic problems. Second, there have been serious confrontations between India and Pakistan during the past years each accompanied by at least implicit nuclear threats. Although geographically distant from the Philippines, the religious sensitivity of the conflict in Kashmir may draw some support from the Muslim population in the southern Philippines taking into account the lessons of Afghanistan, which saw the birth of the al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiah linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Third, the Taiwan Straits is the one flashpoint that holds out the prospect of conflict between China and Taiwan.

11. **Southeast Asia.** The reduction of US presence in the South China Sea (SCS) created a vacuum quickly filled in by Chinese ‘creeping invasion’ of islets in the Spratlys. The future situation in the SCS is a critical element in the general Philippine security environment as it has bearing on the Philippines’ natural gas and oil exploration activities within its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Spratlys or Kalayaan Island Group (KIG). Currently, the Philippines’ Malampaya Project, which draws off natural gas 50 kilometres off Palawan in western Philippines, could generate US\$8.07 billion in projected revenues.⁹ Opportunely, most Asia–Pacific economies currently remain strong despite the 1997 Asian financial crisis as most countries place a much higher priority on economic modernisation and intra-regional cooperation than in political hegemony and military conquest. Regional organisations such as APEC, ASEAN and the ARF¹⁰ provide the framework for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region.¹¹

Internal security situation

12. **Communist insurgency.** This 34-year-old problem still exists where the NPA exploits the social, economic and political problems of the Philippines.¹² Poverty, graft and corruption and the patron-client kind of politics continue to have an adverse impact on the Philippines' social cohesion. To eliminate or at least minimise poverty, as well as graft and corruption, and replace the kind of politics practiced would require changing the political structures and institutions that developed through the years.¹³

13. **Muslim secessionist and Islamic extremist movements.** This conflict stems from as far back as the 1600s with the Spanish conquest of the territory, and the immigration of Christian settlers in Mindanao. While certain government initiatives such as the Philippine Government–Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) peace accord in 1996 have diminished the conflict, a more serious effort needs to be undertaken in making peace with the MILF, an MNLF breakaway faction.¹⁴

14. **New security issues.** Security developments not necessarily of the politico–military nature familiar to defence and military leaders have emerged. These are transnational crimes, which involve drug trafficking, human smuggling and terror networks; ethnic violence; and, environmental degradation. The present geopolitical order provided opportunities for organised crime and terrorist groups to expand their operations. Worse, globalisation and ICT developments have assisted these groups in spreading their power and influence regionally and globally.¹⁵

15. **Economy and demography.** The 1997 Asian financial crisis had a double whammy effect on the Philippines. Poverty has, thus, been used as the platform of insurgent and secessionist groups. This explains why communism still survives in the Philippines despite the collapse of communism in Europe. Notably, one of the exacerbating factors is the burgeoning population figure. To date, the Philippines has a population of 76.5 million growing at the rate of 2.36 per cent.¹⁶ The current capability of the Philippine Government to create national wealth needs to be improved in order to support this alarming population growth rate.

Nature of future conflict

16. A deduction from the examination of the current global, regional and internal security trends and developments is that the future security landscape that will influence the Philippines in the 2015–2020 timeframe will not be that much different from the contemporary settings. It may be assumed that it will continue to have the enduring features of friction, danger and uncertainty.¹⁷ Limited wars fought for limited purposes with varying degrees of intensity will be the wave of the future. Just as the 19th century was Jominian, the 20th century Clausewitzian, the 21st century may well be influenced by the strategic paradigm of Sun Tzu and Liddel-Hart.¹⁸ From hindsight, this nature of future conflict that other states are preparing for is the present circumstances where the Philippines finds itself in the contemporary period. In this future conflict, the PA will carry on playing a vital role on two fronts: internal security and external defence.

17. **Internal Security Operations (ISO).** Based on the Philippine economic, political and social trends, social cohesion will remain an elusive aspiration resulting in the persistence of internal security problems. The communist insurgency and Muslim secessionist movement; the Islamic extremism espoused by the ASG; and, the prevalence of transnational crimes will likely influence the future Philippine internal security picture. These threat groups will also take advantage of the global diffusion of technology to improve their arsenal of weapons. Arguably, the internal security situation is where the clear and present danger exists as far as the Philippines is concerned. ISO shall remain

at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, which indicates that its nature will be characterised by Low Intensity Conflict (LIC).¹⁹

