

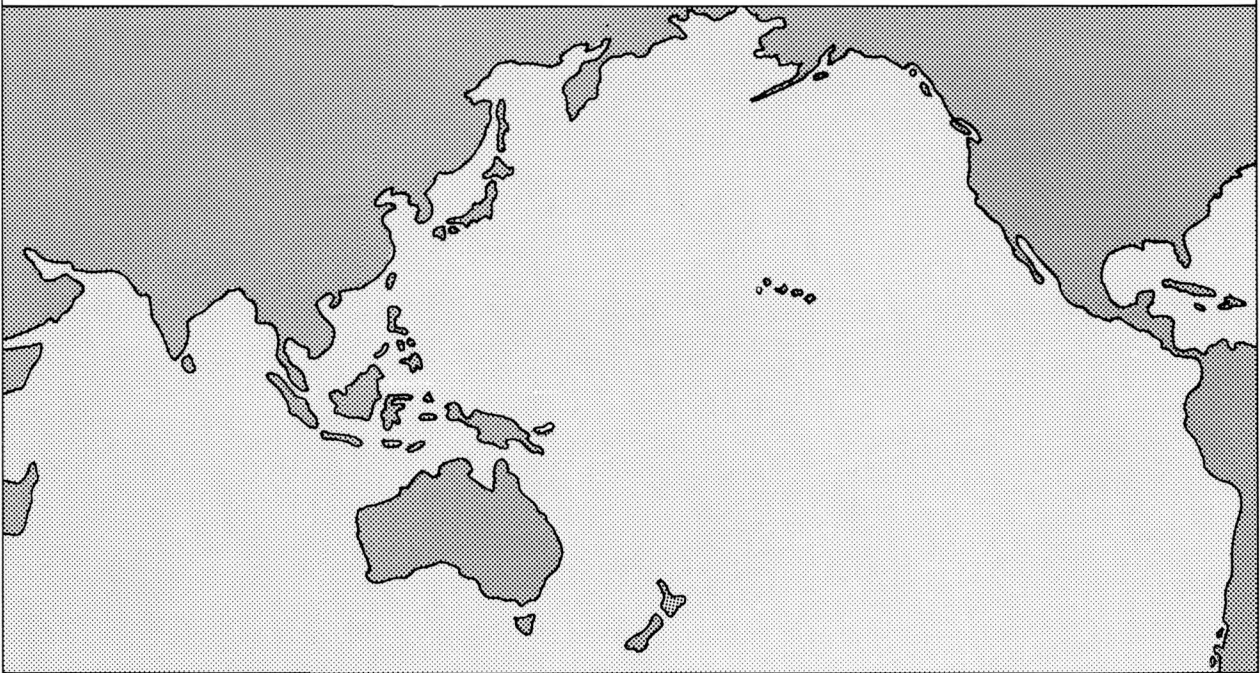


# EAST-WEST CENTER

SPECIAL REPORT

## **Reform or Revolution?**

*The Aquino Government and  
Prospects for the Philippines*



A Gateway in Hawaii Between Asia and America



KEITH B. RICHBURG

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Prospects for the Philippines*

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## Summary

THE STEAMING VOLCANO of Mt. Pinatubo and its devastating after-effects have emerged as a sad but compelling metaphor for the disaster-prone Philippines under the administration of President Corazon C. Aquino.

From the high hopes of the "People Power" revolt in 1986, the country has lurched from crisis to crisis, seeing its modest gains in reviving the economy and rebuilding political institutions repeatedly battered and set back by right-wing coup attempts, leftwing terrorism, secessionist movements, government incompetence, corruption, and a raft of natural disasters. The result has been a government that has been reactive and often paralyzed by events beyond its control.

Mt. Pinatubo's eruption has come as the Philippines began to recover after the Gulf War and the fall in world oil prices. Now, the 15 percent unemployment rate is likely to worsen, and the government may be forced to revise, again, its projected growth in gross national product, which was but 0.2 percent in early 1991.

Perhaps most important for the economy, the volcano has forced the United States to abandon its sprawling Clark Air Base. The continuing volcano threat has made the base inoperable; the fine ash renders computer instruments unusable and is a hazard to jet engines. Manila has been forced to accept an agreement for just \$203

million for America's continued use only of Subic Bay Naval Station.

Coping with this disaster could well define the remaining months of Mrs. Aquino's presidency. Finding jobs for the unemployed, housing for refugees, and money to replace lost revenues will be the standard by which many Filipinos will judge the Aquino government.

After five and one-half years in office, Mrs. Aquino's record does not offer much encouragement. Her government's failure to respond adequately to growing demands for change over the last five years has emboldened forces on the political extremes advocating more revolutionary action.

On the left, the Communist Party of the Philippines shows signs of stagnation. But as long as the government flounders on promises of reform, the radical left will remain a threat. On the right, military mutineers who have styled themselves "reformists" have attempted to co-opt the banner of progress, and will likely remain a source of instability.

Also unsettled is the future of the Philippines' relationship with its former colonial master, the United States. Mrs. Aquino has failed to articulate a clear and coherent policy and to build a consensus over issues such as the U.S. military presence.

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# *Reform or Revolution?*

## The Aquino Government and Prospects for the Philippines

by KEITH B. RICHBURG

**M**ayor Romeo Corpuz of San Marcelino, a farming town two hours' drive north of Manila, sat in the ruins of his municipal building. He seemed at times close to tears as he tried to summarize the damage to his town since the catastrophic June 15 eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, the long-dormant volcano nearby. Only about half of the town's 37,000 inhabitants remained, and for them there was no work and only the food provided by relief agencies. Ninety percent of the town's houses had collapsed under the weight of the volcanic ash. And at noontime—a full three weeks after that major eruption—the volcano was still spewing out ash each day, turning the midday sky as black as midnight.

"There is no peace of mind for the people in this town," the mayor said, explaining how the volcano could remain active for years to come. "They cannot go on with the rehabilitation work. They cannot rebuild their houses because they are afraid. There is nothing."<sup>1</sup>

San Marcelino, in Zambales province on Luzon island, was perhaps the town hardest hit by the unexpected eruption. Overall, across the volcano-affected provinces, Philippine officials estimate that some 650,000 people have lost their livelihoods, 27,000 hectares of farmland have been wiped out, and more than a half-million head of cattle and poultry perished.<sup>2</sup> In addition, continuing mudslides—caused by monsoon rains releasing volcanic debris from the mountain slopes—have displaced tens of

thousands of villagers, many of whom have streamed into Manila. Their presence has added pressure on a capital already suffering from inadequate housing and high unemployment.

The steaming volcano, with all its devastating after-effects, has emerged as a sad but compelling metaphor for the disaster-prone Philippines under the administration of President Corazon C. Aquino. From the high hopes of the "People Power" revolt in 1986, the country has lurched from crisis to crisis, seeing its modest gains in reviving the economy and rebuilding political institutions repeatedly battered and set back by rightwing coup attempts, leftwing terrorism, secessionist movements, government incompetence, corruption, and a raft of natural disasters. The result has been a government that is at best reactive, and at worst, paralyzed by events beyond its control.

Filipinos have grown accustomed to picking up the pieces following disasters—including a bloody coup attempt in 1989, a massive earthquake on Luzon in 1990, and a devastating typhoon later that year that largely wrecked the once-prosperous central island of Cebu. But unlike those upheavals, the volcano's effects linger, creating what John McBeth of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* has termed the "economic strangulation" of the struggling country.<sup>3</sup>

The latest disaster has also come as the Philippines was beginning to see signs of recovery after the end of the Gulf War and the fall in world oil prices. Now, because of the volcano, the country's 15 percent unemployment rate is likely to worsen, and the government may be forced to revise, again, its projected figure for growth in gross national product, which was a scant 0.2 percent for the first three months of 1991.<sup>4</sup>

## Abbreviations

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines.
CARP	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program, Aquino's land reform law.
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines.
GMA-7	A Manila television and radio station seized by rebel troops in 1987.
NBI	National Bureau of Investigation, Manila's equivalent of the FBI.
NDF	National Democratic Front, the umbrella group for leftist organizations.
NPA	New People's Army, the communist military wing.
PAF	Philippine Air Force.
RAM	Reform the Armed Forces Movement.
SFP	Soldiers of the Filipino People, the Marcos loyalist faction.
YOU	Young Officers Union.

In addition, and perhaps most important for the long-term economic picture, the volcano has forced the United States to abandon its sprawling Clark Air Base in nearby Pampanga. The continuing volcano threat has made the base virtually inoperable; the fine ash—something the consistency of baby powder—renders finely calibrated computer instruments unusable and is a hazard to jet engines. Clark had figured into the Philippines' request for \$830 million in annual U.S. assistance. In the aftermath of the volcano, Manila has been forced to accept an agreement for only \$203 million for America's continued use only of Subic Bay Naval Station in Olongapo.<sup>5</sup> Clark's impact on the economy of surrounding Angeles City is formidable; the base employs 42,000 workers directly and indirectly.



Coping with this disaster could well define the remaining months of Corazon C. Aquino's presidency. As San Marcelino Mayor Corpuz put it, "I know we can recover if the national leadership will help us." Finding jobs for the unemployed, housing for the refugees, and money to replace the lost revenues will be the standard by which many Filipinos ultimately judge the success or failure of the Aquino government in its pledge to speak for the poor and the dispossessed.

So far, after five-and-a-half years in office, Mrs. Aquino's record does not offer much encouragement.

The Aquino government's failure to respond adequately to growing demands for change over the last five years has emboldened forces on the political extremes advocating more revolutionary—and violent—action.

On the left, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) is showing signs of stagnation, as the movement is dogged by a more efficient counterinsurgency campaign and an erosion of its ideological base. But as long as the government flounders on its promises of reform, the radical left will remain a long-term threat.

