Democratization and Stabilization in the Philippines

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In the Philippines, elections, not religion, are the opium of the people — a popular saying.

ABSTRACT: The coming to power of Corazon Aquino in the Philippines in 1986 represented the restoration of elite democracy after 14 years of dictatorship. Elite democracy derives its strength from the fact that no matter how cynically the Filipino citizenry might view the electoral process, most Filipinos see no alternative to the ballot as a legitimate means of political succession. Key sectors of the U.S. national security establishment understood this and shifted Washington's support from Marcos to Aquino. The Philippine left, however, misread the population, leading to its marginalization from the mainstream of national political life. Nevertheless, elite democracy in the Philippines is fragile. Filipinos have alternated between allegiance to and disaffection with elite parliamentarism. In the absence of fundamental social and economic reforms, a new round of disaffection may already have begun.

The overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship by a civilian uprising *cum* military revolt on February 25, 1986, was sparked by a bitterly contested presidential election that divested Ferdinand Marcos of what little legitimacy he had left. However, the democratic transition, now nearly four years old, has proven to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, Filipinos were genuinely elated to be rid of the 14-year-old dictatorship. On the other hand, popular energies have been channelled into a narrow process of democratization that has become the main instrument for a conservative stabilization of the country. Political competition is back with a vengeance, but social and economic structures remain as frozen as ever.

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Not only is democracy limited, but it remains fragile. How fragile was revealed by the sixth coup attempt against the government in December 1989, which nearly succeeded owing to the failure of a disenchanted populace to take to the streets in defense of the four-year-old presidency of Corazon Aquino. It took brazen U.S. intervention in the form of Phantom jets buzzing rebel military forces to save the fledgling system of elite-dominated democracy.

Redirecting the Anti-Dictatorship Struggle

Always an influential actor in the Philippine scene, the U.S. has played a central role in assuring the success of the Aquino transition. The current policy of conservative stabilization has its roots in the liberalization that gradually emerged as the dominant U.S. policy thrust in the aftermath of the assassination of Aquino's husband, Benigno, in August 1983. The strategic goal, in the view of the pragmatic State Department bureaucrats who proposed this policy, was to dislodge the leftist National Democratic Front (NDF) and New People's Army (NPA) from their prominent positions in the leadership of the anti-dictatorship struggle. Having led the underground opposition to Marcos, especially in the depths of the 1973-79 repression, the left had gained enormous prestige among the lower and middle classes, which it sought to translate in the mid-eighties into alliance politics with the factionalized elite opposition.

The new approach to containing the left met with some initial resistance in some sectors in Washington, for it directly challenged the 14-year-old policy of U.S. support for Ferdinand Marcos. In 1983-86, rightist ideologues at the White House and the National Security Council were still committed to the Philippine dictator. But the pragmatists were convinced that the quick unravelling of the regime would prove them right. For instance, in February 1985 – fully a year before Marcos' ouster – Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, a career diplomat, sent a cable to Secretary of State George Shultz that confidently outlined the merits of the alternative approach: "If the opposition should succeed in uniting behind a single candidate, and that candidate should be elected president ... our judgment at this time is that the opposition could be expected to act responsibly and that the U.S.-R.P [Republic of the Philippines] relationship would prosper."

During the decisive transition years from Marcos to Aquino, Bosworth was the key player on a team of skilled professional diplomats headed by Michael Armacost, at that time the No. 3 person in the State Department hierarchy as undersecretary for political affairs. Critical supporting actors were Assistant Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz and Philippine Desk Chief John Meisto.[1] Whether they were liberals like Meisto, conservatives like Wolfowitz, or political technocrats like Armacost,

members of the team had one thing in common: a willingness to place *realpolitik* ahead of ideology.

Between the Aquino assassination and Marcos' flight to Honolulu on February 25, 1986, the State Department pragmatists gradually gained the upper hand from the ideologues at the White House and the National Security Council (NSC). Against a clearly bankrupt policy, the pragmatists unfolded a skillful campaign to pressure Marcos to hold free elections as a prelude to easing him out of office. Corazon Aquino was certainly not handpicked by Washington to oppose Marcos in the presidential elections of February 1986. But when she was chosen by the upper-class opposition as its candidate, the pragmatists immediately knew that the popular Aquino, with her image as a "democratic center," was the most potent weapon in their enterprise.

Continuing inter-bureaucratic conflicts produced some near fiascoes. For example, President Reagan stubbornly refused to abandon Marcos until the eleventh hour, when the Filipino strongman was on the verge of being deposed by a military revolt *cum* civilian uprising after his brazen attempt to steal the presidential elections of February 7, 1986. But in the end the strategy worked. As the State Department's key strategist told a closed-door seminar for U.S. foreign service officers a few weeks after Aquino's ascent to the presidency on February 25, 1986: "Our objective was to capture . . . to encourage the democratic forces of the center, then consolidate control by the middle and also win away the soft support of the NPA. So far, so good."

The Philippine transition is a case where the Reagan administration was saved "from its own worst instincts," as one former U.S. envoy put it.[2] It stands in contrast to U.S. policy elsewhere in the Third World, especially Central America. In Central America, the contra policy during the Reagan period was run largely by "ideological maximalists" like Lt. Col. Oliver North at the National Security Council and Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams. Combining official and private right-wing networks, they launched a counterrevolutionary project that ultimately went out of control as ideological excesses prevented realistic assessments and compromises.[3] In Asia policy, on the other hand, career professionals like Armacost secured control of policy-making and prevented mercurial ideologues of the North-Abrams type from gaining significant influence. Because they placed *raison d'etat* and flexibility ahead of ideology, these low-profile but effective professionals of the Asia-Pacific desk not only produced the transition in the Philippines but also contributed to defusing polarization and managing a relatively stable transition to formal democracy in Korea. It is no coincidence that in both instances the U.S. did not take a visible leading role but, rather, "cued in" (to use Armacost's term) to initiatives coming from influential local elites. Nor is it coincidence that State Department operatives placed the weight of the United States behind a strategy of liberalization and

democratization as the best way to defuse political polarization, outmaneuver the left, and secure stability.

