

SHERWIN E. ONA, PH.D

# **COVID-19 AND SECURITY GOVERNANCE:**

AN INITIAL EXAMINATION OF THE  
PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE AND ITS  
POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR  
POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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WRITTEN BY  
SHERWIN E. ONA, PH.D



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Manila, Philippines

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The creation of a security governance agenda plays an essential part in this process. The paper posits that prolonged securitization in its extreme form is not sustainable and may cause more harm than good

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This paper reiterates the argument that a highly securitized approach to public health emergencies is not sustainable. Therefore, there is a need to undergo a desecuritization process and create a security governance agenda to ensure resiliency. In the case of the Philippines, there is a need to reexamine existing policies and identify the possible gaps

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## ABSTRACT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has presented itself as an existential threat to humanity. This unprecedented malady has revealed the inability of both global and national health systems to monitor and control the outbreak adequately. Thus, this extraordinary situation allowed governments to securitize the pandemic by labeling the disease as a threat to national security and enable the use of emergency powers to prevent its spread.

In the Philippines, the government pursued a highly securitized approach in dealing with the pandemic. This is evidenced by the declaration of a national state of calamity and the enactment of the Bayanihan Heal As One Act (RA 11469), which allowed the government to impose lockdowns and curfews, and to realign public funds. These draconian measures, in theory, should enable the government to mitigate the adverse effects of the pandemic. However, these emergency powers also resulted in widespread panic and confusion due to the government's inability to come up with adequate guidelines and ensure proper coordination among national agencies and local governments. Furthermore, it also exposed the resource and capacity limitations of its security and health agencies. The current strategy also exposed social vulnerabilities, with marginalized sectors experiencing its adverse economic effects. The heavy-handed method of the government led to accusations of human rights abuses in the name of national security.

In this paper, the author will examine the current situation using the concept of securitization. The paper will also present how the process of desecuritization can be pursued, stressing on the importance of creating a security governance agenda for the Philippines and emphasizing the need to develop agile institutions, develop stronger communities and forge greater international cooperation. Lastly, the paper will present policy recommendations that underscore the importance of a whole-of-society approach anchored on good governance, responsive policies, and empowered communities instead of a government-centric, highly securitized approach.



# **COVID-19 AND SECURITY GOVERNANCE: AN INITIAL EXAMINATION OF THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE AND ITS POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has presented itself as an unprecedented global health challenge. Suspected of originating from a marketplace of exotic wildlife in Wuhan, China, the outbreak has now affected a total of 120 countries with about three million individuals diagnosed with the disease, and global fatalities estimated around 290,000 as of mid-May 2020.

More than this, because of its lethality and virulence, COVID-19 is seen as an existential threat to humanity. Declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, the outbreak has resulted in the overburdening of public health systems, thus revealing the inadequacy of current governance structures. In response, numerous governments have adopted a highly-securitized approach to mitigate the effects of the disease. This is usually characterized by framing the pandemic as an existential or a national security threat. This, in turn, allowed governments to use emergency or extraordinary powers to control the spread of

the virus, maintain political stability and prevent further damage to its economy. Although citizens initially approved of these measures, critics now point to the possibility of abuse, corruption, and the possible erosion of democratic values.

This paper will use the concept of securitization to examine the experiences of selected countries in their struggle against the novel coronavirus. Proponents of this concept argue that existential threats are usually securitized at the onset. However, a process of desecuritization must occur to allow existing governance structures to function and political authorities to restore normalcy. The paper will also argue that this process can be hastened through the development of a security governance agenda.

To expound on the process of securitization-desecuritization, the paper will trace the securitization of global health, starting with the 2003 epidemic of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and culminating in the 2017 Ebola outbreak. For the current pandemic, the paper presents how certain countries like Taiwan and South Korea were able to quickly desecuritize their actions. These countries also demonstrated the importance of innovation to fight the virus. For instance, data-driven practices enabled by information communication technologies (ICTs) combined with its resilient health systems proved to be valuable in mitigating the outbreak. While countries like Israel and Thailand resorted to a highly securitized approach resulting in the use of its internal security apparatus to track the movements of suspected COVID-19 cases and control information. Moreover, intense militarism can also be observed as these countries mobilized their militaries to impose lockdowns and curfews. For this, critics stress that such draconian measures could lead to abuse and foment distrust.

In the Philippines, the government continues to grapple with the effects of COVID-19. Missing its chance to stem the spread of the virus in late January 2020, its highly securitized approach is shown in the declaration of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) on March 16, 2020, resulting in a total lockdown of Metro Manila and neighboring provinces for two months. The enactment of the Bayanihan Heal As One Law of 2020 (RA 11469) also gave the executive branch the power to impose quarantines, realign funds, and, if needed, take over private companies.

However, the ensuing confusion and panic revealed severe limitations in the government's capabilities and resources to pursue this heavily securitized option. For example, supply chain gaps were evident in the resulting inadequacy in the number of personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing kits. Health authorities continue to struggle to collect timely and accurate data in the hopes of getting ahead of the infection curve. In addition, local governments were caught unprepared for both the health and social implications of COVID-19. The battle against the virus also exposed the social vulnerabilities as well as the limitations of local and sub-national resources. Because of these problems, critics are wary about the possible abuse of power and corruption as the government implement community lockdowns and dispense financial aid with little oversight.

For these reasons, this study will present an alternative view that can address these weaknesses. The paper will examine the current response of the Philippines to COVID-19 and draw attention to policy gaps and identify opportunities using the concepts of securitization-desecuritization. The study will also explore the experiences of selected countries to be able to derive lessons that can be used in creating a security governance agenda for the Philippines.

## **Background: Securitization, Desecuritization, and Security Governance**

The study of security is traditionally viewed through the lens of existential threats besetting the nation-state. Gaining prominence during the Cold War, this concept revolved around the nation-state and its defense capabilities, focusing primarily on the use of military forces to mitigate threats. Hence, this perspective sees the state as the referent object of security and that its ability to wage war to counter these threats are vital in promoting its national security interest (Lemon, 2018).

However, the end of the Cold War saw the emergence of non-traditional threats like terrorism, cybersecurity, climate change, food security, and pandemics. These new global challenges enabled a shift from the traditional view of security—about nation-states and wars—to a much broader understanding of security. This emerging view also recognizes that non-traditional threats may exist beyond national borders and require a multi-state approach. It also entails long-term engagements to attain its goals and ensure the sustainability of solutions. This perspective also espoused the idea of adopting a people-centric approach to security problems and emphasized the need to address development issues (Amer et al., 2012). This orientation provided the impetus for the concept of human security, which pushed security from a nation-state view to a synergy-driven concept characterized by global-local interaction.

As a whole, human security emphasized addressing non-traditional threats such as climate change, food security, economic dislocations, and disease outbreaks. This approach also underscores the need for



an integrated strategy to solve state and global problems through multi-stakeholder partnerships, addressing root causes of problems, building capacities to ensure resilience, and by fostering social cohesion (UNTFHS, 2016).

The broadening of the understanding of security resulted in new scholarship related to securitization and security governance. The works of Buzan and Waever (1998) on the “securitization process,” created a better understanding of security threats and how states securitize these threats. The process involves how actors label a phenomenon as a security threat and convince an audience that it is so. Using this view allowed the focus in the framing of the issues and the ability of the securitizing actor—often the State—to move these issues from its political realm to the level of existential threat as well, as its ability to convince its audience (constituents, citizens) that such move is legitimate (Lemon, 2018).

