
Interview: Philippines Acting Foreign Minister Pacífico A. Castro

American media treatment is 'totally unacceptable'



Acting Foreign Minister of the Philippines Pacífico A. Castro, is a long-time foreign service diplomat with experience in North Africa and Ibero-America. The following are excerpts from a wide-ranging interview with EIR's Paul Goldstein, conducted in October.

EIR: What do you think of the way the U.S. media has been covering the Philippines, and what is your opinion of their truthfulness in presenting the real picture of what is going on in the Philippines?

Castro: I can say outright that the coverage of the Philippine situation in the U.S. media has been distorted, exaggerated, slanted to present the Philippines as a country in disarray. And this is unfortunate, because the Philippines and the United States are military allies, partners in a military alliance, so the actual state of relationships between the two countries should be reported accurately to their two peoples. That is unfortunate furthermore, because since the American media is disseminated worldwide, it has a tendency naturally to affect, to condition perceptions in the other countries. It has created an image that does not reflect the realities in the Philippines.

The reality is that the Philippine government is a fully operational government; there is absolutely no part of the country that is not against third party government. We have 77 provinces and 1,500 municipalities, cities and towns, and not a single municipality, or province is controlled by the left rebels.

EIR: It would appear that the U.S. State Department has been trying to present the facts of the matter quite contrary to the picture you've just presented. What is it in the State Department's policy right now that lends them to this type of exaggerated interpretation of events in the Philippines?

Castro: I don't know much about the State Department, but on my visit to Washington, D.C. last Friday, I had a meeting very briefly with Undersecretary of State Michael Armacost and Assistant Secretary Phil Wolfowitz, and the head of the Philippine office, a certain Mr. Meister. But what is really bad is what is being reported in the press. I have the feeling since I arrived in the United States, that Americans' sense of fairness and justice in presenting the situation is lacking. It is

not the first time that we have had this insurgency; I believe the insurgency in the '50s, based on my own personal historical experience, was more serious than the insurgency we have today. I believe that in the insurgency in the '70, the situation of peace and order was more serious than it is today, because precisely after martial law was proclaimed, the armed forces of the Philippines confiscated more than 500,000 firearms from all over the country. This was more than the firearms in the possession of the armed forces at that time.

EIR: It has been recorded that the NPA (New People's Army) actually only has a hard core of revolutionaries, and that the rest of the NPA cadre are really people who are just basically economically dislocated and not committed to the communist ideology. How do you respond to this?

Castro: This is the position of the Philippine government. We have been saying that Filipinos are not fanatics, they are not ideologically committed to any political philosophy or social system. The majority of our people are basically peaceful and law-abiding citizens. What is happening, is the press is overestimating the capability of the insurgents or the rebels, and underestimating the capability of the Philippine government to attend to this internal problem.

EIR: Do you think that the economic policies of the IMF and the World Bank, in terms of the very harsh austerity measures that they've asked your government to implement, have anything to do with creating further economic problems for your government?

Castro: The economic situation in the Philippines is not unique. There are about half a dozen other Latin American countries and many more in Africa and Asia who are similarly situated, and the uniform concern of all these heavily indebted countries is precisely the harsh conditions imposed by the IMF and the restructuring of the economy.

EIR: Have you seen Alan García, the President of Peru's, proposal about 10% payment back on the debt, geared to the capabilities of export earnings?

Castro: Yes, I've read the speech of President García before the United Nations General Assembly. We have studied this very carefully. Much earlier we had studied very carefully

the declaration of the Cartagena group. As a member of the Third World, and of the developing countries, uated as many Latin American countries, we are of course interested in any developments on the proposals of the Cartagena group as well as of President Alan García.

EIR: Let me ask a very blunt question. Do you think that President Reagan is being properly informed about the actual situation in the Philippines at this time? Do you think he is getting a fair and adequate estimation of what is going on, even after Senator Laxalt's trip?

Castro: President Marcos gave Senator Laxalt a thick memorandum, giving in detail the actual situation in the Philippines, on the insurgency, on our economic recovery program, as well as efforts of the government to address itself to these questions. We hope that President Reagan has had time to go over this memorandum, which I understand is about 300 pages long.