On the opposite side, military mutineers who have styled themselves "reformists" have also attempted to co-opt the banner of progressive change and will likely remain a source of instability not only for Aquino but whoever succeeds her. Also unsettled is the future course of the Philippines' relationship with its former colonial power, the United States, as Mrs. Aquino has failed to articulate a clear and coherent policy and build a national consensus over such divisive issues as the U.S. military presence.

## The Aquino Legacy: What Happened?

It was an uncharacteristically humble, somewhat chastened Corazon Aquino who made the long journey in July from Malacanang Palace to the old Marcos-era parliament building in Quezon City to address the assembled members of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives. In many ways, the very fact that these bodies were meeting at all was a testament to Mrs. Aquino's early success in restoring the formal structures of democracy after two decades of decay. But what she had to say in this, her final state-of-the-union address, seemed to speak more to her failures than to her successes.

"God knows, we have made mistakes," Mrs. Aquino said. "I hope that history will judge me . . . favorably . . . because, as God as my witness, I honestly did the best I could."<sup>6</sup>

The contrast to past Aquino speeches was stark. Typically, in her addresses to Congress or in speaking to the press, Mrs. Aquino preferred to extoll her successes while railing in strident language against all critics. In one address, she chided the unshaven military mutineers by taunting, "Some people don't like the way I dress. Well, I don't like the way they look. I am in power and they are out." Mrs. Aquino's admission of "mistakes" seems to mirror the general sense of the country—the sense of disappointment, disillusionment, frustration and even despair. A reporter who lived in Manila for four years during Mrs. Aquino's rule, and has returned there twice since, found by 1991 the public mood of discontent palpable. Almost everyone, including some of the president's staunch early supporters, spoke about having been let down and were waiting to see what new presidential elections might bring in 1992, since Mrs.

Aquino has repeatedly said she will not be a candidate for reelection.

This disillusion stands in sharp contrast to the heady days of great expectations following the dramatic "People Power" revolt of February, 1986, that ousted the corrupt dictatorship of Ferdinand E. Marcos and brought Cory Aquino to power. The coalition of middle-class Filipinos, the poor, the business community, and the democratic left forces that combined to stage the 1986 revolt were all filled with high hopes that the new government could ease the country's economic slide, restore the integrity of governmental institutions, and usher in a new era of popular democracy.

It would even seem fair to say that the Philippine revolution served as a global model for peaceful transitions from authoritarian rule to democracy from Eastern Europe to Burma.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Aquino became *Time* magazine's Woman of the Year for 1986 and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Within months, however, the hopes of February started to fade. The Philippines no longer was noted for its "People Power" revolt, but for its constant attempted coups and military mutinies. The government came to be characterized by incompetence, inefficiency, and bickering among senior cabinet officials and between the executive and legislative branches. Official, high-level corruption again became prevalent, forcing Aquino's longtime backers in the Catholic Church to issue a pastoral letter condemning the practice. Aquino herself acknowledged in 1989 what many Filipinos had already been saying. "Corruption," she conceded, "is again a way of public life."<sup>8</sup>

What happened? The answers are several. They include:

- Systemic flaws that no Philippine president can easily correct;

- Mrs. Aquino's personal failings as a politician and leader;
- The vociferousness of her opponents who never gave her sufficient "running room," or what Americans might call the presidential "honeymoon";
- And, finally, the nature of the events of 1986 that, in retrospect, appear to have been more of a "restoration" than the "revolution" they have been popularly called.

On one level, Mrs. Aquino's failings make for a classic case of the theory of heightened expectations. That is, popular demands following the fall of Marcos were too high to have been satisfied by any president, much less one with no political experience like Corazon Aquino, a housewife and widow of a popular opposition leader. Mrs. Aquino herself appears to accept this explanation for the shortcomings of her government. In one interview, in October, 1989, just before a sixth bloody coup attempt to oust her, Mrs. Aquino told me: "People were just expecting miracles because of the seemingly easy transition from dictatorship to democracy. . . . When I was running for president, I did not promise many things. In fact, at that time, I think we were all just concerned that this country be brought back to democracy."<sup>9</sup>

In one sense, Mrs. Aquino was correct. A review of her campaign speeches found few specific promises and only vague references to improving the lives of Filipinos and curbing abuses of human rights. Yet during her campaign various groups whose support she needed began grafting on programs and policies they assumed she would support if elected. And while Aquino may have made few promises during her campaign, she did appear to raise expectations for sweeping reform once she was in office. For example, she unveiled a land-reform plan that she pledged would be

“comprehensive” and contribute to “the uplifting of the Filipino masses.” She said land reform would be the centerpiece of her administration.

But the law was gutted by the landlord-dominated Congress, while Mrs. Aquino stood by passively refusing to get involved in the debate. Then its implementation was stalled by bureaucratic inefficiency, the oppositionist tactics of big landowners, and finally by corruption scandals.<sup>10</sup> So far, few land titles have been distributed to poor farmers.

It should be noted that Mrs. Aquino’s early efforts at reform were often frustrated by her political adversaries—the opposition politicians and, in the violent extreme, the military mutineers who were intent on overthrowing her. Much of her early time in office was spent fending off various contenders to the throne, including her defense minister; her vice-president; ex-President Marcos and his wife, Imelda, who were underwriting a destabilization campaign from Honolulu; Communist insurgents; and a restless military. Mrs. Aquino also appears needlessly to have antagonized many local political bosses by her decision to dismiss summarily all local government officeholders—all the mayors and governors and councilmen throughout the 73 provinces—and replace them with handpicked “officers-in-charge” loyal to her.

In many ways, Mrs. Aquino became a victim of her initial success. She did restore constitutional democracy to the Philippines, including a vociferously free press, a fiercely independent bicameral legislature, and a judiciary

no longer controlled from the presidential palace. But she soon found that her legislative proposals became bottled up in Congress as various factions and entrenched interests asserted their power. The press became a constant, harping critic. And Mrs. Aquino found many of her rulings and decrees reversed by the court system she helped to unshackle.



For example, following the bloody December, 1989, coup attempt, Mrs. Aquino tried to project an image of toughness with the plotters by ordering the jailing of the lone opposition senator, Juan Ponce Enrile, on charges that he aided the failed mutiny. But days later, the Philippine Supreme Court ordered Enrile freed and the charges against him thrown out because, technically, the

charge lodged—rebellion complexed with murder—did not exist under Philippine law. The land-reform debacle offers another example of how the president found her efforts thwarted by the very Congress she was responsible for recreating. When Aquino introduced land-reform legislation, she left the key details for Congress to decide, only to find the entire program gutted by a legislature dominated by landlords—including her brother, Rep. Jose (“Peping”) Cojuangco, who led the anti-land reform bloc in the House of Representatives.

Many of those obstacles could have been overcome had Mrs. Aquino proven more adept in the use of her executive powers, and thus the president herself must be at least partly blamed for her failings. She was hampered by the lack of a political party or “machine” to oversee enactment of her policies, and she failed to marshal her vast reservoir of popular

support, the "People Power" that propelled her to office.

Much of the reason for this failing has to do with Mrs. Aquino's often-stated aversion to the use of presidential powers in a dictatorial fashion. Her aversion is understandable, since she campaigned for—and won—election as a candidate opposed to the authoritarian style of Marcos. Once elected, she refused to involve herself in what she saw as the prerogative of the legislative branch, and in the year-long

had called for major reforms during the election, it became apparent that her government was not prepared to take quick action on controversial issues such as land reform.<sup>11</sup>

Aquino readily acknowledged her distaste for what she considered excessive use of executive powers and even the appearance of acting in a dictatorial fashion. In my interview with her in October, 1989, she expressed frustration over the difficulty of trying to satisfy demands

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***"What is happening now is that people would like to have the benefits of a dictatorship at the same time living under a democracy."***

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period before the new Congress was established in 1987, she refused to exercise the vast decree-making executive powers granted to her under the interim constitution (the so-called Freedom Constitution of 1986–87) that was hastily drawn up to replace the old Marcos constitution.

Analyzing the early months of the Aquino presidency, political scientist and Philippine-watcher David G. Timberman, writing in a Singapore journal called *Southeast Asian Affairs*, observed:

The Aquino government . . . often seemed paralyzed by indecision and internal disagreements—even though the "Freedom Constitution" gave it powers equal to or greater than those possessed by Marcos. . . . Progress on key socio-economic issues was frustratingly slow. . . . And although Aquino

for quick action within the constraints imposed by a democratic form of government. She also blamed the Filipino people for not understanding or appreciating that democracy is by nature a slow-moving process.

"What is happening now is that people would like to have the benefits of a dictatorship at the same time living under a democracy," she told me. "When they refer to me as being weak and ineffective, they would like to see the forcefulness of a dictator. But they are not willing to give up their freedoms either, in exchange for the rapid decisions of a dictator."<sup>12</sup>

The problem with Mrs. Aquino's philosophy of restraint is that the quick exercise of executive powers may be precisely what her struggling country needs. Experiences in the more prosperous countries of East Asia appear to

have demonstrated the advantages of a kind of liberal authoritarianism when it is directed towards the goal of national economic development. This has been the case for the military-bureaucratic regimes of Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea and for the strongman, single-party states like Singapore, all of which have seen impressive economic growth, relative political stability, and national development over the last decade.<sup>13</sup>

A case could also be made that a stronger hand at the center in dealing firmly with military mutineers in the early days might have been sufficient to stave off subsequent coup attempts. The commission empaneled to investigate the causes of the December, 1989, revolt said in its initial report:

While there is understandably a reluctance by President Aquino to exercise power in a manner that might be compared with former President Marcos, a democracy in a crisis of transition calls for a firmer and more direct hand at the helm.<sup>14</sup>

The Aquino government's modest efforts at reform have also been constrained by systemic flaws in the Philippine body politic. Indeed, these flaws run so deep that it would probably be fair to say that any Philippine president—even one more disposed to the use of executive authority—would have been similarly stymied. Political scientist and Philippine scholar Benedict J. Kerkvliet of the University of Hawaii has identified what he termed five "broad features of the Philippine politics" that have persisted and acted as constraints on the government.<sup>15</sup> They are:

1. A relatively weak nation-state apparatus. The Philippine archipelago, comprising more than 6,000 islands and encompassing a myriad of ethnic and linguistic groupings, is relatively new as a "nation," despite more than three hundred years of Spanish colonization and forty years under American administra-

tion. The problem is true of many newly independent Asian countries, where the effort at "nation building" is a continuing process and popular identification with the larger interests of the nation is still relatively weak. But the Philippines has the additional problem of having a relatively weak "state," meaning central government. Kerkvliet pointed out that government expenditures in the Philippines are quite low and shrinking as a percentage of GNP—only 11 percent in 1986, for example, compared with 22 percent in Malaysia and 26 percent in Thailand and Indonesia.