Floyd and Croft (2011), on the other hand, stressed that this security actor is a powerful one, highlighting that this power to securitize is expressed through “performative speech acts” that characterized an intersubjective process of convincing the audience of the existence of threats.

Thus, these actions led to securitizing narratives that lift the issue from the regular political regime to access extraordinary measures (Baele and Thompson, 2017) and results in the breaking of rules (Floyd and Croft, 2011). Moreover, discourses on securitization also include the use of non-linguistic artifacts such as images and how these objects affect the audience perception of security (Hansen, 2011) as well as the role of the bureaucratic structures, practices, and routines (Huysman, 2011).

Aside from the issue transformation and audience acceptance, securitization scholars underscore the importance of understanding the social context in which the securitization process occurs. Their view further highlights the need to consider the role of the audience in accepting or rejecting the securitization move. At the same time, other scholars focused on the securitization process and its transformation into governance practices. In this regard, views on the dangers of extreme securitization began to emerge, thus leading to the need for desecuritization and the importance of security governance to pursue this.

In their work about HIV/AIDS, McInnes and Lee (2008) claimed that extreme securitization could lead to a garrison state mentality. This mindset views viral outbreaks as being synonymous invasions. This nationalistic view also impairs the ability of a nation-state to see beyond its borders and realize the transnational nature of diseases (Palomba, 2008).

Moreover, securitization is costly and often leads to resources being diverted from civilian programs to military use. This strong militaristic nature of extreme securitization often blurs the social determinants of the disease (Ibid). Another criticism of securitization is its tendency to blame other countries for the disease. For instance, in the United States, COVID-19 was labeled as the “Chinese virus” and allegations that the virus originated from a laboratory (Brito, 2020; Schultz, 2020). This blame mentality was also evident in travel bans unilaterally imposed by countries on China (Sears, 2020). From a social perspective, Palomba (2008) stressed that securitization has a tendency of treating the ill and the illness as one, which leads to their exclusion and discrimination.

These adverse effects of extreme securitization show that it is

unsustainable and that a desecuritization process must be adopted to diffuse this situation. To do this, the process must allow for the framing of the threat at a manageable level or in a setting wherein typical public policy regimes are sufficient to address the threat (Sears, 2020).

Similarly, Floyd and Croft (2011) argue that the objective of this process is to achieve a level wherein an issue is downplayed as a security concern, and its appreciation is once again restored into its normative political environment. For this to occur, security governance plays a vital role in institutionalizing the forms of state interaction with its network through policies and programs as well as through formal/informal regimes (Webber, 2007; Eilstrup & San Giovanni, 2014; Galbreath & Sauertieg, 2014). Examples of these regimes are the ability of public institutions to exercise legislative/judicial oversight over the use of emergency powers, the participation of civil society in the crafting of programs, and adherence to good governance principles, among others.

Roe (2006) further argues that successful desecuritization can be achieved by addressing the legitimate security concerns of the audience. This idea supports the deconstruction of security issues by examining its context and how the audience is affected by these concerns.

## **Securitization of Health: SARS and Ebola Outbreaks**

Common views on security are usually anchored on the occurrence of armed conflict, thus the emphasis on the state and the role of the military. However, past outbreaks such as the SARS and Ebola

outbreaks, have proven that the most dangerous threat to humanity is right under our noses.

### SARS in Asia: The Case of Singapore

The SARS coronavirus is regarded as the first severe and readily-transmissible disease of the 21st century (WHO, 2003). First reported in December 2002, the SARS coronavirus is said to have originated from Guangdong province, China, and spread immediately to Hong Kong. Consequently, the virus spread to Vietnam and Singapore, even reaching as far as Canada. The virus also showed that it could quickly spread along routes of air travel and is virulent through transportation hubs in densely populated urban centers. It is estimated that in 9 months, SARS infected 8,095 individuals resulting in 774 deaths. It has also caused massive disruption in tourism, business, and transportation (Quah, 2007).

In Singapore, its government adopted a crisis management approach that emphasized the implementation of effective containment, surveillance, and prevention techniques. It also realized the importance of a multi-pronged approach that stressed the need for transparency, public awareness, and legislation (Ibid).

According to the US CDC (2003), the main effort was led by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and with strong coordination with the WHO. The government response to SARS was also characterized by active surveillance of suspected cases, primarily focusing on instances of community-acquired pneumonia, cases among healthcare workers, and unexplained respiratory deaths. Furthermore, the MOH used the Infectious Disease Act to impose quarantine procedures for suspected

SARS cases. The law allowed mandatory quarantine up to 10 days. The MOH, through its auxiliary police force, installed cameras in the homes of each potential case and allowed telephone surveillance of discharged patients for 21 days. The government also implemented a 10-day closure of the Pasir Panjang wholesale market since a significant number of cases were traced to the area. (Koay, 2020).

### 2013-2014: The Ebola Outbreak in Western Africa

In 2013, a more formidable viral challenge was lurking on the horizon. The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) ravaged the West African nations of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia incurring a total cost of USD\$53 billion (Miles, 2018). At that time, the 2013 EVD outbreak was regarded as an epidemic of unprecedented magnitude, killing 10 times more than previous infections. This is due to EVD's appearance in urban centers, poor health infrastructure, and porous borders of the affected countries with the initial response relegated to non-government organizations (Crawford et al., 2016).

Also, the UN Development Group (UNDG, 2015) pointed out that this disease degenerated into a development crisis impacting the economic, social, and human security of the affected countries. The outbreak drew attention to the weakness of the health systems of the affected countries. This weakness is characterized by limited internal capabilities such as the shortage of drugs and ambulances, inadequately skilled staff, among others. Aside from its evident impact on national health systems, EVD also has a substantial social impact. For instance, the UNDG (2015) reports that women are more likely to be exposed to the disease due to their roles in burial rituals and as traditional family

caregivers. Kaner and Schaack (2016) also stressed the impact of the disease on maternal health, with pregnancies associated with EVD that are likely to result in spontaneous miscarriages, stillbirths, and neonatal deaths. Children also suffered from the outbreak, with an estimated 16,600 of them either lost one or both parents to the disease. In terms of school hours, children lost an estimated 486 hours of school in Guinea and 780 hours in Sierra Leone (Ibid).

### EVD in Sierra Leone

The first cases of EVD were reported in May 2014, purportedly emanating from tribal healers who came from a trip to Guinea. The spread of the disease quickly overwhelmed the local hospitals, and on July 30, 2014, the government declared a state of emergency, which resulted in the deployment of troops to quarantine areas (WHO, 2015). To further securitize the threat, the government imposed 90-day enhanced surveillance and enacted a law penalizing those who are infected but remain in hiding with a 2-year jail term (Beaubien, 2015).

The resurgence of Ebola infections outside of the capital, Freetown, forced the government to impose further stricter measures to control the outbreak. In December 2014, Pres. Koroma launched “Operation Western Area Surge” that initiated a house-to-house information and surveillance campaign to stamp out the disease. The effort also encouraged the active participation of communities, especially in reporting the EVD cases. Furthermore, the government struggled to increase bed capacities, increase the number of contact tracers, expand on-site assessment, and construct test facilities in the strategic location of the country (WHO, 2015).

## EVD in Liberia

The first cases of EVD were uncovered in the capital Monrovia in 2014. By September of that year, Liberia would have the highest number of infections in health care workers (about 200 individuals) among the three countries (WHO, 2015).

The outbreak was further exacerbated by the lack of isolation wards in hospitals and the limited number of medical staff with adequate training on infection and disease control as well as the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE). These problems resulted in multiple chains of transmission, which paved the way for the declaration of a 3-month state of emergency (Ibid). Aside from its health implications, the government further securitized the disease by labeling EVD as a threat to the nation's economic and social fabric.

