

IN OUR
IMAGE

AMERICA'S EMPIRE IN THE PHILIPPINES

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K38
1989

STANLEY KARNOW



R A N D O M H O U S E N E W Y O R K

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15. REVOLUTION AND RESTORATION

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Dear God, let it not be me," Cory pleaded in the summer of 1985, flinching at the challenge when she was increasingly cited as the only person who could mend the split opposition to Marcos. "I didn't want to be the candidate," she recalled to me later. "I'm very private and wasn't meant to be at center stage." But she canvased family members and friends—and, begging for divine guidance, she prayed "as I'd never prayed before." The pressure on her intensified after Marcos scheduled the election. If she abstained, she knew, the likely contender would be Salvador Laurel, a routine politician of dubious repute. A priest, couching the issue in moral terms she grasped, was decisive. In this struggle between good and evil, he said, she alone embodied the values of "truth, freedom and justice" that could beat Marcos. She agreed to run on condition that her supporters compile a draft petition containing a million signatures. They did—and, after a day of meditation at a convent near Manila, she declared.

Now, in need of political counsel, she consulted the country's shrewdest politician: Cardinal Sin. He advised her to work with Laurel, but she would have him only as her vice president. Sin then urged Laurel, who had presidential hopes, to accept the number-two slot. "Cory is more popular than you are," Sin flatly told him. "Make the sacrifice, or Marcos will win." After waffling for weeks, Laurel conceded.

Cory had showed herself to be tougher than she appeared. But she was ingenuous in an interview with *The New York Times* in December 1985. The newspaper's Manila correspondent, Seth Mydans, brought along the hard-nosed executive editor, A. M. "Abe" Rosenthal, who happened to be in town. Untutored, Cory nattered away, occasionally asking the amiable Mydans how to answer the questions, or replying as though she were thinking aloud. If elected, she would "probably" try Marcos for Ninoy's murder. She favored the

“removal” of the U.S. bases at some future date, preferring instead to bring the Philippines into a “zone of neutrality,” and would open a “dialogue” with the Communists, many of whom merely “want justice.” As for her presidential program: “The only thing I can really offer the Filipino people is my sincerity.”

The Washington conservatives cackled at her naïveté. Worse yet, Rosenthal returned home to decry her incompetence. His judgment strengthened Reagan’s bias against her and even left an imprint on Shultz, whose faith in Marcos had by then faded. Two months later, when Cory was the only alternative to the crumbling Marcos regime, Shultz still recalled at a key meeting that Rosenthal had pictured her as “vacant.” But her flop in *The New York Times* prompted her American friends to pitch in to repair the damage.

Cory’s entourage sneered at Marcos for hiring an American public relations firm. But Robert Trent Jones, the designer of the golf courses at the Aquino estate, quietly engaged D. H. Sawyer and Associates, a New York public relations firm that usually handled Democrats. At Jones’s expense, Sawyer assigned Mark Malloch Brown, a ruffled Englishman, to teach Cory to cope with irreverent American reporters and to shade her remarks to appeal to U.S. audiences. Brown, formerly an editor of the London *Economist*, posed as a journalist, and Cory’s aides pointed to his nationality as evidence that Americans were not involved in her campaign.

The claim was phony. William Overholt, an American banker based in Hong Kong, was a vital player. Married to the daughter of a retired Filipino general, he had extensive connections in Manila and elsewhere, which he used on Cory’s behalf. He worked with Jaime Ongpin, the president of the Benguet mining company, to raise money for her. To protect her he brought in two security specialists, one formerly with Australian intelligence and the other a British secret service agent disguised as a journalist. Another important American was James Reuter, a Jesuit priest from New Jersey, whose Radio Veritas circumvented the government network to broadcast news of opposition activities along with Cory’s messages. Reuter’s nineteen stations received a grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development filtered through the Asia Foundation, whose Manila representative, Edith Coliver, proudly advertised her pro-Cory sentiments. Senator Lugar helped her as well by observing the election with his group of twenty American congressmen, state officials, clergymen and others. Superficially it all seemed reminiscent of Colonel Edward Lansdale’s management of Ramón Magsaysay, but in fact no American was that close to Cory.

The U.S. Embassy also lent her subtle support, such as advice on how to focus on American public opinion. The U.S. aid agency partly financed NAMFREL, the National Committee for Free Elections, which was to help her by signaling Marcos’s skulduggery at the polls. Her sympathizers were bolstered, too, by the real or illusory belief that Ambassador Bosworth would ultimately defend her. A tactful diplomat, he was restrained in public, but Manila’s flourishing rumor mill quoted him as having pledged privately, “If Marcos tries to stay in power, we’ll disintegrate him in thirty days.”

For the U.S. news media the event was irresistible: a morality play in an Americanized setting with the principal characters speaking English. The major American television networks each fielded several crews along with such stars as Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings, and they could have been back home.

The candidates knew all about prime time and ratings—so much so that Marcos insisted on being interviewed on CBS only by Dan Rather. He and Cory craved attention in the United States in the realization that American validation made them credible to the Filipinos, who distrusted their own news media. Many Filipinos suspected that Marcos had faked his war record, for example, but the story only became true after it appeared in *The New York Times*—and was reprinted by Manila’s opposition newspapers. The correspondents also served as witnesses, particularly for Cory, whose staff directed them to areas where Marcos’s goons might disrupt the voting. To Marcos, conversely, journalists were snooping nuisances, yet he too needed them to deliver his message.

As the campaign gathered momentum, it was plain that much of the old oligarchy dispossessed by Marcos had swung to Cory. Rich Manila matrons garbed in tailored yellow blouses answered telephones and served as typists at her headquarters or put their chauffeured cars at her disposal. Despite threats from Marcos, companies loaned her their private aircraft to tour the provinces and poured a total of some \$6 million into her coffers. The clergy openly backed her. One Sunday morning, at a church on Negros, the parish priest informed me that she would receive the collection plate. I sensed, traveling with her, that she was altering the pattern of Philippine politics. Elections had traditionally been races between rival clans, with voters obedient to their patrons. Now, it seemed, Cory was in direct communion with the people, projecting an aura of sanctity that almost mesmerized devout Filipinos. Her Joan of Arc image, though a tired stereotype, was nevertheless real.

One night in the Mindanao capital of Davao, she delivered a tedious speech drafted by a professor. The audience, packed onto a school basketball court, could not have caught much of her English—and even less the academic jargon. Even so, I felt, her mere presence was electrifying. Another day I drove with her into Cavite, a heavily populated province south of Manila. Yellow banners and bunting adorned every town, and crowds hugged the road, waving the *L* sign as she inched along in her van, smiling and waving back. Her brief speeches at one spot or another were again platitudes, and again it made no difference. She exuded an air of buoyant piety attuned to the garish mysticism of Filipino religion. Marcos’s few campaign outings, by contrast, were lugubrious. Visibly ill, he had to be lifted bodily onto platforms, and his cracked voice was slurred and often inaudible. He was incontinent, a grim task for his handlers.

Having witnessed other Philippine elections, I knew that crowds, speeches and cheers were less important than control of the final tally. I guessed, consequently, that Cory would lose even if she won—which was what nearly happened.

Election day, February 7, 1986, was marred by the usual cases of stolen ballot boxes, intimidation and even killings, almost all of it by Marcos’s thugs. The serious cheating, though, came in adding the votes. Under U.S. pressure, Marcos had allowed NAMFREL, the independent monitor, to tabulate the results in tandem with COMELEC, the official Commission on Elections. Marcos wanted a credibly slim margin of victory, not a suspicious landslide. So, while NAMFREL reported Cory ahead, COMELEC delayed the count to enable Marcos to tailor the total. Lugar’s observers immediately smelled fraud,

as did the platoons of State Department and CIA men brought in especially to track the race. A night after the polls closed, thirty computer technicians tallying the vote dramatized Marcos's sham by fleeing the COMELEC headquarters for the refuge of a church—contending that the figures showing Cory in the lead were being discarded.

