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HOW THE MARCOS OPPOSITION CHALLENGES THE UNITED STATES

INTRODUCTION

The simmering political and economic crisis in the Republic of the Philippines has created a complex problem for U.S. policy makers. Never before has the Philippine Republic figured so prominently in U.S. security calculations--and never before have U.S. security relations with Manila faced so uncertain a future. This is the situation in which Washington must chart a course that will protect U.S. interests in the Philippines without doing a disservice to the general interests of the government of the Philippines or its people.

Since the August 1983 assassination of former Senator Benigno ("Ninoy") Aquino, Jr., on the tarmac of Manila International Airport, the government of President Ferdinand Marcos has suffered severe impairments, and political circumstances in the Philippines have become increasingly volatile. There have been massive defections from the Marcos regime in the urban areas, with both surveys and elections providing evidence of the regime's loss of credibility.

Under these circumstances, the credibility of a variety of anti-Marcos opposition groups has increased markedly. What had been a dispirited and disorganized political opposition has become more effective--attracting broad-based support and significant financial assistance. This revitalized opposition now includes groups ranging from the radical communist left, through left-leaning student and Church groups as well as old-line politicians and Church-affiliated reformist elements, to those who advocate a simple restoration of constitutional government. There also are more moderate reformers within Marcos's party and the armed forces.

Within this complex political environment U.S. officials must choose a suitable course, directly or indirectly supporting one or another, or some collection of political forces, which will foster results that will serve both U.S. and general Philippine interests.

As though all this were not difficult enough, the Philippine domestic crisis is unfolding in an international context that involves the security interests of the world's major military powers. As the Philippines was sliding into political and economic crisis, the Soviet military gained access to base facilities in Vietnam. By the time of the assassination of Benigno Aquino, Soviet naval and air units had become a relatively permanent fixture in Southeast Asia.

THE CURRENT CRISIS

The Soviet Factor

The projection of Soviet air and naval forces into East and Southeast Asia now constitutes a considerable military threat not only to U.S. security interests but to all the nations of the region. This new factor gives the developments in the Philippines a major geopolitical dimension. Soviet naval combatants now routinely use base facilities in Vietnam. Some of the most advanced Soviet combat aircraft have been observed on Vietnamese airfields, and in recent months Soviet reconnaissance aircraft have regularly violated the Philippine air defense zone. Soviet naval and air units have engaged in joint operations with the Vietnamese military in complex amphibious maneuvers in the region.¹

The Soviet fleet's blue water capabilities now extend from the coast of Africa to Vladivostok and threaten the major sea lanes of communication of the Western Pacific. Since early 1983, Moscow has been operating from 25 to 30 warships and auxiliaries in the South China Sea. This means that, for the first time in history, the Soviet Union projects a formidable military presence in Southeast Asia. The most important Western counterweight to this are the U.S. air and naval bases in the Philippines.²

Economic Aspects

In contrast to their security relations, U.S.-Philippine economic relations are of relatively minor importance to the U.S. American investments in the Philippines make up no more than 0.5

¹ See "Soviet Flyovers Reported," Washington Times, December 21, 1984, p. 7A; "The Russians are Landing," The Economist, April 28, 1984, p. 47.

² See A. James Gregor, "The Key Role of U.S. Bases in the Philippines," Heritage Foundation Asian Studies Center Backgrounders No. 7, January 10, 1984.

percent of total U.S. foreign investment and less than 2 percent of all U.S. investment in developing countries.³ In 1981, even before the economic crisis that followed the Aquino assassination, trade between the U.S. and the Philippines only amounted to about \$3.5 billion, about 0.8 percent of total U.S. global trade and just under 7 percent of total U.S. trade with Asian developing countries. For the Philippines, however, the U.S. economic connection is of critical consequence. About 25 percent of all external Philippine economic activity is with the U.S., which provides a market for about 30 percent of all Philippine exports and is the source of about 23 percent of all Philippine imports.⁴ In effect, the U.S. is as important to the economic viability of the Philippines as is the Philippines to the security interests of the U.S. in Southeast Asia.

A Long Political History

Beyond this, unlike most "decolonized" nations in Asia and Africa, the long colonial relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines forged bonds of affection and cultural affinity that have survived to this day. In spite of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos's identification of his nation as an "Asian" and "Third World" country, it remains a Western-oriented, pro-American political community.⁵

The political turmoil following the 1983 Aquino assassination has been fueled by the mounting economic difficulties in the Philippines. These difficulties are expected to persist at least until the Philippine economy begins to grow--something not anticipated before 1986 at the earliest.

The political integrity of the Marcos government has been seriously undermined by the investigation of the Agrava Commission into the murder of Aquino. The Commission concluded that a "military conspiracy" was involved. This, coupled with evidence of a protracted illness afflicting Marcos himself, suggests a high-risk political environment in the Philippines that will persist for the indeterminate future. In this environment, Philippines government functionaries appear to be alienated, demoralized, and largely immobilized.