Due to its virulence and potential adverse impact on African and Western countries, the UN Security Council issued a statement expressing deep concern over the outbreak on July 9, 2014, and on August 8 of the same year, the WHO categorized the 2013 EVD as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).

## Securitization of Global Health: Global Response to EVD and SARS

The Ebola and SARS outbreaks drew attention to the deficiencies of health systems as well as the need for global cooperation to address future epidemics. The transnational nature of these diseases also paved the way for the securitization of global health.

*Box 1 . Important Lessons from the SARS and Ebola Outbreaks*

- *Underscored the need to strengthen national/global laboratory networks*
- *Improve surveillance and information sharing capabilities*
- *Creation of rapid intervention teams that can be deployed to infection hotspots*
- *Strong community involvement for monitoring and coordination of infections as well as promote trust and participation*
- *Traditional customs that have a positive impact on health should be encouraged*
- *Increase the emergency response capacities of governments*
- *Need for effective leadership and political commitment*
- *Emphasize the importance of transparency and openness*
- *Use of mobile telephony should be promoted*

*Sources: (WHO, 2016) (WHO, 2003)*

In West Africa, the EVD outbreak has exposed the severe limitations of national health systems. Affected countries often depended heavily on international assistance. Similar occurrences were observed in the SARS outbreak. The failure of Chinese health authorities to immediately report the cases precipitated the spread of the infection to numerous countries. Both outbreaks also led to high infection rates among medical personnel (WHO, 2003) (WHO, 2016). Box 1 shows a list of the lessons learned from the three outbreaks.

These experiences led to the creation of the global health security (GHS) agenda, which called for the reexamination of the roles of citizens and the state as well as international relations. Also, the concept advocated for the development of new legal and governance approaches in combatting disease outbreaks (Fadaak, 2019). GHS proponents advocated for the creation of a global public health agenda that aims to strengthen epidemic preparedness, improve national public health systems, and use innovative surveillance technologies, as well as support health sector recovery among affected countries



(Heymann et al., 2015). However, Fadaak (2015) asserts that the GHS concept is now in shambles due to loss of novelty and WHO's eroding credibility over the handling of the EVD outbreak. Heymann et al. (2015) also observed that the transformation strategies (changes in the legal, political, and institutional pillars) associated with GHS initially looked appealing. Still, the varying level of international commitment made this concept uncertain.

The EVD outbreak also showed the reality of a North-South divide. For instance, the WHO was widely criticized for its delayed response and slow scale-up of international efforts (Fadaak, 2015). This delayed response was eventually surpassed when Western countries realized the security threat posed by EVD to their countries. This recognition saw the belated deployment of 5,000 military personnel and civilian experts from the US, UK, France, Canada, and China in EVD affected areas to control the spread of the disease (Allen-Valley & Daku, 2019; Kamradt-Scott et al., 2016).

In summary, these cases show that the initial response of the countries afflicted with the disease is to securitize the situation by framing the disease as a national security threat. This was prompted by the inability of states to mitigate the outbreaks, such as shown in the EVD experiences of West African countries. Furthermore, the transnational nature of viral outbreaks also stressed the need for the securitization of global health. For this, the GHS initiative was proposed to learn from the SARS, and Ebola outbreaks. At this point, attempts to desecuritize the threat can be observed. For instance, GHS advocates saw the importance of strengthening public health systems and governance institutions to prevent future outbreaks. It also proposed a global disease surveillance network to mitigate the spread of diseases. However, even with its pioneering security governance

agenda, the WHO encountered a lukewarm response from its member countries. The body was also criticized due to its delayed action and the perception that the health body gave much attention to the concerns of developed Western countries to the detriment of severely affected countries (Allen-Valley & Daku, 2019).

### **COVID-19 and the Securitization of Health: Practices in Other Countries**

As the world continues to grapple with the novel coronavirus, most governments have framed the pandemic as an existential threat highlighting its national security implications. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of these countries have adopted a highly securitized approach to control the spread of the virus and mitigate its effects.

This paper posits the notion that securitization must lead to desecuritization: a process wherein emergencies are labeled as national security threats, thus justifying the use of emergency powers. Due to this unsustainable situation, the state and its partners can pursue desecuritization by diffusing its emergency nature. The paper highlights the importance of creating a security governance agenda and roadmap to achieve normalcy. Desecuritization is also beneficial because it allows governments to ease the burden on its security and health agencies without compromising public safety. Moreover, this will also allow governments to avoid the “slippery slope,” a situation where governments refuse to surrender its emergency powers even after the threat from the coronavirus has subsided. For this, the paper examines the experiences of South Korea, Taiwan, Israel, and Thailand.

## South Korea and Taiwan

The cases of South Korea and the Republic of China (Taiwan) are seen as global best practices in how governments should address the challenges of the pandemic. These countries learned from their past experiences in handling the 2003 SARS and 2017 MERSCOV outbreaks, thus enabling them to deal with the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic quickly.

South Korea is recognized as a best practice in terms of its response to this global health emergency. It is being praised because of its proactive strategy, which ultimately allowed the country to avoid massive lockdowns and prevent further dislocation of its economy. Recognizing its possible viral exposure due to the upsurge in arrivals of Chinese tourists for the Lunar Festival, the Korean government took aggressive steps to protect itself against the effects of the virus. These steps included the isolation of passengers on flights emanating from China and the launch of an awareness campaign aimed at informing the public about the novel coronavirus (Shaw et al., 2020). Moreover, because of their lessons from MERS-COV, the government adopted aggressive contact tracing and containment measures as seen in the Shincheon Ji church case, which resulted in the immediate identification of the super spreader known as patient 31 (Fleming, 2020).

In terms of securitizing the pandemic, the Korean government framed COVID-19 as a critical moment for the country. No less than President Moon Jae-in, during a February 23, 2020 meeting, stressed the need for a society-wide or whole-of-government approach to deal with the pandemic that led to the creation of the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters (CDSCHQ) to coordinate

all ministry-level initiatives and support central-local government activities. The CDSCHQ also created special disease management zones to isolate areas and allocate resources. The CDSCHQ is led by the Korean prime minister, Chung Sye-Kyun (ROK, 764).

Further securitization continued as South Korea confronted the disease. The call of President Moon for an “all-out war” on March 1 has placed the COVID government response at the highest level. Calling on the military to “protect the health and safety of the Korean people”, this securitizing move has also allowed the government to disburse reserve funds and has submitted a supplemental spending bill to its National Assembly (ROK, 768). Furthermore, this high-level response also resulted in the mobilization of 1,400 military medical personnel and the deployment of new graduates of the Korean Armed Forces Nursing Academy to assist in the quarantine effort (ROK, 770).

Another example of this securitization move was done during the 5th Emergency Economic Council meeting last April 23, 2020. This whole-of-government council meeting chaired by the President emphasized that the coronavirus response is an “urgent matter of survival” and that the government must now think of ways on how to re-energize the economy and support industries that were affected by the pandemic to restore normalcy (ROK, 810).