The Elite Democratic Tradition

The effectiveness of the State Department pragmatists during the Philippine crisis lay not only in their ability to influence a fluid political situation, but also in their alignment with a potent ideological tradition. Against adherents of former United Nations Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick's effort to doctrinally legitimize support for dictators like Marcos, the pragmatists passionately invoked the tradition of "missionary democracy." Intervening for "democracy" was justified by Paul Wolfowitz on the grounds that in the Philippines, "the democratic institutions were nurtured under American leadership, and this gives us an even larger stake in their success or failure."[4]

The democratic tradition that the State Department pragmatists manipulated so skillfully originated from the introduction of U.S. colonial rule in the Philippines. Unlike Europe and Latin America, democracy in the Philippines was not a product of internal class struggles but rather a set of political practices imposed from the outside by a nascent imperial power. Alone among the ruling classes of Southeast Asia, the Philippines' ruling class was able to institutionalize a system of electoral competition that served as a mechanism for the transfer of power among themselves.[5] A major reason is undoubtedly that the colonial power served as the guardian of the nascent system as the Philippine elite internalized the rules of the game over a period of four decades, from the early 1900s to 1946, when formal independence was granted.

A wholesale transplant of institutions began shortly after the conquest. By independence in 1946, the Philippine political system was, at a superficial level, a mirror image of the American, with its presidential leadership, separation of powers, and two-party system. In terms of real power, however, it was a marriage between the feudal paternalism of the Philippine elite and Chicago-style "machine politics."

Democracy was enthusiastically embraced by the regional landed elites that the U.S. was able to coopt and detach from the movement for national liberation and form into a national ruling class. For the different factions of this fractious elite, formal democracy provided a means of competing, relatively peacefully, for political office and alternating in power. At the same time, it afforded the poor majority the illusion of democratic choice — that is, the ability to choose among different elite candidates and elite political parties. Indeed, elections served as mechanisms of "income redistribution" as elite politicians were expected to bribe the masses for their vote. Politics in this system was extremely

competitive, but popular energy was mobilized primarily along patron-client, kinship, and regional (rather than class) lines.[6]

In the twenty-six years between independence and the imposition of Marcos' dictatorship in 1972, "democratic representation" degenerated into the art of protecting narrow class interests and engaging in a form of institutionalized looting. Alliances were constantly shifting, based on no other criterion than factional advantage. Thus, elite politicians changed parties the way they changed clothes. Political appointments were a mechanism for rewarding followers, especially middle-class followers. The latter, in turn, used political office to enrich themselves – as quickly as possible, before the next electoral bout threw them out. The classic expression of the essence of elite democracy Philippine-style was provided by a former president of the Philippine Senate in a warning to the country's chief executive: "If you cannot permit abuses, you must at least tolerate them. What are we in power for? We are not hypocrites. Why should we pretend we are saints when in reality we are not?" (quoted in Shalom, 1977).

Though it legitimized a system of economic and social privilege, elite-dominated democracy had its own peculiar corrective mechanisms. An elite candidate would come to power promising everything under the sun. Soon, however, patronage politics would erode popular support for the victorious faction, and the next elections would provide the masses with an opportunity to "kick the rascals out" and install another elite-led faction that inevitably campaigned on an anti-corruption platform. Then the cycle of hope, disillusion, and dismissal would again run its course.

The pre-Marcos elite democracy was a "weak state" par excellence. The powers of the executive and the central bureaucracies were circumscribed by a powerful Congress and party system, two institutions that promoted the dispersal of state power. In other words, the parliament-dominated state had little autonomy from the dominant interests in civil society.

The Marcos Interregnum

Ferdinand Marcos tried to change the rules of the game.[7] A figure of Machiavellian brilliance, Marcos was, in the late sixties, in the enviable position of being able to dictate new rules for elite politics. This member of the provincial elite broke into the circle of patrician brokers of national power by skillfully traversing the traditional route to national power while creating new levers of influence.[8] In his rise to absolute power, Marcos had crafted a number of formidable alliances with powerful families from different regions of the country that had the reputation of being "kingmakers." But Marcos' innovation lay in his creation of three other power bases: his "cronies" or intensely loyal aides placed strategically in key government bureaucracies; the "technocrats,"

or U.S.-educated economists and corporate managers who were proponents of "development from above" and, most important, the military.

While maintaining the armed forces (AFP) in their traditional counterinsurgency and peace-and-order roles, Marcos transformed them for his own use. By the beginning of the 1970s, with the officer corps owing personal fealty to him, Marcos possessed an instrument of personal control that dwarfed the combined private armies of both his allies and his enemies.

Marcos upset the fragile equilibrium of inter-elite politics and monopolized political power when he was reelected in 1969 and imposed martial law in 1972. His regime constituted a sharp break with the tradition and practice of elite democracy, but its collapse was by no means foreordained. When Marcos declared martial law, his condemnation of the "democratic deadlock" had a great deal of resonance, especially among the middle strata, which had come to associate inter-elite electoral competition with violence, plunder, chaos, and an unchanging social order. Prior to martial law, the image of a man on horseback "disciplining an undisciplined society" had circulated widely in this class and, curiously, coexisted with the antithetical yearning for a real democratization of society.