EIR: It's vital, because of the distortions in the American media and the impression that it's giving the Congress as well as the American public, that President Reagan address these issues, as presented from the Filipino point of view. However, it seems that Congress, and specifically Representative Solarz, has been trying to box the White House in on the question of releasing the funds for the leases on the bases as well as other economic aid. What is your opinion of this?

Castro: As I said before, the people that I have spoken to in Washington, D.C., the official relationships of the Philippine government with the United States government are proceeding normally. In fact they are good. So far, both countries have complied with their treaty commitments, the United States particularly with respect to the compensation package for the use of two of our bases, Clark Air Base and the Subic Naval Base, of the 13th United States Air Force, and the Seventh Fleet. The logistics of the economic support plan component of the compensation package has been going on.

EIR: There has been no holding back at this time by the U.S. Congress?

Castro: By the United States Congress, no. By the Executive Department of the United States, no.

EIR: So again, the U.S. media has played this up in distortion of the actual ongoing discussions between the U.S. government and the Philippine government.

Castro: This is what causes us so much concern, why the media is so interested in creating dissension between the United States government and the Philippine government, when we are military allies. Our objective should be to promote greater cooperation and partnership between our two countries, because we are military allies.

EIR: What do you think of the Soviet buildup in the Pacific

in light of the remarks you have just made?

Castro: The Soviet buildup in the Pacific is a natural and logical consequence of the bipolar competition between these two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Wherever one power tries to strengthen its position, the other power naturally, because of the dictates of its status in our bipolar world, will have to match the capability of the other power, and as long as this competition goes on, it will not favor stability or the desire to promote universal peace and harmony in this world. That is why we are looking forward to the summit meeting in November between the heads of state of the two superpowers, in the hope that some form of agreement will be arrived at to ensure universal peace and progress and cooperation.

EIR: Do you think that the Soviet buildup in Cam Ranh Bay specifically threatens the Philippines at this point, or do you see this in the larger context of this U.S.-Soviet superpower confrontation?

Castro: This is part of the—I wouldn't say confrontation, but the competition of the two superpowers.

EIR: We're looking at this Soviet buildup in the Pacific as quite significant, especially, since in the last six or seven years it has been a rather large buildup. They have about 831 ships in the Pacific area; they are building up a base at Cam Ranh Bay, and now in Kampuchea at Kompong Son, where the United States has always had its bases courtesy of the Philippine government, for the last 40 to 50 years. The competition seems to be going more in terms of the Soviet buildup, and the United States seems to be withdrawing from the Pacific, as enunciated by Henry Kissinger in the Guam Doctrine. Do you see the U.S. withdrawing from the Pacific? Do you think that the American media is looking to force the United States out of the bases in that sense?

Castro: As a student of history, I always look at these things from a historical perspective. I think the problem with most of the analysts is this: They look at the problems today in isolation from what has been happening in the past. I think if we look back in history, Russia has always had a powerful Far Eastern fleet, even during the time of Czar Nicholas. You will remember that after the Russo-Japanese War, after the Japanese defeated the Far Eastern fleet of Czarist Russia, they sent the Baltic fleet down all the way to the Indian Ocean—though not through the South China Sea—but the Japanese, having observed this movement of the Baltic fleet of the Soviet Union, unloosed the Russian fleet, and this is the famous battle of Tsushisima Bay. And this destroyed completely Czarist Russia's naval power, which eventually led to the Russian Revolution and the downfall of Czar Nicholas. And so, when we speak about the Soviet buildup in the Pacific, I tend to look at this more philosophically, given the historical importance that the Russians have always placed upon their Far Eastern fleets. Contemporary analysts of the

strategic position of the two powers, give us very impressive figures of the number of men of war of the Seventh Fleet compared to the Soviet fleet, but if there is a dramatic increase in Soviet naval power in the South China Sea, it is because they are proceeding from zero.

