

The Philippines and the United States Today: The Forging of New Relations: Discussion

DR. FRANCISCO NEMENZO: On the whole, I am in agreement with Dr. Fernandez. I think that the last section on the current negotiations between the Philippines and the U.S. is the strongest and most interesting part of this paper. My reservations pertain mainly to the first two sections. However, the last sections do not considerably diminish the force of the arguments in the third section.

The transformation of the U.S. into an imperialist power did not start in 1898 with the annexation of the Philippines. It began in the 1830's when America inherited the Latin colonies of Spain without outright annexation. The U.S. was able to establish new relationships with Latin American countries which are essentially imperialistic.

Let us remember that what is now known as neocolonialism or indirect colonialism is not new insofar as the U.S. is concerned. It even preceded the use of direct colonization. I agree with Dr. Fernandez that the U.S. policy in Asia at the turn of the nineteenth century was dictated by the desire to have a slice of China. The Philippines was indeed incidental. But I think that it was a bit of an exaggeration to say that Philippine-American relations has been and for some time in the future will continue to be a function primarily of the policy of the U.S. towards China. I think that the original motive for the annexation of the colony cannot explain the later policies of the imperialist power. Let us take the case of Malaya. Malaya was acquired by the British not for its own sake — not for the rubber and tin — but because they also needed a stepping stone to China. But later on, Malaya became important to the British for its own sake.

In the case of the Philippines, I think in more than 50 years of colonial relationship, there developed a section of the American

bourgeoisie with special interest in the Philippines. So I think we should not only explain Philippine-American relations in terms of America's interest in China but should also take into consideration the position in the power structure of the U.S. of that section of the bourgeoisie that has special interest in the Philippines. It is true that we were coerced by the U.S. into signing the military bases agreement, but the fear of China was not yet a factor to consider. The function of the bases in the containment of China came much later after 1949 or perhaps after the Korean War. Now this leads to the conclusion which Dr. Fernandez did not state—that military bases are used not only to contain an external enemy but also as a fulcrum for the intervention in the host country's internal affairs.

Whether this other function is still operative in the epoch of détente is something that we ought to consider for it might affect U.S. policy towards the Philippines. Therefore, I would not take hook, line and sinker Dr. Fernandez's corollary theory that the present negotiations to radically rearrange Philippine-American relations may once more be viewed as a function of the new China policy of the U.S. The Nixon Doctrine as we know refers essentially to the withdrawal of direct military presence. It does not imply, as Nixon and Kissinger have emphasized, the termination of imperialistic relationships which are essentially economic. The underlying economic interest of imperialism can still be promoted and protected by other means—and Dr. Fernandez mentioned development, diplomacy, as well as subversion by the C.I.A. Besides, land bases can go, while the American presence is retained.

Now, let us not forget another factor in this region and that is Vietnam. I believe that the Vietnamese will try to play a living role in Southeast Asia independently of China and the U.S. but most probably in alliance with the U.S.S.R. The economic development pattern adopted by the Vietnamese is not designed to turn the country into a major economic power capable of indulging in what is called development diplomacy. But Vietnam can utilize in her diplomatic struggle what she has successfully and effectively utilized in her national liberation struggle—that is, the use of moral power backed up by proven skill at unconventional military warfare.

The opening of diplomatic relations with the socialist countries, is, as President Lopez pointed out, the greatest

achievement of the martial law regime. Now I really hesitate to credit the martial law regime for anything — having been a victim of that myself. But this is something we cannot overlook because I think that it would have been very difficult to take these steps in the pre-martial law days in what is known as the politics or democracy of stalemate. Now our new relations with the socialist countries could indeed be developed as a counterforce to strengthen our hand in the negotiations with the U.S. The U.S. will certainly, as Dr. Fernandez pointed out, use the generalized system of preferences (aid programs) against us. But these can be counteracted by our skillful dealings with the socialist countries especially with the U.S.S.R. and China. I agree with Dr. Fernandez that this is just the right moment for us to make a bid for greater independence from the U.S. The crisis of leadership in the U.S. which started with the Watergate scandal and which I am afraid will not be resolved after the coming elections considerably weakens the diplomatic position of the U.S. *vis-à-vis* the Third World, including the Philippines. How we can utilize the internal contradictions in the U.S. and the contradictions between the U.S. and the socialists in defense of our national interest is, I think, the greatest challenge in the present leadership of our new prince.

DR. EVA DUKA-VENTURA: I feel that what I have to say would really be not as important because I quite agree with Dr. Nemenzo's point that the Philippines was only incidental to the China policy of the U.S. I also subscribe to the contention that afterwards we were really that important in terms of China policy. First of all, when the Americans came here, they were not only viewing China as a trading post but were also intent to develop us as a trading post. Therefore, when they started looking at the resources of the Philippines and found out that glittering metal called gold, we find that (comparing U.S. investments in the Philippines with various foreign countries) the biggest investments originally were and still continue to be in the mining industry. So we can't discard that as a very strong factor plus the fact that they also wanted to show that there was going to be something different in terms of building themselves up as a colonial power. Therefore, their emphasis was: "let's see if we could export our culture to them, so that we could create little brown Americans" and so on.

Having been brainwashed in thinking that we could sell them

goods, and that they could sell us goods in the same manner, it became as important for them to sell us the idea that U.S. goods are superior to other goods. My point in all these is that not only the social and military factors but also primarily the economic factor must be considered in viewing our relations with the U.S.

Let us not forget that the Philippines has also been exploring, as pointed out by Dr. Fernandez, all the other potentialities. It seems that the building up of the ASEAN and the Philippine relationship with the ASEAN has been a grossly neglected sphere in the bid for U.S. relationship.