A State Department task force in Washington, keeping an around-the-clock watch on the Philippines, provided Reagan with massive evidence of Marcos's abuses, but Reagan preferred his own eccentric sources: Nancy fed him information that she was receiving by telephone from Imelda. Donald Regan, his chief of staff, who knew nothing about the Philippines, nevertheless pressed him to stick with Marcos. Their bias was shared by William Casey, despite the messages of his men in the field. Intuitively, too, Reagan felt attached to Marcos—as if Marcos were “a hero on a bubble gum card he had collected as a kid,” as a senior State Department official mused later. He was not even keen to hear Lugar, who landed in Washington from Manila early on February 11. Sensing that Reagan was spinning out of control, Shultz had urged Lugar to return directly to the capital and drive straight to the White House.

Lugar, perceiving that Reagan was prepared to recognize a Marcos victory, warned him that Marcos was “cooking the results.” Reagan replied by mentioning a television segment he had seen of Filipinos destroying ballots and identified them as Cory's campaigners—when, as it later turned out, they were Marcos supporters. Lugar persisted, relating his own accounts of Marcos's chicanery. Reagan was not listening. Speaking for him, Larry Speakes, his press secretary, implied that Cory had lost and should “get on the team” with Marcos to “form a government.” That evening, at a rare news conference, Reagan admitted that violence had been “evident” and conceded to the “possibility of fraud” in the election, but he suggested that “it could have been . . . occurring on both sides.” His primary concern in the Philippines were the bases, not political liberty. “I don't know of anything more important than those bases,” he emphasized.

Flabbergasted, Lugar took an unusual step for a loyal Republican. He refuted Reagan, his party leader, telling an audience in Indianapolis, “The president was misinformed.” Other politicians, Republicans and Democrats alike, echoed his dismay. They were largely reacting to constituents who had seen the faraway campaign on television, fallen in love with Cory and shared her passion to make good prevail over evil. Americans were rediscovering that the Philippines had once been a U.S. colony and, infused with renewed missionary zeal, they felt it their duty to extend their benevolence to their former protégés.

Cory was furious that Reagan equated her with the wicked Marcos. She vented her anger on Bosworth—who himself was devastated. He and his embassy staff had bombarded Washington with proof of Marcos's fraud, only to be shattered by Reagan's disregard. “It was probably the single worst day of my life,” Bosworth later told me. He called Cory, who at first refused to see him, saying, “What for, if I'm being accused of cheating.” Finally she relented and, Bosworth recalled, entering her office was “like walking into a freezer.” She gave him “the full benefit of one of her icier moments”—and, in a rare gesture for an ambassador, the president's personal representative, he disavowed Reagan. “That wasn't the full U.S. position you heard,” he told

Cory. “It sometimes takes us a while to reach the right conclusion, but I'm convinced that we will soon. Please be patient.”

Frustrated, Bosworth shouted over the telephone to his colleagues at the State Department. “But they were just as horrified,” he recollected, “and I was like the minister preaching to the choir.” Shultz soon called him and, in his bland voice, said: “Okay, you've made your point. Now relax. We'll try to fix it.” He did. Reagan had gone to his Santa Barbara ranch, and Shultz dunned him by telephone with details of Marcos's deceit. On February 15, Reagan finally acknowledged publicly that the “widespread fraud and violence” had been “perpetrated largely” by Marcos's side. A few hours later, Marcos announced victory—and the first foreign envoy to congratulate him was the Soviet ambassador. Cory promptly claimed success—credibly, according to the CIA's estimates.

Philip Habib, the diplomatic troubleshooter, now plunged into the confusion. A Brooklynite of Lebanese origin, he was a veteran of nearly forty years in the State Department—an ethnic rarity in the patrician corps. He had risen to become ambassador to South Korea and later undersecretary of state before a severe heart attack retired him. Still energetic, he undertook special missions. He had always prided himself on his candor and was even blunter in retirement—figuring, as he put it, that he had “paid his dues.”

On February 9, two days after the Philippine election, Shultz interrupted Habib's golf game in Florida to ask him to go to Manila. Habib detested the Marcoses, but he accepted the job—which, as he subsequently described it to me, was “simply to assess the situation.” Shultz's real purpose in sending him was to gain time to enable the administration to resolve the deadlock. Habib, however, was too dynamic to play a passive role.

Landing in Manila on February 15, he found himself in a swirl. More than a hundred Catholic bishops had just declared that Marcos's “fraudulent” attempt to retain power “has no moral basis.” Then Cory staged a huge rally in the Luneta, appealing for civil disobedience to unseat Marcos. Habib calmed her jitters by reassuring her that he had not come to urge her to compromise. Marcos, whom he saw, claimed to have won the election. For six days Habib interviewed more than a hundred politicians, priests, educators, businessmen—and two journalists, Robert Shaplen of *The New Yorker* and me. He was particularly impressed by Enrile, who seemed to be distancing himself from Marcos and, Habib felt, might soon “reveal his hand.” By February 22, as he prepared to depart, Habib had concluded: “Cory had won the election and deserved our support. Marcos was finished, and we ought to offer him asylum in the United States.”

Before boarding his U.S. Air Force plane for the flight home, Habib intuitively told an American embassy officer to tell Bosworth, “Something's going to break.”

* * *

Lean and leathery at sixty-two, Juan Ponce Enrile owed his wealth and status to a nimble mind, a sense of timing and patronage. He had been born illegitimate in the mountains of north Luzon and was later adopted by his father, a noted Manila attorney, who sent him to Harvard Law School. Enrile joined

Marcos in 1965 and became his defense minister five years afterward, meanwhile piling up a fortune as Eduardo Cojuangco's associate in the coconut monopoly. But he felt increasingly estranged as Marcos placed the armed forces under General Ver. Soon Enrile discovered that Ver was planning to have him murdered—a fate he escaped when his bodyguards located and liquidated the suspected killer. Enrile's fears also mounted when he learned that Cojuangco, possibly working with Ver, was gunning for him as well. In 1984, Cojuangco hired three Israeli mercenaries to train his private army of nearly two thousand men. Ninoy's death had alarmed Enrile. Until then, he told me later, assassinating a "man of any consequence" was simply not done. Now "nobody was safe."

Enrile formed his own force with a core of some thirty young officers. Starting in late 1983, he secretly imported crates of Israeli weapons along with two retired British commandos to teach his men deceptive tactics. The young Filipino officers, many of them trained in the United States, were serious soldiers—though one, Colonel Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, was a showman whose stunts included parachute jumping while encoiled by his pet python. As professionals, they lamented the favoritism, incompetence and corruption that pervaded the armed forces, crippling their ability to check the Communist insurgents. Rex Robles, a navy captain, wept as he later described conditions to me: "Our men were fighting in shorts and rubber sandals, without uniforms, boots, even canteens. They were dying for lack of doctors, nurses, medicines—while Marcos's generals stole millions."

In March 1985, the young officers organized the Reform the Armed Forces Movement, or RAM, and soon began to plot. They outlined options ranging from the "benign," like urging Marcos to change, to the "naughty," such as abducting him and forcing him to quit. Eventually they agreed on a "naughty" plan: to oust him and set up a committee including Enrile, Cory, Cardinal Sin and Lieutenant General Fidel Ramos, the constabulary chief, as a transition back to constitutional rule. But Marcos's election announcement in November 1985 jolted them. They could not move without appearing to be thwarting the democratic process. Delaying their plot, they vowed to act should Marcos cheat. Whatever the outcome, their choice for eventual president was Enrile, not Cory.

Like boys on a lark, they noisily conspired over beer in the vast lobby of the Peninsula Hotel, and soon all Manila, including Ver and Bosworth, were in the know. Bosworth reckoned that Ver could easily crush an attempted coup or might preempt it. In either event, Marcos would reimpose martial law under the guise of restoring order, and Reagan would probably approve the action. Bosworth warned both Ver and the RAM officers to do nothing. So the two sides played "bluff" during the early weeks of 1985, as Robles recalled. "We leaked to the press that we were about to move, and they did the same. It was a matter of who blinked first."