The same securitization approach can be observed in the case of Taiwan. In a January 30, 2020 announcement, President Tsai Ing-wen, together with Vice President Chen Chien-Jen, outlined Taiwan’s response to the coronavirus. Due to its proximity to China and learning from its 2003 bout with SARS, President Tsai immediately called for the implementation of the following measures: (a) strict entry and monitoring of travelers; (b) strict monitoring of the movement of goods; (c) ensure accurate information and (d) strengthen central-

local government coordination. The President also announced the possibility of providing subsidies to Taiwanese businesses, especially tour operators and manufacturing companies. President Tsai also mentioned the need to enact special laws and budgets to operationalize these measures (ROC, 5969)

As the first COVID-19 cases were reported, the government, through its “Team Taiwan” program, rallied its private sector to produce masks, initially banning its export. In a move to get ahead of the virus, the government undertook rigorous investigations to track the travel and contact history of every patient afflicted with the virus. The effort is also characterized by the innovative use of technology, a centralized command structure, a single-player health system, and efficient decision-making (Frias, 2020).

In an article written by President Tsai for TIME magazine on April 16, 2020, she said they recognized the pandemic as a “humanitarian disaster.” She added that Taiwan needs to strengthen its defenses by mobilizing its health professionals, the private sector, the government, and society at large to mitigate its effects. She also mentioned the establishment of the Central Epidemic Command Center in early January to handle disease prevention and coordination with the various sectors. President Tsai also reiterated the importance of avoiding mass panic buying, which led the government to control the production and distribution of medical-grade face masks (Tsai, 2020).

### Highly Securitized Approach: Israel and Thailand

Israel is, perhaps, an example of a more securitized approach. Its government relied on its security agencies in handling the coronavirus

pandemic. Because of its history of conflict, its security organizations have always enjoyed a high level of trust and confidence among its citizens, and the government's highly securitized approach is viewed as normal under the circumstances. Its prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has described Israel's situation as being at "war with an invisible enemy" (Konrad, 2020) and has rallied its people reminding them to trust in God's guiding presence alluding to the Passover story of the Book of Exodus. (Mitchel, 2020). During his daily media briefings, he has fashioned himself as the "father of the nation", assuring citizens that the current draconian measures of his government are meant to protect its citizens (Haaretz, 2020).

This war declaration prompted the government to take a highly securitized approach. For instance, its internal intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, was allowed to tap technologies used in its war on terror to monitor Israelis afflicted with COVID-19 (Tarnopolsky, 2020). Israel's highly respected and feared intelligence service, the Mossad, used its network to procure medical supplies and to acquire appropriate equipment as well as expertise from international sources. The head of Mossad, Mr. Yossi Cohen, heads the command and control center, which oversees the distribution of medical supplies throughout the country (Bergman, 2020)(Krasna, 2020).

The government is also anticipating widespread civil unrest, calling on the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to prepare for this eventuality. The government also expanded the role of its military reserves, using them to participate in food distribution, night community patrols, and house calls (Sverdlov, 2020). The IDF has also kept a high level of readiness. For example, the navy has ordered several of its ships and submarines to deploy during the onset of the coronavirus to maintain its operational readiness. Its mission is to secure the supply lines since

an estimated 90% of goods imported into Israel comes from the sea (Ahronheim, 2020).

Generally, the Israeli public has praised the government's aggressiveness in dealing with the pandemic. The government is also credited for placing Israel "ahead of the curve" (Halbfinger and Kreshner, 2020). However, these moves by the government to securitize the pandemic is being heavily criticized by the opposition. The decision to use anti-terror technology on Israeli citizens is seen as an invasion of privacy and a tool that can be used against the political opposition (Krasna, 2020). These events have renewed calls for the government to be more transparent so as not to erode public trust.

Countries in Southeast Asia are also struggling with the pandemic, although their approach remains varied. In the case of Thailand, its government adopted a highly-securitized strategy by declaring a national state of emergency on March 24, 2020. This enabled Prime Minister Prayut-o-cha to invoke the 2005 Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations, thus authorizing the government to mobilize its security and public health infrastructure to combat the outbreak. The decree also allowed for the use of force, if necessary, to suppress violence and misinformation. The decree also gave powers to restrict travel, impose curfews, and even ban the consumption of alcoholic beverages (Crispin, 2020; Khunsong, 2020). A ban on the entry of foreign nationals and social gatherings was implemented while the military was designated as the country's primary security arm (Japan Times, 2020). Some critics have been arrested for posting critical views online against the government's perceived incompetence in handling the pandemic. The government justified these arrests as violations under the Computer Crime Act and accused violators of spreading fake news (Peck & Khunsong, 2020).

However, critics characterized the government's response as erratic and corrupt, further alleging that the government is using the pandemic to also infringe on individual rights, control the media, and silence the opposition (HRW, 2020; Peck & Khunsong, 2020; Mchagama & McLaughlin, 2020).

### What can we learn from these experiences?

The profound effects of COVID-19 have caused many states to adopt draconian measures to guarantee public safety. With a supportive audience, this discourse of danger allowed states to undertake “beyond the normal” actions. It can be surmised from the abovementioned cases that these emergency actions are usually characterized by the following: (a) controlling the movement of its population; (b) the promulgation of emergency powers; (c) the conduct of widespread surveillance done by the state's intelligence services; and (d) the use of its military to implement pandemic-related restrictions. Although many agree that states are themselves coping with this new normal, it remains to be seen how governments will revert to normalcy and balance these extreme measures with the need for accountability, transparency, and openness.

In the Taiwanese and South Korean cases, it can be observed that there were initial attempts to securitize COVID-19 through speeches given by political leaders and their government's strategy to adopt a whole-of-society approach. However, these countries avoided total lockdowns and have resorted to aggressive testing and contact tracing to get ahead of the virus. It is also noticeable that the two nations were very particular about transparency and the importance of maintaining



trust between the government and its citizens. Because of this, these countries largely avoided using strong militaristic languages (e.g., war, invasion, etc.) to allay the fears of the public. It also allowed citizens to participate by treating them as conduits to the efforts to prevent the spread of the disease. For instance, the use of innovative smartphone applications lets citizens know nearby COVID-19 infections, thus enabling them to take precautionary measures. Also, mass panic-buying of face masks was avoided with the rationing of these supplies by the government.

It is also important to point out that both countries recorded a relatively low number of infections and deaths attributed to COVID-19. According to Johns Hopkins global tally, as of May 21, 2020, Taiwan has recorded 440 infections and seven deaths, while South Korea has 11,110 infections with 263 deaths. Attempts to desecuritize the situation can be seen in the plans of both governments to support their affected industries through grants and subsidies.

While the cases of Israel and Thailand show varying degrees of securitization, similarities can also be observed. Both countries framed the pandemic as a national security threat, which led to national emergency declarations. These declarations have enabled both governments to impose national lockdowns and curfews aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. Also, the two countries relied heavily on its military and security agencies. In the case of Israel, the country's intelligence services were at the forefront in the sourcing of medical supplies. At the same time, surveillance technologies used in counter-terrorism were mobilized for tracking the movement of individuals with COVID-19. Like Israel, Thailand relied on its military to implement its state of emergency. It also used surveillance technologies to stop misinformation, although critics were quick to

point out that these were meant to silence criticism of its handling of the pandemic.

However, it can be observed that both countries are in the path towards desecuritization. Thailand and Israel are implementing social aid programs and economic stimulus packages for its industries as it struggles to restore normalcy and maintain the stability of their nations. Both countries are also confident that their respective health systems can now effectively deal with the pandemic. According to Johns Hopkins, as of May 21, 2020, Israel has 16,665 infections and 279 deaths, with a high patient recovery estimated at 13,574, while Thailand has 3,034 infections and 56 deaths with high patient recovery at 2,888.