Despite the strong personal stamp of the dictator, the Marcos regime had many of the same defining features of the "bureaucratic authoritarian" state in Latin America (see O'Donnell, 1973). Marcos presided over a transformation which saw a significant strengthening of central state apparatuses – the bureaucracy, technocracy, and the military – *vis-à-vis* the organs promoting the dispersal of power, the legislature and the party system. Indeed, the old Congress was dismantled and replaced with one dominated by regional and local elites totally subservient to Marcos. It served as a rubber-stamp for executive decrees. The two-party system was similarly abolished and replaced by a monolithic government party which provided the arena for a measure of elite infighting, provided it did not threaten the prerogatives of the dictator or destabilize the ruling coalition. Over the period of 1966-86, the Philippine state under Marcos developed a degree of relative autonomy from civil society that far surpassed that of the parliamentary republic.

While Marcos did not alter the basic political and economic relationship between the Philippines and the United States, he did attempt to transform the local power structure. Fundamental changes in the structure of class domination did not occur. But the center of gravity of elite power did shift from the entrenched patrician landed interests to a more fluid coalition composed of the Marcos family, upstart provincial elites allied to Marcos, nouveau-riche business interests, high-level technocrats favored by foreign banks and the World Bank, and the military brass.

From one perspective, the Marcos regime reflected an attempt to broaden the ruling bloc to accommodate selected sectors of the middle class. The technocrats, Marcos' business cronies, and, most important of all, the officer corps were overwhelmingly recruited from the middle class. Insofar as one can speak about a constituency for the regime, it was made of the urban and rural middle strata. It was to the middle class that Marcos directed his ideological alternative of "constitutional authoritarianism," the doctrinal centerpiece of which was that the elite's abuse of traditional political rights made it necessary to suspend those rights to break the "democratic stalemate" and achieve economic development. Strong central authority was the price of prosperity.

In fact, Marcos' efforts to win and maintain middle class support turned out to be the Achilles' heel of his regime. It prevented him from constructing a base among the lower classes and creating a system of authoritarian populism *à la* Peron in Argentina which could have definitively changed the parameters of Philippines politics. Initially the regime promised the Filipino peasantry, the bulk of the population, the vision of a more egalitarian future. Launched with fanfare shortly after the declaration of martial law, Marcos' agrarian reform program touted the redistribution of 1.8 million acres of rice-and-corn land to one million peasants. But the reform ground to a screeching halt a little over a year later as government fieldworkers met great resistance from the school teachers, clerks, retired officers, and small merchants who constituted the overwhelming mass of small and medium-sized landowners.

On the urban front, Marcos also initially courted working class support, but soon opted for a program of export-oriented industrialization fueled by the entry of foreign capital enticed by the offer of cheap, non-union labor. Again, maintaining the allegiance of the middle class was a central consideration because Marcos saw growth based on the massive entry of foreign capital as providing new avenues of upward mobility for the middle strata. It was not surprising that the left found its most fertile field for organizing among the urban working class, which saw itself as the prime victim of the Marcos-World Bank economic strategy, and the peasantry, whose hopes for a New Deal were rudely smashed by Marcos' about-face on agrarian reform.

Having abandoned the populist path, Marcos opted to keep the middle and upper classes happy with a superficial prosperity generated by the massive inflow of foreign money. However, the middle class, always cautious about Marcos and scornful of the extravagant ways of his wife, Imelda, became gradually alienated as the economy stagnated following the worldwide economic downturn in 1979. Fueled by the increasingly uncontrolled corruption of Marcos' cronies, middle-class alienation changed into active opposition with the August 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino, Jr., Marcos' chief rival.

Middle-class resentment and lower-class alienation set the context for the reinvigoration of elite democracy as an ideological and political alternative. The demand for "democracy" became the point of unity of a broad, multiclass opposition alliance. This coalition spanned the political spectrum, from disenfranchised elite politicians seeking the restoration of elite democracy, to middle-class intellectuals espousing "social democracy," to the leftist National Democratic Front with its program of "national democracy."

While "democracy" was the generic word that masked different political projects, it was the elite opposition that clearly defined it: free elections, party competition, strong checks on central authority — in short, a return to the previous status quo. But although it was led by the disenfranchised patrician elites, the mass base of the restorationist project was the middle class.

Democratic Stabilization, 1986-89

The State Department pragmatists were attuned to the realities of Philippine political culture and realized that the masses identified free elections with democracy. It was the mobilization of this electoral energy — dammed up for 14 years — that they counted on to fight and marginalize their strategic foe, the Philippine left. State Department officials attributed the growth of the left not to the attractiveness of the guerrillas' revolutionary program of national democracy but to their ability to project themselves as the only viable opposition to Marcos' repressive, arbitrary rule.

The pragmatists were not disappointed. The electorate ignored the National Democratic Front's call to boycott the February 7, 1986, presidential elections — or the "circus of reactionaries," as it described the event (*Ang Bayan*, 1985) — and voted massively for Aquino. This vote set off the train of events that led to Marcos' flight to Honolulu. A year later, the Aquino-endorsed constitution was approved by over 75 percent of those voting, despite the left's call for a "no vote."

But during the elections for the new Congress in May, 1987, the "old politics" showed its continuing hegemony over most of the masses. The leftist Partido ng Bayan, or People's Party, ran candidates for both houses, but it came up against elite candidates who were engaged in frenzied competition for the votes of the masses, deploying not only bombastic rhetoric but also billions of dollars in bribes. In contrast, the left continued to display its ambivalence toward the electoral process throughout the campaign. This was manifest in the weak campaign machinery it scraped together and in the conflicting attitudes that its different sectors brought to the campaign. Some campaigned to win while others saw candidates mainly as a way of "reaching the masses" with the left's program. In the end, the combination of money, high media

visibility, leftist ambivalence, and the continuing strong influence of patron-client relationships won the day. Leftist candidates were defeated nearly everywhere, and elite politicians won the vast majority of seats in both the House and the Senate.