2. The close relationship with the United States constrains independent action. Kerkvliet noted two instances, the problem of debt repayment and land reform, in which the dominant position of the United States in the Philippine economy has limited the government's freedom of movement. On the problem of the debt, there was a strong sentiment among the Philippine political elite for some kind of selective moratorium on repayment, particularly on questionable loans obtained by the discredited Marcos regime, until the new government could sort out its own economic priorities. But fears of U.S. retaliation, among other reasons, prompted the government to adopt a policy of repaying bad or questionable loans while asking for debt relief only as part of overall aid negotiations.

3. Economic disparities. This is perhaps the most glaring feature of the Philippines, as even the first-time visitor will notice that Manila is a city of Mercedes limousines and mansions at one extreme and ragged street beggars and sprawling squatter communities at the other. According to Kerkvliet's calculations, the top 20 percent of the population had incomes 23 times that of the bottom 20 percent. And the gap is growing.

4. A strong system of patronage. Much in the Philippines (as elsewhere in Asia) is built

on ties of family, province, linguistic group, and fraternity. The patronage system parallels and often supplants formal lines of authority.

5. A blurred distinction between what is public and what is private. This relates to the patronage system and is known in the West as corruption. In Philippine terms, it means that public monies—for example, funding for a provincial highway project—are often distributed as the private reserve of provincial politicians to support family and village kin.

These features of Philippine life have persisted for generations, and it was perhaps unrealistic to believe that any president operating within traditional constraints could have molded an entirely new and modern nation. Traditional patterns were allowed to reassert themselves because of the nature of the street protests and military mutiny of 1986 that led to the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship and the ascension of Cory Aquino.

That changeover has been mistakenly labeled a “revolution.” Mistakenly, I say, because a revolution, in the classic sense, would have uprooted traditional patterns and practices. The old system would have been broken down in a true revolution, and a new system would have been instituted in its place. A true Philippine revolution would have brought about pervasive political, social, and economic restructuring.

Rather than a revolution, the events of February, 1986, might best be called a “restoration.” The term was chosen with care. It refers on one level to the restoration of past patterns and practices—the traditional pattern of feudalistic, patronage-based dynastic politics that permeated the Philippines until it was disrupted by two decades of Marcos’s authoritarian rule. But in another sense, “restoration” also refers to the revival of some of the same players on

## Philippine Political Parties

LDP	Lakas ng Demokratikong Pilipino
LP	Liberal Party
PDP	Pilipino Democratic Party
NP	Nacionalista Party
PP	Partido Pilipino

the political stage, the political elite that had dominated Philippine politics until the entire process was hijacked by Marcos and his new breed of elite, the so-called crony capitalists.

The two elections held during Aquino’s first two years—the May, 1987, congressional elections and the January, 1988, local government balloting—were supposed to mark the consolidation of the gains of the 1986 “revolution.” The elections were to signal a shift away from traditional politics ruled by “guns, goons, and gold” to what became popularly known as the “new politics” ushered in by Aquino and People Power. There were some changes. The congressional elections did bring some young, previously unknown candidates, who were backed by Mrs. Aquino, into the House and Senate, while the subsequent gubernatorial elections on the surface appeared to be a rejection of old-school politics. The average age of the winning governors was four years less than that under their predecessors in the Marcos era, while only four of the old-school governors remained (in the total of 73 provinces).<sup>16</sup>

But the changes were far fewer than the initial numbers might suggest. In the first place, according to the private Institute for Popular Democracy in Manila (quoted in the *Far East-*

*ern Economic Review*), 129 of the 200 elected congressmen were identified as leaders of old political clans, while 39 were scions of established provincial oligarchies. The institute found that 65 percent of the new congressmen had pre-1987 political experience, and only 15 percent were political newcomers.<sup>17</sup> The new young governors, as well, appeared to mark a passing of the torch to the next generation of the same old family dynasties rather than a shift in political power.

Thus it would appear that while the Aquino 1986 election and "revolution" are credited with bringing a new period of political democracy and reform, what actually occurred could be more accurately called a "restoration" of old-school politics. As the traditional oligarchs, family dynasties, and provincial bosses reasserted their longtime grip on the country, the chances of true reform—at least through the formal, political and legislative process—were diminished. The rape of Aquino's land-reform legislation in the landlord-dominated Congress was ample demonstration of how the traditional politicians are inherently conservative and not so much interested in reform as in preserving the status quo, and all of its inequalities.

So far, only two identifiable nationwide groups are advocating broad-based systemic change—including breaking the power of the traditional oligarchs, redistribution of income, and "comprehensive" land reform. They are the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) on the left and a loose alliance of military rebels, including the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) and the Young Officers Union (YOU), on the right. The sincerity of each group in its advocacy of reform is highly questionable, although both claim to be speaking for the poor, the rural masses, and the economically dispossessed. Both advocate violent, revolutionary change.

And both pose serious, long-term threats not only to the Aquino government but to whatever government succeeds it in 1992.

## The Communist Party

In the first half of the 1980s, the CPP and its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA), were considered the greatest threat to Philippine stability. The phenomenal growth of the insurgency under Marcos—fed, in fact, by the old regime's dictatorial repression—led many U.S. and foreign analysts to predict an eventual communist takeover unless reforms were instituted. Fear of the insurgency was one of the reasons that key figures in the Reagan administration lobbied for a new policy of breaking with Marcos and opening ties to the democratic opposition and dissident groups in the military. Washington persuaded Marcos to call a surprise, or "snap" presidential election before his constitutional term expired, and when evidence of widespread fraud surfaced, State Department and Pentagon insiders persuaded a reluctant President Reagan to withdraw support from the old regime.

With Mrs. Aquino, and the restoration of democratic institutions, the country was seen as having a greater chance to stem the growth of the insurgency, which by 1986 boasted a peak of some 24,000 guerilla fighters (half of them armed). From that peak, however, the communist insurgency has seen a steady decline. A combination of factors over the last five years has led to this diminishing of the Communists' strength and an erosion of their support. Among them were:

- The ill-advised decision of the CPP Central Committee to boycott the 1986 "snap" election. The Communists thereby missed an

opportunity to participate in the democratic process and later to claim a stake in helping Mrs. Aquino succeed to the presidency.

- A newly invigorated Philippine armed forces, flushed with more American assistance and heightened morale following the 1986 revolt. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) began scoring impressive gains against the insurgents, who in the past had the upper hand in some areas.
- Improvement in the AFP intelligence capabilities that led to the arrest of several key CPP Central Committee members. They include Saturnino Ocampo and his wife, Carolina ("Bobby") Malay—perhaps the best-known Central Committee members—who were arrested on July 27, 1987, and NPA chief Romulo Kintanar, who was arrested with his wife while being fitted for a pair of eyeglasses at a Makati hospital in early August, 1991. AFP intelligence also led to the capture of Communist Party computer diskettes that authorities described as a veritable treasure trove of information on the insurgents, their internal debates, safehouses, and international financing.
- The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The global crisis in communism sapped the Philippine insurgents of their ideological underpinnings. While the Communists consistently claimed that they were building an indigenous "Philippine model" of socialism based on the country's internal condition, they had often, in interviews, mentioned Nicaragua as a potential model.<sup>18</sup>
- Internal schisms within the party over the wisdom of sticking with the Maoist, rural strategy of slowly building support in the countryside versus a Leninist, urban strategy that would put more stress on violent

guerilla activities in the cities, including the killing of Americans. The debate became so intense—and so public—that at one point, the captured head of the New People's Army, interviewed in prison, warned against the party's shift towards "military adventurism" and said the party needed to concentrate on the more tedious work of education in the villages.<sup>19</sup>

- A spate of assassinations of police officers and local officials in Manila by communist hit teams called "sparrow units" because the killers were able to strike their victims quickly and flitter away like tiny sparrows. (The AFP at one point formed its own unit to track the sparrows and named it The Eagles.) The sparrow killings appear to have drained the insurgents of much of their public sympathy and support.
- Recruiting difficulties. The party reportedly had trouble attracting new members from among its urban bases, the squatter communities and particularly on college campuses.
- The growth in some major outlying provinces, like Negros island and parts of Mindanao, of military-backed vigilante groups. Some groups were linked to small tribal religious sects, like the Tadtad in Davao, whose name means "chop to pieces" because of their propensity for hacking their victims up with machetes. Others, like the older, established Alsa Masa in Davao City, included Communist defectors. The Alsa Masa was responsible for chasing the Communists out of the Agdao district of the city that, before 1986, was so heavily Communist-infested that it was referred to as "Nicaragdao." The vigilantes were accused of using violent methods and abusing human rights, and there were various attempts to bring them under more direct AFP control. But there is little doubt about their effectiveness.<sup>20</sup>



In short, the Philippine Communists were never able to adopt a coherent strategy for dealing with the Aquino presidency. Aside from their admitted blunder of boycotting the "snap" election, the Communists never developed a convincing argument for opposing a generally popular democratically elected president whom most Filipinos continue to view as personally honest and incorruptible.