### **The Philippine Response to COVID-19**

The novel coronavirus threat prompted President Rodrigo Duterte to declare a state of public health emergency on March 8, 2020. This proclamation (No. 922) cited the need for a whole-of-government approach in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. This also enabled the government to operate under a public health emergency framework emphasizing the importance of community-level preparedness in monitoring and isolating possible cases. However, the WHO pandemic declaration and reports of the rising incidence of infections prompted the Philippine government to declare a “national state of calamity” on March 16, 2020, through Proclamation No. 929. The declaration placed the entire Philippines under a 6-month emergency mode, while the whole Luzon island was placed in an Enhanced Community

### *Box 2 . Salient Points of Proclamation No.929*

- *Underscored the need to strengthen national/global laboratory networks*
- *Placed the entire Philippines on a 6-month state of emergency*
- *Paved the way for the implementation of an enhanced community quarantine in Luzon*
- *Directed all national agencies and local governments to allot resources and pursue actions that would eliminate the COVID-19 threat*
- *Ordered all security and public safety agencies to maintain peace and order*
- *Instructed the executive secretary and the secretary of health to craft guidelines for the implementation of the ECQ*

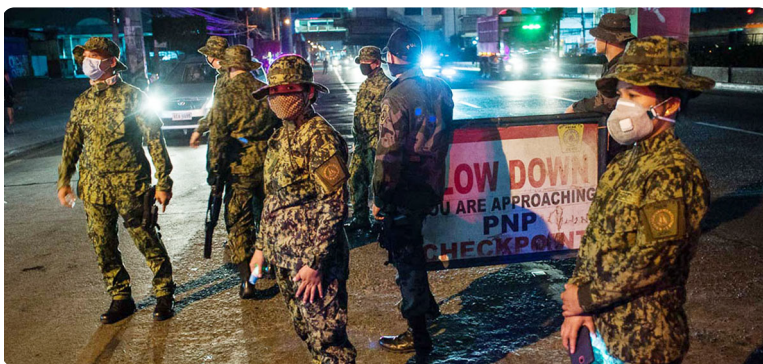
*Source: (Official Gazette, 2020)*

Quarantine (ECQ) up to April 14. Box 2 shows the critical points of Proclamation No. 929.

Proclamation No. 929 clearly showed the government's attempt to securitize the COVID-19 threat. In his televised speech, President Duterte, flanked by generals and admirals, justified his decision by saying that he does not have the luxury of guessing the possible impact of the contagion and described the pandemic as an invisible enemy. Although the President assured that the ECQ is not similar to the imposition of martial law, the Proclamation was nevertheless seen as a draconian solution. It included mandatory home quarantines, the suspension of mass public transportation, closure of schools and business establishments as well as restrictions on the entry of foreigners. In one of his press conferences, the President even instructed the military and the police to "shoot violators of the ECQ" once the situation becomes untenable.



*Figure 1 . President Duterte flanked by high ranking military and police officials during the March 16 state of calamity proclamation and the subsequent deployment of AFP and police units in ECQ checkpoints in the Metro Manila*



Source: [pcoo.gov.ph](http://pcoo.gov.ph) and [rappler.com](http://rappler.com)

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Consequently, the national emergency declaration immediately saw the deployment of police and military units to enforce the ECQ. Local governments mobilized its public safety and community defense units to support the proclamation. Several cities and municipalities in the Visayas and Mindanao adopted their lockdowns. Given these actions, it is clear that the national government is intent on using all its resources to address the adverse effects of the outbreak.

However, the onset of the ECQ also led to widespread confusion and fears among the public. For instance, the Presidential Declaration on March 16, 2020, allowed local governments to implement their own lockdowns and curfews. Most of these measures were inconsistent with the national guidelines promulgated by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) on COVID-19. These lapses eventually caused the prices of essential commodities like vegetables and poultry to rise by 5% to 46% (Ocampo, 2020). Furthermore, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) estimates the lockdown will initially affect 500,000 workers due to the temporary closure of 9,028 business establishments (Santos and Aurelio, 2020). This was further aggravated by the projected shortage in rice supply and the outbreak of the African swine flu epidemic in Luzon. To address this dire situation, the Department of Agriculture imported 300,000 metric tons of rice and has culled 250,000 pigs (Simeon, 2020; Mendoza et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic also surfaced the limitations of the country's public health system. Hospitals continue to experience severe inadequacies in their PPE and testing supplies. Even with expanded testing from satellite laboratories, the DOH has failed to meet its target of 8,000 tests per day as of May 1, 2020.

This chaotic situation was further exacerbated due to failures in leadership. For instance, during a congressional hearing on February 15, 2020, revealed that the DOH was caught flatfooted in its initial response to the coronavirus, admitting that it failed to do aggressive contact tracing and coordination with other government agencies. In the same venue, the DOH even castigated its own Epidemiology Bureau for incompetence and complained of a lack of manpower (Paris, 2020). At this point, the implementation of RA 11332 (Disease Surveillance Law of 2018) proved to be wanting as the DOH struggled

to collect data from communities, hence failed to show how the disease is progressing.

In the weeks that followed, allegations of underreporting of infections and the inability of the government to track the spread of the disease surfaced, leading to calls by legislators for the health secretary to resign (Domingo, 2020). The situation further exacerbated by confusion among local governments about its role and surfaced the inability of the police to implement the ECQ strictly. Social disparities were made more pronounced as the lockdown took its toll on the marginalized and vulnerable sectors of the society.

In addition, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is also struggling with the enormous demand placed on its resources. In an April 26 press briefing, no less than Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana raised the possibility of overburdening the limited airlift and sealift capabilities of the AFP (Mangosing, 2020).

### *Box 3 . Highlights of RA 11469 or the Bayanihan Act of 2020*

- *Grant the Executive Branch the authority to reallocate PhP 275 Billion from the National Budget*
- *Provide subsidy to low income household affected by work stoppages*
- *Stand by powers to take over private businesses*
- *Grant exemptions to the procurement law*
- *Liberalize incentives for manufacturers and importers*
- *Enforce measure against hoarding, profiteering, injurious speculations, manipulation of prices*
- *Expand the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino program*
- *Regulate the use of public transportation, water, fuel supply and energy resources*

*Source: (Official Gazette, 2020)*

To address the looming national crisis, the government resorted to further securitizing the situation. On March 22, Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea presented to Congress a proposal from Malacañang requesting the granting of emergency powers to the President. By March 26, the Bayanihan Heal as One Act (RA 11469) was signed into law giving the president expanded powers to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The public widely supported this move since it saw the necessity of providing all the necessary tools for the government to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus. Box 3 presents the critical items of the Bayanihan Act of 2020.

