

Dr. Ricardo T. Jose
Director, Third World Studies Center
Professor, Department of History
University of the Philippines Diliman

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I prepared a longer speech for this morning, but I will not read it anymore. I also prepared a slide presentation, but in the interest of time, I will not go into it in detail.

I'd just like to thank our speakers for this morning: Col. Vilorio, Maj. Young, Col. Flores, Gen. Villamor. They put in the personal aspect of it and really spoke of the human side of our participation in PEFTOK. I'll try to put it into a bigger perspective because what happened in 1950 to 53 was only part of a longer relationship between Korea and the Philippines. So, let me put it in a bigger perspective, and then I'll pick up a few things from what was presented by our four speakers and highlight some things that, perhaps, we should look into and we should focus on and remember.

First, I'd like to look into the compared histories of Korea and the Philippines. When one looks at the history of Korea and the Philippines, there are similarities in both. We were both at the mercy of colonial powers. We were both colonized. We were both threatened. Korea and the Philippines both occupied positions of strategic importance. Therefore, we have been victimized. We've become part of wars that were a result of our strategic position.

In the case of Korea; Korea, of course, lies between China and Japan, and therefore, Korea has been a battlefield between the Chinese and the Japanese.

The Philippines lies in the center of Southeast Asia, and therefore, we are the crossroads of shipping powers that come through Southeast Asian waters. We still are, and Korea is still an important position in East Asia.

So, on one hand, you have an East Asian country that is sandwiched between two powers, and on the other hand, we have a country in Southeast Asia that is also surrounded by other potential adversaries and potential powers.

Interesting note is that when the Philippine Revolution was fought in 1896 and going into the Filipino-American War, Korea was technically an independent state. They had their own dynasties. They had their own rulers. They had their own emperors. But they were being threatened by outside powers. So, while we were struggling to fight, trying to build up our independence, trying to show that we were capable of a country ruling ourselves, Korea was also doing the same thing. So, ironically, while we were fighting for this, Korea was trying to gain international recognition.

Unfortunately, the powers-that-be decided our fates. The Philippines was colonized by the United States. Korea was eventually colonized by Japan. At the point that we were starting our colonial experience under the United States, in fact, the Koreans were sending delegations to the United States to try to win recognition from the US. The US chose to turn that down because they felt the Philippines was more important to them, and so, with their diplomatic relations

with Japan, the United States decided that the Philippines was for the US; Korea, bahala na. The Japanese would have Korea. So, here we have again a situation of two colonized peoples with the international arena as the battleground.

So, given that, the Koreans did have a long tradition of fighting for independence. The Koreans have had also a long tradition of fighting. In fact, if one looks at Korea today, one will see that there are many, I mean, we are familiar with telenovelas here. But when you look at what's being shown in Korean TV these days, there are many about life during the Japanese occupation and how the Koreans stood up against the Japanese. So, that's one thing that we will see. There's that sense of pride in that they realized that it was a period of hardship, but it was a period where they fought for their freedoms.

Now, jumping into the Korean War itself, 1950. Now what happened? Why was there a Korean War? Korea was one. Korea was one country. But because of World War II, when the Japanese gave up, Korea was split into two. As the war ended, Russia then entered the war, and the USSR, at that time communist, entered North Korea and immediately began trying to control it—propagandizing communism, bringing in the ideas of the communists. They controlled society and everything else. South Korea was supposed to develop on its own, but because of the threat from the north, US Army forces came in, and Korea became a divided country.

This was the Cold War, and during the height of the Cold War, nuclear weapons were developed. At first, only the United States had an atomic bomb, but when we look at the immediate period before the Korean War, 1949, shocks were

being felt by the whole world. In 1949, the Russians detonated their own atomic bomb, which made the Cold War much more serious. It was not going to be a conventional war anymore. It might develop into a nuclear war.

And then, secondly, China, which had a civil war. By 1949, the communists took over China. So from one perspective, from the perspective of the US, the communists were out to dominate the world. China, then Korea, and in the Philippines itself, the Huk movement was going on, so there was a threat to the established government here also from the left. So, it seemed like there was this whole communist domination attempt. And therefore, when the Korean War broke out, we were fighting our own internal battle. We were still fighting the Huks.

However, again, this showed what it was like at that time, that we felt like we were part of the international community, and therefore, when the Korean War broke out, we answered the call of the United Nations to send troops. We were hard-pressed here, fighting our own internal war, but we did send one battalion combat team.