In the first year of the Aquino administration, the Communists did show themselves to be somewhat adept at taking advantage of what the president referred to as the country's new "democratic space." They participated in peace talks with the government—and even won a ninety-day truce that allowed their members safe passage in Manila, free from the threat of arrest, to move above ground and talk openly with reporters. They continued their infiltration of labor unions. Communist sympathizers were able to use the new government's concern for human rights to raise complaints against the military for its counter-insurgency activities in the provinces. But after the end of the truce in early 1987, and the collapse of talks aimed at finding a comprehensive peace, the CPP-NPA returned to the underground and stepped up its "sparrow" attacks. The timing seemed to coincide with the radical left's general decline and internal disarray.

## The Rise of the Coup Factor

The rise of military factions as a major—and often violent—catalyst for political change has been an unexpected and stunning development during the Aquino administration. It was unexpected since the Philippine military had traditionally been apolitical until Marcos

made it his handmaiden in the administration of martial law. Since becoming independent in 1946, the Philippines had never known a period where the military ever came close to threatening direct intervention into politics. It was stunning because the form of military protest was the mutiny and the attempted coup. In the span of just a few years, the Philippines went from being known as the country of "People Power" to the country with the most coup attempts in rapid succession.

The number of military coup attempts under Aquino is generally placed at six, although some definition is required. Some of the military revolts might be best described as just that—revolts—or better still, as mutinies, since it was unclear whether their ultimate objective was to seize power. In other cases, such as the so-called God Save The Queen operation in the fall of 1986, which led to the ouster from the cabinet of Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, no shots were ever fired.

In that episode, the government claimed to have learned of the coup in advance and to have preempted it by sacking Enrile and reassigning his top security aide, Col. Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan. But Enrile has denied any coup plot ever existed, and questions remain as to whether "God Save The Queen" was an actual coup plan about to be implemented, or more the kind of backroom plotting and intrigue that occurred every day in the Philippines. But whether the coup plot was real or exaggerated by the government, the central question remains; if a coup plot was discovered and preempted, should it still be counted officially as a "coup attempt?" I think not.

By the standard definition of a "coup," Mrs. Aquino has survived only three actual attempts to oust her. The first was the bloody August, 1987, revolt where rebels led by Honasan seized the main military headquar-

ters, Camp Aguinaldo, and had to be bombed out. More than 50 people died in that revolt.

The second was staged by a motley collection of Marcos loyalists in January, 1987, timed to disrupt the voting for a new Aquino constitution. Rebels simultaneously attacked several military camps and a television station around Manila, but only the attack on the TV station succeeded. Since only about two hundred rebel soldiers ended up occupying the television station, GMA-7, the episode has since been dismissed more as a comic opera coup than a serious military revolt. But that does not dismiss the fact that the event started with the attacks on the camps.

By far, the most serious of the real coup attempts was the revolt in December, 1989, in which more than a hundred people died and the rebel soldiers briefly occupied Manila's main business and financial district, including several five-star hotels with their foreign guests held as hostages. This was the most serious in that the largest number of officers and soldiers were involved, and the revolt appeared to attract some support from outlying islands, including Cebu, where rebel troops seized the Mactan Air Base and the Cebu International Airport. It was well-coordinated, and, in contrast to other Philippine coup attempts, it was violent.

With each successive coup attempt, the demands of the rebels broadened, from strictly military concerns—poor pay, inadequate housing, a change in the military hierarchy, and perceived lack of government support for the anti-insurgency campaign—to a wide-ranging agenda of socio-economic concerns, such as land reform and an end to corruption, family dynasties, and patronage. This seemed to reflect, at least in part, a deliberate attempt by the coup plot leaders to attract wider public support for their actions by trying to exploit popular grievances against the government.

## Philippine Coup Attempts

July 6, 1986	Takeover of the Manila hotel by Marcos loyalists.
Nov. 23, 1986	"God Save the Queen" alleged attempt in which Defense Minister Enrile is sacked.
Jan. 27, 1987	Attack on Manila military camps and a television station, which is often called the "GMA-7 Coup."
April 18, 1987	Mutiny by Marcos loyalist troops at Fort Bonifacio, the country's main army camp, in what is sometimes called the "Black Saturday Coup." It was quickly crushed.
August 28, 1997	Coup attempt by Honasan.
October 1988	Alleged plot by Marcos to launch a coup before his indictment on fraud and racketeering charges by a New York grand jury. Imelda Marcos was reportedly seen in a Hawaii store buying hundreds of pairs of combat boots.
December 1989	Coup attempt with the loyalists, RAM, and YOU.

On another, deeper level, however, it appeared to reflect the "revolutionizing" of the Philippine rebel military forces. They have gone from wanting to force a change in the military hierarchy—which would have amounted to making the civilian government subservient to the wishes of the rebels—to wanting to seize power and run the country themselves.

After each of the escalating coup attempts, the government focused on the undeniable statistic that the vast majority of the armed forces stayed loyal to the constitution, the president, and to the chain-of-command. But that claim

ignores, first, that each successive attempt appears to have attracted a larger number and broader cross-section of the military, culminating in the December, 1989, coup attempt when some of the generals appointed by Mrs. Aquino were involved. Also, the last coup attempt involved some of the country's youngest and best-educated officers—captains and lieutenants—suggesting that the discontent reaches deep into the ranks and was not really a phenomenon of the martial-law years.

Third, that the majority did not openly back the rebels ignores what many reporters learned from talking with pro-government soldiers in the camps and on the streets; while there was disagreement over the rebels' violent course of action, there was widespread agreement with many of the issues and grievances they raised. One young lieutenant colonel who remained on the government side during the coup, but who referred to the plotters as "classmates, friends," told me during the coup in December, 1989: "You are talking about people who are politicized. They are motivated. We have a lot of idealistic young people, and they think their cause is right. A lot of what they are saying is justified." When I asked him which side he would be on if the rebels staged another coup, he replied; "I will decide later what I will do."<sup>21</sup>

## Roots of Unrest

At the outset, it is fair to say that in general, many of the soldiers do not like Mrs. Aquino. And the reverse seems true; from the outset of her six-year term, she has made known her own dislike for, and suspicions of, the military establishment, which she blames, among other things, for the long incarceration and eventual assassination of her husband, opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino, Jr.

She is not of their culture, and they not of hers. Many of the soldiers openly backed the reelection of Marcos, and some were photographed with red-and-blue "Marcos-Tolentino" stickers affixed to their rifle butts. Many appear to have been persuaded by Marcos's campaign scare tactic alleging that Mrs. Aquino's closest advisors were closet Communists, and that a vote for her was a vote for communism. Mrs. Aquino herself inadvertently helped feed that belief by three early actions as president that further stoked military suspicions of her government's supposed leftist leanings.

First, she ordered the release of about five hundred persons considered to be political prisoners, including top Communists Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and Bernabe Buscayno, alias "Kumander (Commander) Dante," head of the New People's Army. Some Philippine officials reportedly had warned her not to include avowed Communists among those released, because it would risk a rupture between the government and the military. But in those early days, Mrs. Aquino—at least according to her public statements—appeared to view Philippine communism as mainly an outgrowth of the excesses of the Marcos regime. She was looking for a fresh start, and held out the olive branch of peace talks with the rebels.<sup>22</sup>

Second, Mrs. Aquino created a human rights commission authorized to investigate past and present human rights abuses that had allegedly been committed by the military. This was later to become a source of tension between the government and the military. In the four years I spent traveling the Philippine provinces and interviewing officers and men in the field, the most common complaint was that the troops consider the government to be one-sided on the human rights issue.

In their view, the Communist rebels were responsible for the greatest abuses of human

rights—ambushes of military convoys, kidnapping and assassinating village leaders, and in a few cases, massacring large numbers of people during periods of internal party purges. But investigating Communist atrocities fell outside the charter of the human rights commission, which was responsible only for investigating allegations of abuse by the military.

It should be noted, moreover, that the internationally accepted definition of a “human rights violation” usually refers to the violation of a person’s rights by his government. But the way the average soldier saw it, if a Communist killed him and his entire unit, there would be no government investigation, but if a soldier shot and killed one Communist, he was liable to be brought up before the human rights commission to answer for his actions.

Third, and equally important, Mrs. Aquino appointed to her government some longtime human rights lawyers and anti-government critics whom military officers and soldiers considered to be either Communists or Communist sympathizers. There is no evidence that any of the advisors they most frequently named had any affiliation with the CPP or its front organization, the National Democratic Front. But the fact those advisors had been outspoken in their criticism of military abuses was enough to raise suspicions in the minds of some soldiers. Specifically criticized were executive secretary Joker Arroyo; legal aide (later senator) Rene Saguisag; Arroyo’s assistant (and later natural resources secretary) Jun Factoran; labor minister Augusto Sanchez; and local governments minister (later senator) Aquilino Pimentel.

A final complaint, voiced more by the military top brass—including staunchly loyal officers like former Chief of Staff and Defense Secretary Fidel V. Ramos—is that the Aquino government did not allocate enough national resources—in other words, money—to the

military services. Ramos particularly was fond of pointing out how the Philippines devoted a smaller percentage of the national budget to its armed forces than any of the other five countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, despite the fact that the Philippines was the only country still facing active insurgencies on two fronts (the Communists and Moslem secessionists in the South). Comparative figures on defense spending by the ASEAN states show this complaint to be based in fact.<sup>23</sup>

While the three actions by Mrs. Aquino seem to have stoked the military’s distrust of her government, they alone obviously do not account for the depth of discontent and pervasive politicization that would cause a faction of the soldiery to take the risky step of rising up in revolt against the established regime. That politicization goes back to the early 1970s and Marcos’s declaration of martial law.