Marcos's election chicanery finally spurred the plotters to schedule a coup for the early hours of Sunday, February 23, the feast of Saint Lazarus. Their plan was to attack the Malacañang and seize Marcos—but, above all, not kill him. They alerted Ramos, whose men were vital. Cardinal Sin, obliquely informed, obliquely blessed them. Cory, in the dark, was going with her

brother to Cebu to campaign for civil disobedience, and they advised him to keep her there.

Suddenly there was a hitch. On February 20, Marcos had arrested four rebel confederates in his entourage, and they talked. The RAM officers heard of the arrest two days later, when they also learned that other comrades had been picked up. It was now the day before the coup, and Colonel Honasan warned Enrile that an attack against the palace would be suicide. He had also been told that they were about to be arrested. Hastily revising plans, they decided to retreat to Camp Aguinaldo, a large Manila military compound and site of Enrile's defense ministry, and appeal to other army elements for support.

At six o'clock on the evening of February 22, Enrile arrived at the camp, a bulletproof vest under his olive drab windbreaker. He was joined by Ramos, an undemonstrative West Point graduate. They initially had only two hundred men—no match for Marcos's legions. Enrile first telephoned Bosworth to tell him of their move. Bosworth informed Washington, then began a series of calls to Marcos, urging him not to employ force. Enrile also called Cardinal Sin to say, "I'll be dead in an hour." Soon, mobbed by correspondents, Enrile held a televised news conference in which he recognized Cory as the election winner—revealing that he himself faked nearly four hundred thousand votes for Marcos in his own region. He went on to confess to other duplicity, including the phony ambush in 1972 that gave Marcos the pretext to declare martial law.

Other soldiers drifted into the camp. Within hours, too, thousands of people swarmed around Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, known as Edsa, a broad boulevard running past the compound. Hawkers quickly poured in to peddle food, drinks, cigarettes and Ninoy souvenirs. More disaffected troops arrived, and the crowd swelled. Ramos shifted to Camp Crame, a more defensible installation across the boulevard, where Enrile later joined him. At nine o'clock that night, the irrepressible Cardinal Sin spoke on Radio Veritas, appealing for support of "our two good friends," Enrile and Ramos. Cory, hearing news of the revolt in Cebu, was convinced that Marcos would swiftly wipe it out. The U.S. consul offered her refuge aboard an American navy frigate anchored in the port. Instead she went to a nearby convent to wait, watch and pray. She telephoned Cardinal Sin, who optimistically told her, "This may be the miracle we've been expecting."

If so, providence was assisted by clandestine American intervention. Rebel helicopters were allowed to refuel and rearm at Clark Field, the U.S. commander noting afterward that technically the base belonged to the Philippines. Defense Secretary Weinberger maintained later that the choppers were helping to "avert bloodshed," though one fired rockets at the Malacañang palace. The American military mission in Manila intercepted messages between the two sides, ostensibly to "make sure that they understood each other," but also to slip intelligence to the rebels. A team of U.S. experts tapped into Ver's secret radio net and furnished the dissidents with his orders to his men. On Sunday morning, when Marcos's troops smashed the Radio Veritas transmitter, CIA specialists provided an alternative system. Usually posing as reporters, CIA men assisted the mutineers in a disinformation campaign to spread phony news about Marcos's intentions.

Marcos could have routed the rebels at the start, when they were weak. Instead he waffled, later claiming that he was being humane. Actually he distrusted his own troops to obey his orders, and he also feared the opprobrium of American opinion. By Sunday afternoon, Manila was delirious. The boulevard between the army camps was a human sea, the crowd surging and receding like a tide as government forces arrived and retreated and returned. Demonstrators carried banners demanding Marcos's resignation. Rebel soldiers, their flag patches inverted, mingled with the throng. One of several climaxes came when loyalist tanks lumbered into the area. As people chanted hymns, priests and nuns knelt in prayer before the machines, and children pressed flowers on the crews. The tanks retired, the people advanced and the tanks withdrew. The tension continued through the day, the crowd cheering each small victory. The Edsa Revolution subsequently became a legend, encapsulated in Cory's escutcheon: People Power.

A surreal electronic battle was also going on as Marcos, Ver, Enrile, Ramos and various intermediaries haggle and bargained over the telephone. Nor was television forgotten. Ramos appeared on *Meet the Press*, vowing to defeat Marcos "by sheer numbers," while Marcos, on the same program, threatened revenge: "We will bide our time, disperse the civilians and then handle Enrile and Ramos." He had been legally elected and would not resign, Marcos insisted—adding, "I don't believe President Reagan would ask me to step down."

Washington is thirteen hours behind Manila, and reports from the U.S. Embassy were swamping the State Department on Saturday morning. At three o'clock that afternoon, Shultz assembled a few of his staff in his elegant seventh-floor office. They were dressed casually, the weekend custom. Among them were Michael Armacost, former U.S. ambassador in Manila and now undersecretary of state; Paul Wolfowitz, the assistant secretary for Asia; and Charles Hill, Shultz's close aide and alter ego, a diligent professional with a razor-sharp mind. Even at this late stage, they were struggling to shape a firm Philippine policy—proof again that policies are often forged in the heat of crisis rather than in cool contemplation.

Slow, laconic and deliberate, Shultz had watched the problem ripen into a crisis, awaiting the moment to act. Seeing that moment, he said: "Marcos is unraveling. At some point we have to tell him it's over, and offer him asylum in the United States." Armacost observed that the picture was still a blur as assorted Filipino factions jockeyed for position. "Once they see a major swing," Shultz replied, "they'll try to save themselves." Hill pleaded for a quick U.S. decision. "Don't underestimate Marcos," he stressed. "If his opponents don't move fast, he'll bring in forces from the provinces and roll over them. We could see Enrile begging for his life and house arrest, and we'll end up with the Marcos dictatorship versus the Communists." Shultz, agreeing, proposed that a statement be drafted for Reagan, pledging a "safe haven" for Marcos and his family. Even so, Shultz was not sanguine.

Marcos was not "going to bend," he went on—and nothing would embarrass Reagan more than being rebuffed by him. Besides, Shultz added, Reagan "isn't the guy to pull the plug on Marcos." So, the staff concluded, the only approach for the moment was to warn Marcos against using force—as Bosworth was doing in Manila. But the crisis still begged for action, and Shultz

decided on a meeting the next morning of the National Security Planning Group, the senior policy-making committee.

At nine o'clock the group gathered around the dining room table of his house in suburban Bethesda as his wife, Helena, served coffee and homemade blueberry muffins. Those present included Weinberger, Armacost, Vice Admiral John Poindexter, the president's national security adviser, and Robert Gates, the deputy CIA director, pinch-hitting for William Casey. Habib was there, having arrived the night before from Manila. Shultz had just received a message from Bosworth: "Marcos will not draw the conclusion that he must leave unless President Reagan puts it to him directly. Go for a dignified transition out." The problem now was plain if difficult: how to persuade Reagan to tell Marcos to quit.

Leading off, Habib reported that Marcos was isolated, looked "horrible" and refused "to realize that he faces a widespread movement to dump him." When Shultz cited A. M. Rosenthal's description of Cory as "vacant," Habib dismissed Rosenthal as "a bird of passage [who] flies, perches and then flies away." If Marcos crushed the Enrile mutiny, Habib went on, he would move against Cory next. Shultz concurred: A Marcos police state would polarize the situation and benefit the Communists. He reflected on the damage caused the United States by these "total shifts," like the chaos that followed the falls of Diem and the shah. "We pay a heavy price for our past," he said. Pursuing the point, Weinberger asked, "What happens in the Philippines after Marcos goes?" Habib replied: "It's not Iran. There is a democratic opposition backed by the Catholic Church." When Shultz interposed, "We have a great store of goodwill," Habib pressed on: "If we want to have some control over the situation, we must move fast to a transition." After a brief silence, Shultz declared: "Our conclusion is unanimous. Now we need scenarios."