The local elections of January 1988 completed the restoration of elite democracy. Most candidates favored by the left lost, even in rural areas where the guerrillas were strong. The left was confronted with a grim lesson: no matter how cynically the masses might view the bourgeois electoral process, most still saw no alternative to the ballot as a legitimate means of political succession.

The left, however, chose to ignore this lesson. When the New People's Army responded to the changed political situation by escalating the armed struggle in mid-1987, the left found itself very vulnerable to being isolated and marginalized by the popular appeal of the government slogan calling on the people to "defend the democratic center against the extremes of right and left."

Civilian Rule, Military Veto

Brought to power by a multi-class opposition, Corazon Aquino initially tried to appropriate some themes of Marcos' aborted populism, especially land reform. However, after nearly four years in power, the Aquino "revolution" has been stripped of its progressive promises and is down to its restorationist essence: electoral competition, formal separation of powers, strong limitations on presidential power, and a constitution that is merely an upgraded version of the American-type 1935 constitution that established the elite democratic order.

But restorations are seldom ever pure. Indeed, the Aquino government is a complex combination of the old and the new. It has one vital difference from the pre-Marcos system of elite democracy: elected members of the elite must now share political power with the unelected, bloated Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) that Marcos bequeathed his successor.

Under Marcos, the military quadrupled in size from 60,000 to 250,000 personnel. The AFP in 1986 was no longer the small force that had obediently followed the dictates of the landed upper class during the 1960s. Having tasted political power under Marcos and having developed a strong institutional presence, the military had become a relatively autonomous actor that was not about to exit from the political scene just because Corazon Aquino had promised the return of democratic processes and civilian rule. Indeed, the military was even prepared to deviate from the role envisioned for it by its traditional patron, the U.S.

Both the State Department and the Pentagon favored the establishment of civilian supremacy. As the Pentagon viewed it, a politicized officer corps stood in the way of the armed forces becoming an effective

counterinsurgency force. The "restoration of professional, apolitical leadership" of the AFP therefore became a priority of the U.S. government.[9] From this perspective, the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM), which had helped depose Marcos, posed a special problem. Led by Lt. Col. "Gringo" Honasan and graduates of the Philippine Military Academy's class of 1971, RAM sought to install the military as the country's directing elite. The Americans admired RAM for its stress on professionalism, but they were distressed by its drive to politicize the military.

RAM's goal was somewhat disguised in February, 1986, when it positioned itself behind the rebellious Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and against Ferdinand Marcos. But the RAM-led coup attempt against Aquino on August 28, 1987, could no longer be regarded as an effort to bring a civilian to power. It was the inevitable conclusion of a process that had begun two decades earlier when Marcos started to politicize the AFP. Honasan and RAM were merely carrying the process to its logical conclusion: the AFP would serve as the political guardian of the nation.

It took six attempted military coups between 1986 and 1990 to forge the grand political compromise that now reigns. The AFP did not set itself up as the political guardian of the nation, as the coup plotters proposed, but neither did it give the president unconditional loyalty. The resulting political arrangement was one in which the military recognized "civilian supremacy" and accommodated itself to the existence of elite democracy, but only on condition that Aquino gave it a blank check in the counterinsurgency – indeed, only if the civilian elite recognized it as a "state within a state" exercising veto power over vital areas of national policy. This *modus vivendi* can be described as elite democracy *cum* military veto power. One Manila columnist has called it a "Faustian Bargain" that has given Aquino the backing of all but the most extremist fringe of the armed forces (Coronel, 1988).

Yet that fringe remains very influential among the 14,000-man officer corps, and the accomodation continues to be quite fragile. This was underlined during the RAM-led coup attempt in December, 1989. Many military units initially took a wait-and-see attitude, postponing their decision to take sides until it became clear who was winning the struggle.

The unstable political compromise that lies at the heart of the regime accounts for the seeming contradictions of the Aquino government: formal democratic practices are in place, but the human rights situation is, in some respects, now worse than in the last years of Marcos. The press is the freest of any in Southeast Asia, but dissent is checked by shadowy death squads and "vigilante" gangs operating with seeming impunity. One observer, trying to make sense of the situation, recently wrote: "In the Philippines there is both an elite democracy and a fascist military dictatorship. Side by side" (Goertzen, 1989).

These contradictions, however, exist only on the surface. In fact, in a society marked by severe social discontent, as the Philippines is, military or military-backed repression can play a vital role in maintaining the stability of elite-dominated democracy. An elite democracy functions best in an environment that has been *politically sanitized* — in which anti-elite candidates with radical political programs have been driven from the electoral arena by the threat of force — so that even intense electoral competition will not be too destabilizing. This was the case during the local elections of January, 1988, when electoral competition among the traditional, elite political parties was feverish, but candidates of the leftist *Partido ng Bayan*, fearing for their lives, dared not run in areas dominated by military-backed vigilante groups.

The political compromise rests on an ideological consensus among the civilian and military elite which defines all those advocating programs that seek substantial social and economic reform of the current social order as being outside the democratic pale, as being "communists." Dissent is indeed possible but within sharply circumscribed limits. Those who breach the limits become fair game for death squads and right-wing vigilantes.

The ways that military repression complements elite democracy under conditions of a continuing challenge from a strong progressive movement must not, however, distract from the fundamentally contradictory character of the Aquino regime. For the military carried into the post-Marcos era the centripetal, centralizing thrust of the state under Marcos, counteracting the centrifugal thrust of elite democracy — its tendency to disperse and dilute state power and diminish the relative autonomy of the state *vis-à-vis* the structure of class power. Whether she liked it or not, Corazon Aquino was heir to a vastly strengthened state apparatus that had its own set of interests. The nearly successful coup attempt of December, 1989, served to remind Aquino and other members of the traditional upper class of this reality: there was really no returning to the old order.

