



## **Country Briefing Note:**

### **Security Sector Reform and the Peace Process in the Philippines**

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to explore Security Sector Reform (SSR) and the peace process in the Philippines in order to gain a better understanding of the current internal security environment in the country. First, the paper provides an overview of the peace process and then it discusses SSR efforts and the transformation of security sector. The third section covers both the peace process and SSR by evaluating the relationship between the two processes. The following section points out several challenges related to the peace process and SSR in the Philippines, and the paper concludes with some final words on the importance of formulating a National Security Strategy (NSS).

## **The Peace Process**

The Philippine Development Plan (PDP), during the mid-term of the Aquino administration (2013), stated that:

“(t)he challenge for the government is to sustain the gains in the peace process and in the security reforms in order to attain an end to armed conflict by the end of the term of this administration. This will be done through a determined and deliberate strategy of negotiated political settlement, accompanied by a complementary track that aims to mitigate the impact of armed conflict and address the basic issues that sustain armed hostilities.” (Philippine Development Plan, Chap. 9, 2013)

Indeed, among the major commitments of the Aquino administration is the pursuit of peace, especially in Mindanao. To do this, the employed twin-strategy consists of (a) forging a negotiated political settlement with armed groups through peace talks or “Track 1”, and (b) the convergence of good governance mechanisms and services, alongside a private-public partnership in conflict-affected areas. Utilizing this two-prong strategy aims to bring all armed conflict to a permanent and peaceful closure.

Currently, the peace negotiations of the Philippine Government with different armed threat groups are at varying levels of completion. There are active peace tables with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which resulted in the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014, and with the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People’s Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF), which has been stalled since 2011.

Two agreements are in the implementation of peace agreement commitments phase: the Final Peace Agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was signed in 1996 and the process is in the stage of completing the commitments; and a peace agreement was signed with the Cordillera People’s Liberation Army (CPLA) in 1986,

which led to the signature of the closure agreement in 2011, and the process is in the stage of completing the commitments.

Lastly, the peace agreement with the Revolutionary Proletariat Army-Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPM/P-RPA-ABB) was signed in 2011 and is in the process of finalizing a “closure agreement”.

Immediately upon assumption to office, the Aquino administration re-opened the peace tables that were stalled during the previous administration: talks between the Government of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF (or the GPH-MILF) and the talks between the Government of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front (GPH-NDF). The peace process with the MILF is steadily moving forward, with the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014, and is now in the process of having the agreement translated and passed into law by the parliament in early 2015. The peace process with the CPP-NPA-NDF that opened in February 2011, however, stalled in the third quarter of 2011 due to demands by the NDF to the GPH to release their alleged consultants who are currently serving sentences in jail.<sup>1</sup> A “special track” was explored in late 2012 to early 2013, hoping to engage the top leadership of the NDF panel in a continuing dialogue to ferret out development and governance concerns. The process also failed to achieve an inroad that would move the peace process forward. The table, thus, continues to be at an impasse; meanwhile, armed violence on the ground, especially in areas affected by the presence of the NPA, continues.

The Government also reviewed the remaining commitments of the Philippine government under the 1986 agreement with the CPLA and forged a “completion” agreement with the group in 2011. It is also in the process of doing the same review and accounting remaining commitments with the RPM/P-RPA-ABB, with whom a peace agreement was signed in 2001.

The convergence of governance mechanisms, also referred to as the *complementary track*, is meant to jumpstart development in conflict-affected areas. This is done through a convergence of government services and private sector initiatives for conflict-affected areas, particularly the most vulnerable sectors in communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Disagreement arose due to the failure of verification since the sealed envelopes that supposedly contain the list of consultants did NOT contain actual/ hard copy of list of names, photos, and aliases of consultants, but only diskettes allegedly containing the names, aliases and photos. The diskettes was encrypted and could not be decrypted by the NDF, hence, there was no means to verify if indeed the prisoners that the NDF alleged to be their consultants are indeed in the original list.

Currently, the peace tables are moving towards the post-agreement phase – in international parlance, the DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) stage. The goals of the post-agreement and closure process are two-pronged: on the one hand, it hopes to contribute to the community's security stability and its resilience to violence; on the other, it also hopes to improve the quality of life of the former rebels, including their dependents and their respective host communities. In particular terms, the different tables are in different stages of any or all of the mutually reinforcing processes:

- Arms Control and Management: Removing/ managing the arms of former rebels, as well as controlling and managing the proliferation of firearms in communities.
- Force Management and Demobilization: Dismantling the military-like chain of command of liberation armies and helping transform the armed organizations into civilian groups – whether as civil society or political parties. This process also attempts to facilitate the “re-civilianization” of former rebels.
- Rebuilding and Rehabilitation: Facilitating interventions that aim to rebuild individual lives, as well as rebuilding relationships with communities. It also aims to rehabilitate communities affected by armed conflict, alongside the rehabilitation of the lives of former rebels and their families.