The conventional analysis of many Philippine military watchers, like political scientist and retired Col. Candido Filio, is that the AFP, as the administrators of martial law beginning in 1972, enjoyed unprecedented powers. Officers served in the armed forces at the same time they ran civilian departments and agencies. Marcos gave military officers wide influence over matters of government policy and preserved military loyalty by corrupting the promotion system to ensure that his staunchest supporters were in charge of key service positions.<sup>24</sup>

The experience of the February, 1986, anti-Marcos revolt—when the military for the first time intervened directly to change civilian presidents and won widespread popular support and backing from the Catholic Church—was the deciding factor in the military’s crossover. It changed from a professional institution subservient to civilian command to a force unto itself that reserved the right to

intervene again. It has become something of a truism around the globe that once soldiers have tasted power, they often find it difficult to return to barracks. This was certainly the case in the Philippines, where the young officers who staged the revolt that ousted Marcos decided that they were thus the self-appointed watchdogs over the new regime they helped to install.

Paradoxically, part of that sense of mission derives from the rebel soldiers' interpretation of a clause in the 1987 constitution supported by Mrs. Aquino. It declares that civilian rule is "at all times supreme," but goes on to say: "The Armed Forces of the Philippines is the protector of the people and the state." Rebelious officers have interpreted that section to mean that the role of the military is to "protect" the people from corrupt or incompetent government officials. In essence, they define the "people" and the "state" as distinct and separate from government officials and bureaucrats.

Rigoberto Tiglao, a respected Filipino journalist, has offered a different, more complex explanation for the politicization of the armed forces. He said the politicization of the AFP must be seen as one of two revolutionary political movements that emerged as a response to martial law. One was the student movement, which became radicalized through infiltration by the Communists. The other was the military officers now in their 30s and 40s who came of age during martial law; the pivotal event for them was the 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno S. Aquino.

Tiglao sees the Philippines as essentially a society torn between two competing revolutionary forces, both of which developed during the Marcos years. Unlike the government's explanation that the coup attempts are the work of a clique of power-hungry officers, Tiglao sees

### Officers Actively Involved in December 1989 Coup Attempt

Brigadier Generals	7
Navy Commodore	1
Colonels	13
Lieutenant Colonels	45
Captains	155
First Lieutenants	123
Second Lieutenants	91

Source: Rigoberto Tiglao, *Kudeta: The Challenge to Philippine Democracy*

the unrest more like the formation of a broad-based political movement within the ranks of the AFP. Unlike the Communists, the military movement is not cohesive and lacks a coherent ideological base. But by virtue of the existing military structure, the movement is disciplined and hierarchical and provides a ready ground for new recruits from the military camps.<sup>25</sup>

Electoral results from 1987, and the numbers of active duty officers and reservists involved in the bloody 1989 revolt, provide some measure of the depth of military discontent.

The electoral figures are not a precise indicator, but are nonetheless suggestive. In January, 1987, while most Filipinos nationwide were giving a resounding "Yes" vote to the new constitution supported by Mrs. Aquino, a survey of the results from polling stations near military camps showed the opposite returns; the soldiers appeared to be voting no. A similar result emerged from the elections for a new Philippine senate in May, 1987. The slate of

candidates backed by Mrs. Aquino swept 22 out of 24 seats (with Joseph Estrada, a popular movie actor, and ousted Defense Minister Enrile winning the only two opposition seats). But, again, surveys from polling stations around military camps showed an opposite result. There, the opposition slate—called the Grand Alliance for Democracy—fared far better than the Aquino-backed candidates.<sup>26</sup>

The second gauge of the depth of discontent—and what that holds for future instability—is in the numbers. Some 534 officers were directly involved in the December, 1989, coup attempt, including 7 brigadier generals, 1 Navy commodore, 13 colonels, 45 lieutenant colonels, 155 captains, 123 first lieutenants, and 91 second lieutenants. They appear to represent a small fraction of the 14,000-member officer corps until one examines the class and age groupings. The core group of plotters, the Reform the Armed Forces Movement, were almost all from the graduating classes of 1971, 1972, and 1973. Then there is a ten-year jump to the second bloc of plotters, almost all younger officers from the classes of 1981, 1982, and 1983.<sup>27</sup>

## The Military's Factions

The military antagonists responsible for the instability fall into three distinct categories; the Marcos loyalist faction, the Reform the Armed Forces Movement, known as RAM, and the lesser-known Young Officers Union, or YOU.

The Marcos loyalists are the least significant since their numbers have dwindled and their seeming cause—the return of the dictator—obviously lost its resonance with his death in Hawaii in 1989. Some of the Marcos loyalist officers have entered civilian politics, like

Vice-Governor Rolando Abadilla of Ilocos Norte, who was a colonel in charge of the dictator's Metropolitan District Command (Metrodiscom) and was known as "The Assassin" by some critics in Manila for his alleged role in the disappearance and execution of Marcos opponents. Others, like Gen. Jose Zumel and former chief-of-staff Fabian Ver, are either in hiding or in overseas exile. The loyalists were largely behind the first two serious military mutinies, the takeover of the Manila Hotel in July, 1986, and the coup attempt of January, 1987, that ended up with the takeover of GMA-7 television station. The strength of the loyalist troops, according to the government, has always been their access to money, through the financial network of Marcos and his cronies abroad.

The most significant group, the RAM, was formed in July, 1982, by a group of reform-minded young officers. They had become disenchanted with Marcos's corruption, the misuse of the military promotion system to reward personal loyalty, and the perceived decline in the readiness of the AFP in the face of what was then a growing threat from the rapidly expanding New People's Army.<sup>28</sup>

The RAM members could be called "martial law babies," since they graduated from the Philippine Military Academy and took their commissions just as martial law was imposed in 1970, 1971, and 1972. They were initially idealistic supporters of Marcos, and they believed in his stated vision of a "New Society" that would tackle the country's pressing problems of poverty and inequality. But as the dictator's excesses became more and more apparent, they gradually broke with him and sided with then Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile. Many of the RAM core members worked on Enrile's staff as his personal security detail and as his intelligence specialists.

The RAM, with Enrile's support, was planning

an anti-Marcos coup for late 1985.<sup>29</sup> But the dictator preempted the plot by calling a "snap" presidential election, meaning an unscheduled election with only two months notice. The election campaign made it clear that the majority of Filipino voters were backing the opposition candidate, Mrs. Aquino, and that Marcos was trying to win the election through vote-fraud and intimidation.

Marcos then discovered the coup plot and had Enrile and other conspirators arrested. The "Ramboys," as they were called in the local press, used the fraudulent election as a pretext for staging a so-called withdrawal of support from the regime, and their ultimate shift to the Aquino camp. The coup plotters, who faced arrest under Marcos, suddenly became the heroes of what became known as the "revolution" of 1986. Because of the widespread media coverage, their names and faces became instantly recognizable throughout the Philippines—"Gringo" Honasan, "Red" Kapunan, "Tito" Legaspi, Felix Turingan, Vic Batac, and Rex Robles. They were the matinee idols of Manila, a squad of swashbuckling young officers with their Uzi submachine guns and open-necked shirts. They also became a continuing source of instability for the new Aquino government that they had helped to install.

The "Ramboys" made their first overt bid for power in the coup attempt that failed in August, 1987. Honasan managed to escape by helicopter from the burning wreck of the AFP General Headquarters (GHQ) at Camp Aguinaldo. For the next several weeks, his celebrity status grew as he moved around the capital giving interviews to the local and foreign press, appearing on CBS-TV's "60 minutes" program to chat with Diane Sawyer, and threatening to strike again at a time and place of his own choosing. Honasan was arrested in December, 1987, but then made another escape three months later on Easter weekend and quickly resumed his plotting. His ever-

## Armed Factions Battling in the Philippines

The Marcos Loyalists

The Reform of the  
Armed Forces Movement

The Young Officers Union

The pro-government armed forces

The New People's Army (Communist)

The Moro National Liberation Front  
(MLNF, Moslem secessionist)

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front  
(MILF, Moslem secessionist)

present threat kept the government constantly off-balance for most of 1988.

Honasan and his backers struck again in December, 1989, but this coup attempt brought to the fore a little-known military clique calling itself the Young Officers Union. During the 1986 revolt, the YOU members were the messengers and coffee boys for their older RAM colleagues. That experience had served to politicize the young officers. They apparently became disenchanted with the macho personality cult built up around Honasan and the RAM, and they distrusted the RAM's links with Enrile and others they considered "traditional politicians" linked to Marcos.

The YOU members are nationalistic in their rhetoric, anti-feudalist in their social policy, and somewhat leftist-sounding in ideology. That is no accident; most of the YOU leaders say that their first assignments out of the military academy were as field commanders fighting the Communist insurgents in the hills. They learned from the Communists and

adapted some of their methods—including the cellular organizational structure and the emphasis on mass education. While they claim to be stridently anti-Communist, the YOU manifesto, released shortly after the December, 1989, coup failed, could easily be mistaken for a Communist document. The YOU says it has determined that the social justice concerns of the Communists are well-placed, and that the way to defeat communism is to tackle its root causes, such as poverty, inequality, and the corruption and patronage of the political system.<sup>30</sup>

The YOU also appears more prone to violence than its RAM mentors. YOU members Capt. Danilo Lim and Maj. Abraham Purugganan, both decorated scout rangers, emerged as the group's spokesmen and leaders during the takeover and seige of the Makati financial district in December, 1989, when the YOU held several five-star hotels and thousands of foreign guests as virtual hostages. The YOU is also widely suspected to have been behind several bombings in Manila that followed the coup, and they have claimed credit for a number of jailbreaks in which detained coup participants have been freed.