Sources of Instability

Though it retains its hold on power, there are forces at work that could erode the legitimacy of the Aquino regime in the medium and long term. Three are particularly crucial.

(1) Perhaps the most immediate threat to the effectiveness of elite democracy as a stabilizing mechanism is the military — not only in the sense of directly threatening a military takeover, but also in the sense of eroding the credibility of the government through abusive behavior. Random and indiscriminate abuse by the AFP was one of the main factors that dissipated the legitimacy of the Marcos regime. Thus U.S. officials, aside from forcing Marcos to yield power, also embarked on an

enterprise to "professionalize" the AFP – that is, make its application of repression more discriminate, selective, and disciplined. The AFP, however, has proved to be unreformable, and its current strategy to contain the insurgency – creating and arming vigilante gangs, death squads, and paramilitary forces like the Citizens' Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU) – is one guaranteed to make repression even more indiscriminate and random.

The statistics are depressing to those who see a direct correlation between military abuse and instability. After declining sharply in 1986, the first year of the Aquino government, the "body counts" have been rising once more. In the last three years, there have been 705 summary executions, 205 disappearances, and more than 12,000 arrests for political reasons (Church Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, 1989). Indeed, the murder of human rights monitors, a rarity under Marcos, is becoming a feature of the Philippine political scene. In 1988, the Philippines, according to Human Rights Watch, held the world record for monitor murders, accounting for seven out of 30 cases documented (*Philippine News Survey*, 1988).

That the vigilantes and death squads could undercut the fragile stability created by the reestablishment of elite democracy was underlined recently by a senior Pentagon official testifying before Congress:

> We are . . . disturbed by increased reports of death squads and other extra-legal activity by military or paramilitary personnel. The commitment to basic human rights is a cornerstone of the Aquino administration, a major source of popular support, and a critical element in the transition from a repressive dictatorship to genuine democracy. There is, therefore, no room for backsliding.[10]

The official's concern is well-founded, if one considers the Philippine experience in the light of the U.S. experience in El Salvador. There, the massive killings by death squads in 1980-82 expanded rather than contained the revolutionary forces, so that the U.S. was forced to rein in the right-wing *pistoleros* in 1983 and introduce a more sophisticated counterinsurgency strategy (Miles, 1986).

(2) A second source of likely instability is economics. The U.S. and the Aquino government are mindful of the fact that the depressed economy of the early eighties helped bring down Marcos. Thus, they have not concealed their elation at the 12 percent growth that the economy registered in 1987 and 1988. This growth stems from the explosion of consumer spending that had been repressed by political uncertainty during the last years of Marcos. Sustaining this growth in the medium-term, however, is likely to be very difficult because the government failed to address the basic structural barriers to genuine economic development. The Aquino government is, in fact, following the old World Bank-Marcos formula that proved to be such a fiasco: relying on export

markets and foreign capital as a locomotive of growth in the absence of the political will to sweep away the forces preventing the development of a vibrant internal market. The absence of land reform prevents the emergence of a dynamic internal market because the impoverished peasantry has very little effective purchasing power. On the other hand, an export-oriented growth strategy is increasingly difficult because the rise of protectionism in the U.S. and other advanced capitalist markets. Foreign credit is becoming more scarce at the same time that a continuing hemorrhage of capital takes place in the form of interest payments on the country's $30 billion debt.[11]

Aquino is beginning to discover that the continuing loyalty of the middle class is greatly dependent on maintaining economic growth, as Marcos found out. Another bout of stagnation, so soon after the economic cataclysm of the Marcos period, will sorely test the allegiance of this fragile base of the Aquino government and may again convert it into a volatile "swing sector" in a future polarized political setting.

(3) A third critical source of instability in the medium term lies in the very structure of elite democracy as a system of containing the lower classes. This system of governance generates the illusion of democracy at the formal political level to defuse the reality of social and economic inequality.

A classic instance of the way elite democracy defuses and derails mass dissent was provided by the debate over agrarian reform, probably the most pressing social issue in a country where 70 percent of the population lives in the countryside. Despite the massive clamor for land reform, the "magic" of elite democracy produced during the elections of May, 1987, a House of Representatives where 90 percent of its members were big landlords. With the typical cunning of the Philippine elite, the landlord bloc did not frontally oppose land reform. Instead, it adopted a land reform bill proposed by the reformist minority and proceeded to stipulate enough loopholes, evasions, and contradictions that it's implementation was castrated. For instance, the land retention provision limiting a landowner to five hectares and each child 15 years or older to three hectares looks attractive at first glance. Actually, the land retention provisions were carefully tailored to ensure that most land would remain within the landowner's family. It has been estimated they will effectively exclude about 75 percent of the country's total agricultural land from land reform.[12]

The processes of elite democracy may stabilize a society rent by deep inequalities for a time, but in the absence of genuine, thoroughgoing reform, its stabilizing effects will inevitably be eroded, especially if the economy experiences a downturn and graft and corruption are unchecked. Elite democracy might then be perceived by the masses as a state of political paralysis rather than as an acceptable system of democratic representation.

The Philippine masses have oscillated between allegiance to and disaffection with elite parliamentarism. Marcos in 1972 was able to effectively use the massive poverty, inequality, and a cynical population to denounce the "democratic deadlock" of the pre-martial law elite democracy and install a dictatorship promising "social and economic reform" without too much opposition, at least initially.