"Forget reconciliation," Habib began. Cory would not deal with Marcos. The group then offered proposals, one by Weinberger for a new election. "Without a new election I have trouble," he said. "You have trouble with everything," Shultz retorted. "A new election is a must," Weinberger insisted. Gates interceded: "Let's be realistic, not legalistic. The public view is that Aquino won. So we have to think of a way to install her in power and give Marcos a fig leaf to depart. Aquino in, Marcos out." Again Weinberger objected, submitting that Reagan would be distressed if he "publicly appeared" to be dumping Marcos. Poindexter agreed. Someone suggested doing nothing, to which Shultz answered, "There's a lot to be said for that." Habib thundered: "Give Marcos a chance to stay, and he'll hang on. He has to go!" Shultz, alarmed by the danger of bloodshed if Marcos dug in, discursively recalled his experiences as a marine in a bloody battle against the Japanese during World War II. Then, back on track, he recommended public statements aimed at Marcos, coupled with an emissary to him, perhaps Laxalt again. He called another session at the State Department after lunch, in case Reagan convened a meeting for that day. As he rose from the table, Habib said, "Don't assume a quick solution."

The same cast met in Shultz's office at two o'clock, now with an acute sense of urgency. It was one o'clock on Monday morning in Manila, and Bosworth reported that Marcos might attack the rebels at daybreak. A decision by Reagan was vital before then. Charles Hill, who had attended the morning

session at Shultz's house, had taken notes in his spidery handwriting: *Marcos can't govern . . . Forces favors left, bad for us . . . We have more options now than later . . . Do right by Marcos, departure in safety and dignity . . . Presidential phone call . . . Broker transition . . . Public call for no force.* Using the notes, Shultz personally wrote a step-by-step script for Reagan, proposing that Laxalt fly to Manila with a presidential message urging Marcos to resign, with Habib accompanying him to broker the transition.

At three o'clock, the group gathered in the White House Situation Room for a formal National Security Council meeting. Vice President George Bush and Treasury Secretary James Baker were there along with Casey, who had missed the discussions until then. As Reagan listened, the session rapidly became a verbal brawl between Don Regan, his chief of staff, and Habib. Regan, as one participant recalled, "didn't understand or care to understand" the issue, but "thought that he was conveying Reagan's thoughts." Evoking the Iran analogy, he vehemently opposed scuttling Marcos, called Cory an unknown quantity and warned against "opening the door to Communism." Habib, after repeating his case, concluded, "The Marcos era has ended." Endorsing Habib's assessment, Shultz said: "Nobody believes that Marcos can remain in power. He's had it." As the debate droned on, Reagan's attention waned—except when new reports arrived of imminent violence in Manila. He appeared to the anti-Marcos faction to be turning around when, at one point, he remarked that Marcos had to be "approached carefully" and "asked rather than told" to depart. He declined to telephone Marcos and tell him to go, nor would he send him a personal message. Nor would he countenance a replay of Jimmy Carter's refusal to allow the shah to enter the United States until he was near death. Marcos, he affirmed, could have asylum in America. So, as the ninety-minute meeting closed, Reagan had acquiesced to deposing his "old friend."

Two potential catastrophes haunted Reagan and his staff. One was the danger that Marcos, in a final desperate attempt to prevail, might attack the rebel camps, slaughtering masses of civilians—on world television. Equally horrible was the possibility that the mutineers might capture and murder Marcos and his family, thus reenacting the assassination of Diem in the South Vietnamese coup encouraged by the United States. To avert either disaster, Reagan approved a public statement warning Marcos that he "would cause untold damage to the relationship between our two governments" if he used force, and threatened to suspend his military aid unless he obeyed. But Reagan's decision to tell Marcos to leave was kept secret for the moment in the hope that, through private persuasion, he might go voluntarily and thus be spared the embarrassment of having been removed under U.S. pressure.

Three channels were operating. Nancy, constantly being telephoned by Imelda, told her that she and Ferdinand would "certainly" be welcomed in America. Marcos's labor minister, Blas Ople, had come to Washington to lobby for him, and Shultz advised him to urge his boss to depart gracefully. Shultz also called Bosworth, reaching him at about four o'clock on Monday morning, Manila time. He ordered him to inform Marcos that his "time was up," and that "we will make the transition as peaceful as possible." Marcos angrily rejected Bosworth and, going on television, claimed to be in control.

"I will fight to the last breath," he intoned, "even though my family cowers in terror in the palace."

Reagan afterward said with admiration that Marcos "did not want bloodshed or civil strife" and had shown restraint as a result. In reality, Marcos knew, as his troops defected to the rebels in droves, that a military response was too late. He tried to bargain. Calling Enrile, he proposed a coalition excluding Cory. Enrile, wary of Marcos's wiles, refused and urged Cory to legitimize herself quickly in an inauguration—and she did the next day. Equally obsessed with legitimacy, Marcos set his own inauguration for the following day. On Monday afternoon in Washington, while still pursuing the private conduits, Reagan approved a public plea to Marcos to quit: "Attempts to prolong the life of the present regime by violence are futile. A solution to this crisis can only be achieved through a peaceful transition to a new government." Marcos received the message at three o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, February 25, Manila time, and immediately called Laxalt in Washington, hoping through him to reach Reagan.

There, on Monday afternoon, Shultz, Habib and Armacost were in the Capitol building, secretly briefing thirty key members of Congress, including Laxalt. The telephone call from Marcos to Laxalt interrupted the session. Marcos wanted the word straight from Reagan: Was the statement about a "transition" real or another State Department plot? With Shultz, Habib and Armacost hovering over him, Laxalt confirmed it. The conversation lasted twenty minutes, Marcos's raspy voice betraying his exhaustion. He essayed alternatives, like a "power sharing" deal with Cory. After all, he said, he was a veteran at fighting Communists and negotiating with foreign creditors. Floating another idea, he might serve as Cory's "senior adviser" while remaining president until the end of his original term in 1987. Laxalt promised to consult Reagan and call him back.

The briefing finished, Laxalt accompanied Shultz to the State Department to drop off Habib and Armacost. As they drove through a snow flurry, Laxalt asked whether Marcos's proposals for a "power sharing" or "advisory" deal might work. Armacost, recoiling from the ingenuous question, explained that Marcos would eventually rally his loyalists and "you would have civil war." Laxalt then went with Shultz to the White House to confer with Reagan, Poindexter and Regan in the Oval Office. The meeting lasted thirteen minutes. Laxalt recounted his talk with Marcos, and again raised the proposal for an accommodation with Cory. "Impractical," said Shultz. Reagan, nodding assent, added that Marcos would be welcome in the United States "if he saw fit."

Laxalt moved to Poindexter's office and, fulfilling his promise, telephoned Marcos—who at five o'clock in the morning in Manila awaited the call. With Shultz guiding him, Laxalt told Marcos that Reagan had vetoed a deal with Cory but offered him asylum in America. Marcos, still angling for the Olympian word, asked if Reagan wanted him to resign. Laxalt ducked the question. "Senator," Marcos pressed, "what do you think? Should I step down?" Laxalt responded without hesitation: "I think you should cut and cut cleanly. I think the time has come." There was a silence so long that Laxalt, wondering whether they had been disconnected, asked, "Mr. President, are you there?" "Yes," responded Marcos in a thin voice. "I am so very, very disappointed."

Bosworth, who had been planning Marcos's departure for two days, decided

on the advice of his military aides that a helicopter lift would be safest. He arranged to take the Marcoses from the Malacañang palace across the Pasig River by barge, then fly them to Clark Field and from there to the United States. The project, ready on Tuesday morning, was soon delayed. Marcos wanted to hold his inauguration ritual. There was packing, dawdling, telephoning friends, attempts at last-ditch deals. Finally, in the late afternoon, the Marcos family and its retinue of sixty were braced to depart. Show biz to the end, Marcos and Imelda stepped out onto a palace balcony, peered at a crowd of supporters and hecklers, and sang a farewell duet: "Because of You."

