

**"Empowering the Filipino People"**

**SPECIAL TO THE MANILA BULLETIN**

**by former President Fidel V. Ramos**

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**CHINA, U.S., PHILIPPINES – "SAVING FACE"**

**(Last of Two Parts)**

*"We will always place Asia on top of our diplomatic agenda, stick to the policy of building good-neighborly relationships and partnerships with our neighbors... China will always be a good neighbor, good friend and good partner of other Asian countries."*

**-- President Hu Jintao, Boao Forum for Asia, China, 15 April 2011**

From the beginning of the Scarborough imbroglio, it appears that China has been implementing a strategic game plan consisting of a variety of calibrated options ranging from warning blasts from Beijing, economic sanctions (bananas, tourism), military posturing (build-up, maneuvers), and face-saving.

**Apparently, China's objective is to compel the Philippines and other claimants to accept a resolution of the South China Sea/West Philippine Sea disputes through BILATERAL negotiations. This strategy is meant to "save face" by not succumbing to the Declaration of the Code of Conduct in the SCS (signed by ASEAN and China in 2002) which calls for MULTILATERAL agreement. This wider "internationalization" of the problem, it is feared, may bring in U.S. intervention.**

The U.S., too, had been involved in "face-saving" towards China and the American electorate (in fact, the whole world) on human rights issues sparked by a blind, courageous Chinese activist.

**Chinese Dissident Chen**

*Reuters* reported (05 May): "Blind Chinese dissident Chen Guangcheng made dramatic pleas for help that reached a U.S. Congressional hearing -- raising the pressure on President Obama over his Administration's handling thereof."

**Lest we forget, both China and the U.S. are now in the process of leadership change, to be concluded this November. Both superpowers are thus pressured into avoiding developments that might "rock the boat" or "send wrong signals" -- which would negatively influence outcomes of the coming selection (in China) and election (in the U.S.).**

Chen, a self-taught lawyer under detention in Shandong province, managed to escape last month undetected by local police. Chen had earlier exposed abuses of China's "one-child" policy like sterilizations and forced abortion of expectant mothers. By creeping and crawling, he somehow reached the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. He was given sanctuary by Ambassador Gary Locke (former Governor of Washington State whose ancestors are Chinese).

**By his unbelievably daring escape, Chen became an iconic symbol of defiance against oppression that embroiled the U.S. and China on human rights issues and the rule of law. The heroic activist became an urgent topic of U.S. Congressional inquiries.**

These circumstances forced Secretary Clinton to focus with great compassion on Chen's case so that the U.S. would not "lose face" by its inaction on such a sacrificial feat in defiance of the Chinese Government.

### **Clinton's Timely Intervention**

Chen expressed the wish to meet Clinton to thank her and ask for help. Further, refugee Chen complained that villagers who helped him escape were being harassed, and was fearful for the safety of family and neighbors.

**In a statement, Secretary Clinton said: *"I'm pleased that we were able to facilitate Chen Guangcheng's stay and departure from the U.S. Embassy in a way that reflected his choices and our values. He has a number of understandings with the Chinese Government about his future, including opportunities to pursue higher education in a safe environment."***

**The U.S. Government is therefore committed to the safety of Chen and associates in the months ahead. Actualizing this commitment is an inescapable task of Washington.**

**U.S. officials have defended their actions, but Republicans were critical, saying the White House must ensure Chen's safety (wherever he seeks sanctuary) and that of family and associates.**

Republican Presidential frontrunner Mitt Romney criticized the White House for failing to emplace "verifiable measures" that would ensure the safety of Chen et al. *"If these reports are true, this is a dark day for freedom, and a day of shame of the Obama Administration,"* Romney opined.

### **Face-Saving For The U.S. And China**

*The Associated Press* reported (07 May): *"A deal allowing Chen Guangcheng to study in America serves as a face-saving measure for all involved: Washington can say it safeguarded human rights, Beijing can point to its cooperative diplomacy, and Chen gets a new start in America."*

**The compromise that led to Chen's leaving the U.S. Embassy without being arrested and subsequent assurances for his better future, is unprecedented for China and the U.S., and "saves face" for both.**

**Continued the AP: "After hectic negotiations, the announcement by U.S. and Chinese officials pointed to a positive end for a standoff that embarrassed the Chinese Government by shining light on its human rights record, and put President Barack Obama in a tight spot while campaigning for re-election.**

Several steps remain before Chen can secure an academic fellowship in the U.S. But the speed and "face-saving" with which a near-calamity was resolved illustrates the maturing partnership between the world's two biggest powers -- after years of stumbling over lesser disputes.