### **Security Sector Reform and Transformation**

The reform initiatives in the security sector, particularly in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), are contained in two main documents: the Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP-Bayanihan), and the AFP-Transformation Roadmap (ATR). Both documents bring together the reform agendas of the review study commissions of 1989 and 2003. Note that, in almost all of the review processes, civilian involvement is pronounced. The SSR agenda and process, hence, have a strong civilian perspective.

The IPSP and the ATR are attempts to create new perspectives, processes, mechanisms, and rules towards a more cohesive, unified, and professional military that adhere to human rights, civilian supremacy, and democratic control. The SSR and transformation agenda is a clear paradigm shift for the institution. Shifting the paradigm is a bold step for the institution that has been used to address and view internal insurgent groups as threats to state authority and survival. With the new IPSP-Bayanihan and ATR, the military goes into a major change, moving away from simply protecting the survival of the state but to also protecting the survival of the people. The doctrines, equipment, rewards and promotion scheme, the military justice system, and even the core

competencies of soldiery will be affected by the new plan. The challenge for the institution, thus, is how to move in this direction as seamlessly as possible.

The outcome of the SSR and transformation process is to achieve a progressive transformation of the defense establishment in order to be capable in accomplishing the defense missions and to be fit and ready for the future

It is premised on the strong belief that the Aquino government will finally forge peace agreements with armed insurgent and ideological groups. The IPSP also indirectly forces the local and national government units to take care of local peace and security matters in their respective communities rather than always relying on the AFP when it comes to internal security.

### **Convergence of Security Sector Reform and the Peace Process**

It is especially in the interest of the military to end internal armed threats. For as long as there are internal security threats, the military will always be drawn into the conflict, not by choice, but by the dictates of political leaders. In other words, the success of SSR rests on a successful peace process.

The peace process also requires reform of the security sector to help create a positive condition for the peace process to move forward. Professional and rights-promoting security forces create confidence among the rebel groups to continue negotiating with the government.

Clearly, there is a symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationship between the peace process and the SSR agenda. Concretely, SSR aims to:

1. Ensure that internal stability is promoted and sustained; and
2. Enhance resilience of communities and disaster risks reduced.

On the other hand, the Peace Process aims to:

1. Have a negotiated political settlement with armed groups; and
2. Ensure that communities affected by conflict benefit from “peace dividends” (i.e. inclusive development for all).

Together, the peace process, SSR and transformation can address the two domains of peace and security: (a) the physical security, addressing the internal and external armed threats to the state; and (b) the human security, addressing the human survival needs, development needs, and sustainable development requirements of the people.

## **Current Challenges**

Saying that the twin processes of peace and security are difficult is stating the obvious. Basically, the major question that needs to be asked is: *How long, how far and how comprehensive should the processes be?*

There are three institutional concerns with the two processes: money involved in the program (can the local economy support and sustain the processes?); commitment of political leaders (how long and how deep will the leaders' commitment to the process be – both government leaders and rebel group leaders?); and acceptance of “external-to-process-communities” (will communities who are no party to the process, and, hence, will not directly benefit from the windfall of peace dividends, be warm to the process?). The last point is especially a concern given that the majority of people also need the same support provided to former rebels. The major challenge is how to clarify to the larger population that the peace dividends are not ‘rewarding’ the rebels but are ‘investing’ in peace.

Second, there are concerns regarding combatants and affected communities. Combatants would want to enter the DDR post-agreement program if the condition in the community has improved. For instance, relinquishing firearms can happen if the security situation has improved and when there is no threat to their lives. Demobilization of forces will happen if combatants see and feel that services are flowing and that structural changes are happening (hence, less reliance on liberation front leadership). Yet, the paradox is that improvement in community conditions will not happen or will be slow to happen if armed combatants will not undergo demobilization.

For example, investors shy away from conflict-affected communities; the impact of state-sponsored reforms is not immediately felt; and support for state-investment in conflict-affected areas is harder to justify if the majority sees no change in the security condition.

## **Conclusion**

Some fundamental and philosophical questions remain:

- Can the political settlement ensure that the communities will actually enjoy peace? Will the process finally address and end the decades-long armed conflict?
- What is the government's over-all strategic plan in handling and managing internal and external conflicts?
- How does the involvement of the military in internal strife impact its capability to handle external threats?

Now, more than ever, the need for a National Security Strategy (NSS) is underscored. The NSS can definitely help in clarifying strategies in the following three areas. For the on-going peace process undergoing the post-agreement and DDR phase, the NSS can help the leaders to understand how the transition can be operationalized and when the “exit” strategy can commence. For communities who are not party to the process and are in fact critical of the process, the NSS can outline the general strategy on how to win the peace on the ground. For the Defense establishment, the NSS can clarify the engagement-disengagement plan of the military vis-à-vis the internal security process, as well as the role of different institutions to address security, peace and other concerns.

SSR in the context of peace process is not just about changes in management or organizational structure. It is centrally concerned with changing power relations and often occurs within a highly charged and politicized environment.

It is therefore a necessity to have a national consensus on security issues. It also necessitates a change in the behavior of the members of the armed forces towards the security environment of the state and its people. Finally, it also requires dedicated leadership, communication and consultation with all stakeholders, and commitment and political will to see the reforms through to the end.