The helicopters flew the Marcoses to Clark Field, where they were to board a U.S. Air Force transport for the United States. But Marcos balked, asking instead to spend "a couple of days" with his family and friends in Ilocos Norte, his home province. His escort, Major General Theodore Allen, the chief American military aid adviser in the Philippines, telephoned Bosworth, who called Washington, which suggested that he contact Cory. She was torn between her gratitude to Marcos for releasing Ninoy to have heart surgery and her fear that he might stir his native region to revolt. After consulting her advisers, who favored a quick exit, she asked Bosworth: "Is he really ill?" "Aside from being exhausted, I don't know," Bosworth replied. "Well," she said, "let him stay the night at Clark and after that he must leave the country." Soon afterward, the Clark commander reported to Bosworth that loyalist Marcos troops were nearing the base, saying, "I want that guy out of here now." Bosworth agreed. Allen told Marcos, "You can go anywhere you want as long as it's out of the country." That night, the Marcoses and their children took off for Guam, their ultimate destination Hawaii. Once aloft, Imelda began to sing "New York, New York."

The Reagan administration reveled in the neat, bloodless change, as did even its fiercest press critics. "It is a long time since Americans of all political views have felt so good in a transforming event abroad," wrote Anthony Lewis, the liberal *New York Times* columnist, extolling Reagan's "great skill and impeccable timing." Morton Abramowitz, one of the senior State Department officials who had labored to remove Marcos, termed the conjuncture of events "luck, sheer luck."

Reagan never forgave Cory for denying Marcos a visit to his native region, but his faith in Marcos sank as the proof of plunder emerged. The loot found in the Malacañang was shocking enough. Worse yet was the evidence of racketeering by Marcos during his rule and even after his exile in Hawaii. Nearly a hundred civil suits were filed against him in the Philippines, seeking a total of nearly \$100 billion. Meanwhile, a grand jury in Honolulu began to probe his attempts to buy weapons to stage a comeback, a breach of the Neutrality Act, and another in Pittsburgh started to look into alleged kickbacks in the Westinghouse nuclear project. Marcos refused to face a panel in Alexandria, Virginia, which formally charged one of General Ver's cronies with fraud in connection with official arms purchases. The big sensation, however, was the indictment on October 21, 1988, by a New York grand jury. The Marcoses and eight others, including the Saudi Arabian fixer Adnan Khashoggi, were accused of embezzling more than \$100 million from the Philippine government to acquire three Manhattan buildings, defrauding American banks to finance the deal. The investigation also revealed twenty secret Marcos accounts in a Swiss bank and

other clandestine deposits elsewhere. With Marcos too sick to travel, Imelda appeared in court to post \$5 million bail, lent by one of her few remaining chums—the aged tobacco heiress Doris Duke. George Bush was then campaigning for president, and for Reagan to defend the Marcoses would have tarnished the Republican ticket. Nor could Reagan afford to alienate Cory, who had just signed an interim bases agreement with the United States. Reagan did nothing—though he was "pained," a senior administration official confided to me, by the final degradation of his old friend.

* * *

In the summer of 1983, the eve of his fatal return home, Ninoy told an interviewer: "If you made me president of the Philippines today, my friend, in six months I would be smelling like horseshit. Because there's nothing I can do. I cannot provide employment. I cannot bring prices down. I cannot stop the criminality spawned by economic difficulties. I mean, let's face it. When people are hungry, you can bring Saint Peter down, and you won't get a stable government." Had he rather than Cory toppled Marcos, he might have also observed that revolutions invariably raise expectations that cannot be easily fulfilled. Cory ran into that reality soon after Marcos's collapse.

The miracle of her victory inspired in Filipinos—and in many of her American admirers—the dream that she would now perform economic, social and political miracles. The end of tyranny and the revival of democracy euphorically signaled a new era of peace and prosperity. As Cory began to pick up the pieces of her shattered country, however, she faced an array of staggering problems that no individual, even with divine guidance, could resolve rapidly. Nor was she inclined to promote drastic measures. Though she labeled her overthrow of Marcos a revolution, it was really a restoration.

Cory was not a revolutionary determined to renovate the society from top to bottom. Essentially conservative, as befit a member of her class, she sought to resurrect the institutions dismantled by Marcos rather than construct a new system. In the process, she revived the old dynasties he had dispossessed, including her own family, and they jockeyed to regain their former positions of privilege. She also lacked experience and confidence in her ability to govern, and at first surrounded herself with a cacophony of advisers, each tugging in different directions. Prudent and uncertain, she was reluctant to take advantage of her immense popularity to impose her leadership, preferring instead to rule by moral example. She gradually began to assert herself and showed in instances that she had the right stuff, but she squandered her initial momentum, thereby losing a unique opportunity to introduce reforms. Into the vacuum poured a multiplicity of undisciplined, selfish, querulous factions eager to advance their own ambitions. Revisiting the Philippines during the years following Cory's takeover, I was reminded of the 1960s, with its disorder, drift and doubt. Now, as then, there appeared to be little prospect for the profound and pervasive changes vital to deter the spread of the Communist insurgency or perhaps even the return of a Marcos in different guise.

Particularly dramatic was the skepticism, disappointment and apprehension of the groups that had vaulted Cory into power: the intellectuals, businessmen, clergy and army. They clamored for stability, yet they carped at her inces-

santly, their behavior seeming to mirror two antithetical ingredients in the Philippine heritage: an Asian reverence for authority and a Latin penchant for hypercriticism. The uncomfortable mixture did not make Cory's task any easier as she wrestled with a job she had never wanted, and she responded to their taunts by saying, "What is your alternative?"

A foremost Filipino writer, F. Sionil José, originally an ardent supporter, unleashed a tirade in the summer of 1987, faulting her for failing to "translate her massive popularity into action" and warning that "unless she changes quickly she will bring this country to ruin." Jaime Ongpin, her able finance secretary, who had rallied the business community to her side, committed suicide in despair after a series of squabbles inside her cabinet. Father Joaquín Bernas, a Jesuit scholar and one of her closest campaign advisers, vented his frustration publicly. Her "revolution" had been "perfect," he said in an interview—"a 360-degree turn back to where we were before . . . still no social justice, still corruption and economic deprivation. . . . The people," he added, "are not getting the president they voted for." Amando Doronila, the studious editor of the *Manila Chronicle*, echoed the same theme: "There has been no national agenda, no initiatives. Cory is a passive president who follows, not leads." The army manifested its dissatisfaction in five coup attempts during her first year and a half in office—the most serious of them staged in August 1986 by Colonel "Gringo" Honasan, who had led the mutiny against Marcos. The surprise revolt nearly succeeded. "Until it was over," a Pentagon official remarked later, "we didn't realize how dicey the situation was." Cory showed unique courage and serenity during the coup, in which her son was injured. "I am fatalistic," she again told me afterward, candidly admitting her belief in predestination.

Most of the criticism of Cory was centered in Manila, a city that flourishes on political gossip. Out in the rural areas, her capacity for survival gave her an aura of sanctity that reinforced her popular appeal. Early in 1987, she held a referendum to approve her new constitution, a thick, turgid document that defied easy comprehension. It won overwhelming endorsement—actually overwhelming endorsement for Cory. Her legislative elections in May 1987 and local contests a year later both drew big turnouts, even though she had declined to create a political party. Still the malaise continued.

Striving to reconcile the disparate elements that had backed her crusade, Cory at first cobbled together a coalition cabinet. It was a basket of crabs. She chose as her chief of staff a leftist lawyer improbably named Joker Arroyo, to whom she was grateful for his defense of Ninoy. A schemer who bore an uncanny resemblance to the young Bonaparte, he was anathema to the army for his past battles over human rights violations, while his administrative incompetence appalled technocrats like Jaime Ongpin. Enrile, her defense secretary, was meanwhile plotting against her, and Salvador Laurel, the vice president who doubled as foreign secretary, had his own priorities in mind. She dumped Enrile and later fired Arroyo and Ongpin, and Laurel subsequently quit the cabinet to remain, incongruously, vice president in opposition. Cory was hailed for firmness, but two precious years had been wasted.