All these factors--predicated on security, economic, and political interests--make up the "special relationship" that has

³ Edberto Villegas, Studies in Philippine Political Economy (Manila: Silangan, 1983), p. 4.

⁴ Philippine-American Relations (Manila: National Media Production Center, August 1982), pp. 6-7. See A. James Gregor, Crisis in the Philippines: A Threat to U.S. Interests (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy, 1984), pp. 24-25.

⁵ See Ferdinand E. Marcos, The New Philippine Republic: A Third World Approach to Democracy (Manila: Ferdinand E. Marcos, 1982), chap. 7.

characterized U.S.-Philippine interchange for eight decades.^o All are threatened by the current crisis that has settled down on the Philippines. It is within these circumstances that U.S. policy makers must find the most appropriate courses of action.

THE ALTERNATIVES

A number of major considerations influence current American judgments concerning Philippine alternatives. One is the apparent indisposition of U.S. analysts to take Filipino declarative policy seriously.

Reminiscent of the analysis of many "China-watchers" in the late 1940s is the inclination of some American policy makers and academics to interpret Filipino political pronouncements rather than to listen to them. Thus, the anti-Marcos opposition is understood to seek no more than a restoration of pluralist democracy. In fact, many of the leaders of the anti-Marcos political opposition choose to interpret the present crisis in the Philippines, not in "bourgeois democratic" terms, but in quasi-Marxist categories.

Americans often have made costly mistakes in assessing the character of political and revolutionary movements: in China in the late 1940s, in Cuba in the late 1950s, in Cambodia in the early 1970s, and a few years later in Nicaragua. Revolutionary pronouncements, fundamentally anti-U.S. in inspiration, typically have been dismissed by American analysts as expressions of pique, as an "understandable" reaction to "mistaken" U.S. policy that has "supported" an incumbent, and offending, regime. The suggestion has always been that, after a revolution displaces the offending system, "moderate" oppositions, irrespective of their revolutionary and anti-American rhetoric, would lapse back into broadly democratic, pro-U.S. postures. Once again these arguments are being heard in the U.S., this time in terms of the anti-Marcos political opposition in the Philippines.

The analysis currently offered divides the viable political forces in the Philippines into two broad categories: those identified with the Marcos incumbency and those loosely grouped as the "anti-Marcos opposition." Most attention seems to be focused on the latter. In terms of U.S. interests, however, it is evident that those identified with the Marcos administration, rather than with the opposition, afford the assurance of a continuation of the policies that have proved compatible with overall U.S. interests. Those associated with the anti-Marcos political opposition, on the other hand, constitute a threat to those interests.

^o See the discussion in A. James Gregor, ed., The U.S. and the Philippines: A Challenge to a Special Relationship (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1983).

There is little to suggest that any of those identified with the Marcos administration would profit in any way by assuming an anti-American posture. Prime Minister Cesar Virata and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, for example, frequently mentioned as potential successors to Marcos, would find little political advantage in pursuing an anti-American policy. Even Minister of Human Settlements and Mayor of Metro-Manila Imelda Marcos, consort of the President, would gain absolutely no political advantage assuming an anti-U.S. stance.

Ferdinand Marcos has made the position of his administration eminently clear. In his judgment, the agreement between the U.S. and the Philippines regarding the U.S. naval base at Subic Bay and the Air Force installation at Clark Air Base could not be abrogated "without disrupting the present basis of international relations which has certain strategic utility for the stability of [Southeast Asia] and, to a certain degree, to the whole world." Added Marcos: "American development assistance, extended bilaterally as well as through the United Nations and other international institutions, has been a major factor in sustaining economic and social progress in the Third World."

No one in the Marcos administration has suggested abrogation or termination of the U.S.-Philippines military bases agreement, a review of the security relations between the two countries, or a fundamental change in the developmental strategy pursued by Manila for the past decade or so. The reelection of Marcos in the scheduled 1987 voting or his replacement by any member of his administration would result most probably in a continuation of the basic policies that have characterized Filipino politics since the imposition of martial law in 1972. In fact, U.S. interests would be best served by a continuation of Manila's current policies, supplemented by adaptive changes that would foster greater accountability on the part of the Philippine government agencies, more assiduous financial and administrative control over quasi-governmental monopolies in the various productive sectors of the Philippine economy, the assurance of honest and open elections in the local and national contests in 1986 and 1987, and increased protection for civil and political liberties throughout the republic. What this suggests is evolutionary change rather than revolutionary transformation. The alternatives to that process are fairly obvious.