Unless there is a major change in the distribution of wealth and power in the near future, a new round of disaffection with sterile upper-class parliamentarism is likely to ensue. The near success of the RAM-led coup in December, 1989, may indicate that that point may be reached soon. While it appears that most Filipinos still prefer Aquino's bumbling democracy to military dictatorship, hardly anyone took to the streets to defend the government while the coup was in progress. The government's legitimacy is still widely acknowledged, but its credibility has greatly suffered because of Aquino's tolerance of corruption in her family and the upper rungs of government, her unwillingness to follow through on promised social reforms, and her notorious indecisiveness in nearly all areas of policymaking. The question is which of the two currently marginalized forces — the authoritarian right or the left — will benefit from mass disaffection.

The Challenge to the Left

Whether the sources of potential instability discussed above will lead to a period of renewed revolutionary ferment will depend greatly on the state of the left. The left in the Philippines is diverse, but towering above all other formations are the National Democratic Front (NDF) and the New People's Army (NPA), two organizations where the Communist Party of the Philippines exercises strong influence. When Marcos fell, the NPA numbered 30,000 troops, 10,000 of them regulars with high powered rifles. It had units in about 59 of the Philippines' 73 provinces (*Liberation International*, 1988). In the cities, mass organizations strongly influenced by the NDF, like Bayan (New People's Coalition) and the KMU (May First Movement of Workers), were central actors in the snowballing movement of street protest from 1983 to 1986.

The left found its most fertile ground for organizing among the impoverished peasantry, which was resentful at Marcos' failure to carry through agrarian reform, and the working class, which was the main victim of the Marcos-World Bank economic policy. But it also found a great deal of resonance among the intelligentsia, youth, students, professionals, and the clergy. So long as polarization drove Philippine politics, the left enjoyed the political initiative in the opposition. These dynamics were described succinctly outlined by one analyst:

> During the period of resistance to dictatorship, the revolutionary forces functioned as a steadfast anchor of opposition. Political groups that were individually ineffectual gravitated around the revolutionary Left.
>
> Raging issues — such as the presence of the U.S. bases, the nuclear threat to the environment, the foreign debt, corporate destruction of the environment, human rights violations and anti-people policies — merged easily into the framework of the revolutionary agenda. The common anti-Marcos perspective submerged whatever ideological, political, and organizational differences there were (Magno, 1989).

It was precisely to defuse the politics of polarization that the State Department pragmatists shifted to a policy of encouraging liberalization and eventually supporting the candidacy of Corazon Aquino. The left played perfectly into this strategy when, rather than trimming its sails and sailing close to the wind, so to speak, it called for a boycott of the 1986 presidential elections, which had become the channel for a massive popular movement to oust Marcos. The pragmatists at the State Department were elated at this strategic blunder, which was compounded when the left sat out the civil-military uprising that finally brought Aquino to power.

The NPA's entry into cease-fire negotiations with the government late in 1986 and its participation in the congressional elections of May, 1987, were tentative attempts to adjust to new realities. But the NPA perspective of promoting political polarization and placing the emphasis on armed struggle continued to dominate, leading to more political isolation. This was brought home by the mass disapproval that met both the guerrillas' escalation of armed warfare in the countryside following the collapse of the peace talks in early 1987 and the campaign to assassinate "abusive" policemen carried out by NPA "Sparrow" units in the summer of that year.

The left began to be viewed by many people, especially among the middle strata, as a threat to Aquino's democratic enterprise, as a force that resorted to arms because it could not win in the electoral arena. The military skillfully took advantage of this mass perception to justify extraordinary, repressive measures against both the underground and the legal left.

However, key sectors of the left realize that the last four years have transformed the terrain of revolutionary struggle. Among the key understandings developing are the following:[13]

(1) An indispensable ingredient of success is the formulation of a progressive program and vision that will "move millions." Throughout the Marcos period, the widespread popularity of clear-cut anti-fascist slogans rendered less urgent the task of effectively articulating,

"packaging," and projecting a view of the future that was in sharp contrast to the elite's project of democratic restoration. Under the Aquino regime, that enterprise can no longer be postponed. To win the masses, the left must convey a convincing and attractive vision of substantive democracy that is superior to the formal democracy that now reigns.

The democratic vision offered by the left needs to be projected as a deepening of the whole democratic enterprise, where equality in access to economic resources is as much a cornerstone of democracy as free elections, free speech, and a free press.

(2) This transformation of the ideological relationship between elite democracy and popular democracy from a sharp "break" to a "transition" or "transformation" would have its correlate in political practice. Rather than an apocalyptic and dramatic break in the form of a violent, military seizure of power such as that which took place in Vietnam in 1975, political transformation would be a many-sided, uneven, and mainly political process. The main thrust would be building up a decisive "counter-hegemony" of the popular democratic vision among the masses – principally, the middle strata, working class, the urban poor, and the peasantry.

(3) With a decisive shift in the terrain of struggle from the military to the political and ideological, the left must participate in the parliamentary framework set up by Aquino in a wholehearted and professional fashion – or risk being marginalized from the mainstream of political debate and thus losing credibility as an alternative.

Equally critical will be the development of innovative approaches in extra-parliamentary arenas of struggle: the various open mass movements seeking to generate pressure from below and "united front" politics with other political forces. Among other things, this would mean, says one strategist, ceasing to be obsessed with controlling united fronts and instead building truly pluralist, multiclass alliances.[14]

(4) The shift to more political forms of struggle should not be interpreted to mean that the NPA has to completely cease the armed struggle. But it certainly spells the end of the centrality of military warfare among the instruments of revolutionary transformation. The *Prison Notebooks* is as relevant, if not more so, to the Philippine left today as *State and Revolution*. But whether the Philippine left, which has been trained in the tradition of Lenin and Mao, can undertake what is essentially a Gorbachevian or Gramscian process of renovation remains to be seen.