She blundered, her critics claimed, by refusing to decree agrarian reforms under her revolutionary powers, and instead passed the buck to the new legislature. Her virtuous purpose was to respect democratic procedure. Pre-

dictably, the debate over reforms dragged on until June 1988, when representatives for the landed interests finally voted a law riddled with loopholes. Enforcement was delegated to local councils usually controlled by landowners, who in addition won the right to challenge decisions in court—an endless process. One of the clauses, evidently sponsored by Cory's brother, José Cojuangco, would exempt their family sugar plantation by instituting a "profit sharing" arrangement for the workers—with the proprietors determining the profit. Cory's own secretary of agriculture, Carlos "Sonny" Domínguez, who had drafted a comprehensive plan, was dismayed. "More than anything," he said, "we needed radical land reform, but Cory was too cautious. She had an opportunity and she blew it."

A curious trace of nostalgia for authority emerged in observers like *Chronicle* editor Amando Doronila, who spent the Marcos years in exile in Australia. He saw in the legislature a "circus of atomized members, each acting on behalf of individual or at best limited interests" to block reforms. The "impasse," he wrote, might tempt Cory to become another Marcos or perhaps spur a military junta "to seize power in the name of national development."

But agrarian reform of any kind faced an immense obstacle: money. Aside from paying landowners for their property, the program had to furnish farmers with credit, seeds, tools and above all training. One estimate put the cost at more than \$7 billion for a ten-year period, a sum the Philippines could not even begin to contemplate, given the crippled economy Cory inherited in the aftermath of Marcos's egregious profligacy. Attempts to raise funds from the sale of government companies had bogged down, and the prospects for foreign aid looked bleak.

Cory rosily declared in July 1988 that she had overcome the Marcos legacy, and that "the economy has taken off." A growth rate of about six percent in the gross national product for the previous year seemed to prove her point. So too did the appearance of Manila during my visits. I saw new houses going up in residential suburbs and a booming stock exchange. Restaurants, nightclubs and discos were packed, and shopping centers thronged with buyers of furniture, refrigerators, air conditioners and other big-tag items. The picture was both true and false. The urban middle classes were thriving, due in part to higher salaries for government employees, but the prosperity touched neither the sprawling city slums nor the countryside. A confidential World Bank study completed in the summer of 1988 observed that "there are more poor people in the Philippines today than at any time in recent history," adding that their plight "has worsened during the past three decades." Of the population of fifty-six million Filipinos, the report said, more than half lived in "absolute poverty"—meaning that their income "did not enable them to satisfy basic needs." The survey repeated a familiar litany: the government's neglect of rural areas, widespread tax evasion by the rich, a grossly inequitable land ownership pattern. Even with an unusually high growth rate of six percent, the study concluded, the Philippines would return to its 1982 economic level only by 1992—and at that barring a crisis in the world market for sugar, copra and other commodities.

A major impediment to economic growth was servicing the foreign debt of nearly \$28 billion contracted by Marcos, which drained the country of forty percent of its earnings from exports. Another plague was corruption, which

in 1988 cost the Philippine treasury \$2.5 billion, or about one third of the national budget. As Cardinal Sin quipped, "Ali Baba Marcos fled, leaving behind the forty thieves." It differed from Marcos's plundering, a state enterprise directed from his palace. Nobody could fault Cory for personal dishonesty, but despite her campaign promise to promote integrity, she was confronted by an endemic problem.

Returning to Manila during her years in office, I again listened to the same old tales of corruption: customs agents engaged in smuggling, kickbacks on government contracts, fake licenses, payoffs to cops. A commission created by Cory to recover Marcos's "ill-gotten gains" was revamped after the revelation that its members had stolen some of those gains. One of Cory's early backers, newspaper publisher Joaquín Roces, whom Marcos had jailed, startled her at a public meeting by saying that her regime was guilty of "self-aggrandizement and service to vested interests, relatives and friends." He was transparently referring to her brother José, known as "Peping," and his wife, Margarita, or "Tingting," the reputed bosses of enterprises ranging from a gambling monopoly to the illicit barter trade in the south. A brother-in-law, Ricardo "Baby" Lopa, was denounced by the Manila press for having acquired for a pittance the companies that Imelda's brother "Kokoy" had acquired for a pittance. The petty graft by minor bureaucrats reflected their struggle to survive amid dire poverty. The reluctance to pursue offenders mirrored age-old kinship loyalties. Cory told a reporter that she had warned members of her family against abusing their position. "Short of ordering them to hibernate or go into exile," she said, "I don't know what else I can do."

The economy has also been stunted by the spiraling population, which is bound to intensify into an unmanageable problem in the years ahead. But the Catholic hierarchy has denounced birth control as "dehumanizing and immoral," and Cory has evaded the issue out of religious piety. When I first visited the Philippines in the late 1950s, there were about twenty-five million Filipinos. The population has doubled since then and is expected to double again by the year 2010, and the implications of that projection are horrendous. To keep pace with the explosion, according to a study in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the Philippines will have to increase food production by forty percent by the end of the century in addition to providing for thousands of schools and clinics and millions of jobs. "The pressure of people on land," a World Bank report declared in 1988, "has brought about the impoverishment of a large part of the rural sector." It is that impoverishment, probably more than any other single factor, that has fueled the spread of the Communist insurgency—a war that plainly cannot be won by battalions and bullets.

Cory announced in July 1988 that "this may be remembered as the year the insurgency was broken." But her optimistic forecast was soon punctured by a leak to a Manila newspaper of a secret military study stating that the rebels had gained "the tactical initiative in major engagements." As usual, the truth was somewhere in between. The Communists made a grave error by boycotting the election that lifted Cory into power. Their chief spokesman, Satur Ocampo, candidly admitted the mistake to me, saying, "We failed to benefit from the popular sentiment against Marcos." The movement was further weakened by disputes between advocates of a political approach and champions of armed struggle. In many places, local revolts against the government were prolifer-

ating, eluding the control of the Communists. Still, the New People's Army, as the Communist guerrillas called their force, remained dynamic, organized and menacing. By contrast, the Philippine military establishment continued to be nagged by shortages of supplies, command rivalries and other difficulties—though its morale had risen since the Marcos era. Honasan's abortive coup ironically helped by alerting Cory to the need to raise the wages of soldiers and improve their conditions.

An effective check to the Communists have been a variety of vigilante groups, like one in the Mindanao capital of Davao known as *Alsa Masa*, or "Up with the Masses"—its commander, Lieutenant Colonel Franco Calida, advertised himself to the press from an office decorated with a big poster of Sylvester Stallone as Rambo. In 1986, when I visited Davao, the Communists controlled a slum district called Agdao. Calida cleaned out the area within two years with his three thousand men, numbers of them Communist defectors. But his and other groups, acting without official supervision, summarily killed suspects and settled old feuds. Some, like the Tadtad, which means "chop," were mystical, cannibalistic cults that beheaded victims and ate their livers. Cory originally applauded the vigilantes as prototypes of "people power," but their abuses tarnished her name with human rights activists. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, a New York organization, concluded in June 1988 after months of research that "the human rights of Filipinos have suffered grave violations on a wide scale." Criticism from such movements, which had pleaded for Ninoy during his imprisonment, grated a raw nerve in Cory, and she angrily refuted the charge. The director of her human rights commission indirectly confirmed the complaint, however, saying that "in an environment of war . . . it is most difficult, if not impossible, to prevent brutality."

* * *

Revisiting the countryside has always been an opportunity for me to gain a sense of perspective outside the narrow, incestuous confines of Manila. No place in the archipelago is typical, given its diversity, but the island of Negros in the Visayas has always been a microcosm of the nation's most critical problems.

One of the poorest islands, Negros had been among the richest until the collapse of the world price for sugar, its main crop. Nearly all of its two million people are involved in the sugar industry, and the slump spared nobody. Worst hit were the three hundred thousand sugar workers and their families, whose existence has always been precarious. The government hospital in Bacolod, the province capital, treats about fifty children a day for malnutrition, and countless numbers who never reach the hospital die of starvation. They suffer from the pressure of population as well as an archaic social and economic system.

