

PHILIPPINE DIPLOMACY IN A CHANGING WORLD ORDER

By: Amb. Albert del Rosario

Lecture Forum at Ateneo

Nov. 13, 2018

Let me first of all thank Ateneo for once again inviting me to speak on a timely and important subject. I am deeply humbled by Ateneo's continuing confidence in me and I hope to fully reciprocate that trust by sharing some thoughts that I hope you will find relevant and thought-provoking.

In a humorous way, standing before you, I find myself in a paradox. While I was in the foreign service, I knew a lot but could say very little. Now that I am out of the service, I know very little but I am being asked to say a lot. A failing memory is also not very helpful.

Nevertheless, to manage today's expectations, I will endeavor to start with my prepared remarks dwelling on priorities of Philippine foreign policy; this is to be followed by anecdotes on our adventures in implementing our foreign policy; to end we will have a Q&A portion.

The first part is what I should say to you folks. I will do that. The second and third parts may dwell on what I really may want to say which requires a prior understanding on how we can do this within the boundaries of good order. How about I propose we follow Chatham House Rules which is the

protocol in a London based forum where we can say anything without fear of attribution. On a just in case basis, I will ask that we all agree to Chatham House Rules for today. Anyone who does not agree, please raise your hand. So thank you, we all agree then.

The title of our main discussion today is Philippines Diplomacy in a Changing World Order. Certainly, we are being bombarded everyday with news and images of a world seemingly out of control. There seems to be across the board disruptions in so many fields at the same time. Long stable countries have disintegrated internally. Old alliances are being called into question. A large-scale trade war is brewing between major economic powers.

The questions that that these trends raise are both troubling and obscure. Are we on the verge of another nuclear arms race cycle? How will we fare in the struggle for global economic dominance among some of our closest foreign trade and investment partners? What must we do to manage the inevitable onslaught of the results of the new wave of artificial intelligence captured in the Fourth Industrial Revolution? Is it possible to have better global migration governance with hundreds of millions of people on the move, involving millions of our own kababayan? What about climate change and its effects on the Philippines? How do we manage the tidal wave of fake news?

It is easy to be overwhelmed. One of the distinctive features of our present times is growing uncertainty. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that we are at the dawn of an Age of Uncertainty. The comfortable policy certainties of the past have evaporated. We can no longer rely exclusively on the lessons of our forebears.

Our Ship of State now has to navigate uncharted waters that are broader and more perilous than perhaps at any other time in the past half-century. We must choose our course carefully. We must ensure that our Ship of State is seaworthy. And our seamanship has to be the best we can provide.

Crowded by so many imponderables, we must first make sure of our ballast. The analogy here is to discern the sources of our foreign policy which is the key to its understanding. I submit that our foreign policy is a function of our national policies. What are the wellsprings of those policies?

First of all, the Philippines has to be able to ensure its territorial integrity and independence as a nation-state. Its integrity as a state can and has been threatened externally and internally. Sovereignty is the touchstone of our actions, whether in defence of our maritime territory, or to protect against domestic terrorists, separatists and insurgents. So naturally the protection of national security and territorial integrity is a critical part of Philippine foreign policy.

Second, that the Philippines is a developing nation with a growing population in Southeast Asia. Whereas in earlier years, Southeast Asia had been beset by conflict and instability, it is now known as the home of ASEAN, a fairly successful regional organization and the fastest growing region in the world.

As a developing nation, the primordial concern is to promote inclusive growth, expand decent employment, improve technological capabilities and elevate the general standard of living of the people. This can best be done through improving the country's competitiveness in the context of a policy of economic openness and regional integration. Supporting development, therefore, has been a crucial aspect of the foreign policy of our nation.

Third, the total number of international migrants in the world is estimated at some 280 million people. The Philippines accounts for only about 10 million of those, but these have been vital for the economic well-being for our country. Hence the emphasis in Philippine foreign policy on protecting the rights and welfare of migrant Filipinos and by extension its profound interest in securing bilateral, regional and international migration governance cooperation.