18. **External Defence Operations (EDO).** The threats of a full-blown conventional war in the SCS, in Kashmir, in the Korean Peninsula, and in the Taiwan Straits, shall remain and cannot be discounted. The participation of post-industrial and information-based countries in this conflict will ensure that high-tech weapons will be involved. For the Philippines, its sovereignty claim for the islets in the KIG within its EEZ is vital to its economy. The prospects of oil and natural gas exploration in this area impact directly on the country's ability to create national wealth for its growing population. EDO would qualify to be within the Medium-Intensity Conflict (MIC) to High-Intensity Conflict (HIC). However, there is low probability of such a conflict breaking out in the next 50 years.²⁰

Implications on the Philippine Army

19. Before implications of the nature of future conflict could be considered for the Philippine Army, a glimpse at its history and a description of its current form appear imperative. The doctrinal concepts and responsive force structure of the future Army could best be arrived at when its history and current form are contrasted with the likely nature of future conflict it may face.

History and experiences of the Philippine Army

20. PA origins could be traced to the Revolutionary Army, which took up arms against the Spanish Government from 1896 to 1898, and against the Americans during the 1899–1903 Filipino–American War. The enactment of the *National Defence Act* in 1935 provided for the creation of the PA composed of regular ground troops, a reserve force, an offshore patrol and, an air corps.²¹ When World War II broke out, the PA was incorporated into the US Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE).

21. The PA subsequently became the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in the 1950s with four armed services: the Philippine Army, Philippine Air Force, Philippine Navy and the Philippine Constabulary. During this period, the communist-inspired Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon (HUKBALAHAP), which sought the overthrow of the Philippine Government was successfully crushed by the AFP led by the PA. The HUKBALAHAP became the forerunner of the NPA. Faced with a communist militancy in the region, the PA saw its troops participating in the 1950–53 Korean War through the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK). In the 1970s, the PA was instrumental in defeating the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) secessionist campaign. Through the Philippine Civic Action Group in Vietnam (PHILCAGV), the PA once again saw action overseas in the Vietnam War.²²

22. For 34 years now, the PA through the conduct of counterinsurgency warfare (CIW) effectively contains the NPA. In 1992, the passage of Philippine Republic Act 8186 resulted in the separation of the Philippine Constabulary (PC) from the AFP. The PC became the nucleus of the present-day Philippine National Police (PNP). Recent PA participation in UN-led peacekeeping operations was in Cambodia and East Timor.²³

23. From the combat and peacekeeping experiences of the Philippine Army, it may be deduced that it has gained enough expertise and valuable skills in conducting both conventional and unconventional operations. The Mutual Defence Treaty (MDT) between the Philippines and the US further enhances PA's capabilities in conventional warfare through regular exercises with US troops. The MDT provides the PA with exposure to US conventional warfare concepts, which is beneficial to the PA especially during its participation in coalition operations.²⁴

Army-In-Being

24. The Philippine Army remains a strong pillar of the Philippine defence system addressing the threats to Philippine national security. It is mandated by the Philippine Constitution to:

conduct prompt and sustained ground operations in support of the AFP's mission of protecting the people and securing the sovereignty of the state, and the integrity of Philippine national territory.²⁵

25. The Philippine Army consists of combat units composed of eight infantry divisions, a light armoured brigade, and a Special Operations Command. The combat support component consists of five engineer brigades, an artillery division, an intelligence and security group and a signal group. Service support elements are a reserve command, a training and doctrine command and a logistics support command. PA combat and combat support units are deployed nationwide conducting CIW operations against the NPA and the MILF; counter-terrorist and special operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group; and, support to law enforcement and environmental protection. The PA also promotes regional and global peace and stability through the conduct of bilateral exercises, exchanges and visits with foreign armies, and participation in UN-led coalition operations.

26. In support of the Philippine Agenda 21 (PA21), the Philippines' whole-of-nation strategic sustainable socio-economic development program for the 21st century, the PA is involved, aside from its core tasks, in concerns beyond its principal mandate.²⁶ This involvement means, among others, the participation of PA units in nation-building activities such as the construction of roads, bridges and schoolhouses, which primarily employ the services of the PA's engineer brigades.²⁷ The PA is also actively involved in disaster relief and search and rescue operations during calamities.

27. The wide range of challenges and concerns confronting the Philippines in an era of budget tightening calls for serious, innovative and broad-based PA responses. This is most critical for the PA because its preoccupation with internal security tasks may lead it to ignore the dangers of external developments. The PA's doctrinal concepts and force structure are the two key areas where the impact of the nature of future conflicts will have the most significance.