The sugar workers live on the plantations, often miles from towns. One day I accompanied a planter to a *barrio* on one of his properties, about an hour from Bacolod. We bumped in a four-wheeler over a dirt road that, he told me, turned into an impassable mire in rainy weather. Sheltered in a grove of palms, the village was a cluster of a dozen or so bamboo huts and a thatch-roofed barracks for migrant laborers—none, of course, with running water or electricity. The women, some fat and others stringy, seemed old beyond their years

from childbearing, and the men were small and gnarled, their faces leathery from the sun. Families work together, planting, cutting, drying and hauling cane, earning \$500 or \$600 for the six-month season. Lacking crafts like basketry or weaving, they have no other income. The planter leases them a tiny plot to grow vegetables and rice. They can never afford to pay the rent, he can never collect it and they have nothing for him to dispossess. The debt had accumulated until they were indentured to him.

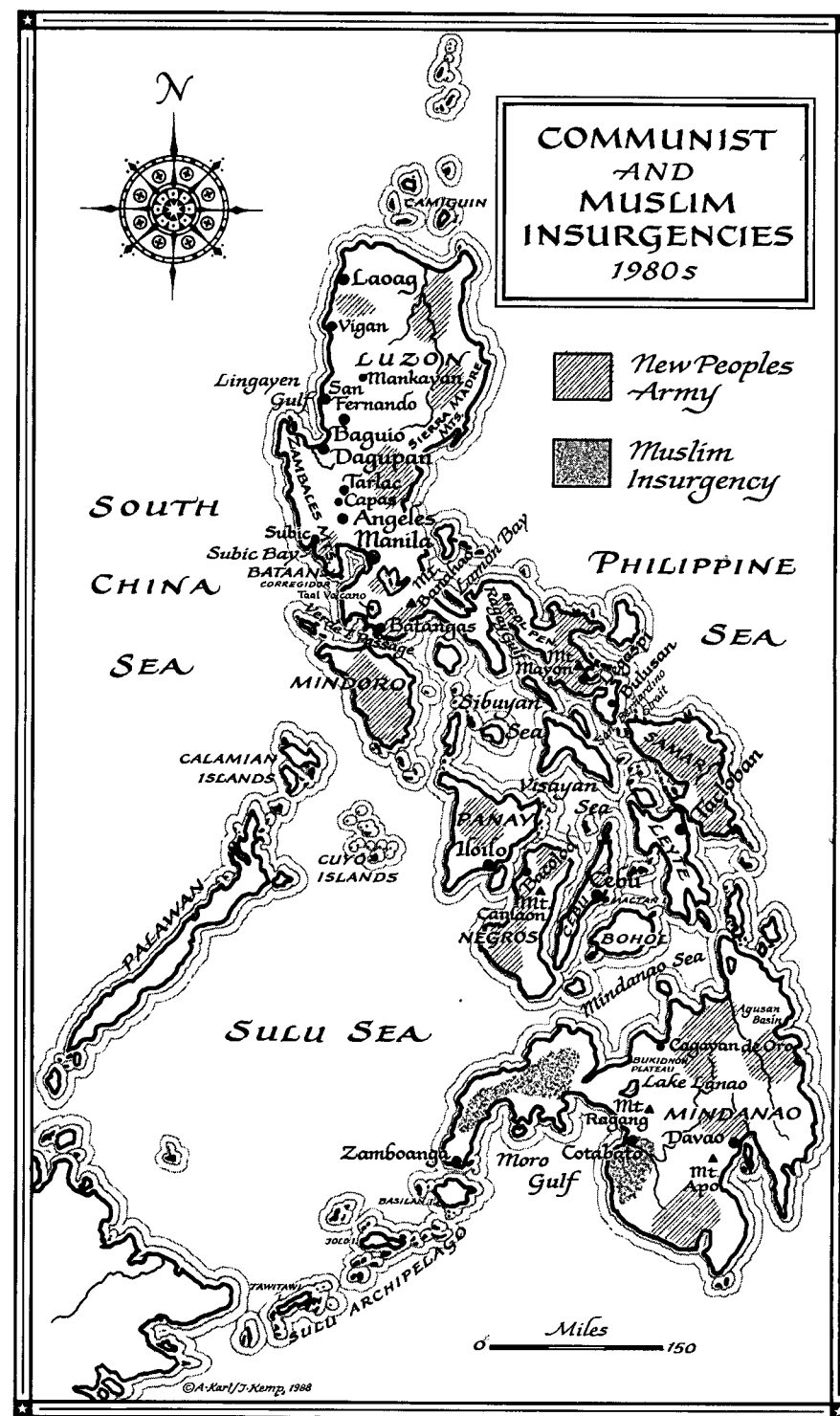
Their servitude ought to have made them sullen, but that day they were gaily celebrating their patron saint—and the planter, in feudal fashion, had come for the occasion. He explained to me that he was fulfilling his responsibility as a landowner, and to have failed to appear would have been taken as a snub. The laborers mixed familiarly with him, chatting and joking and betting on the cockfights, the main event. As we returned to town, he remarked almost casually: “They’re mostly Communist sympathizers. I know it, and they know I know it.” He left to me to deduce that he, like landowners throughout the country, had accommodated the insurgents, perhaps paying them taxes or giving them medical care.

Not long afterward, I joined a few colleagues on a trip into an insurgent “zone” on Negros. The journey was arranged by a Communist intermediary, who sauntered into the hotel one afternoon, wearing a Lacoste tennis shirt, smoking Marlboros and speaking fluent English. That night we climbed into a van, drove to the edge of a sugar field, then trekked single file by moonlight to a hamlet of five or six huts.

It was not Mao Zedong’s base in the mountains of Yanan. The *barrio* was about half an hour from town, close enough to send out for a cold beer. But government troops and police seldom entered the area, either because they tolerated the rebels or were simply too lazy. Many of the guerrillas were sugar workers. Counterinsurgency experts who maintained that the peasants needed protection from the rebels misunderstood the reality: The peasants *were* the rebels.

We had hardly arrived before a band of guerrillas swept in, looking as if they had come out of central casting. They wore blue jeans and T-shirts, and a few sported bandannas à la Che Guevara. They carried American-made Armalite rifles and Uzi automatics manufactured in Israel. One brandished a Soviet AK-47, the worldwide insurgent symbol. Over beer and cigarettes, two or three of them treated me to a session of rote propaganda. They quoted Marx and Mao, decried the U.S. military bases in the Philippines and excoriated American corporations for “exploiting the masses.” Their pitch to the villagers was more concrete.

“Organizing people is slow,” one of them explained to me. “We study conditions on a plantation in order to know the problem—whether, for example, the workers are underpaid or abused. Then we approach them indirectly, maybe through a comrade who belongs to their family, because they naturally trust their relatives. We don’t rush them. Some fear arrest, or they haven’t figured out how we can help. If they refuse us, we move on and return later. Or we try to show them that we can get the landowners to meet their demands.” Recently, he told me proudly, they had persuaded a planter to raise the daily wage for sugar workers from twenty pesos to thirty pesos—from a



dollar to a dollar and a half. The Communists were clearly a long way from the revolution.

But they were not just benign labor organizers. They burned and pillaged the estates of uncooperative planters, and ambushed army units, mainly to acquire weapons. To show their muscle, they occasionally attacked police stations and public buildings. Their urban terrorists, so-called sparrow squads, assassinated officials. One of them recalled to me how he and his comrades had killed a reputedly cruel cop, making it sound like a scene from a western. "We followed him into a café, his regular hangout. The place cleared out immediately, and we shot him—point-blank. He never knew what hit him." Informers, another told me, were given a "people's trial" and speedy execution. "If they try to hide in the city, the sparrows get them." My interlocutor had talked to correspondents before. Like everybody else in the Philippines, the Communists cultivate the press. Late one afternoon, two insurgent commanders showed up to welcome us—and, of course, to be interviewed and photographed.