What was a battalion combat team? It was based on the lessons of World War II. Prior to World War II, you had infantry regiments. You had cavalry regiments. You had other regiments. A battalion combat team combined all of those—infantry, artillery, tanks. And so, the 10th BCT was a combination of all these—one combat unit which was a fighting force more than anything. Not a specialized infantry unit. Not a specialized tank unit. It was all of these together. So it was compact. It was combined. It was something of a fighting force. And we could not spare any of them. But the fact that the

United Nations called, and we answered that call very quickly, was something that the world took notice. We were telling the world, “We are ready to participate in world affairs.” And the personal stories were told earlier this morning.

But that was something that made us proud also. It was this point in time where Carlos P. Romulo was in the United Nations, making a strong pitch for the Philippines as an independent nation speaking for other smaller countries which could not be heard at that particular time. So we were at the forefront of this particular movement to get the Philippines recognized and to get the Philippines in the part of this world at this time.

It was mentioned also earlier, okay, that there were cases of heroism. Lt. Artiaga, yes, very heroic. He did not give up his post. His unit died in the forefront. It was an outpost line. He was overwhelmed, but nobody surrendered. Nobody pulled back. Unlike the Turks and the others which were pushed back, the 10th BCT position held. And that was one thing that other United Nations people admired—and the Koreans admired very much.

We also mentioned the case of Lt. Artiaga’s immediate superior, Capt. Yap. Capt. Yap would actually be so concerned about Lt. Artiaga’s company that he would himself go forward, launch a counter-attack to try to see if anybody was still alive. Unfortunately, everyone had been killed or wounded, but Capt. Yap went forward and led the counter-attack and tried to bring back, if not the survivors, the bodies of those who had died. That was very selfless. That was a very powerful action on his part—that he would lead that movement. He was being told by the others, “Don’t. The unit is gone.” But he wanted to bring at

least the bodies back home. And that was the responsibility of a commander. So, he won the Medal of Valor for that particular act. There were many other acts of heroism which followed that. And all you have to do is pass by Camp Aguinaldo, and the road there, Boni Serrano, is named after another Korean War hero.

So, there was heroism. These Filipinos who went there, as some of our speakers said this morning, they were veterans of World War II. They would fight for their own. They would still serve the country even after the Korean War. Others had not experienced the war. They were teenagers. But the volunteers were there, and that kind of spirit was something that—it would be nice to see that kind of spirit again now—patriotism, dedication to something, dedication to ideals. That would be something that would be very important to have at this particular point in our history.

Now, aside from this, we'd also point out the fact that, I think, in the 10th BCT and the succeeding BCTs, they were not just men from Luzon. They were men from different provinces. They came from different parts of the Philippines, and therefore, they represented the Philippines, not the particular geographical area, but different parts of the Philippines. They showed the Philippines as one whole.

And as a result of that fighting, even after the fighting, the Koreans were very, very impressed with what happened. They were very thankful with what happened. And after that, as pointed out earlier, even though peace returned to the South Korean area, we continued to help the Koreans in building their cities, reconstruction, food, and other things. In fact, the first time I went to Seoul, my Korean friend was showing me, "This

building was constructed by Filipinos. It was designed by a Filipino architect.” And so, our contribution went even beyond the Korean War, but even into the years of building South Korea afterwards.

So, nowadays, of course, we have a large Filipino overseas population in South Korea. We have a large Korean population here in the Philippines. And we see how the two countries have interacted very closely. We paid in blood for what South Korea is today, and now, they are trying to repay in whatever way they can to say thank you to what we did. We are in the museums in South Korea. We are always given a prominent space there—that we were one, the “fightingest” groups of people that we were the first Asian country to respond to the call. And so, we are given very good recognition there. Perhaps unknown to most of us is the fact that that large statue of Lapu-Lapu in Luneta was actually donated by the South Koreans. So, when you look at Lapu-Lapu facing the sea, facing the Manila Bay, showing Filipino gallantry and love of country, it was the South Koreans who financed that to show their own thanks to our contribution to their cause.

So, after 65 years of this kind of relationship, we can look forward to a stronger relationship between our two countries, and now, seeing how more closely intertwined we were, we’ll see that that particular relationship, built heavily on the experience of the Korean War, but also on other historical events, is moving into a stronger, friendly relationship.

So, with that, thank you very much to our Korean War veterans, to our PEFTOK veterans. My thanks to all of you, and congratulations for a job well done.