Because the agenda of the YOU is so close to that of the Communists, much speculation in 1990 centered on the possibility of a YOU alliance with the Communist Party of the Philippines and its military wing, the New People's Army. The Communists even made a blatant appeal for such an alliance in May, 1990, at the opening of negotiations over the U.S. military installations in the Philippines. The CPP in a statement urged "all armed political groups" to assist it in "striking militarily against U.S. bases and occupation troops."<sup>31</sup> Such a marriage of convenience, however, seemed unlikely from the start, since the YOU members consider themselves staunchly anti-Communist.

Despite the threat posed by the military factions from 1986 until the bloodiest coup attempt at the end of 1989, the likelihood of another coup attempt appears to have receded somewhat. Visitors to Manila in mid-1991 noticed a sharp reduction in tension and a new focus on the upcoming 1992 elections as the next pivotal event for the country.

The approaching elections seem to be a significant mitigating factor weighing against another military revolt. But at least four other important factors enter into the new equation for stability.

First, money appears to be a problem for the coup plotters. A coup attempt on the scale of the December, 1989, affair is a costly venture, and the rebels may have lost many of their traditional financial backers because of that failure. With elections approaching, the financiers—including exiled crony businessmen living in the United States and elsewhere abroad—would probably rather put money into bankrolling political campaigns.

Second, logistics now appear to be a more formidable obstacle to staging another coup. Mrs. Aquino's military high command appears to have learned a lesson from the last major revolt and is making sure that key air force and armored units stay under the command of officers loyal to the government.

Third, the creation of a de facto "counter-coup force" would make any new attempt to grab power more difficult. The government's own Presidential Security Group (PSG) is better equipped and trained. Splitting off the national police into an autonomous group has created a new power center partly to balance off the army and marines.

Finally, the government side—particularly the National Bureau of Investigation, which is the



Philippine equivalent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States—has tracked down some of the core RAM and YOU leaders and put them behind bars. The new AFP staff chief and the new Army commander, both veteran officers respected by all the factions, have announced their desire to enter into dialogue with the rebel holdouts and negotiate an end to the instability. Reportedly, contact was made with Honasan in July, 1991, about a possible return to barracks and an end to the continuing state of hostility.

## Washington and Manila: Friends Forever?

Two contrasting scenes perhaps best tell the story of the decline of U.S.–Philippine relations under President Aquino.

The first is from September, 1986. The glow from the “People Power” events of the preceding February is still fresh, and Mrs. Aquino is making her first official visit to Washington as the president of a newly restored democracy. Secretary of State George Shultz gushes as he wears a Cory doll affixed to his lapel, and declares he’s “bullish” on the Philippines. President Aquino gets a roaring ovation from a joint session of Congress and is immediately rewarded with an extra two hundred million dollars in economic aid. She attracts crowds from New York to Boston. She is the conquering heroine, the Joan of Arc and the dragon slayer who toppled the evil dictator. *Time* magazine names her “Woman of the Year.”

The second scene is just three years later, and Mrs. Aquino is making her second trip to Washington. She has survived several coup attempts, but restive military factions are still plotting. Her government is dogged by accu-

sations of corruption and bureaucratic incompetence. Her popularity has fallen to around 58 percent, the lowest of her presidency. She’ll ask for more aid, but the U.S. Congress is in a cantankerous, budget-cutting mood.

“I think she is still one of the best known and most popular democratic leaders on the world stage today,” a Western diplomat in Manila said before her trip. “But obviously after three years there is less romanticism. . . . There’s a sour . . . mood in Washington. There’s a lot more interest in burden-sharing, and the Philippines is always seen as having its hand out.”<sup>32</sup>

Relations between the former colony and the former colonial master have been bittersweet since the Philippines was granted independence from the United States on the Fourth of July, 1946. On one level—the human, person-to-person level—Americans feel very much at home in the Philippines, and Filipinos generally enjoy things American from basketball to fast food to trips to visit family members in Los Angeles and Chicago.

On the governmental level, however, tensions show. The American side constantly stresses what it believes is best to sustain “the special relationship” and Filipino officials chafe at what they consider U.S. paternalism, lack of respect, and self-interest at the expense of Philippine concerns. They are irritated by what they see as continued American economic and cultural domination.

A political scientist at the East-West Center, Muthiah Alagappa, who is a Malaysian, observed in the journal *Contemporary Southeast Asia* in 1989:

This bilateral relationship has been described as “patron–client,” “love–hate,” “neo-colonial,” “symbiotic and comple-

mentary," "unequal," "special," and so forth. The phrase "special relationship" has been used by both the Philippine and U.S. governments.

The accuracy of these labels notwithstanding, it is a fact that the relations between these two countries are presently in a state of flux.<sup>33</sup>

The main issue on which the relationship most often pivots has been the U.S. military presence in the Philippines and the corresponding American economic and security assistance to the country. The installations—Clark Air Base, Subic Bay Naval Station, and four smaller support and communications installations—have long been described as essential to the maintenance of U.S. military readiness in the Pacific and crucial to securing vital sea lanes and promoting regional stability.

From the Philippine side, the bases issue brings into play emotional questions of national sovereignty and national pride, resentment at what is seen as a last vestige of colonial domination, and a fear that the bases can be used as a pretext to justify American covert intervention into Philippine domestic affairs. There is also a sense that America is not paying nearly what the bases are worth, and Filipino officials constantly cite statistics showing that Israel and Egypt, which do not host U.S. bases, receive more aid than the Philippines.

By contrast, the American side stresses the economic benefits the Philippines gets from the bases—not only in direct assistance, but in the "spin-off" costs of employment and in money pumped into the surrounding base towns. American officials also tend to lecture Filipinos about their security obligations to the rest of Asia and how the stability of the region is a benefit in which Manila should be proud to share. (It is an argument that usually

**U.S. Security Aid to ASEAN Countries**  
(in \$US million)

Year	Philippines	ASEAN Total
1976	37.0	154.0
1977	36.4	159.1
1978	36.5	147.6
1979	32.0	108.1
1980	75.7	164.2
1981	75.3	172.5
1982	51.8	185.3
1983	52.0	176.6
1984	51.5	211.1
1985	41.9	184.1
1986	102.3	200.4
1987	102.5	167.9
1988	127.6	180.1
1989	127.6	155.6
1990 <sup>a</sup>	202.9	258.4

<sup>a</sup> Proposal for FY 1990.

Source: U.S. Department of Defense figures cited in Muthiah Alagappa, "U.S.-ASEAN Security Relations," p. 23.

falls on deaf ears in Manila, as Filipinos tend to be the most insular and least attached to the region of all the ASEAN countries).

A new agreement, which is now before the Philippine Senate for review, attempts to find a middle ground in a compromise made possible mainly by the unexpected eruption of the Mt. Pinatubo volcano that has rendered Clark Air Base inoperative. The new agreement calls for the United States to turn over the four smaller facilities in 1991 and Clark Air Base in 1992 (after some clean-up) and grants a ten-

year lease on the naval base at Subic in exchange for \$203 million in economic and security support.<sup>34</sup> That amount is far less than the \$830 million demanded by the Philippines, and the foreign secretary, Raul S. Manglapus, had maintained that he would not budge from that demand even after the volcano damaged both major bases.

Far from settling the matter, the new agreement has fed the same old arguments about the bases and is imperiling the pact's chances of getting the mandatory two-thirds approval in the Philippine Senate. Washington is still seen as having access to the bases at too low a cost.

While the base debate has provided the overall context for the relationship, other factors have led to the steady deterioration in ties between Manila and Washington over the last five years.

The most crucial factor has been the lingering suspicion in Manila that the Reagan and Bush administrations did not fully support the Aquino government. This might sound odd, given Washington's help in engineering the "snap" election of 1986 and then help in persuading Marcos to leave the presidential palace. Washington also increased its aid substantially to Manila after Mrs. Aquino took office, including unlocking frozen military aid, and the White House and State Department have made repeated statements of support to Mrs. Aquino in the face of various threats.

Still, the feeling persists, and has led to the constant rumors—often voiced openly by members of the Philippine Congress and reported in the Manila press—that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has been behind the various attempts to oust Mrs. Aquino. This suspicion has been fed by:

- The presence of former President Marcos in Hawaii until his death in 1989. At one point, when President Reagan placed a call to Marcos, Filipino politicians and journalists interpreted the call as a show of support for the ousted strongman.
- The connection between conservative groups in the United States and rightwing anti-Aquino politicians in Manila. Filipino journalists, particularly, have been fond of writing how conservative think tanks, like the Heritage Foundation, were the intellectual arm of the White House. When such groups met with opposition leaders like Vice-President Salvador H. Laurel, it was interpreted in Manila as sending a signal to Aquino.
- Perceived links between U.S. embassy officials in Manila and some of the coup plotters. The U.S. embassy, mostly through its military attachés, established contacts with Honasan and the other RAM members when they were the above-ground opposition to Marcos. They often played golf together at military camps and attended family functions. These close ties that were praised when they helped unseat Marcos were later criticized as proof that the American embassy was trying to "play both sides."

The criticism of these links escalated when it was revealed that an Air Force colonel had been inside Villamore Air Base at the time of the coup attempt in August, 1987, while another senior embassy official, Phil Kaplan, who was chargé d'affaires at the time, placed a phone call directly to Honasan at the height of the coup asking him to desist. After Honasan's escape, unconfirmed and un-sourced stories routinely circulated through the Philippine media reporting that the fugitive muntineer was being protected at Clark Air Base.