Yet there is a fourth, intangible but fundamentally important wellspring of our foreign policy. And that is the values by which we aspire to live as a nation. We see ourselves as an emerging democracy with a proud national tradition not only of fighting for freedom, but endeavouring to ensure that such freedom provides a better life for our people.

The liberty and rights we cherish as a free people inform much of our action on the international stage. From these fundamentals we forged our stance of friendship for all who seek to be our friends, of cooperation with like-minded nations, of the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy, of respect for international law covering many areas including non-aggression, sovereignty, the peaceful resolution of disputes, adherence to the rule of law in international relations, human rights, climate justice and humane conditions for migration.

These democratic values moved us to become a Charter Member of the United Nations and a founding member of ASEAN, APEC and other groupings aiming to promote closer understanding, mutual benefits and progress overall through the peaceful avenues of diplomacy, commerce, economic integration, functional cooperation and peaceful exchanges of all kinds.

These then are the three guiding pillars, priorities or focal points of Philippine foreign policy: National Security; National Development, and Overseas Filipinos. Philippine

foreign policy, therefore, must continue to navigate through the problems and issues of international relations with these focal points, often interlinked with one another, as the principal guides for action.

In a world beset by growing uncertainties, our diplomacy must in general support national development while helping to secure stability, security and peace at home, within our immediate region and if at possible, globally as well.

Philippine diplomacy has long assisted our security agencies in the major tasks of combating internal insurgency and terrorism. The spread of violent extremism after 9/11 has not stopped. Modern terrorism is transnational as well as increasingly cyber-enabled.

We will continue to seek counter-terror assistance in the form of capacity-building, training, intelligence sharing and other measures with the United States, our Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) ally and other partners nearby and further afield, as well as in regional and multilateral organizations. No country can defeat modern terrorism on its own so cooperation with other states will remain a national security priority.

However, we recognize that in the long run, we cannot prevail over extremist ideologies and violent separatism with military means alone. Philippine diplomats, therefore, have also supported the peace process through various avenues, including bilateral programs and with international

NGO's. Cooperation has centered on building conditions most conducive to durable peace through a variety of measures for disarming combatants, promoting local development and livelihoods, and strengthening local government, policing and education.

In addition, Philippine diplomacy has sought to be instrumental in aiding the country's military modernization for external defense to protect our maritime territories. However, our defenses remain modest. Furthermore, our country is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes and to respect for the rule of law in international relations.

This was why the Philippines chose to go for arbitration in trying to manage the South China Sea dispute. This dispute is multifaceted, involving several states claiming different portions of the South China Sea. Arbitration is fully consistent with international law, the United Nations Charter and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Our legal position was found to be sound and the international arbitration tribunal ruled against Beijing's so-called Nine-Dash Line, which by claiming virtually the whole South China Sea, was the principal source of this dispute.

This legal victory for the country is of great significance. It defends the applicability and hence stability of UNCLOS and can hopefully offer a basis for an eventual long-term resolution of the South China Sea dispute. Nonetheless, given China's refusal to recognize the tribunal's decision,

the Philippines has also been active in finding other, pragmatic means for defusing tensions and avoiding maritime clashes. These have included confidence-building measures (CBM's), bilateral and ASEAN-based regional dialogues, and most importantly, negotiations for an eventual binding Code of Conduct on the South China Sea.

Some of our compatriots also believe that joint exploration for resources in the disputed areas could be another avenue for reducing tension and overcoming misunderstanding. My view is that this must be done very carefully and only after multisectoral consultations to ensure that all dimensions of this joint exploration proposal are fully understood.

Our most critical foreign policy project has been ASEAN and its many mechanisms and other regional bodies especially APEC. The reasons are compelling. Southeast Asia is our home region. It is where we find our closest neighbors. Southeast Asia, moreover, is part of East Asia and the Western Pacific, a part of the world where vital interests of all other major world powers, and our largest economic partners, intersect.