The senior of the pair was Nemasio Demafelis, a stocky figure in his late thirties whose various noms de guerre included "Iko." Of peasant origin, he had been a political science student at a local college when he went underground in 1972, caught up in the ferment of the time. A year before, in retaliation for the massacre of civilians by a paramilitary unit in a nearby town, he had planned a raid against an army garrison, killing twelve soldiers. He talked at length about the necessity for violence as the only way to "liberate the masses from oppression." By chance, some months afterward, I met him in the Bacolod jail. Evading the question of whether he had defected or been captured, he denounced the Communist policy of "all-out violence." He supported armed struggle, he said, but he also favored a flexible political approach. "The situation is polarizing," he explained. "There will be more and more killing, and more and more people will suffer." Remembering our earlier encounter in the insurgent hamlet, he recalled the other insurgent leader who had accompanied him that day, revealing to me that they subsequently clashed over strategy. He identified his comrade as Francisco Fernandez, whom he described as a proponent of indiscriminate violence.

A sinewy, taciturn man also in his late thirties, a forty-five tucked in his belt, the other rebel chief was a priest whom the villagers addressed as "Father Frank." He related his conversion to Communism as a logical process. "I went to work with the poor after completing the seminary, but soon I saw that real change required political action. I began to support the demands of the people, and that angered the planters and the army. They put me under surveillance. I was in danger of arrest, so I joined the movement." How did he square violence with his religious faith? "My conscience is clear," he replied predictably. "Our cause is just."

Priests on Negros had been in the vanguard of efforts to aid the sugar workers since the early 1970s, when a Jesuit devised the slogan "There's blood in your cup of coffee." They were encouraged by the bishop, Antonio Fortich, a large man with a furrowed face and earnest voice.

The son of a rich sugar planter, he told me that he was originally inspired to join the priesthood in hopes of easing the plight of the workers. He stressed the need for reforms in his first pastoral letter as bishop and subsequently

pressed for labor unions, higher wages and improved working conditions. When the landowners protested, he warned them, "Make concessions now or you will lose everything later." But they resisted and, he said, "The social volcano is no longer just rumbling, it is already exploding." The answer was "land, land, land—what the masses want more than above all else." Skeptical toward Cory's land-reform program, he guessed that it would "determine her success or failure."

Fortich was the target of a misfired grenade in early 1987. The local military commander, Lieutenant Colonel Miguel Coronel, later accused him of shielding thirty-five Communist priests—a charge dismissed by Fortich as "false, malicious and preposterous." Several landowners also circulated the allegation. Fortich's position was nuanced. He had excluded insurgent clergymen like Francisco Fernandez from the church organization, but he would not recommend their excommunication—since, as he explained to me, "I am not the keeper of their conscience." In any case, Negros seemed to me to resemble Mississippi during the 1960s, with the rednecks pitted against the civil rights activists—with one difference: There was no Supreme Court to impose a judgment.

As in Mississippi, the controversy was not simple. The planters clung to their land less for its value, which had dropped with sugar prices, than because it symbolized the authority that their families had enjoyed for generations. They also continued to grow sugar, often at a loss, for lack of an alternative. Several of the army officers I saw had attended counterinsurgency schools in the United States and read books on Vietnam, and they understood that the struggle against the Communists was not merely a military effort. But the economic, social and political components of a progressive program were missing—partly because of resistance from the Negros landowners and also because of Cory's reticence to promote dynamic reforms.

The army, as an expedient, had created a home defense force called the "forward command." It was financed by the planters, who recruited the volunteers from among their sugar workers. These militiamen were supposed to protect their villages and furnish intelligence on rebels in their areas. A local priest dismissed the project as a scheme to preserve the privileges of the landowners. "They wouldn't be paying if they weren't getting something in exchange," he said.

Given the choice between guarding a village or laboring in the fields, volunteers were plentiful. But those I saw being trained at a makeshift camp one day were unimpressive. They were scrawny, awkward teenagers in shorts and sandals, and many, barely literate, could not easily learn the English-language signals system borrowed from the American army. It occurred to me, recalling similar units in Vietnam, that many might be Communist infiltrators. Agreeing, the captain in charge said, "That's a risk we have to take." Later, over a beer, he voiced his disillusionment. Trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, he had returned home with aspirations that had since been shattered. "We are a poor man's army."

The man in the middle on Negros was Daniel Lacson, the governor, a former businessmen educated in the United States. Bubbling with ideas, he believed in leaving the sugar estates intact while developing local industry to manufacture toys, garments and simple electronic equipment. He had already

begun to promote potentially lucrative shrimp farms. What worried him was the tendency in the Philippines to launch promising programs that soon fade into bureaucratic confusion and ineptitude. The cultural affliction is known in Tagalog as *ningas cogon*, which literally means a sudden brushfire that burns out quickly—and connotes grand plans announced with great fanfare that stall for lack of follow-up. “We are urging people to hold on, to be patient, to hope,” Lacson said of his design for Negros, “but something must be done fast. The time bomb is ticking.”

His phrase described the challenge to the Philippines as a whole. And it also raised the question posed repeatedly since Cory was catapulted into office: “Can she make it?”

Stephen Bosworth, writing in *The Washington Post* late in 1987, had a judicious reply. “The question itself requires definition. If ‘making it’ means turning the Philippines into a stable, prosperous, self-confident model of democracy in a developing country, the answer is clearly no. The problems are too difficult, the Filipino sense of nationhood too weak and the time given to Aquino until the end of her term in 1992 too short. On the other hand, if the question is whether her government can survive and she can continue to make gradual but important progress, then my answer is yes.” Whatever happened, Bosworth emphasized, the future of the Philippines hinged on the Filipinos themselves.

But not without the Americans.

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In the aftermath of Marcos’s downfall, the Filipinos faced obstacles that they could not conceivably hurdle alone. Their economy was burdened by a foreign debt that had put them at the mercy of their foreign creditors. They needed foreign investment and foreign aid. Only the United States could carry them through the crisis—and, even then, the going would be precarious.

Yet a vocal faction of Manila politicians, journalists, professors and others, determined to assert their nationalism, championed a tougher stance toward the Americans out of a complexity of motives. Some contended that the United States was not being generous enough toward one of its oldest allies, while others advocated a clean break with the Americans as an affirmation of Philippine sovereignty. In large measure, the ferment was stimulated by the permissiveness of Cory Aquino’s administration. Unshackled from the fetters of the Marcos autocracy, Filipinos were indulging themselves in a feast of freedom. To denounce the United States had always been one of their favorite sports, but they realized that it was a tricky game. And, in the end, they displayed caution.

A turning point came in October 1988, with the agreement signed in Washington to ensure the operation of the U.S. bases in the Philippines until 1991, when a longer-term pact would have to be concluded. Both sides had postured during the bargaining. Cory’s foreign secretary, Raul Manglapus, called America’s presence in the archipelago a violation of national independence, claiming that the moment had arrived to end the residual colonial relationship. Secretary of State Shultz and other senior U.S. officials threatened to transfer

the bases elsewhere, and bolstered their warning by disclosing that the cost of moving would be less than at first anticipated.

Money, not principles, ultimately concluded the dispute. After seven months of negotiations, the Filipinos settled for an American aid package of \$481 million a year in exchange for the bases—one third of Manglapus’s original demand. The deal sparked an outburst from Filipino nationalists, who contended that, once again, U.S. pressure had prevailed.

The compromise was a prelude to fresh discussions to prolong the life of the bases beyond 1991. But the interim accord represented an indirect admission by Filipinos that they desperately needed American assistance—and would for years to come. Also implicit in the agreement was an understanding on the part of both Americans and Filipinos that, however lopsided, thorny and at times frustrating their “special relationship” might be, it reflected a century of shared experience. Dewey, Taft, MacArthur, Edward Lansdale and Ronald Reagan, Aguinaldo, Quezon, Magsaysay, the Marcoses and the Aquinos had marched together through history along with millions of other Americans and Filipinos, and their common past had ordained both their present and their future.