



The Davide and Feliciano Reports



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March 12, 2006



WITH the military problem in our midst flaring up yet again, may I suggest that we all take out the two reports commissioned after the coup attempts of 1989 and 2003 and read them thoroughly.

I suggest not only reading these reports, one commissioned by the Aquino administration and the other by the Arroyo administration, both of which have borne the brunt of military intervention but analyzing them with intelligence and common sense.

I am speaking of the Davide Commission Report, an end result of the detailed investigation of the 1989 coup, and the Feliciano Commission Report, the result of the investigation of the 2003 coup. Both of these reports were competent and disinterested probes by highly regarded professionals with distinguished track records and unquestioned nationalist credentials. They should not be merely filed away gathering dust as they seem to be.

Both these reports itemized the problems of the day-to-day military role in the management of our democracy. The military is a vital component of any country for defense of its territorial integrity and the implementation of its social compact. However, over time, particularly when the civilian supremacy begins to act more for itself than for the country, the military are in effect neglected and exploited.

The cavalier treatment by government officials concerned which naturally extends to official government policy regarding the needs of soldiers and their officers results in onerous conditions which they must bear as they carry out their duties. This, in effect, diminishes both morale and efficiency. Are the recent and continuing NPA depredations with much military loss of lives and battles not a sign of things amiss?

Furthermore, the processes and procedures to be followed by the military in the exercise of its function as the defender of the nation and as preserver of peace and order have been noted by the reports as faulty enough to become a source of inequities and discontent. Here is where problems begin and extralegal if not extraconstitutional reactions are born.

Juxtaposing these inadequacies that hamper what should by all lights be a committed and competent military role in the society we want is the utter faithlessness in which the civilian government leaders had treated them in the past.

The oft-repeated promise of modernization, a dire necessity as of two decades ago, has not materialized. The sale of the Fort Bonifacio land belonging to the military establishment has raised funds in the billions. But these billions were never applied for modernization of the military. Surely, this anomaly has been noted not only by the officers but also by the foot soldiers whose needs for clothing, food, shelter and even benefits have never been met adequately.

Thus, we have no air force planes to defend our skies, hardly enough navy boats to guard our territorial waters and insufficient army equipment. This country has let its military deteriorate not only in equipment, technology and training, but has also dampened its ideals, its courage and its sense of mission by the shabby treatment that the civilian superiors have tolerated and perpetuated.

Aside from the glaring abuses, there is the corruption of the merit system which is the base for any military career and organization. While civilian leaders have criminally neglected the military as a whole, they have selectively corrupted a part of it by bribing and compensating them in return for personal loyalty above God and country so as to keep themselves in the style they wish to govern and luxuriate in power and pelf.

The Davide and Feliciano reports, each in its own way, show where things went wrong in the handling of the military. They depict the consequences of this mishandling, resulting in a segment of this society retreating to itself in self defense and disgust, enabling them to rationalize their consequent anti-civilian, antidemocratic and ultimately antisocial grab for power using the force of arms.

It is certainly also true that self-defense or a retreat into one's particular interests has impelled the military to extreme behavior. If the budget for them is nil or inadequate, they turn to the ingenious but illegal and immoral conversion solution. Except that conversion does not stop at obtaining what is necessary for military operations but extends to feathering the nests of those involved in it, those who handle the funds and those who authorize how they are used. If funds need to be raised for personal or public tasks of the military then firearms and other equipment can be surreptitiously sold, building budgets can be diverted; kickbacks can be institutionalized. Or, funds for the ordinary soldier can be misused.

It is not far-fetched that the military and others in the same outsider roles in our midst come to an alliance of convenience that is truly pernicious to the society in which they conspire against and sabotage, deterring and diverting it from its quest for progress and national viability.

What is so difficult about reading these two reports, the product of much time and treasure, and learning enough from them to follow their recommendations as well as implement them for good governance?

Surely, there must be some intelligent minds out there that can make an informed judgment and initiate suitable and necessary action so that these meticulous investigations and careful recommendations can be made useful.