When it was founded more than half-a-century ago, ASEAN was composed of five, weak nations that had only recently come through the conflicts of decolonization, nascent independence and the Cold War. I don't believe anyone could then have foreseen what ASEAN would eventually become. Indeed, in its earliest years, ASEAN was regarded with

considerable suspicion by both the Western and Eastern Blocs.

However, ASEAN stuck to its guns. Instead of becoming a military pact, the original ASEAN Five chose non-alignment and low-profile political, economic and social dialogue and cooperation. Decisions were made by consensus. Growth was very measured and deliberate. But the ASEAN Five and its neighbors pursued a policy of bringing the whole region under one big tent in order to heal the wounds of the Indochinese wars, to stabilize Southeast Asia and to shield the region from deeper great power meddling.

Prudent economic policies and a general attitude of economic openness enabled ASEAN Member States to take maximum advantage of the globalization that was enveloping the world. Today, the ASEAN Ten has a regional population of some 640 million, a very large and increasingly integrated regional economy, and contains some of the fastest growing economies in the world, including the Philippines.

The Philippines played its part in ASEAN's ascent. We were a founding member. We helped forge the economic agreements that brought us closer through trade, investment and tourism. We took a lead role in the drafting of the ASEAN Charter. We worked with our ASEAN partners to foster a closer sense of regional community. And we helped build the elaborate system of dialogues and summits

with our key partners, including China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India, the United States, Canada, the European Union and Russia to reinforce ASEAN centrality in regional affairs.

Now ASEAN has to face the future. There is a lot of opinion that ASEAN could do more to determine the strategic climate in East Asia. ASEAN has faced criticism on issues such as human rights and the South China Sea.

However, some people would believe that it is best for ASEAN to focus on elements that strengthen the development drive of its Members and consolidate its regional prowess and identity. This means ASEAN should continue with deepening regional integration, improving connectivity, strengthening capabilities, especially in science and technology, attracting employment-generating investment, modernizing infrastructure and taking the steps necessary to remain competitive in the midst of possible trade wars. ASEAN must also be prepared for the economic disruptions expected from the so-called industrial revolution and expanding Artificial Intelligence applications. The aim may not be self-reliance, but in a world that is still globalizing, to attain greater regional resilience to withstand external shocks.

The same concerns should to be addressed in APEC and other regional economic colloquia as well. Despite storm clouds gathering on the trade front, and the slowing down of

global growth, East Asia and ASEAN still face very good economic prospects. If only investments can be mobilized and properly channeled to where they are most needed, such as in expanded and refurbished transportation networks, urban renewal and the greening the economy.

Nonetheless, our region still requires political and security stability in the region to allow our countries to work toward development. The advent of the Trump Administration and China's rising power have generated challenges we must face. Fortunately, we seem to have had measured progress on the Korean Peninsula. But there are other problems. Given our external orientation, the freedom of navigation and peaceful seas are vital, yet there continue to be flareups in the South and East China Seas. And most recently, there is now the possible danger of a renewed nuclear weapons race which may affect the Asia-Pacific.

We have to encourage dialogue and trust-building among the major powers to shield our region from their rivalry. This can be done by providing venues to reinforce our areas of common interest in stability, security and interchange. It is in this context that the Philippines needs also to maintain our external security links with the United States, our only defence ally, and with like-minded countries such as Japan and Australia.

Keeping our defence ties strong is not taking sides. It is a conservative position conducive to stability. It is important

for us that a regional security balance be maintained and that we avoid the unexpected. The status quo need not be static, but a dynamic balance is needed to account for everyone's strategic concerns.

There are different approaches that can be pursued. We have the ASEAN Regional Forum, which is the region's only security forum involving all the principal players. There is the East Asia Summit (EAS) for the top-level discussions. The region has several so-called Track 2 or non-governmental symposia where views can be aired and shared. We have an active academic regional security studies community. In all these areas, the Philippines must continue to provide its inputs and perspectives.

There are other areas where the benefits of regional cooperation are more clearly evident. These include counter-terrorism, anti-money laundering, education to fight against extremist ideologies and other transnational crimes. In addition, we can seek from our partners more access to modern technologies and know-how to confront the negative effects of climate change, address extreme weather, and handle marine ocean pollution, over-fishing and the depletion of maritime resources and to clean up our cities.