Theoretical Implications

The political transition in the Philippines in the last few years is rich in its implications for the theory of the state in the Third World and the theory of imperialism. In concluding this study, we would like to dwell on

two points highlighted by the Philippine experience: (1) bourgeois democracy may be as normal a form of class rule for certain Third World states as it is for advanced western states; and (2) the extension of formal or bourgeois democratic forms of rule is an essential component of U.S. imperialism.

The State in the Third World

For the most part, the different paradigms of the Third World or "peripheral" state that we encounter in the literature, such as "post-colonial state" or the "bureaucratic authoritarian" state, see political domination mainly as a process of coercion by local ruling classes which are allied to imperialism and which enjoy very little legitimacy.[15] Cultural or ideological hegemony as a means of domination by Third World elites is hardly ever addressed. And insofar as serious consideration is given to formal democratic, parliamentary regimes, these are often regarded as mere facades for military dictatorships, or as unstable and less than ideal forms of rule to which the elite resorts to contain the masses during periods of acute crisis when they can no longer rule in the same old way. Bourgeois democracy, according to the dominant perspective in progressive analysis, is the normal form of rule in the capitalist states of the center, while varieties of authoritarianism are the normal means of domination in the periphery.

Most Central American states fit the dominant paradigm, but a different, more complex system of political domination reigns in countries like the Philippines, India, Uruguay, Colombia, and Chile. As we have seen, ruling in the Philippines is a far more complicated process than imposing the iron fist. It is based on the creation of cultural or ideological hegemony, obtaining the consent of the ruled through the use of institutions, symbols, and processes that enjoy a strong degree of legitimacy among the ruled. An ideology of eighteenth-century democracy, the socialization of the population to a tradition of intense electoral competition among political parties, and a system of governmental checks and balances designed to disperse class power made the colonial and post-colonial Philippine state-system akin to Western European democracies wherein the "state was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" (Gramsci, 1971:238) Or to view it another way, also using Gramsci's World War I imagery, bourgeois democracy in the Philippines is a complex system of outer fortifications, minefields, barbed wire, and outer trenches that disperse and defuse revolutionary challenges long before they reach the inner trench that hides the repressive core of class rule. In the Philippines — and in Uruguay and Chile, two other Third World states with an elite democratic tradition — dictatorship or authoritarian

rule is an exceptional and ultimately very unstable form of political domination.

The practices of elite democracy produce two vital results. First, electoral competition serves as a mechanism governing the relatively peaceful alternation in power among fiercely competitive elite factions. Second, elite democracy provides a sophisticated process of screening out fundamental challenges to the social status quo. As in many contemporary western democracies, like the United States, this screening process is based not only on mass socialization that brands radical proposals as illegitimate and suspect but also on the enormous advantage conferred by wealth and resources in the long, drawn-out and complex process of creating political parties, fielding candidates, waging lengthy political campaigns, dominating in the media, and last, but not least, bribing the electorate.[16]

But the Philippine case also shows that these strengths of elite democracy, which make for stability in the short and medium term, become, in the long run, the Achilles heel of this form of domination. The masses sooner or later realize that the more faces change at the top, the more frozen is the social and economic structure. It is at this point of mass disaffection with the normal "rules of the game" that alternative forms of rule become attractive.

Marcos offered a middle-class-based authoritarian regime. It failed primarily because it did not create a base among the lower classes by carrying out effective reform and other redistributive measures. But there was another key reason for failure, and this was the regime's inability to formulate an alternative source of legitimacy that would displace the deeply internalized belief — even at the moment of greatest disillusion with elite parliamentarism — that free elections constituted the only legitimate means of political succession. Indeed, these two failures were related, for only sweeping economic reforms could have delivered Marcos a clean majority in free elections.

The U.S. and Elite Democracy

The emergence and eventual hegemony of elite democracy as a form of domination in the Philippines cannot be understood without taking U.S. imperialism into consideration. When the U.S. annexed the Spanish colony of the Philippines after defeating Asia's first modern movement for national liberation at the turn of the century, it was faced with a unique problem of legitimation. Colonialism was already regarded as a politically antiquated and morally questionable system among significant sectors of the populations of western countries.

But even more important, as the product of an anti-colonial and bourgeois democratic revolution a mere 125 years earlier, the United States found it difficult to justify adopting the forms of classical colonial

domination. There was a profound contradiction between the substructural imperative of economic expansion and the superstructure of democratic ideology that is the nation's secular religion. The solution to this dilemma was classically American: "Preparing the Filipinos for responsible independence" by exporting the institutions of American bourgeois democracy became the unique formula for legitimizing imperial expansion — that is, building consensus around expansionism among both Americans and Filipinos.[17]

"Exporting democracy" was the equivalent of the French's *mission civilatrice*, but it was much more effective in its impact among the subject population. Only by taking into account the phenomenon of "missionary democracy," with its paraphernalia of electrons, free press, mass education, and American mass culture, can we understand how the U.S. managed to captivate the pre-World War II generation of Filipinos after a colonial conquest in which at least 600,000 Filipinos — a good tenth of the population — died.

America's experience in the Philippines became a paradigm for the U.S. approach to the Third World upon its assumption of the role of premier imperial power after World War II. American CIA operatives like the notorious Col. Edward Lansdale tried to make Ngo Dinh Diem a reformist democrat like his Filipino protege Ramon Magsassay and the South Vietnamese political system into an elite democracy in the Philippine mold (see Lansdale, 1972). And, in the effort to counter the left in Latin America, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations allied themselves with democratic reformist movements like the Christian Democrats in Chile. As Frances Fitzgerald noted, the way to contain communism was to export American-style democracy:

> The idea that the mission of the United States was to build democracy around the world had become a convention of American politics in the 1950s. Among certain circles it was more or less assumed that democracy, that is, electoral democracy combined with private ownership and civil liberties, was what the United States had to offer the Third World. Democracy provided not only the basis for American opposition to Communism but the practical method to make sure that opposition worked (Fitzgerald, 1973:116).

