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More Unrest Forecast for Philippines

Hill Report Says Reforms Needed

Associated Press

Increasing civil unrest and a growing communist insurgency will force change in the government of the Philippines within three years unless President Ferdinand Marcos makes major reforms, a congressional assessment concluded yesterday.

The prediction by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence reinforced pessimistic administration assessments about the Philippines, a key U.S. Pacific ally and location of the two biggest American military bases outside the United States.

In the two years since opposition leader Benigno Aquino was assassinated as he stepped off a plane on his return to Manila from the United States, U.S. officials have become increasingly concerned about Marcos' future.

Last month, President Reagan sent Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.) to Manila to deliver a message to Marcos that the United States wanted reform.

Earlier this week, top State Department and Pentagon officials told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the former U.S. colony is headed toward "civil war on a massive scale" unless Marcos makes drastic changes.

Sen. David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.), chairman of the intelligence panel, told a news conference yesterday that "I am hopeful Marcos will step aside."

Durenberger said he does not know what should be done but that "I'm not suggesting" the United States should use covert action to destabilize Marcos' government or should take other steps to ensure Marcos' successor is friendly to the United States.

The communists, who fight as the New Peoples Army (NPA), control or are contesting areas inhabited by 10 million of the 53 million people in the Philippines, the report said.

"In the two years since the Aquino assassination, the NPA has expanded so rapidly that it now poses a credible threat to the survival of the Philippine government," it said.

"From a total force of a few thousand armed guerrillas in 1970, the NPA has grown to probably over 15,000 regulars and a somewhat larger number of part-time irregulars," the study concluded.

The response by the Philippine military "has been inept" because the military is led by Marcos' cronies and has been guilty of a wide range of abuses, according to the report.

"The recent rapid growth" of the insurgents "is attributable to the communists' skillful exploitation of a growing catalogue of popular grievances against the Marcos regime," it said.

"Government policies have tended to increase rural poverty and worsen income distribution," it noted. "Most Filipinos blame official corruption for much of their government's poor performance.

"Abuses perpetuated by the corrupt officers and undisciplined personnel and a general breakdown of peace and order have severely shaken respect for the military and the police."

The communist movement is indigenous and there is no evidence it has been supplied with weapons or money by the Soviet Union, the report said, but "Soviet attention to events in the Philippines is certainly on the rise."

The document noted that as yet, the communists have not targeted Clark Air Base or Subic Bay Naval Base, the two large U.S. bases outside Manila.

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