The direct U.S. intervention in the Philippines at the height of the coup attempt in December, 1989, when American F-4s provided air support for beleaguered Philippine ground troops, would seem to have ended all speculation about which side America was backing. But some Philippine politicians and columnists, again showing an uncanny propensity to defy logic, began openly speculating that Washington had engineered the coup, then used its planes at the last minute to crush it to demon-

set out to forge what he called a new, non-aligned and independent foreign policy. He stated in an early speech that his goal was to "slay the American father-image" and put U.S.-Philippine relations on a more equal footing than in the past. He said he wanted to end the "isolation" of Philippine foreign policy, which in the past had closely adhered to American strategic interests around the globe. He expressed interest in having Manila join the non-aligned movement, which was com-

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*"As foreign secretary, Manglapus . . . seemed to have a habit of irking American officials with policy statements and quips that seemed more directed at his Philippine audience than Americans. . . ."*

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strate to Mrs. Aquino her dependence on U.S. military bases.

Those suspicions aside, a second factor that led to some deterioration in the relationship was the appointment in 1987 of Senator Raul S. Manglapus as foreign secretary and his rapid emergence as the government's principal voice in foreign policy-making.

Manglapus was a well-known Philippine exile in the United States during the martial law years, and that period appears to have affected his view of the United States. He has spoken of embarrassing treatment he and other dissidents suffered at the hands of American officials who at the time were still closely allied with the Marcos regime.

As foreign secretary, Manglapus immediately

plicated by the presence of the U.S. bases on Philippine soil.

As part of that new policy, Manglapus launched a series of initiatives to show more independence from Washington. First, he made a series of overtures to socialist countries about opening or improving relations. In November, 1988, he made the first visit by a Philippine official to Hanoi, where he praised his Vietnamese Communist counterpart, Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, as a fellow fighter against colonialism in Asia.

Then in December, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze made the first visit to the Philippines since the two countries opened diplomatic relations in 1976. In January, 1989, Manglapus announced his interest in opening relations with North Korea. He also

organized and hosted what was called a "Conference of Newly Restored Democracies" from around the world and rankled the United States by inviting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua as a "newly restored democracy."<sup>35</sup>

Manglapus seemed to have a habit of irking American officials with policy statements and quips that seemed more directed at his Philippine audience than Americans, who listened with a mixture of bemusement and dismay. In response to the shooting death of American servicemen by Communist terrorists, Manglapus dismissed the attacks and said it was the price America had to pay as a superpower.<sup>36</sup> In a more recent speech, oddly titled "The Philippines; Strategic Corner of the Universe," he calculated that the Philippines was a net aid donor to the United States because of the presence of large numbers of Filipino doctors and nurses working in America.

But it was in the negotiations over the U.S. bases that Manglapus most directly demonstrated his ability to irk the United States. In the preliminary talks in 1988 over a continuation of the existing treaty, then two years later in the opening of talks on a new agreement, the foreign secretary surprised, confounded, and enraged American negotiators with demands for increased compensation. In addition, Manglapus raised side issues such as dual usage of the facilities and Philippine government control over operations and demanded that Washington disclose whether nuclear weapons were stored in the facilities.

American members of the bases panel said privately to journalists that they found Manglapus an often-cantankerous negotiator who was difficult to pin down on details. They also expressed frustration that Mrs. Aquino chose to stay aloof from the talks, giving her foreign secretary freer rein to press his own fiercely nationalistic agenda.

In a final episode, in February, 1990, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney paid a visit to Manila as part of a regular program of bilateral security exchanges. But the visit took on added significance when Mrs. Aquino inexplicably said on a radio call-in show that she would not see Cheney. Her refusal to see Cheney reflected in part her personal pique over American press reports about the trips of two other high-level American visitors in the wake of the December coup attempt. Reports of those earlier meetings leaked to the press and reflected unfavorably on her. Palace officials later conceded that Mrs. Aquino's decision not to see Cheney resulted more from a mistake than a deliberately thought-out attempt to rebuke the U.S. defense chief.

Still, this action was widely interpreted as a "snub" to an American cabinet officer. It seemed a particularly nasty snub considering that just two months earlier the United States had scrambled its jets at Clark to assist Mrs. Aquino in crushing the coup attempt. According to many analysts familiar with the Philippines, the Cheney snub probably did more to damage Mrs. Aquino's support in Congress—where Cheney had been a popular member—than any of the other recent points of tension.<sup>37</sup>

The new lease governing Subic Bay would appear to give both the United States and the Philippines the opportunity to begin forging a new relationship that goes beyond slogans and sentimentality to one that casts both sides as equal partners with a shared history and common interests in the region.

For the Philippines, the return of Clark and the four smaller installations—and the prospect of the return of Subic itself in another ten years—would seem to meet nationalistic concerns over sovereignty without the massive shock to the economy that a complete and immediate U.S. withdrawal would no doubt precipitate.

On the American side, a ten-year lease on Subic and the return to the Philippines of the other facilities would acknowledge that the end of the Cold War has reduced the imperative for a large American military presence in the Philippines. At the same time, ship repair and logistics operations would be maintained during a reasonable phase-out period.

Whether the nationalistic-minded Philippine Senate will interpret the pact the same way is the key question that remains. It appears doubtful at this writing that the treaty can win ratification without serious adjustment. Senate acceptance of the pact might assist in restoring a part of Corazon Aquino's legacy, as she will be remembered as the transitional president who prepared her country for the phase-out of American bases and for putting Manila's relations with Washington on a more even footing. But a rejection that leads to a complete American withdrawal—with all the economic hardships that would bring—might be seen as one last and tragic error for an administration now known more for its failures than its many successes.

## Conclusion: Towards 1992

Since Mrs. Aquino has consistently said she will not be a candidate for president in May, 1992, when her six-year-term ends, speculation has already begun on the question of who will succeed her. There are no fewer than a dozen announced or probable candidates vying for the job, although the field is likely to be whittled down as the contenders reassess their chances and begin forming alliances.

The elections will be pivotal for the Philippines. They will determine, first of all, whether the uprising of February, 1986, indeed marked a turning point away from old-style, Marcos-

era politics where elections were decided by strongmen buying votes and making alliances with provincial warlords. The election of a new, reform-minded candidate without ties to the traditional politics of the past would mean that the revolt of 1986 was not a one-time "fluke," but a major step in the development of Philippine democracy.

The elections might also allow for a test of the theory that a stronger hand at the helm might stand a better chance of reforming Philippine society and attacking embedded traditions like corruption than an untrained former housewife with a reluctance to use executive power. No Philippine president is likely to succeed entirely in restructuring society. But a president with more commitment to reform, and a willingness to exercise power to implement policies over the opposition of an intransigent legislature, might well be able to stave off further challenges to democratic authority from the self-styled reformists on both the far left and the far right.

Several questions may be determinant. Will elections proceed as scheduled, with voting for president, the 24 Senate seats, all 200 seats in the House of Representatives, and local government offices taking place on the exact same day? Or will the Congress move to schedule separate elections for the various offices? Leaving the balloting as scheduled runs the risk of creating widespread confusion, and at the extreme, heightening the prospects for bloodshed. A confused and bloody election might give military adventurists yet another excuse to stage a new rebellion before the votes are counted.

Also relevant is the current plan for a winner-take-all presidential vote, with no run-off. As it stands, a candidate could win the presidency with only a plurality of the vote, and with several candidates competing, the winner could conceivably receive only a third or a

## Possible Presidential Candidates in 1992

General Fidel V. Ramos, former secretary of national defense

Speaker Ramon V. Mitra, Jr.

Senator Aquilino Pimental

Senator Joseph E. Estrada

Senate President Jovita R. Salonga

Senator Juan Ponce Erle

Vice-President Salvador H. Laurel

Former Ambassador Eduardo Cojuangco

Former Secretary Miriam Defensor-Santiago

Former Secretary Oscar M. Orbos

Governor Emilio R. Osmena

Former First Lady Imelda Marcos

quarter of the votes cast. In that event, a new president without a clear majority would have to face serious questions of legitimacy. Such questions might provide another pretext for military rebels to attempt to overturn the vote through extra-constitutional means.

Will a new president be able to rein in all the factions of the restive military? A former military man like Ramos, who resigned from the cabinet in July, 1991, to run for president, would seem to have the best chance. But it was during Ramos's tenure as chief of staff and later as defense secretary that the various mutinies, revolts, and coup attempts took place. The rebels have consistently criticized Ramos for failing to stand up for the interests of the

military services in his dealings with the presidential palace. It is unclear whether he could improve his image among the ranks if he is elected to the top job and has a freer hand to pursue policies like increasing the budget of the armed forces.

The anti-Aquino opposition remains a question mark. If the opposition is able to unite around a single candidate—either Vice-President Laurel, Senator Enrile, or former Marcos business associate Eduardo Cojuangco—then they could mount a formidable and well-financed race for the presidency. On the other side, at least a half-dozen candidates occupy the same political ground as Mrs. Aquino, and they will be seeking her endorsement. Many are expected to run regardless of whom the president chooses as her successor.

Philippine elections have traditionally not been about issues, but personalities. That is likely to be true in 1992 as well, although the issue of the lease on the Subic Bay Naval Station could eventually figure into the debate if the contest becomes a question of competing nationalistic credentials. Almost every opinion poll has shown that a vast majority of Filipinos favor a continued American military presence, and some of the anti-base politicians—running for president or even for Senate seats—might have to account for their position to the voters in 1992.

Although much has been made of former first lady Imelda Marcos, her political support inside the Philippines is considered negligible. She has no independent political base and is widely disliked in the Ilocos region on Northern Luzon, which was her husband's political bastion. Many people there blame Imelda's notorious extravagance for the downfall of President Marcos.

Finally there is the role of the Catholic Church, a prominent political force in the

overwhelmingly Catholic Philippines. Church support for Mrs. Aquino in 1986 was pivotal, and similar backing for a perceived "reform candidate" in 1992 might provide the needed edge in a close election.

