

"WINNING THE PEACE THRU BAYANIHAN"
CEAP Discussion Forum
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Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I am here to talk about our challenges to peace and security and how we may deal with them. Our long experience has brought forth a stark realization: that challenges to peace and security are multifaceted and complex and given that, needs a comprehensive approach. That comprehensiveness can only be achieved if the whole nation commits to it, voluntarily and spontaneously, in the spirit of *Bayanihan*.

As a nation, we face a lot of challenges that impede our growth and progress. Among others, underdevelopment, poverty, peace and security, too much politicking and divisiveness, all related to each other. Among these challenges, peace and security seems to be the more prominent now. As this is also a topic I am familiar with, let me share with you some insights.

In the area of national security alone, we confront huge challenges both internal and external. A long drawn communist insurgency; secessionism which has now morphed into terrorism; disasters as a result of environmental degradation and climate change; and defense of our territory particularly in the West Philippine Sea.

The lingering communist insurgency has persisted for more than four decades. While communism has lost its relevance, it is still being used by local lawless elements to rationalize their nefarious activities. Hopefully, the ongoing "on and off" peace talks, in whatever form (perhaps localized peace talk), shall lead to an end to hostilities. The more comprehensive solution though is to be able to address the core issues that are motivating some of our people to take up arms against the government.

The Muslim secessionist movement on the other hand has now changed its character. While we have successfully concluded peace negotiations with both the MNLF and MILF, more extremist groups have evolved. These are the ASG, BIFF, KIM, Maute Group and others that reject autonomy as the solution to their struggle. Lately, these groups have taken inspiration from ISIS and have now banded together under one leadership with the aspiration of establishing a Wilayat or Islamic State province in Southeast Asia. This is the group that has attacked Marawi. Again, we need to understand how or why they are being radicalized if we are to solve the problem of violent extremism in the Philippines. Also, we need to resolve the issue of the Bangsamoro Basic Law.

In the West Philippine Sea, our sovereignty and sovereign rights are being threatened by China. It has occupied features that we are entitled to, harasses our fishermen and

continues to destroy the environment. We won our case in the Permanent Court for Arbitration but China blatantly disregards the ruling. While we want to avoid conflict and maintain our friendship with China, we have to stand up for our rights not necessarily by waging war but by leveraging the other elements of national power.

Finally, we have all been witness to climate change, environmental degradation and their destructive effects. This is an issue that we need to prepare for. We need to develop our national resilience if we are to withstand nature's wrath.

The best insurance that we can weather them all is the cohesiveness of our people. If we are to stand up to these challenges, we need to get together as a people. That is why I have long advocated peace using the whole of nation approach - the concept of "Bayanihan". From 2011 to 2016, the AFP implemented the Internal Peace and Security Plan Bayanihan to address our internal security challenges. Let me briefly describe its concept.

Bayanihan's paradigm in the conduct of operations is "*winning the peace more than just defeating the enemy*". It adopts a more comprehensive approach in addressing security challenges. Beyond the immediate goal of diminishing the armed capability of threat groups, the AFP gives weight on the long-term and equally important effects of military operations on the people's way of life and their well-being. In order to genuinely win the peace, *Bayanihan* is underpinned by two strategic approaches: the Whole-of-Nation approach, and the People-Centered approach.

The Whole-of-Nation approach calls on the active participation and involvement of all stakeholders in pursuit of peace and security. This is centered on the recognition that military solution alone is inadequate in resolving internal peace and security issues. *Bayanihan* sheds light to a concept of security that is shared not just among security forces and government agencies but also with non-government entities and other sectors of society. The Plan presumes that even ordinary citizens are essential contributors to the attainment of peace and security. In this context, the role of the AFP is to actively engage its counterparts and partners in consultation and dialogue, forge partnerships, and build a broad peace and security constituency.

The People-Centered Approach situates the people's welfare at the center of military operations. Within the broader frame of human security, it gives primacy to human rights and explores ways for promoting security and safety based on the needs and realities at the grass-roots level. In order to win the peace, the protection of civilians is an end goal in itself.

The *Bayanihan* experience has brought to the fore some essential elements for it to succeed. Firstly, the importance of preparing security forces if they are to successfully address the security challenges. The Armed Forces must be prepared to assume new

roles under a new paradigm. There is a need to achieve the moral high ground thru institutional reforms if the armed forces is to succeed.

Secondly, there is a need for strong involvement and coordination among stakeholders. Only when a shared concept of security is formed can responsibilities be shared among all stakeholders. This in turn enables the mobilization of a cohesive national effort to address the root causes of conflict. It's got to be all of us performing our respective roles to address the core issues that have brought forth these problems. While government needs to step up in terms of governance, the private sector needs to do its part - among others, business and industry to generate employment, the academe to deliver quality and purposeful education, the church to provide spiritual guidance. Families need to be strong and communities must be involved. Private citizens to include students have a role to play as well. Being aware and simply speaking out against violence and coercion either by local terrorists and extortionists or against an aggressive neighboring country are significant contributions to achieving peace and security.

Finally, for *Bayanihan* to have a meaningful impact, its implementation needs to be sustained. This highlights the importance of continuity in policy and strategy over a long period of time. The execution of the plan should transcend changes in both civilian and military leadership. After all, leadership is key to achieving synergy of effort of all stakeholders.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a wealth of experience that can be of benefit to us. As other nations have taken interest in our realizations and approach, we must cherish and learn from them as well. The solution to our problems is in our indigenous philosophy that has been there all the time - the Filipino spirit of Bayanihan. Peace and security can be fully achieved through the concerted and united efforts of all of us.