

UCLA

Philippines/Schirmer Series

Title

U.S. Support for Philippine Dictatorship: Threat to Peace and Security in Asia

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9f0235qt>

Author

Schirmer, Daniel Boone

Publication Date

1973-10-01

U.S. Support for Philippine Dictatorship: Threat to Peace and Security in Asia.

The rape of democracy in Chile in the past few weeks brings forcibly to mind similar events of the past year in the Philippines that also merit the attention and condemnation of progressive world opinion.

The Philippines was a colony of the United States from 1899 to 1946. Consequently today it is a nation in which the U.S. military-industrial complex has big stakes: two huge military bases, over two billion dollars of investment, and a major share of the two billion dollar foreign debt of the Marcos government.[1] Moreover, after the crumbling of the Indo-China front, the Philippines assumes increased importance to the Pentagon as a military stronghold in South East Asia. Perhaps that is why the U.S. Defense Department in 1973 spent over four million dollars for military construction at Clark Air Base in the Philippines, more than on any other U.S. air base.[2]

The Philippine economy, a legacy of the colonial status, has been distinctively agrarian and tenant farmer; it has also been under-developed, poverty-stricken and dominated by multi-national corporations, particularly those of the United States. As a result of these conditions, in the last years of the 1960's and the first two years of the '70's, Philippine farmers, workers, intellectuals and middle classes made strenuous efforts to organize and better their conditions, to foster economic and political nationalism.

Then, just over a year ago, on September 21, 1972, President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared martial law, abolishing freedom of speech, press and assembly, banning strikes and demonstrations, setting aside the Philippine Congress and establishing a one-man military dictatorship. Marcos arrested and imprisoned several thousand Filipinos, political rivals, trade union leaders, educators and church people, who he thought might be critical of his regime (today most of these are still in jail). Shortly after martial law, the American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, representing important U.S. corporate interests there, sent President Marcos a telegram wishing him "every success" and assuring him of their "confidence and cooperation." [3]

Marcos, in the past year, has held two national referendums in the attempt to legitimize his coup d'etat before world opinion. But martial law restrictions on freedom of press, speech and assembly reduce such plebiscites to a hollow formality, and no one has been fooled. Similarly Marcos has declared his interest in reforming the hard lot of the Philippine people, but so far the most tangible improvement brought by martial law has been in the position of the foreign investor (i.e., especially the U.S. investor). Marcos has thrown critics of multi-national corporations in jail; he has opened Philippine resources in off-shore oil to exploitation by U.S. firms; he has allowed foreign investors full repatriation of their capital and profits, and is reported to be considering a reduction of the tax on dividends.[4]

The Marcos dictatorship came as a counter-blow to the popular struggle of the previous decade, repressing it and driving it underground, where it continues, now directed against the dictatorship. The sharpest form of the anti-Marcos opposition has been the guerrilla resistance especially stimulated by what the U.S. Department of Defense calls "the two major insurgent groups": the New People's Army, active in Luzon, and the Muslim Revolutionary

Forces, active in Mindanao and the Sulu Islands.[5] One week after martial law, Marcos' troops ordered the relocation of 53,000 peasants from their homes in Isabela province in Luzon where the guerrillas had been active.[6] In September, 1973, Marcos' troops were still reported fighting Muslim guerrillas who have threatened extensive fruit and rubber plantations owned by U.S. corporations in Mindanao and the Sulu Islands.[7]

Most important is the fact that U.S. military and economic aid helps keep the Marcos dictatorship in power, at the expense of Filipino liberties. Indeed there are those in the Philippines who regard it as decisive. The *Wall Street Journal* of March 12, 1973, reported a powerful Philippine politician as saying: "The people know that it is the American government behind Marcos. Without American support he wouldn't last a month."

This year the Marcos regime, having received 83 million dollars in U.S. economic and military aid, appealed for more in the year to come to help put down the insurgencies, and the White House has asked Congress to appropriate 100 million dollars for economic and military assistance to Marcos in 1974. Of this, 30 million would go outright for military aid in one form or another (including seven million dollars worth of military equipment left over from the Vietnam War at 1/2 acquisition cost).[8]

When the Administration's requests for increased aid to Marcos were placed before Congress this spring, Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Rush, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said, "Our program in the Philippines is for the internal security and stability of that country... The United States maintains military facilities in the Philippines and stability in that country is of particular importance to us." [9] A communication from the Defense Department to the Senate Armed Services Committee further explained the military purposes of such aid. Asserting that the New People's Army and the Muslim Revolutionary Forces "have expanded in the past year and have increased in military sophistication," the Defense Department told the Committee:

The U.S. security assistance program to the Philippines has as one of its major objectives the improvement of the Philippine Armed Forces capability to cope with insurgency problems. To this end we are providing military assistance suitable for this role. This includes aircraft, rifles, trucks, communication gear, helicopters, patrol boats and landing craft, and other weapons. The goal is to improve mobility, communications and firepower—all vital elements in the conduct of counter insurgency operations.[10]