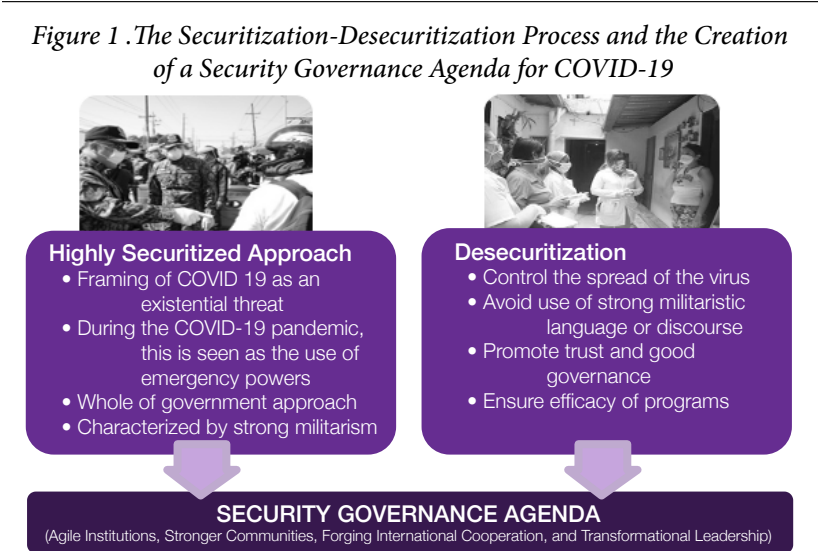
The new law also gave the government additional powers to ensure the following: (a) minimize supply chain disruptions; (b) reschedule national tax deadlines; (c) grant authority to hire additional healthcare workers; and (d) ensure credit availability to affected sectors. Moreover, the government assured the public of the availability of funds to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. Finance officials unveiled a 4-pillar strategy to fight COVID-19- PhP 305.2 billion for poor, PhP 35.7 billion to fight the disease and PhP 830.5 billion to support the country's recovery plan (DOF, 2020). While the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), the country's central bank, said that it would inject PhP 300 billion to finance the government's COVID-19 efforts and fund the government massive infrastructure program (Rivas, 2020).

However, critics have slammed the Bayanihan law, calling it unnecessary and may lead to the declaration of martial law. Local human rights groups alleged that the granting of emergency powers is meant to cover up the lapses and may serve as a prelude to military rule. It also contends that the government is using sedition and cyber libel laws to quell dissent and silence its critics (Navallo, 2020; Heydarian,

2020). For its part, the National Union of Journalist of the Philippines (NUJP) has referred to the government as the “arbiter of what is true or false,” citing the numerous arrests done by the police in various parts of the country. This has provoked fears that the extraordinary powers afforded by the Bayanihan act will not be rolled back once the pandemic has passed (Aspinwall, 2020). Furthermore, demands for more transparency are increasing as allegations of corruption and misreporting of cases are uncovered.

**Discussion: Securitization-Desecuritization Process and the Need to Develop a Security Governance Agenda**

At this point, it is crucial to reiterate the significance of a process of desecuritization to enable the Philippines to achieve normalcy. For



Source: National Security Strategy, 2018; Official Gazette, 2020; Palomba, 2018; Webber, 2007



this, the creation of a security governance agenda plays an essential part in this process. The paper posits that prolonged securitization in its extreme form (e.g., Use of emergency powers, total lockdowns, strong militarism, etc.) is not sustainable and may cause more harm than good. Extended high levels of securitization cannot guarantee that these draconian measures can address the adverse effects of the pandemic. Its extreme form is also open to abuse and could lead to the undermining of democratic values. Figure 1 shows the process of securitization-desecuritization and how pursuing a security governance agenda can be used to hasten this process.

The following discussion also highlights the importance of learning from the experiences of other countries. The author believes that the lessons from SARS and the Ebola epidemics can provide valuable insights while COVID-19 best practices from countries like Taiwan, Israel, and South Korea can be emulated. In addition, the examination of current national security policies and programs gives us insights into the government's views and security priorities. It is likely that due to the novel nature of the pandemic, oversights can be discovered. Still, it should be emphasized that the purpose of this examination is to address these lapses and propose ways on how to solve these problems.

Also, this section discusses the other factors that will hasten desecuritization such as the following (Figure 1): (a) control the spread of the virus; (b) avoid the use of strong militaristic language; (c) promotes trust and good governance; (d) ensure the efficacy of programs. These factors can be used to develop a security governance agenda to pursue the process of desecuritization further. Managing this process simply requires the development of a security governance roadmap that incorporates the following: (a) the need to develop agile organizations/institutions; (b) build stronger communities; (c)

forge international cooperation; and (d) need for transformational leadership.

*Desecuritizing the COVID-19 Response:*

*Learning from Experiences and Best Practices*

Non-traditional threats are not new to the Philippines. At this point, it is essential to mention that to desecuritize the situation, there is a need to do two things. The first is to get ahead of the virus, meaning that the government and its partners should pursue aggressive testing, contact tracing, and containment. Social distancing must now be considered as a norm, while the phased reopening of society must be sought. At the same time, the government should provide useful guidelines on how the various sectors of society can reopen. The current whole-of-society approach should be complemented with innovation and reinforced by good governance practices. For this, we can look at the experiences of countries that have so far succeeded in their fight against the novel coronavirus and similar outbreaks.

For SARS and Ebola (EVD) as well as COVID-19, early detection remains one of the key takeaways. In all outbreaks, the aggressive screening at ports of entry and contact tracing are essential practices to mitigate the spread of the virus. For SARS, Singapore's aggressive contact tracing and surveillance of cases proved to be successful in stemming from the onslaught of viruses. While for COVID-19, the contact tracing and screening practices of Taiwan and South Korea are considered global best practices. In both countries, it can be observed that there was a low level of securitization. This low level was evidenced by the avoidance of large-scale lockdowns that characterized the highly securitized approach of Israel and Thailand. Although

both countries initially presented the pandemic as an existential threat, these countries learned from their previous bouts with SARS and MERSCOV. The two nations underscored the importance of mobilizing their citizens through public awareness campaigns as well as by employing innovative tracking techniques to avoid the spread of the virus. Massive subsidy programs targeting the most affected sectors are also in place. These programs will enable Taiwan and South Korea to restore normalcy, thus hasten its desecuritization process. The second item is to learn from our experiences in DRRM. This entails a review of our existing laws and practices, as stressed by Webber (2007) and related regimes (Eilstrup and Sangiovanni, 2014).

The country has seen its share of adverse climate events as well as human-made calamities. Seasonal health outbreaks like that of dengue and influenza are annual occurrences. In the area of disaster risk reduction (DRR), the Philippines is recognized as one of the pioneers of community-based disaster management practices. The passage of the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act of 2010 (RA 10121) has led to substantial improvements in how local governments respond to climate-induced calamities. Local governments used this law to address dengue outbreaks and even for the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, numerous studies point to the recurring gaps in capacity and resources. For instance, a 2019 report from the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction leads to the need to strengthen further the institutional capabilities of both national agencies and local governments to deal with natural disasters. The report stressed the need to harmonize the goals of DRR, climate resiliency, and sustainable development. It further suggested that civil society groups, grassroots organizations, and faith-based organizations should be given a more prominent role in disaster management. In the area of knowledge

management, no less than the Commission on Audit (COA) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) cited the gaps in the collection of data, its storage and use that would enable tracking of donations, and the creation of a database for disaster response (SEPO, 2017).

Alcayna et al. (2016) cite the perennial problem of understaffing and the need to maintain a competent human resource base for the local DRR councils. These challenges in the DRRM in the Philippines are somewhat reflected in the current response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is clearly shown in the inability of the DOH to conduct adequate community-level testing and aggressive contact tracing. Moreover, even the IATF admitted that they lack an updated database of recipients for the emergency cash aid under the social amelioration program (SAP). This situation forced the national government to rely on hastily prepared lists coming from community-level (barangay-level) officials. Because of this, allegations of corruption and favoritism surfaced, casting doubts on the efficacy of the SAP.

In terms of data management, there are also serious allegations that the current COVID-19 data are inaccurate due to lapses in reporting. This severely undermines the effort of the government to get ahead of the viral curve. To further exacerbate the situation, this data lapses together with the easing of quarantine restrictions, and the return of OFWs to the Philippines may lead to the second wave of infections. This raises questions about the government's ability to monitor and control this new wave. Moreover, we can also learn from the 2013 EVD experience that epidemics have a gender aspect. With this, the Philippine government must now plan and adopt proactive measures on how to address gender vulnerabilities as part of its security governance agenda.

