

Misplaced Loyalty
An Ethical Problem Facing the Philippine Army Today

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Subject: Ethical Problem Facing the Philippine Army Today

Misplaced loyalty is the ethical problem that confronts not only the Philippine Army today but the entire Armed Forces. A complicated ethical problem that needs an immediate but viable lasting solution.

What makes this ethical problem complicated? To answer this question, one has to have an idea as to who are these individuals (soldiers) that possesses this kind of loyalty; the root cause and other contributing factors. These contributing factors include political, the political atmosphere, the military organization itself and the previous coup attempts as precedent.

First, who are these individuals with misplaced loyalty? The 2003 Oakwood Mutiny (named after the 5-star hotel occupied by the mutineers) aimed on forcing President Gloria Macapagal- Arroyo to step down as president was staged and led by field grade officers (1LTs-CPTs). Their more or less 300 followers were composed of the Armed Forces elite troops from the army's Scout Rangers and Special Forces, Marines' recon units and Navy's SEAL. Majority of these officers and NCOs are on combat duty status for more than a year in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. Almost eighty percent of the officers are graduates of the Philippine Military Academy - the "West Point" of Southeast Asia.

The root cause of this mutinous act is dissatisfaction with the Armed Forces Chain of Command and to the Commander-in-Chief. Among their complaints are rampant corruptions in the government and in the military, too much politics, lack of support to the operating units and worst of all, the alleged involvement of the then Secretary of National Defense in Mindanao bombings.

The issue that politics was involved in this mutiny came into picture after the mutineers were convinced to surrender. The politicians that helped in “convincing” the mutineers were all anti-President Arroyo’s administration. The large amount of money used to finance this uprising was another issue of concern. The mutineers occupied a 5-star hotel in the business district of Makati City almost 5 days before they were discovered. The sophisticated firearms and state-of-the-art communication equipment that they used were not even in the inventory of the Armed Forces. A five-month pay of all the officers involved was not enough to pay for the hotel rents. How much more in purchasing high-powered firearms and sophisticated communication equipment?

On the political atmosphere, it is worth to note that this most recent coup attempt was staged during the very fragile and volatile period of the Arroyo administration. At this period, the peso-dollar exchange rate hits its highest peak. The First Gentleman (husband of the President) is being implicated to graft and corruptions, the Abbu Sayaff terrorist group issue, and most of all, the president’s lack of people’s mandate. She is seated as president as a result of the former president impeachment (President Joseph Estrada). Even so, said impeachment is being contested by the political oppositions as highly irregular and unconstitutional.

The previous coup attempts and the actions taken by the government in dealing with the perpetrators is something that must be carefully looked into. In the 1986 military uprising backed by Peoples Power, the soldiers and the civilians who played vital roles for the ouster President Marcos were heralded as heroes. One of them became president, while others made it to the cabinet posts, elected as senators, congressmen, promoted to generals, appointed as business executives and a lot other more lucrative and juicy

positions. During the Aquino administration, seven coup attempts were made with the last one as the most serious. It claimed lives and limbs both from the military and civilian populace and scared the much needed business investors. The punishment given to these coup perpetrators, or “misguided soldiers” as the then administration called them, were imprisonment, separation from the service, demotion and 10-20 push-ups! When the next president assumed office, amnesty was given. Those who were discharged were reinstated and the demoted retained their former ranks and compensated with all the pay and allowances that they were not suppose to receive while serving their sentence. Some of the officers are now with star ranks or retired with a star ranks, while some of the NCOs are now Sergeants Major of some of the Armed Forces major units.

If you are on the same footings, aren't you going to do the same?

The above incidents are very good examples of misplaced loyalty. Better yet, a misplaced loyalty that serve personal interests.

All men in uniform during their oath of office for commissions (officers) and enlistment (NCOs) are sworn-in to support and defend the government and the Constitution for which it stands for. This oath of office demands *absolute* loyalty. No “ifs” and “buts”. Loyalty to uphold the supremacy of the civilian authority over the military in time of war or in peace, loyalty to the Chain of Command, to peers and subordinates. Embracing it for the purpose of serving personal interest or for the interests of few is tantamount to self- destruction. For how could you earn the trust and confidence of your superiors and peers if your loyalty is anchored on the principle that fits you best? In the same manner, how could you, as a leader, expect loyalty from your subordinates if your loyalty differs from theirs?

Grievances and demands for change in the government and the military organization almost always has valid reasons. In a civilized world, it needs to be brought out into the light rather than curse it in the dark. And it really needs a prompt and appropriate action. Their cause maybe noble if politics and personal interests were not behind it. But the manner at which it was carried out overshadow all their good intentions. There is always a proper forum to voice out grievances and demands for change. It maybe a long and tedious process but that is what **DEMOCRACY** is all about.