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Imelda and the generals

The ambition of **President Ferdinand Marcos's** influential wife, **Imelda**, to succeed him will almost certainly be thwarted by the armed forces chiefs. This emerges from secret messages of the Central Intelligence Agency obtained by FOREIGN REPORT.

"Mrs Marcos can be expected to become one of many candidates to succeed her husband, and her manoeuvring will add greatly to the political turmoil and instability that will follow his departure," one CIA report predicts. But it will not be easy, according to this report, because her "political coterie" does not include any influential military leaders.

"Much of her power is based on her husband's authority and on the belief among both foreigners and Filipinos that she is able to influence his decisions." Her political organisation is "largely made up of media people and businessmen, plus a scattering of politicians and a few military men. Most are sycophants seeking protection".

The CIA believes that her strongest opponent is the defence secretary, **Juan Ponce Enrile**. "She regards Enrile, a longtime Marcos confidant with strong support in the military, as the principal threat to her ambitions," a secret report says. "Since the early days of martial law, Enrile has been widely considered the most obvious successor to Marcos, and there is a long-standing deep personal antagonism between Mrs Marcos and him."

When Marcos planned a purge of corruption in government, Imelda added her own contributions to the purge list, hoping to protect some of her supporters in the armed forces who were threatened with dismissals while purging some of Enrile's friends. Marcos pulled back from the purge under military pressure because, the CIA says, the generals asserted that there was no reason why they should be publicly humiliated for corruption while many of the president's relatives were equally tainted.

The CIA reports that Mrs Marcos "is not well-regarded by senior officers", that their loyalty to the president "does not extend to Mrs Marcos" and that many "do not like her".

The CIA has learnt that a group of senior military officers has been making plans for a post-Marcos government that would exclude his wife. When it appeared that Marcos was going to nominate his wife as his successor, Enrile was quoted as saying privately: "We members of 'the group' must keep our heads down and our mouths shut. Unless we do, we will not survive." The CIA said, in this report, that Enrile would have to "smile and do what is necessary and stay alive".

Another CIA cable quotes a Filipino army officer as saying that "if Marcos dies before she does, and she makes her anticipated bid for the presidency, then as surely as night follows day, we will get rid of her. (We) could not tolerate her running the country." Two other military officers were quoted in the same cable as saying that if Marcos were to die, the armed forces would oppose Mrs Marcos and "she would be ordered to leave the country immediately".

Mrs Marcos is aware of her weakness and has been trying to develop a military following by courting some officers and by working through their wives, one of the CIA reports says. But most of her friends "are opportunists who want her help in protecting their economic interests. Few of them carry much weight in the military, and they would not necessarily support her in a bid for the presidency".

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