These and many other complex issues, however, need global and not just regional management. It is for this reason that Philippine diplomacy reaches out to the international level, principally the United Nations System. We must do so even

at the present difficult time, in the face of attacks against the multilateralism symbolized in the United Nations.

These attacks against multilateralism are not in our favor. The United Nations and other international organizations give developing countries like the Philippines a forum where their views can be heard and where they can combine their numbers to really help shape global outcomes. We need the United Nations so that the strong and powerful might perhaps be persuaded to find their interests together with ours. At the present time, when the world order seems to be fracturing, we should reform the United Nations, not wreck it.

At any rate, the three pillars of our foreign policy – national security, economic development, protection of Filipinos overseas – are covered at different angles in our multilateral agenda centered on the UN system. National security, broadly speaking, is covered by the UN's efforts nuclear disarmament, other arms control, counter-terrorism, counter-illegal narcotics and prevention of other transnational crimes.

In order to reinforce peaceful conditions and humanitarian protection of civilians, the Philippines was active in the global effort to ban anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions, to control biological and chemical weapons as well as small and light arms. For the same reason, we supported the UN effort to have a nuclear weapons ban

treaty. Looking ahead, we supported measures for the peaceful uses of outer space. The Philippines opposes the militarization of space. We have also taken part in the search for an international regime for autonomous weapons system including drones. Cyber-crime has recently emerged as a major new threat area, which may worsen as governments and industry become ever more reliant on modern communications technology.

Over the years, we have answered the call to provide peacekeepers around the world despite our limitations as a developing nation. The Philippines is proud to have contributed both military and police peacekeepers, including uniformed women. These are all areas of common global concern where our country should remain active.

Socio-economic development must remain to be a major focus of the Philippines in the international realm. We are drawing ever closer to the global economy beyond ASEAN. What happens overseas matters increasingly to our country. We cannot act as passive onlookers. We must maintain a vigorous presence in all the rule- and norm-setting international bodies. These include the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WTO).

In addition, the Philippines must continue its involvement in United Nations system in both established and new areas for

cooperation, such as closing the digital divide and managing the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution. The purpose of this is to keep abreast of developments, to have a say in the global governance of these issues and to tap fresh sources of knowledge, expertise, capacity building and assistance from the UN's technical agencies.

Climate change is a major issue that must continue to be tackled under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the objectives of the Paris Agreement to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. Despite the walkout of some nations, international cooperation here is still imperative. During the Paris Agreement negotiations, the Philippines pushed for a 1.5% reduction target without success. The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now calls for the same.

The dangers of pandemics and the enduring threat of disease and ill-health call for our continuing our interaction with the World Health Organization. Our concerns for migrants and refugees and for humanitarian assistance necessitates cooperation within the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee and International Federation of the Red Cross.

The central organizing principle is the Agenda 2030, which sets out the blueprint for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). The SDGs constitute a call agreed upon by all nations for cooperation to end extreme poverty, protect the planet and ensure that peace and prosperity will be obtained by all people. Philippine national development policies are designed to achieve the SDG's, which covers very broad issues of interest to the Philippines, including the environment, health, quality of life, human rights, social justice and migration.

Let me now discuss the third pillar of Philippine foreign policy, namely, the protection of the rights and promotion of the welfare of Filipinos overseas. The invaluable contribution of the Filipino Diaspora is well known and much admired. At the same time, the Philippine Government is widely recognized as a model manager of the migration process.

Philippine diplomats extend assistance to our nationals all over the world. The work ranges from helping individuals, to implementing overseas voting, supporting diaspora communities and undertaking emergency mass evacuations from some of the world's troublespots.

But the ten million or so Filipinos join a total global migration population of some 280 million. Migration was long ignored as a major part of globalization, with commerce, capital and technology in the spotlight. Now it is a major

issue on the global agenda. The Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which is due to be signed in Marrakesh at the end of this year, is the first, universal attempt at global migration governance.