The U.S. government provides military assistance to Marcos in other ways than by Congressional appropriations for equipment. While the Defense Department denies that U.S. military personnel are involved in hostilities with the insurgents, the New People's Army claims (in a report issued March, 1973) to have killed 25 such U.S. personnel in the past four years of combat. Undisputed, however, is the fact that a permanent installation of 65 U.S. army officers called the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) supervises the operations of the Philippine Armed forces at the highest level.[11]

It is also a matter of public record that, since January, 1972, Special Forces teams of the U.S. army and troops of the Philippine Armed Forces have conducted at least 12 joint "civic action exercises" (bridge and road building, propaganda work, etc.) in dissident areas. These are measures of counter-insurgency warfare, in a reconnoitering and psychological phase, as a Jesuit priest in Manila pointed out when he said of "civic action" that the Americans were "getting smart. They're getting to know the terrain where the resistance is operating, trying to poison the water before the guerrillas get to swim in it." [12]

Besides sending surplus war materiel from Vietnam to the Philippines, Washington is sending civilian "pacification" personnel from Vietnam to areas of guerrilla activity in the Philippines. [13] These "pacification" personnel come under the heading of economic assistance (AID) grants as does the training and equipment of the Marcos police supplied by the U.S. government in recent years.

Capping all these counter-insurgency measures and preparations was the Administration's appointment this summer of William H. Sullivan as Ambassador to the Philippines. Sullivan is one of the original architects of the Vietnam War; it was while he was Ambassador to Laos that the brutal bombing of that country took place, and the CIA moulded mountain tribesmen into a clandestine army. He is the United States' foremost authority on counter-insurgency warfare in South East Asia. [14]

Speaking before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee prior to his appointment as Ambassador, Sullivan explained that there was a possibility that the U.S. might commit troops to combat in the Philippines under the terms of the SEATO treaty, and declared that it would be the responsibility of the U.S. President to make that decision in consultation with the U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines and the Department of State. [15]

The Marcos regime laid the legal groundwork for such intervention on the part of the United States and other members of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization early in 1973, when it notified them that it was threatened by an insurgency in the Southern Philippines in which "foreign trained troops bearing foreign arms" were participating. It also notified the Association of Southeast Asian nations to this effect at the same time. [16]

In many ways the U.S. relationship to the Philippines resembles the U.S. relationship to Vietnam some ten years ago. But the experience of Vietnam has had a sobering effect on public opinion in the United States, and this has begun to be reflected in the halls of Congress. This spring Senator Alan Cranston of California lifted his voice against continued U.S. military aid to the Philippine dictatorship, and Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota recently introduced an amendment to the military assistance bill of 1974, denying U.S. aid to any government which punished its citizens with imprisonment for political reasons.

As U.S. support for the military junta in Chile represents Washington's effort to block a people on the road to national regeneration, so in the Philippines the Marcos dictatorship and U.S. aid thereto are attempts to nip growing nationalism in the bud, to check a movement for effective independence before it gets too strong. Since it is likely that the Philippine popular resistance will continue to grow, despite Marcos' efforts to the contrary, the way is opened to violent confrontation on the style of Vietnam. The Marcos regime and its U.S. support constitute a threat and a menace to peace and security in South East Asia. That is why it would be well for the World Peace Congress to speak out against the Marcos dictatorship and against U.S. aid to Marcos, why it would be well for delegates to the Congress, on return home, to urge their governments to cut off any and all support to Marcos and condemn U.S. military and economic aid to the Philippine dictatorship.

NOTES: [1] *Phillipine Times*, June 30, 1973; *Boston Globe*, February 5, 1973. [2] Hearings, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, on Foreign Military Sales and Assistance (Bill S1443), May 2, 3, 4, 8, 1973, p. 378. [3] *Philippines Information Bulletin*, September, 1973. [4] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 3, 1973. [5] Hearings, Armed Services Committee, U.S. Senate, on Fiscal 1974, Authorization for Military Procurement (S1263), Part 1 (Authorization), March 28, 29, April 2, 1973, p. 163. [6] *Time*, February 12, 1973. [7] *New York Times*, September 25, 1973. [8] *Congressional Record*, June 25, 1973, (S11905). (The figure given for 1973 does not include the special appropriations for Philippine flood relief.) [9] Hearings, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, on Foreign Military Sales and Assistance (Bill S1443), May 2, 3, 4, 8, 1973, p. 104. [10] Hearings, Armed Services Committee, U.S. Senate, on Fiscal 1974, Authorization for Military Procurement (S1263), Part 1 (Authorization), March 28, 29, April 2, 1973, p. 163. [11] *New York Times*, April 2, 1973. [12] *New York Times*, April 2, 1973; *Washington Post*, September 16, 1973. [13] "The Moveable War," Tad Szulc, *New Republic*, May 12, 1973. [14] *The Manchester Guardian*, September 11, 1973. [15] Hearing, Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Senate, testimony of William H. Sullivan on his appointment as Ambassador to the Philippines, May 10, 1973. [16] *Boston Herald*, March 16, 1973.

Position paper by Daniel B. Schirmer representing **The Philippines Information Bulletin**, Box 409, W. Somerville, Ma. 02144, USA