Doctrinal concepts

28. In view of the nature of future conflict the Philippine Army may confront, its conduct of land warfare may well be driven by the following broad doctrinal concepts. First, the conduct of land warfare needs to emphasise flexible response for multiple missions. It is essential that PA forces are capable of responding to both external and internal fronts.²⁸ The doctrine must provide for a mechanism for shifting responses from peacetime to wartime conditions, internal to external conflict, and traditional to non-traditional roles. In other words, PA troops must be able to fight from LIC to MIC/HIC scenarios which merits the development of a modular defence system and the technology that goes with it to enhance flexibility in responses.

29. Second, the doctrinal concept needs to adhere to the theory of selective engagement. This requires the PA to prioritise and be selective in the threats to be engaged with based on the level of national interests they undermine, the capability the threat group possesses and the environment they operate in. Asymmetric strategies could be selectively applied to situations where PA conventional capabilities cannot match that of the adversary's.

30. Third, the doctrine must prescribe the concept of rapid deployment. Quick and timely responses are essential in neutralising a potential aggressor's movements and manoeuvres. This concept shall enable the PA to quell or contain a brewing conflict at the earliest time possible and prevent it from developing into an untenable situation.

31. Fourth, the doctrine must stress the capability to conduct combined arms, joint, and inter-agency and coalition operations for the attainment of missions and objectives. PA units must be able to effectively work with each other as members of a Combined Arms Team, with other AFP units as members of a joint force, and with foreign armies as members of a coalition force.²⁹ In order to effectively perform its PA21 tasks, the doctrine of the future Army must emphasise the role it plays in providing support to nation building, support to law enforcement, support to environmental protection and humanitarian assistance operations.

32. Lastly, the above doctrinal concepts must be underpinned by an overarching warrior ethos ingrained upon the soldiers because contrary to what the information age and the ongoing revolution in military affairs (RMA) has led some to believe, war will never be bloodless.³⁰ It needs to be underscored that in the future, the demarcation line between conflicts and wars will be blurred.

Force structure

33. The current PA organisation is designed solely for counterinsurgency operations. Permitting it to respond simultaneously to ISO and EDO means restructuring the Army to make it more relevant and responsive to the future.³¹ A key enabler and component of this force restructuring is the acquisition of affordable high-technology weaponry and equipment giving priority to lift capabilities, ISR and C4I systems³² to achieve a land force characterised by mobility, flexibility, adaptability, agility and decentralisation. This shall, in turn, require higher education for soldiers to develop and integrate the doctrinal concepts that would exploit this technology. The PA needs to be agile with advanced capabilities able to apply precision firepower over considerable distances.³³

34. The future Army may be organised to have a manoeuvre force, a territorial force with integrated reservists, a PA21-support force and the corresponding combat and combat service support units. Expandable territorial forces consisting of professional cadre and reserves will be ideal. From a base structure of one regular infantry battalion and two cadre type battalions in each of the Philippines' 15 political regions, an infantry brigade can be formed by mobilising the elements of the cadre battalions.³⁴

35. In the event of a conventional war, a territorial brigade will have the capability to be expanded to an infantry division. The division and brigades will be optimised if formed and organised as multi-role units. Their structure may be designed to enable them to adapt to their multifarious roles such as defence against any threat, support to law enforcement, socio-economic development, disaster response and environmental protection. To enable reserve units to be relied upon during exigencies, its organisation, structure, manning and equipment need to conform to the organisation of the regular force.

Conclusion

36. The aim of this paper is to determine the potential impact of the likely nature of future conflict on the Philippine Army in order to maintain its responsiveness and relevance in the 2015–2020 timeframe. The globalisation of world economy and global diffusion of technology are key global 21st century trends identified to impact directly on the likely nature of future conflict. An examination of the strategic security trends and developments led to the recognition that the future Philippine security landscape will not be that much different from the contemporary settings.

37. Underpinned by warrior ethos, doctrinal concepts for the conduct of land warfare need to emphasise flexible response for multiple missions, adhere to the theory of selective engagement,

prescribe the concept of rapid deployment, and stress the capability to conduct combined arms, joint and inter-agency and coalition operations for the attainment of missions and objectives. On future force structure, a more flexible land force may be formed to consist of a manoeuvre force, a territorial force with integrated reservists, a PA21-support force and the corresponding combat and combat service support units. A key enabler and component of this force restructuring is the acquisition of affordable high-technology weaponry and equipment giving priority to lift capabilities, ISR and C4I systems to achieve a land force characterised by mobility, flexibility, adaptability, agility and decentralisation. This requires higher education for soldiers to integrate the doctrinal concepts that would exploit this technology.