### *Avoid Strong Militaristic Language*

To further facilitate desecuritization, the government must avoid using strong militaristic language. An allusion to war or an invasion as a means to depict the pandemic is dangerous and outright erroneous. This discourse of danger can further foment fear and may result in panic. Instead, such a depiction must be replaced with the need for national unity and the role of each individual in mitigating the effects of the virus. The language that promotes uncertainty and fear must now be replaced with certainty. This lesson is evident in the cases of Taiwan, and South Korea cases wherein the leaders of both countries initially adopted a strong national emergency tone but eventually shifted to a public health emergency mode. Images matter as well. For instance, strong militarism displayed in soldiers implementing curfew and community quarantine can initially present a determined national response. However, the government must temper this image with assurances of its temporary nature and the primacy of the rule of law. It must also guard against abuse and ensure that threats are sufficiently addressed.

### *Promoting Trust, Good Governance and Ensuring the Efficacy of Programs*

Trust is a vital commodity in desecuritization. The relationship between the government and its citizens must never be broken, especially during times of emergency. With this, the government must maintain this relationship by promoting good governance principles. For instance, emergencies are occasions where people demand information. Because of this, authorities must guarantee access to accurate and timely information. The cases of Taiwan and Korea point

to the importance of transparency and openness to promote trust in government. Sourcing of information through population surveillance is also an instrument in a country's national security toolbox. The example of Israel stands out as it deploys technologies used in their counter-terrorism operations. Although the majority generally accepts this, there are calls for extra caution as it can adversely affect privacy rights.

Communication also plays a crucial role in promoting trust. Being able to communicate with citizens through different mediums (e.g., Tri-media, internet) and various local dialects can further avoid conflict and misinformation.

Trust can further be maintained by calling for participation. Participation encourages citizens to see their role as partners and household front liners in the fight against the pandemic. For instance, the call by some local governments for households to create their backyard garden is a right way of encouraging families to be self-sufficient. The DOH campaign of promoting cleanliness habits is another excellent example of how families can participate in controlling the spread of the virus. Furthermore, ensuring the efficacy of programs is an essential part of the desecuritization process. The government must now guarantee that its grants and social aid are correctly monitored and delivered to the intended recipients. For this, digital transformation models and information technology can provide useful techniques and tools to support this endeavor.

To further sustain the process of desecuritization, the paper advocates for the creation of a security governance agenda. Security governance calls for also managing the desecuritization process by highlighting the importance of policies, organizations, and leadership.

## Developing a Security Governance Agenda: The Need to Build Agile Institutions

Webber (2007) stressed that during the process of desecuritization, policies, and institutions matter. While Roe (2006) further adds to the practical side by citing the significance of how threats are perceived and how these threats are addressed. These views require an examination of national security policies and programs. Proposed laws related to the pandemic will also be discussed.

The National Security Policy (NSP, 2017-2022) outlines the security priorities of the Philippines. This policy cites the need for the country to prepare for traditional and non-traditional threats. On the conventional security aspect, it highlights the need to address the immediate threats besetting the country. From internal security to external defense, the NSP stressed the importance of empowering communities and harnessing international cooperation to resolve conflicts. It also points to the need to protect the Philippine economy from global economic downturns.

Furthermore, the NSP also cited the importance of addressing non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, criminality, and climate change. However, there was little emphasis given to pandemics as a non-traditional threat. The document merely mentioned health security as a necessary ingredient to the quality of life of Filipinos (p. 24). This lukewarm treatment of health security is further shown in the non-inclusion of health/medical supplies as part of the strategic industries and flagship projects that are essential to national security (p. 27).

Another important policy document is the National Security Strategy (2018), which presents a detailed discussion of the NSP.

However, similar to the NSP, it focuses on internal security, external defense, and a common non-traditional threat like adverse climate events, cybersecurity, and terrorism. Despite the threat posed by pandemics, it was seen as one of the many aspects of human security. Moreover, the document contained policy proposals to support the health aspect of human security, such as the following: (a) expansion of the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM); (b) implementation of vaccination programs, and (c) Improvement of the nation's chemical, biological, radio-nuclear (CBRN) capabilities (p. 48). Unfortunately, it is only a one-and-a-half-page discussion in a 116-page document and thus need to be expanded in light of the current situation.

Legislative proposals are also vital to the desecuritization process. To date, there are two major legislative proposals related to the pandemic. One is the proposed creation of the Philippine Center for Disease Control (House Bill No. 6096), which aims to fill the institutional gaps in disease surveillance and mitigation. Another is the proposed New Normal bill (House Bill No. 6223) that aims to institutionalize safe distancing practices as well as the use of face masks and implement effective disease mitigation mechanisms.

The heavily-securitized approach by the Philippine government was characterized by reliance on its security and law enforcement agencies to implement the ECQ. Soldiers from the three major branches of the AFP augmented the Philippine National Police (PNP) in maintaining community lockdowns, enforcing curfews, and providing medical services. While the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) also added to the effort by providing additional personnel to man checkpoints, provide medical assistance and transport much-needed supplies. However, this proved to be an enormous task for these organizations as it finds



itself overburdened, and its resources further stretched to its limit.

A security governance agenda will be remiss if it fails to reexamine the current modernization programs of its defense and law enforcement agencies.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines Modernization Program (AFPMP) and the Philippine National Police Modernization Plan (PNP-MP) are currently being implemented. However, its current priorities are in the areas of traditional-internal security threats. For instance, the AFPMP emphasized the need to restore its lost conventional warfare capabilities, thus resulting in the procurement of jet trainers, naval frigates, and the improvement of the capabilities of its land forces. Non-traditional threats were primarily seen as part of its humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) acquisitions and are usually tied to the AFP's ability to respond to adverse climate events. Consequently, acquisitions along this area focused on additional transport planes and logistics ships. These purchases proved to be vital but grossly insufficient as the country struggled against COVID-19.

For its part, the objective of the PNP-MP focused is to improve the ability of police units to “move, shoot, communicate and investigate.” Thus, this paved the way for the acquisition of additional firearms, helicopters, and force protection equipment. SMART policing, infrastructure development, among others, are also part of this program (Dalizon, 2019).

Lastly, the PCG also embarked on its modernization program. The program focused on the expansion of its maritime and air assets, as well as improving its firepower and expanding its human resources. Most of these acquisitions are primarily meant to support the government's counter-terrorism and maritime security operations (Parameswaran, 2017).

These modernization programs missed the need to prepare for non-traditional threats like pandemics. It is imperative at this point that the government's security governance agenda include revisions to the acquisitions of these agencies. Furthermore, it is also important to stress the need to reexamine the doctrinal basis for these programs. This will enable these organizations to adopt a more strategic outlook in their modernization plans.

### Developing a Security Governance Agenda: Foster International Cooperation

The staggering global impact of the coronavirus will further securitize global health. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa proved to be the starting point to foster the demand for international cooperation to address viral outbreaks. Although the WHO was widely criticized for its delayed response, it nevertheless developed protocols through the revised international health regulation (IHR) and demanded that countries adhere to its tenets. It can be expected that because of the magnitude of COVID-19, WHO will compel countries to invest more in their health systems and vaccination programs. Other regional blocs and associations are expected to echo this securitization move by the WHO. For instance, with calls to revamp its crisis management system, the European Union (EU) is now faced with questions about its lackluster response to the pandemic. ASEAN, for its part, sees the need to strengthen its pandemic response capabilities further, calling for closer military cooperation among its member states (Tsjeng, 2020).