The centrality of elite democracy in the American imperial enterprise is revealed by the fact that popular support for intervention dramatically declined whenever building democracy could no longer be credibly justified as a major goal. When Vietnam began to be justified mainly as an effort to save an ally or to secure "peace with honor," the war was lost. In the 1970s and 1980s, all attempts to formulate an alternative ideological rationale for intervention and expansion have failed to be effective, such as Henry Kissinger's invocation of European-style *realpolitik*,

Samuel Huntington and Jeanne Kirkpatrick's glorification of authoritarian rule, and Ronald Reagan and George Bush's redefinition of murderers, military dictators, and autocrats as "democratic allies."[18]

In this regard, the "human rights" dimension in Jimmy Carter's policy toward the Third World was the product of neither naivete nor hypocrisy, but a manifestation of the "idealist" element in U.S. imperialism. Alarmed by the loss of legitimacy of America's worldwide presence created by the supremacy of raw *realpolitik* or counterrevolutionary containment in U.S. foreign policy after Vietnam, Carter and many elements in the U.S. Congress tried to tie the granting of military and economic aid to respect for bourgeois democratic rights and the reestablishment of formal democratic regimes. Whether individual members of the establishment were hypocritical or not (for instance, Carter's exempting Park Chung-Hee of South Korea, Marcos, and the Shah of Iran from the policy) is beside the point; Carter and key Democrats in Congress were articulating the necessary, ideological dimension of U.S. imperialism.

Economic expansion, counterrevolutionary repression and missionary democracy have coexisted uneasily as *relatively autonomous* imperatives of U.S. imperialism. The history of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World, especially in the last 20 years, reflects the attempts of various administrations to work out an accommodation among these three strategies. By the 1980s, the overwhelming dominance of the combination of *realpolitik* and the counterrevolutionary drive was destroying the American interventionist enterprise in Central America. However, State Department pragmatists were able to reestablish the bourgeois democratic ideological dimension in U.S. policy toward the Philippines, South Korea, and Chile, in the process securing breathing space for its elite allies in the first two countries and strengthening the hand of U.S.-allied reformist elements in Chile. The foreign policy establishment is relearning the lesson that the contradictory union of expansionism and missionary democracy is the engine that drives U.S. imperialism. In essence, U.S. policymakers since World War II have been seeking to reproduce the Philippines in the rest of the Third World.

Notes

1. Armacost is now ambassador to Japan. After helping manage the transition in the Philippines, Wolfowitz became ambassador to Indonesia and Meisto was reassigned to Panama.

2. William Sullivan made these remarks at conference on the Philippines sponsored by the Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy, Washington, D.C., April 30-May 1, 1986.

3. The term is borrowed from Feinberg (1983).

4. Paul Wolfowitz, assistant secretary of state for Asia-Pacific Affairs, made this statement to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, October 30, 1985.

5. According to Ben Anderson at a panel at the Association for Asian Studies Conference, San Francisco, March 27, 1988.

6. A classic analysis of factional, patron-client politics is Hollnsteiner (1963).

7. For a more detailed analysis of the dynamics of Marcos' rise to power, see Bello (1988a).

8. I borrow this distinction between the patrician national elite and the provincial elites from the writings of Al McCoy.

9. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Policy Toward the Philippines," National Security Study Directive (NSSD), Washington, D. C., November 2, 1984. This study was leaked to the author by State Department sources and later released to the press.

10. Rear Adm. Timothy Wright, USN, acting deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, "Statement on the Security Situation in the Philippines," Presented at hearing of Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., March 7, 1989.

11. The poverty and extremely unequal income distribution in the Philippines is the main barrier to the development of a viable internal market that would sustain economic development. According to the World Bank, 51.7 percent of the population lives in absolute poverty, compared to 31 percent in Thailand and 7.7 percent in South Korea. In 1985, the top 20 percent of the population accounted for 51.1 percent of the national income, while the bottom 30 percent accounted for about 9.9 percent. Cited in *Philippine Resource Center Monitor*, 1989:9).

12. Estimate of Jimmy Tadeo, head of Philippine Peasant Movement (KMP), quoted in *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 17, 1988.

13. The following impressions were gathered in interviews with selected leading figures of the Philippine left conducted April 15-May 1, 1988. See also Walden Bello (1988b).

14. Interview with a leader of Philippine left who wishes to remain anonymous, April 20, 1988.

15. On the post-colonial state, see Alavi (1972); on the bureaucratic authoritarian state, see O'Donnell (1973) and subsequent discussions in Collier (1979).

16. For one of the best discussions of the way that the rules of the bourgeois democratic game defuse and derail fundamental class challenges, see Bachrach and Baratz (1970).

17. For more liberal treatments of the role of formal democracy in the colonial enterprise, see Owen (1989), Karnow (1989), and Stanley (1984).

18. See Huntington (1968) and Kirkpatrick (1979). During a visit to Manila in June, 1981, then-Vice President George Bush uttered his classic toast to Marcos: "We love you, sir ... We love your adherence to democratic rights and processes." Henry Kissinger's Central European view of U.S. relations with the Third World was capsulized in his equally classic statement when Salvador Allende came to power in Chile: "I don't see why we should let a country go Marxist because its people are irresponsible." Quoted in Powers (1979:250).

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