**"It is a testament to how far we've come in building strong and resilient relationships, and being able to candidly discuss issues where there is disagreement -- without endangering the entire range of significant matters we're working on together," Secretary Clinton concluded in Beijing.**

**Summarized the AP: "The escape forced the Obama Administration to balance its defense of a renowned human rights activist against U.S. courting of the Chinese to help advance global economic recovery and deal with North Korea and Iran. It presented tough choices, too, for Beijing, whose violent crackdown on pro-democracy protesters at Tiananmen 23 years ago is the portrait of its human rights behavior retained by the world."**

Chen's dramatic, nighttime escape into the U.S. Embassy, just before Clinton arrived for unrelated meetings, indeed had all the ingredients of a diplomatic fiasco waiting to happen.

### **Philippine Face-Saving**

This week, ASEAN officials will continue to negotiate with China on the multilateral Code of Conduct to adopt concrete measures to resolve the South China Sea disputes. According to DFA insiders, the original Philippine proposal for the Declaration of a Code of Conduct in the SCS included a "Disputes Settlement Mechanism," but that clause was removed, apparently due to Chinese pressure.

Now that ASEAN is pushing for a more binding Code of Conduct, the Philippine Government should no longer allow the cancellation of a DSM. This is DFA's job.

**The Philippines itself must do some "face-saving" to prove to our people that Filipinos are not pushovers despite Chinese bullying. Towards the aggrieved fisherfolk of Zambales, Pangasinan, Mindoro and Palawan;**

the deprived banana growers of Davao and Central Mindanao; the disadvantaged tourism operators nationwide; the harassed OFWs in China-Hongkong-Macau; and other Filipino interests in the huge China market, our Government must undertake substantial “face-saving” actions to rescue potential economic losers.

**ASIDE FROM PROTRACTED NEGOTIATIONS BY DFA (WITH THE UN/ITLOS/STATE DEPARTMENT) AND DND (WITH THE PENTAGON/CINCPAC), WHY DOESN'T MALACAÑANG FIELD VICE-PRESIDENT JEJOMAR BINAY WITH “FULL POWERS” TO NEGOTIATE DIRECTLY WITH THE HIGHEST CHINESE AUTHORITIES TO REMIND THEM OF THEIR REPEATED COMMITMENTS TO BE “GOOD NEIGHBORS” IN A PEACEFUL, HARMONIOUS AND PROSPEROUS ASIA-PACIFIC?**

VP Binay is uniquely qualified for this “mission possible,” having previously dealt with Beijing on various “hot potatoes.” Malacañang’s meek ploy is to order bureau-level officials of our Agriculture, Fisheries and Tourism agencies to negotiate with their Chinese counterparts.

**IN THE ABSENCE OF A RESIDENT PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR TO CHINA, WHY NOT VP BINAY INSTEAD TO TACKLE BEIJING? FORTUITOUSLY, HIS CHINESE COUNTERPART IS VICE PRESIDENT XI JINPING WHO IS THE LEADING FAVORITE TO SUCCEED PRESIDENT HU JINTAO.**

In the eyes of worried Filipinos, this could be a good test for aspirants to the Presidency come 2016.

### **A World Without Great-Power Wars**

Certainly, there are positive confidence-building measures that the U.S., China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and other claimants must undertake to avoid further irritants and facilitate solutions. Having long wrestled with similar problems (along Tracks I and II), FVR believes win-win solutions are achievable if Asia-Pacific’s leaders strive unwaveringly to forge a covenant binding upon all country-stakeholders – big or otherwise.

**The empowerment of people (as at EDSA and the “Arab Spring”), global interdependence, and science/technology offer humankind the possibility of a future world without war. People’s assertion of their political/human rights everywhere is making war obsolete (even suicidal) among the great powers. War in the 21<sup>st</sup> century could conceivably escalate to “mutually assured destruction,” given nuclear weapons proliferation.**

**Peace and development are universal aspirations strongly affirmed in the Joint Communiqué following President Hu Jintao’s visit to the U.S. in January 2011, thus:**

**“THE U.S. AND CHINA AGREED TO ENHANCE COORDINATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN A SPIRIT OF MUTUAL RESPECT AND COOPERATION, AND TO WORK TOGETHER WITH OTHER ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THROUGH MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS, TO PROMOTE PEACE, STABILITY, AND PROSPERITY.”**

**UPON THESE ASSURANCES, THE WORLD COMMUNITY HOPES TO BECOME A HARMONIOUS CONCERT OF CIVILIZATIONS – WHERE COUNTRIES ABIDE BY CIVILIZED RULES OF THE UNITED NATIONS.**

Kindly revisit our *Manila Bulletin* column, “Rizal, Spratlys, China, Philippines, Vietnam” (19 June 2011).