In conclusion, the 1992 elections might answer the question of whether the Philippines can move peacefully towards reform of its social and economic system, or whether the violent revolution advocated by the extremes will find more currency. At the outset of the campaign, the picture is confusing. The issues are largely being ignored, the declared and likely candidates come mainly from the old school of politics, and the Philippines appears likely to face a prolonged period of political uncertainty and further instability.

## Notes

1. This account is based on my trip to San Marcelino and interview with the mayor on July 13, 1991.
2. John McBeth, "Picking Up After Pinatubo," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 153, no. 30, July 25, 1991, p. 24.
3. Ibid.
4. Rigoberto Tiglao, "Test of Resolve," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 153, July 25, 1991, p. 24.
5. Details of the agreement are from the Joint Statement on the Bases, July 18, 1991, obtained by fax from the United States Information Service (USIS), Manila.
6. Aquino's July 1991 state-of-the-union address was reported by various news agencies. The stories appeared in the local newspapers, the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*.
7. As the Southeast Asia bureau chief for the *Washington Post*, I was able to travel to South Korea and Burma during periods of student unrest and met student leaders who told me that they were inspired by the Philippine "People Power" revolt from reports they had heard via the Voice of

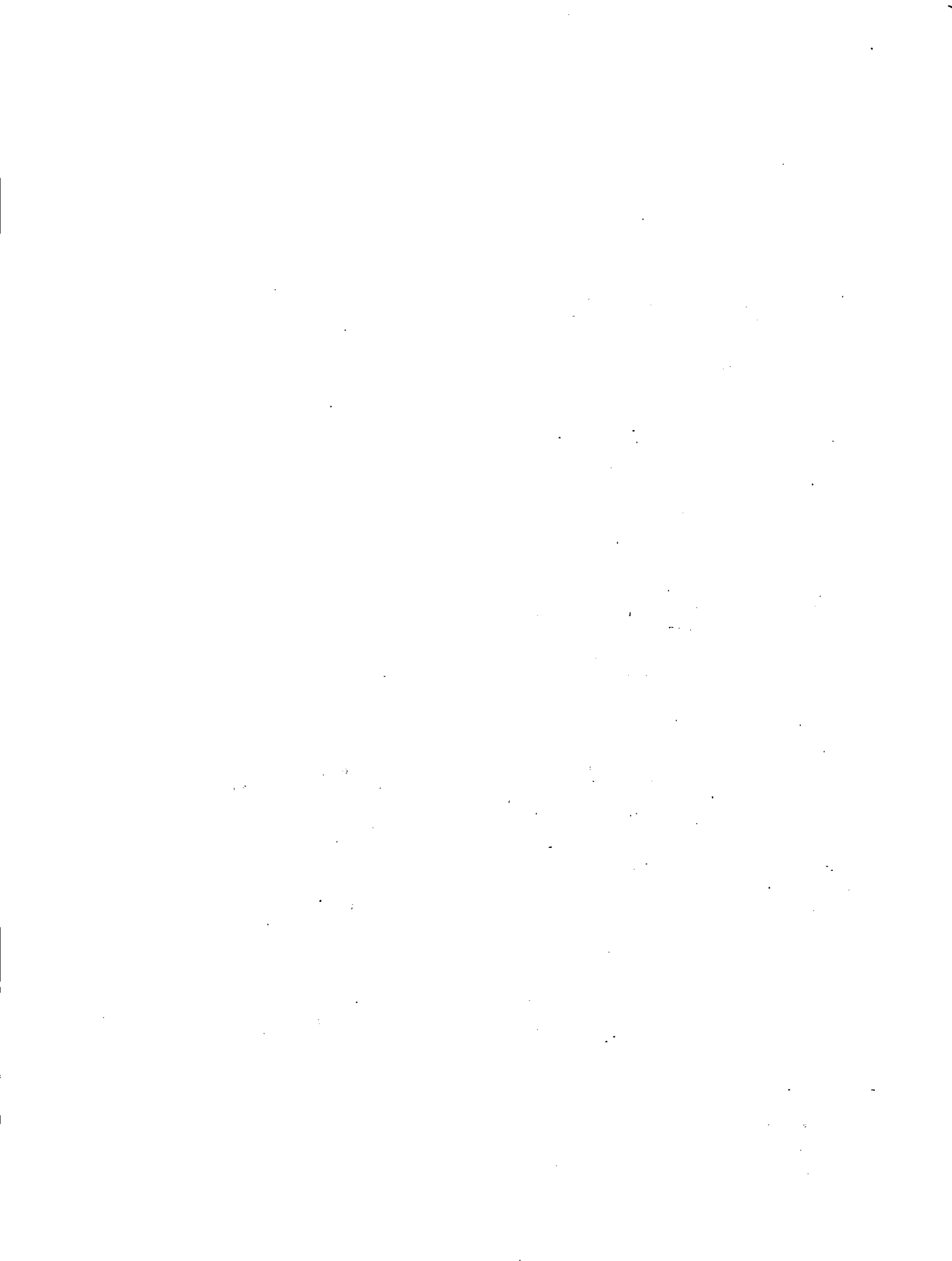
America, the BBC, and from the newsweekly magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek*.

8. Richburg, "Aquino Concedes Many Still Mired in Misery," *Washington Post*, July 25, 1998.
9. Richburg, "People Power Euphoria Begins to Wear Off for Aquino," *Washington Post*, Oct. 26, 1989.
10. I covered the land reform debate from Aquino's first announcement of her "comprehensive" plan in a press conference at Malacanang Palace on July 23, 1987, until the final approval of the bill by Congress on June 8, 1988. My stories appeared in the *Washington Post*.
11. David G. Timberman, "Unfinished Revolution; The Philippines in 1986," in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1987 edition, p. 249, published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.
12. "People Power Euphoria . . .," *Washington Post*, Oct. 26, 1989.
13. For more on this question of the link between strong central governments and economic growth in Asia, see Stephan Haggard, *Pathways From The Periphery: The Politics of Growth in Newly Industrializing Countries* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).
14. From the report of the investigating committee.
15. From a talk by Ben Kerkvliet of the University of Hawaii before a Philippine seminar and workshop on March 16, 1991. The statistics on wealth and the gap between the richest and poorest were provided by Kerkvliet.
16. John McBeth, "The Boss System," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 145, no. 37, September 14, 1989, and also McBeth, "A Congress of Words, Not Acts," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 149, no. 28, July 12, 1990.
17. McBeth, "A Congress of Words, Not Acts," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 12, 1990.
18. From interview with Communist Party leaders Saturnino Ocamp and Antonio Zumel with Mrs. Katherine Graham, publisher of the *Washington Post*, in October, 1986.
19. Much of this internal Communist Party debate



was played out in the local press during 1988 and 1989. I interviewed Rodolfo Salas, the former Communist Party chairman, in a cell at Camp Crame in Manila on July 27, 1989.

20. The analysis of the factors that have contributed to the erosion of the CPP-NPA strength is essentially that of the author, after extensive interviews over four years with foreign diplomats, Philippine military and intelligence officials, and other analysts who have followed the insurgency movement.
21. Richburg, "Military Unrest Remains Problem for Aquino," *Washington Post*, Dec. 10, 1989.
22. Timberman, "Unfinished Revolution."
23. From charts on comparative ASEAN defense expenditures. One chart is provided within the text.
24. I talked with Candido Filio in Manila in the days during and immediately following the December 1989 coup attempt. He is quoted in Richburg, "Military Unrest Remains Problem for Aquino," *Washington Post*, Dec. 10, 1989.
25. Rigoberto Tiglao's analysis is contained in the overview chapter in the book *Kudeta: The Challenge to Philippine Democracy* (Manila: Center for Investigative Journalism, 1990), which provides the best chronology of the 1989 coup attempt and the roots of military unrest in the Philippines.
26. From my own coverage of the election results and the reports of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) in Manila.
27. From *Kudeta: The Challenge to Philippine Democracy*.
28. The history of the Reform the Armed Forces Movement is well-known and has been widely reported. For more information on the RAM, see Cecil Arillo's Manila-published book, *Breakaway*.
29. Honasan and Enrile confirmed the existence of their earlier coup plot during an October, 1986, dinner at the Manila Hotel with Mrs. Katherine Graham of the *Post* during her trip to Manila. I was in attendance.
30. John McBeth has an excellent article on the Young Officer's Movement titled "Who are YOU?" in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 148, no. 23, June 7, 1990. Also, I was able to interview some YOU members during the December coup attempt, as well as some military officials familiar with the group.
31. From a 1990 official Communist Party statement delivered to my office in Manila and to other local and foreign news agencies during the base negotiations. The document was later determined to be authentic.
32. From my article, "People Power Euphoria," *Washington Post*, Oct. 26, 1989.
33. Muthiah Alagappa, "U.S.-ASEAN Security Relations: Challenges and Prospects," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 11, no. 1, June 1989.
34. From the joint statement on the bases, provided by USIS Manila.
35. Richburg, "Shevardnadze to Pay First Visit to Manila," *Washington Post*, Dec. 17, 1988, and "Philippines Seeks to Expand Links to Socialist Countries," *Washington Post*, Jan. 18, 1989. I also traveled to Vietnam in late November, 1988, to cover the trip of Foreign Secretary Manglapus.
36. Manglapus, in a meeting with foreign correspondents, said that having citizens killed in terrorism overseas was part of the price of being a superpower and that Americans should learn to "relax and enjoy it." He later offered an apology and clarified his remarks to say that he did not mean to sound insensitive to U.S. deaths in the Philippines.
37. Richburg, "U.S.-Manila Ties Fall to Low Point," *Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 1990.





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