38. The challenge for the Philippine Army is how to come to terms with what may be the future of war. A vision of the likely nature of future conflict shall afford the Philippine defence planners a sound basis to postulate what may be its implications on the Philippine Army of the future. In order to make the Army responsive and relevant instruments of national policies in the future, the Philippine Army must transform by being appropriately structured and doctrinally adept both for conventional and unconventional threats. To win against future adversaries and help secure a future for the Philippines, the Army must change with the times.

Endnotes

1. Carl von Clausewitz, 1976, *On War* (edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret), Princeton University Press, New Jersey, p. 593.
2. V Anand, 2000, 'Future Battlespace and Need for Jointmanship', <<http://www.Strategic Analysis Future Battlespace and Need for Jointmanship.htm>>, viewed 8 Oct 2003.
3. F Umbach, 2000, 'Military Balance in the Asia-Pacific: Trends and Implications', (Paper presented at the 14th Asia-Pacific Roundtable, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, June 4, 2000), p. 3.
4. J Malik, 'Sources and Nature of Future Conflicts in the Asia-Pacific Region', *The Future Battlefield*, Deakin University Press, Victoria, pp. 41-48.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*
7. A Toffler and H Toffler, 1993, 'The 21st Century Global System', *War and Anti-War*, Little, Brown & Company, Ltd, USA, pp. 241-252.
8. R Hill, 2002, 'S11 Its Implications for Australia and the Defence White Paper', *Defender* Vol XIX, No 2, Winter 2002, p. 8.
9. SPEX, 'Brochures and Pamphlets re-Malampaya Deep Water to Gas Power project,' p. 3.
10. APEC stands for Asia Pacific Economic Conference; ASEAN stands for Association of Southeast Asian Nations; and, ARF stands for ASEAN Regional Forum
11. C Carlos, 'Asia-Pacific Century for the 21st Century: Dynamics and New Directions', *Asia-Pacific Security at the Turn of the Century*, <http://www.apcss.org/Report_Annual_97.html>, viewed 8 Oct 2003.
12. R Urgello, 1986, *Aspects of Insurgency*, OG2 Publication, Makati, p. 25.
13. S Granau, C Gee, J Stevens & C Moore, 2002, 'Philippines: A Risk Assessment Brief', *CIFP and NPSIA*, Carlton University, p. 2.
14. Granau, Gee, Stevens & C Moore, *loc. cit.*
15. Umbach, *loc. cit.*,
16. National Statistics Office, Republic of the Philippines website, <<http://census.gov.ph>>, viewed 10 Oct 2003.
17. The Australian Army, LWD 1, *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, 'The Nature of Conflict', ADF Publishing Service, p. 35.
18. Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
19. Malik, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-79. According to J Mohan Malik, LIC is at the lower end of the conflict spectrum, which manifests itself in the form of ethno-nationalist or communal conflicts, civil wars, and terrorist operations by non-state actors.
20. Malik, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74. According to J Mohan Malik, HIC of the future will be those wars between post-industrial, information-based countries armed with high-tech weapons and nuclear, space, and info-war doctrines. MIC will be those wars between newly industrialised countries and developed states or between two developing/industrialised countries.
21. R Jose, 1992, *The Philippine Army, 1935-1942*, Ateneo de Manila University Press, Manila, pp. 30-45.
22. Philippine Army website, <<http://www.army.mil.ph>>, viewed 7 Oct 2003.
23. *ibid.*
24. Armed Forces of the Philippines website, <<http://www.armedforces.mil.ph>>, viewed 7 Oct 2003.
25. PA website, *loc. cit.*
26. Philippine Agenda in the 21st Century: Sustainable Development', <<http://www.psdn.org.ph/agenda21>>, viewed 6 Oct 2003.

27. O Soriano, LTGEN, 1995, 'The Role of the Philippine Army in Building the Philippines', *Armies and Nation Building, Past Experience–Future Prospects* (edited by David Horner), Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Canberra, pp. 147–153.
28. Department of National Defence, 1998, *In Defence of the Philippines*, DND Publishing Service, Quezon City, p. 60.
29. Armed Forces of the Philippines, 1985, *AFP Operations Manual*, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, p. 63.
30. Malik, loc. cit., p. 82.
31. Headquarters, Philippine Army, 1995, *Vision: 21st Century Philippine Army*, PA Publishing Service, Makati, p. 4.
32. ISR stands for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, and C4I stands for Command, Control, Communications, Computer and Intelligence.
33. Malik, op. cit.
34. *ibid.*, p. 7.

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