

Konferenzberichte

International Conference on the Role of the Military in Democratic Transition

Puerto Azul, Cavite (Philippines), June 28-30, 1991

In an attempt to put local developments into a broader and comparative perspective, the Naumann Foundation office in Manila teamed up with the National Institute for Policy Studies, the Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs of Ateneo University, the Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute and International Alert to organize and conduct this conference.

Attorney Potenciano Flores from "Kilusang Mayo Uno", which some people call the "militant trade union" (of the Philippines) questioned the logic of the meeting's topic. Since the military is not democratic, it has no role in democratic transitions, he claimed. Army chief Maj. Gen. Arturo Enrile on the other hand saw a significant role for the armed forces in democratization. Harold Crouch from the Australian National University pointed out that a weak, inefficient and corrupt civilian leadership in government will most likely invite military intervention in countries where democratic institutions are being slowly restored. "It is the failure of civilian governments that is the root cause of military intervention", he said. Professor Garcia from the University of the Philippines described and analyzed developments in Latin America, whereas his colleague, Dean Suchit Bunbongkarn (Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok) shared with the participants the wealth of experience Thailand has with military-civilian coexistence. The comparative approach was further enriched by contributions from Dr. Sarasin Viraphol, Royal Thai Ambassador to the Philippines, and Col. Teerapongs Srivatanakul, the embassy's army attache.

If one were to sum up the dominant impression from the conference, the participants would most likely say that it was a pleasant surprise. They came from different sectors of society, different walks of life: officers, former military-turned civilian policemen, the deputy chief of staff for intelligence from the armed forces, representatives of the National Security Council, labour leaders, activists in the peace movement, members of the Commission

on Human Rights, members of the Fact-Finding Commission that examined the December 1989 coup in the Philippines, journalists, diplomats and members of the academe.

The trade unionists perhaps thought it would be useless to talk to the military and the military may have been sceptical and reluctant to meet human rights activists. However, having been invited by a foreigner and being polite Asians, all of them came. Professor Edmundo Garcia and General Enrile succeeded from the very beginning of the conference in creating a pleasant, friendly atmosphere so that people were in an animated, yet relaxed mood to intently listen and talk to one another.

On the last day, the conference benefitted from the presence of members of the Fact-Finding Commission, and the official recommendations of that commission provided the basis for a workshop on "Learning from the comparative experiences and formulating recommendations to ensure civilian supremacy and to promote human rights in a democratic setting." Work was done in three different groups which presented their findings to a closing plenary session, and here again, the moderating skills of Professor Garcia worked wonders in bringing about a synthesis and a friendly agreement to disagree on a number of topics.

During the conference, young officers described their tremendous problems in the field where government, administration and social services are non-existent and the people are as poor as they are scared. Leaders from the trade unions shared their experiences from labour disputes and encounters with the police. Describing a situation typical of many countries, Prof. Dr. Carolina Hernandez concluded that "compared with military's decision-making based on control and command by the hierarchy, the processes of democracy are slow, inefficient and often unwieldy."

The conference provided a most congenial atmosphere for discussion and helped to establish contacts that have already proved very useful. There are plans, for instance, to design a seminar especially for the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Cooperation among the foreign scholars who so superbly contributed to the Puerto Azul meeting will therefore definitely be maintained and intensified.

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