For its part, the Philippines will have to forge closer ties with

the WHO and the international community. The transnational implications of the coronavirus are profound, as it would affect not only health but also socio-economic and political stability. The country needs to reexamine its compliance with the IHR and sponsor revisions to the agreement that would lead to the strengthening of public health systems. Moreover, the Philippines should now lead ASEAN in pandemic response and mitigation. It can start by reorienting the association's climate-centric response to that which includes health pandemics.

### Developing a Security Governance Agenda: The Need for Transformational Leadership

During times of national emergency, national governments must maintain a united front against a common threat. This is part of the formal and informal regimes that Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2014) was referring to. For instance, the whole of government strategy adopted by the Philippines is an excellent way to underscore the importance of national unity. However, the country's highly securitized approach is not sustainable. Prolonged use of emergency powers can lead to distrust, overburden frontline organizations, and encourage the use of resources with little fiscal oversight.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that pursuing its security governance agenda requires exceptional leadership to guide the desecuritization process. As shown in the examples of Taiwan and South Korea, this type of leadership involves adherence to good governance principles, promote trust between the government and its citizens. This new brand of leadership also requires that leaders can

adopt innovative solutions. Again, Taiwan and South Korea, as part of their new normal strategies, are eyeing the use of digital transformation models for their supply chain and customer service portfolio as well as for work/study from home arrangements. These technology-driven initiatives are seen as solutions to minimize the economic and social disruptions due to the pandemic.

Transformational leadership also requires effective communication. For this, national and local leaders should learn how to empathize with their citizens and allay their fears. In the process of desecuritization, leaders should avoid the use of strong militaristic languages and images, as this can lead to further uncertainties and fear.

### Developing a Security Governance Agenda: The Need to Build Stronger Communities

A security governance agenda should also recognize the indispensable role of communities and local governments during health emergencies. Aggressive contact tracing practices of Singapore during the SARS outbreak, as well as that of Taiwan and South Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic, are examples worthy of emulation. The Philippines has a vast network of village-based health community monitors. Further empowering this network requires the deployment of a suitable reporting system. Capacity building programs must also be implemented. Moreover, communities must also benefit from the nationwide surveillance initiatives through access to applications that will enable the local use of community-relevant health data. For this to gain credence, there is a need for national leaders and policymakers to recognize that communities and households are the country's first line of defense against viral outbreaks.

## Policy Recommendations

A post-pandemic scenario requires countries to restore stability and ensure public safety by adapting to the new normal. We will see a lot of postmortems, but clearly, achieving societal resilience is of utmost importance. This paper, once again, reiterates the argument that a highly securitized approach to public health emergencies is not sustainable. Therefore, there is a need to undergo a desecuritization process and create a security governance agenda to ensure resiliency. In the case of the Philippines, there is a need to reexamine existing policies and identify the possible gaps. For this, the paper presents the following policy recommendations that can support a possible security governance agenda.

### *a. Re-examine the National Security Policies of the Philippines*

The government's highly securitized approach to the pandemic showed that our national security planners failed to fully grasp its impact. For this, there is a need to reexamine the tenets of the NSP and the NSS. Security planners must now expand their view of the dangers posed by non-traditional threats, especially health pandemics, requiring that the NSP and NSS expand its definition and appreciation of this threat. Specifically, revisions to the NSS should include the need to secure the logistics/supply chain of medical supplies and recognize the medical supply sector as a strategic industry. Furthermore, the move to expand the RITM should be pursued vigorously. Plans should also accompany this proposal on how to create a network of affiliated laboratories and research centers that can augment the RITM's capabilities.

Lastly, the government's securitized approach showed its reliance on security and public safety agencies to implement the ECQ. Pandemic

response coincided with traditional security concerns, which resulted in the overburdening of these organizations. For this, a thorough review of its modernization programs is needed. Future acquisitions must allow these agencies to better respond to non-traditional threats.

Lastly, policymakers should now consider enacting a new national defense act. The 1935 law (Commonwealth Act No. 1) is deemed to be obsolete and, therefore, not reflective of the country's security needs. This new law can provide the impetus for national security planning and doctrine development. This can also formalize the whole-of-society strategies and consider both traditional as well as non-traditional threats.

#### *b. Need to Develop Agile Institutions*

The onslaught of COVID-19 saw the closure of businesses, schools, and government offices, among others. To minimize the effects of these closures in the future, the public and private sectors should seriously consider creating themselves as agile organizations. Agile institutions or organizations are entities that can quickly adapt, respond, learn, and innovate. For this, the New Normal Bill (House Bill No. 6623) is a welcome proposal, but it should incorporate provisions for developing organizational agility.

Existing laws may also be used to create agile institutions. For instance, the National ID Law (RA 11055) requires the implementation of a national ID system to facilitate transactions with the government. At the same time, the Ease of Doing Business Law (RA 11032) mandates the development of online information systems to improve the delivery of government services. These laws can provide the impetus for achieving the government's Philippine Digital Transformation Strategy. In short, online government services

can lead to organizational agility. E-government services can also promote good governance.

There is a need to review further the Disease Surveillance Law of 2018 (RA 11332) and its relevance to the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Law (RA 10121). Systems and programs for disaster management and pandemics are similar. Therefore, resources allotted for the implementation of these laws can be consolidated to avoid duplication.

The proposal to establish the Philippine Center for Disease Control (House Bill No. 6096) can also be considered given the inability of DOH-affiliated agencies to respond to the pandemic adequately. While adding another bureaucratic layer is not always an optimal solution, the bill should ensure that the proposed agency is given sufficient authority and resources to perform its tasks.

### *c. Build Stronger Communities*

In the Philippines, local governments and their communities are always viewed as first responders to public emergencies. During health pandemics, DRRM practices can also be adopted. However, there will always be a need to capacitate further community frontliners such as the barangay health workers and nutrition specialists. Local governments must improve their disease-surveillance systems and response mechanisms, as well as invest in building its resiliency. Again, a review of the country's DRR and the health surveillance laws are needed for this.

In the medical community, COVID-19 has surfaced the need to review the current Magna Carta for Health Workers Law. For instance, issues of occupational safety (e.g., Lack of PPEs) and additional social safety nets (e.g., Need for insurance) must be considered to protect the

community. Moreover, the post-COVID-19 environment will see a surge in demand for Filipino health professionals. Policymakers must now use this opportunity to further strengthen medical education in the country.

The ability of our society to be resilient is also contingent on our ability to learn. For this, further investments must be made in research and development. Academe and research institutions must now give meaning to our experiences to avoid future catastrophes. For its part, the government must support these research initiatives by defining areas of inquiry and by providing grants.

*d. Forge International Partnerships*

Like SARS and Ebola, COVID-19 showed us that it does not respect national boundaries. Thus, its transnational nature underscores the importance of international cooperation in addressing the adverse effects of the pandemic. The Philippines must now seize the opportunity of leading the ASEAN initiatives on COVID-19. The Philippines can also provide adequate representation for developing and least developed countries in global bodies like the WHO.

Global health challenges will stay with humanity in the foreseeable future. Because of this, the Philippines must ensure that the country can withstand the adverse effects of COVID-19 and be more prepared to deal with future pandemics. Thus, the country can use the concept of securitization-desecuritization and develop its security governance agenda to ensure societal resiliency.



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<sup>1</sup> Page 50 image credit: [www.news.yahoo.com/philippines-reports-2-611-novel-080236171.html](http://www.news.yahoo.com/philippines-reports-2-611-novel-080236171.html)

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