The Philippines took a lead role in the GCM negotiations. Now we must be active in its implementation. Though it is not legally binding, the GCM holds good prospects in offering some of best practices for migration management that countries can choose to pursue.

Philippine diplomacy has also been active on migration policy on the bilateral and multilateral levels. We have entered into bilateral labor agreements of various types to secure ethical recruitment and decent working conditions for our overseas workers. Last year, during the Philippine Chairmanship of ASEAN, the leaders of ASEAN issued the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers.

As a major labor providing country, the Philippines has to be at the forefront of the global migration governance agenda. This is especially important given the rising hostility to migrants and refugees and the use that certain parties have made of them for political purposes in several countries.

In closing, let me make some general observations that may be taken as cross-cutting ideas that should inform our

diplomacy more deeply as we move forward.

First, we must always remember that we are both a democracy and a developing nation. We are a constitutional republic, with a democratically elected government. We respect fundamental human freedoms. At the same time, through democratic processes, we pursue national development policies that, while market-based, allow for limited strategic intervention.

We must consequently view our global agenda from the twin perspectives of ever meaningful and inclusive freedom as well as of economic modernization. Both serve to uplift the Filipino People. Our pursuit of greater world peace, international humanitarian efforts, the SDG's, cooperation on human rights and social justice, effective responses to Climate Change and disaster resilience, closer ASEAN integration and bilateral partnerships, must all be filtered through these two lenses. They provide the standards by which can ascertain the value of our work.

Second, we should realize that modern technologies impact not only the mechanics but also the content of our diplomatic endeavors. This means we have to upgrade the technology at the disposal of the Department of Foreign Affairs as well as the know-how in the Department of the emergent new global economy of value chains and block chains, the impact of artificial intelligence on global production patterns and the rules for all these novel

ventures. If we cannot have such skills in-house, then we should be able to out-source them.

This brings me to the third point, namely, partnership. The pace and depth of globalization is expected to increase, despite the anti-globalization sentiments being expressed of late. The dynamism of globalization seems inevitably moving in that direction. In response, our diplomacy has to find more ways to work more closely and more effectively with other stakeholders who are vitally interested in our national development. This means not just the business sector, but also members of the academe, media, civil society, diaspora organizations, social action bodies, humanitarian outfits and even the religious. There are many different constituencies of interest in the world, and some are organized enough to pursue a global agenda.

Such stakeholders deserve not only to be properly consulted, but their networks, expertise and resources might be placed in the service of our nation's diplomacy. This could extend the reach, the capacity and the knowledge base of our diplomats as they promote the national interest around the world.

Fourth and finally, notwithstanding all of the above, the Philippines must still continue to recruit, train and continually upgrade its professional career Foreign Service Corps. I have had the privilege of working alongside so many of the good men and women of our Foreign Service. I know

through personal experience how patriotic, hard-working and experienced they are, imbued with integrity, humility and a strong commitment to public service.

Our Department of Foreign Affairs and our Foreign Service are quite possibly the most technocratic of our government instrumentalities. I mean this as a positive description. They are perhaps the most professional and least politicized workers as a cadre in our civil government. This character has to be preserved and nurtured to have an effective diplomatic arm to serve our nation overseas.

I would like to thank you all for your kind patience with me today. My assignment was to discuss Philippine foreign policy in a changing world order. In doing so, I have gone from some basics to an exposition of the major themes we need to address. I have no crystal ball, but I can hazard some reasonably educated projections based on my own work and on observations on what is happening around us.

As we move forward as a nation, I would strongly urge everyone in this room to be more aware of our country's foreign relations and to share ideas on that subject. Many of our individual destinies are already connected with opportunities and prospects in other countries. But our national destiny is without doubt intertwined with the outside world.

We have to do more to follow what is going on and to figure out what our national responses should be. In the 21st Century, this process can no longer be limited to small elite circles. A much broader national conversation is called for. As they say, forewarned is forearmed. If we cannot predict the future, we can certainly be better prepared for the most likely contingencies.

Thank you very much.