

April 5, 1939



Yesterday I had a very disagreeable incident with General MacArthur which, nevertheless, ended happily. For some time now past, there had come to me recommendations that I propose the creation of a Department of National Defense. My own reorganization board, especially the chairman, Mr. Unson, felt strongly that the Army should not be allowed to become accustomed to hear no other voice than that of an army man, but on the contrary, it should be made to feel its dependence upon the civil authorities. In spite of the fact that on several of my papers connected with the Army I have emphasized the fact that in a democracy the Army is only a instrument in the hands of civilian authorities. To perform certain governmental functions, it seems to me that public opinion would not be satisfied until the Army was actually placed under the immediate control and supervision of a department head who was a civilian. Certain informations which have been revealed to me during the last two months convinced me that my office, with all the amount of work that it has to supervise, could not exercise sufficient supervision over army matters to satisfy me that nothing of real importance was done in the National Defense program without my knowledge. This, together with that pressure from outside, induced me to agree with the leaders of the National Assembly particularly the Speaker to enact a legislation that would authorize





me to create and organize the Department of National Defense if and when, in my opinion, the time was ripe for such a step. There was another consideration why I thought that this should be done. The time for the expiration of my term as President is approaching and I always felt that I would not leave the presidency without having created the Department of National Defense and having it functioned for some time so that the head of the department would be able to establish under my administration precedents that would be followed by his successors. in regard to non-political interference with national defense affairs on the one hand and the Army on the other would be made to feel its dependency upon civilian authorities.

Upon my return from my farm in Arayat yesterday, Jorge came to me and told me that General MacArthur called him on the phone and expressed great concern over the bill which has been reported to the Assembly according to the newspapers, creating the Department of National Defense. Jorge told me that General MacArthur wondered whether this meant that I was dissatisfied with his services and if so all that I had to do was to inform him of the fact and that he would immediately return to the United States without the necessity of creating this department, indirectly to deprive him of the authority to carry out the <sup>national</sup> defense program, and that if he were to retain him he felt that he would be unable to perform the duties I have entrusted to him if the department was created. From the report of Vargas, of the conversation,





I realized that General MacArthur was unduly excited, yet I did not take it seriously and simply told Vargas to call General MacArthur over the phone and tell him that there was no occasion for him to worry and that since I had to leave for Baler, I had no time to see him but would write him a short note explaining the situation. Then I took my siesta. When I woke up, a little note was sent to me by the telephone operator telling me that General MacArthur wanted to talk to me over the phone, but since I was not disposed to talk this matter with the General at this time, I sent words to the operator that I was not in. Fifteen minutes later, my messenger came to my bedroom and informed me that General MacArthur was already in the Palace. I told my messenger to inform the General that I was not in. It seems, however, that the General remained in the Palace despite this answer and then went to the office of Vargas in an effort to secure an interview with me. I was positively provoked by this insistence of the General. I felt that he was going beyond the bounds of propriety, for although we were very close friends I was, nevertheless, his chief and it was my privilege to decide when and how I should discuss with him official matters. So I made up my mind to give him a lesson and so I simply refused to see him. By eight o'clock that night after disposing of some urgent pending matters, I asked Vargas to show me the proposed reorganization bill which contains





this provision regarding the creation of the Department of National Defense and which I was seeing for the first time. And after going over the bill and informing myself of its contents, I told Vargas to dinner with me because I was willing to see General MacArthur and I wanted him to be present during the conference. Vargas told the General that I was ready to see him and General MacArthur in a few minutes appeared in the Palace before I finished my dinner and gave instructions to take him to the porch. After my dinner I went out to meet with the General and greeted him in the usual way - "hello General", and he answered, "Good evening, Mr. President, I am afraid I am not very welcomed at this time." I ignored this remark, invited to a chair and he said, "Mr. President, I am sorry that I have attempted to see you when you were not ready to see me, but I am a very frank man and I want to know what does this bill now pending before the National Assembly regarding the greation of the Department of National Defense mean, whether it means that you are through with me." I said, "well, General, I am going to answer you with the same frankness. I want to tell you that I resent your reaction to that bill. When this noon Vargas informed me of your conversation with him, I just laughed because I thought it was very foolish of you to have so construed the meaning of that bill. You should know me well enough to know that if I had anything against you I would tell it to you before I said it to anybody else. I am not one of those who hit in the back." Then I explained to the General the reason for the presentation of the bill <sup>and</sup> finally





ended by saying, "Of course, I never intended to organize that Department of National Defense without fully discussing the matter with you and whether I organize it or not it was my intention that you should continue you work in accordance with our understanding in Wawhington, but, General, it is time for you to realize fully, as I have no doubt you do, that after all the final authority and responsiblity in this government rest with me; that while I have the highest regard for your ability as I consider you one of the greatest if not the greatest soldier of your time, and while I have absolute confidence in your loyalty, I must, nevertheless, reserve the right to have the final say on all matters where I may have my own opinion even when that opinion is contrary to yours. I know how ignorant I am on military affairs, but I still can and do form my own judgment on some of these questions, and when I do I must insist that what I say will go." To this remark General MacArthur simply said, "Well, of course, Mr. President, you know that I am a soldier and if a soldier knows something, he knows his duty to obey orders whether the orders that he is obeying, he likes them or not, and he gives <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ best evidence of his training as a soldier when he obeys orders faithfully and loyally that he dislikes. There has never been any question in my mind that when after you have said the last word after giving me the opportunity to express my views that your last word must be obeyed". "Well, I said, that settles the question, General, and let us forget





the incident. Now I want to talk to you about other things in the army. I want you to tell me whether as a matter of practice or discipline with all the armies in the world, it is contrary to regulations for a subordinate officer to express his disagreement with his chief when, in his opinion, the chief is making a decision which is wrong." General MacArthur said that it is not, on the contrary, it is the duty of the officer to express his disagreement provided he expresses it through the proper channels and does not go over the head of his superior. "Well," I said, I very glad to know that because I intend to tell you that regardless of what the practice of armies in all the world, I want the Philippine Army to give to the officers of the Army the privilege to express their opinion and once they have been heard the superior authority may still decide the question contrary to their expressed opinion and in that case the superior's order has to be obeyed. Then we talked about General Valdes and General MacArthur told me that General Valdes would make a better Chief of Staff than General Santos.

Thus a subject which I thought was going to end with a showdown was ended in a mutual satisfaction between General MacArthur and myself.

Aboard the "Casiana"