This also expresses partly the problems in analyzing the extensive growth of communist insurgency in the Philippines. You see security analysts of the Philippines these days fail to take into account the fact that since we gained our independence in 1946, until President Marcos normalized relations with the People's Republic of China in 1975, and with the Soviet Union in 1976, Filipinos were completely forbidden from reading anything about communism. Filipinos, including Filipino diplomats, were forbidden from fraternizing with communists. And so of course, to an observer who is not familiar with this historical prohibition of contacts, of fraternization with Communist, Russian, or Soviet agents—there has been a 100% increase in the influence of the Soviet Union, of communist power, in the Philippines. Naturally, because there had been absolutely no contact with the Soviet Union from 1946 up to 1976, a period of 30 years.

Every time they talk about the growing influence of the Soviet Union in the Philippines, I tend to be amused by the naïveté and simplistic approach to the study of the problem of communism in the Philippines.

EIR: Why is the United States very obviously trying to put more pressure upon your government then, to carry out so-called military reforms, economic reforms, social reforms? Why is there all this additional pressure, that seems to be coming out of the State Department?

Castro: As I told the reporters of the *Washington Post* yesterday, when they told me that these assessments are being made by experts and specialists based not only in Washington, D.C., but also in the Philippines, I reminded them that with all due respect to the so-called security analysis or studies about my country, the analysis of these same people about the situation in Vietnam, the situation in Cambodia, the situation in Laos, the situation in Iran, and the situation in Nicaragua, were not sustained by historical events. I think they should study this very carefully, because they might just be committing the same errors of analysis that they committed in the past, in assessing developments in the five countries I have mentioned.

EIR: Do you think that's due to a lack of cultural understanding on the part of U.S. analysts of the Asian culture, and specifically of the Philippines? Americans project their own values, their own outlook, on other peoples, and then interpret things from that standpoint.

Castro: Basically that is the reason, and secondly, there are the administrative ambitions of people. The American political process is such that a congressman, for example, has to be reelected every two years, so he must project an image of

an active representative of American interests, as an articulate defender of American interests. Also because of the nature of the bureaucracy, where every four years, with a new President, there is a change in the top administrative decision-making levels, the bureaucratic analysts must try to project themselves as wise and judicious people, as intelligent people, in formulating policies and making decisions to advance their own career ambitions. This, I believe, is part of the explanation. And of course, basically, because of the lack of cultural understanding, which is unfortunate, we have had this long historical partnership between our two countries, beginning from the time the Americans established their consulates in the Philippines in 1876, or earlier in 1846.

One basic flaw in analyzing Philippine-American relations is that we begin in 1898 with the arrival of Admiral Dewey in Manila Bay. As a student of history, I would like to begin from the first time that there were official representatives of the American government in the Philippines, and this dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, when the United States had more consulates in the Philippines than they have today. . . . These are the things that have been overlooked in the analysis of Philippine-American relations: that our relationship did not begin with the guns of the *Olympia* shelling Manila Bay; it began through the peaceful methods of diplomacy and commerce and trade, such that when Admiral Dewey arrived in Manila—and probably this is the motivation of Teddy Roosevelt in ordering Commander Dewey to steam to Manila in preparation for the Spanish-American War—is that the United States was the biggest trader in the Philippines, even before Admiral Dewey arrived. . . .

EIR: Do you think that you have accomplished what you hoped to accomplish in your trip to the United States?

Castro: I had very modest objectives in coming to the United States. The first was to deliver the policy statement of the Philippine government before the United Nations General Assembly during the period of the general debate. I was able to do this on Oct. 11.

The second objective of my visit to the United States was to meet many people who are friendly and sympathetic to the Philippines, like the *Executive Intelligence Review*. I am very grateful for the honor and privilege of having dined with Mr. and Mrs. LaRouche, a very, very attractive couple, who have been helping us in our efforts to counteract the vicious media campaign against the Philippines and the Filipino people. And I am grateful for this opportunity to be able to express to the *Executive Intelligence Review* the concerns of the Philippines about the United States press. If the American press has been talking about American concern about conditions in the Philippines, I think we Filipinos are also entitled to express our own serious concern about the way we have been treated in the American media. It is totally unacceptable to any sovereign and independent country.