THE ANTI-MARCOS OPPOSITION: THE LEFT

Opposition outside the Marcos party has assumed anti-American postures that could well threaten the peace and security of the entire Western Pacific region. In this regard, there is little

4 Ferdinand Marcos, "Genesis of RP-US Relations," in Bulletin Today, Manila, June 2-3, 1983.

doubt about the anti-Americanism of the radical left. The "Maoist" Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its political extension, the National Democratic Front, are openly and unqualifiedly anti-American in orientation and intention. For the Filipino Maoists, the U.S. remains the "imperialistic oppressor" whose machinations have imposed a "fascist dictatorship" on the Philippines. For them, the only course open to the Philippines is to cut all "neocolonialist" ties with the U.S. and insist upon the immediate removal of all foreign military bases from Philippine soil--since those bases constitute a critical part of the "structure of oppression" that weighs heavily on the islands.⁸

In addition to the organized Maoists, a variety of leftist sects in the Philippines provides the intellectual rationale for anti-Americanism. The radical Christian left espouses a version of "liberation theology" that brands the "capitalist" U.S. as the oppressor of Third World peoples.⁹ The most radical Christian leftists call themselves Christians for National Liberation. The CNL now makes up a constituent part of the Maoist National Democratic Front, and some of its members apparently belong to such groups as the "Light-A-Fire" and "April 6th" revolutionary "liberation" groups.

Those Christian groups associated with former Senator Raul Manglapus are tendentially or explicitly anti-American. They not only oppose U.S. military bases in the Philippines, they oppose U.S. investments in the islands and the presence of U.S. aid officials anywhere in the nation.¹⁰ Recently Armando Malay, one of the most astute political commentators on Philippine politics, spoke of the "surprising similarity of the demands of different groups" on the Philippine left. He remarked that among them "there are hardly any differences in terms of substantive issues. They are all against American imperialism. They all believe that American imperialism is the greatest impediment to development." Moreover, he went on, they all tend to oppose the presence of U.S. military bases on Philippine soil.¹¹

⁸ The "obligation" of the Maoist CPP is to "fight U.S. imperialism and all its local reactionary agents....[The] Philippines has too long served as the bastion of U.S. imperialism....The national united front should be lined up primarily against the class forces of counterrevolution, the U.S. imperialists...." Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party (Congress of the Re-establishment, Communist Party of the Philippines, December 26, 1968. London: Filipino Support Group, n.d.), pp. 36, 37. See Amado Guerrero (Jose Maria Sison), Philippine Society and Revolution (Oakland: California: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979); Programme for a People's Democratic Revolution in the Philippines (Boston, Massachusetts: Philippines Liberation Press, n.d., reprinted from Ang Bayan, Organ of the Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines).

⁹ See the discussion in A. James Gregor, "On 'Liberation Theology,'" Cogito (Manila), 1, 2 (June 1983).

¹⁰ Crisis in the Philippines, op. cit., pp. 69-74.

¹¹ Armando Malay, Jr., "Some Random Reflections on Marxism and Maoism in the Philippines," in Marxism in the Philippines, pp. 80-81, see p. 83.

There is little doubt that the views of the Maoist and "Christian" left are inimical to U.S. economic and security interests in the Philippines. While the "Christians" distinguish themselves from the Maoists in terms of certain domestic political arrangements and their vision of the future Philippine society, there is a doleful unanimity of opinion with respect to future Philippine-U.S. relations. Those who identify themselves with "social Christianity" are just as insistent about the necessity of resisting U.S. "economic exploitation" as are their secular Maoist compatriots. They are equally urgent about the necessity of "dismantling the U.S. military occupation of the Philippines." For those concerned with U.S. interests and the future of the Philippines, the choice between the Maoists and Christian left is no choice at all.

THE ANTI-MARCOS OPPOSITION: THE "MODERATES"

Many well-intentioned Americans view the moderates as an acceptable alternative to the Marcos administration in terms both of the vision of a future Philippine society and of U.S. interests in the island nation.

The anti-Marcos "moderates" generally are seen as those who do not call themselves revolutionary Marxist-Maoists. This means that the likes of former Senator Raul Manglapus are classified as "moderate" even though they may be far from moderate in terms of the most vital U.S. interests. Manglapus, for his part, animated by his own interpretation of "liberation theology" and "Christian socialism" has advocated armed revolution against the Marcos government and has declared his opposition to the "patchwork democracy," the capitalist greed, and the military aggressiveness of the U.S.¹² He is a forthright advocate of abrogation of the U.S.-Philippine military bases agreement and characterizes the economic relationship between the two countries as "neocolonial."

Manglapus's view of the U.S.-Philippine relationship is essentially that of the entire anti-Marcos "moderate" opposition. Last December 26, most of the anti-Marcos "moderate" opposition signed a "Declaration of Unity" that specified the principles uniting them.¹³ The signatories included almost every candidate for leadership in a post-Marcos opposition administration: Agapito "Butz" Aquino, Jose W. Diokno, Raul S. Manglapus, Ramon Mitra, Aquilino Pimentel, Jovito Salonga, Corazon C. Aquino, Jaime V. Ongpin, and Lorenzo M. Tañada were among them.

¹² See Reuben R. Canoy, The Counterfeit Revolution: Martial Law in the Philippines (Manila: Reuben R. Canoy, 1980), chap. 5; and Raul S. Manglapus, Philippines: The Silenced Democracy (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1976), Introduction and pp. 25, 27, 55, 60, 63.

¹³ The full text of A Declaration of Unity is to be found in Veritas, Manila, January 6, 1985.

