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Unexpected lessons from Manila.

WHERE WE WENT WRONG

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S decision to withdraw its support from Ferdinand E. Marcos has been almost universally heralded. At home the praise has been effusive and bipartisan. In the archipelago, Filipinos celebrating in the streets wrapped themselves in the American flag. But it wasn't long before the enduring problems in the Philippines resurfaced: the eviscerated economy, the communist-led insurgency, the corrupted democratic institutions, and so on. The current euphoria should not obscure America's partial responsibility for the rubble. Looking back on 20 years of U.S. policy in the Philippines, we might learn five lessons.

(1) *Listen to career foreign service officers at the mid and even lower levels.* When Marcos declared martial law in 1972, foreign service officers in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research were virtually the only U.S. officials to voice any concern. In a secret memorandum for Secretary of State William Rogers, they expressed prescient "skepticism" about Marcos's commitment to reform, and concluded: "By one means or another, Marcos clearly intends to control Philippine politics for many more years." Their advice was ignored. The National Security Council, the White House, and the Pentagon embraced Marcos.

During the Carter administration, some foreign service officers in Manila and the human rights bureau at the State Department believed that the administration ought to press Marcos to lift martial law. But Carter did little, in large part because the Pentagon didn't want any talk about human rights to interfere with negotiations about the leasing of American military bases.

The Reagan administration moved even closer to Marcos, honoring him in 1982 with his first state visit to Washington in 16 years. This policy began to change only toward the end of Reagan's first term, when mid-level embassy officers began insisting that there would be no reform as long as Marcos was in power. It was also an embassy officer who alerted Washington in the summer of 1984 to the growing threat posed by the New People's Army. But these views were largely ignored by senior policymakers until they finally began to realize that Marcos was losing control of the country. In the final days it was an insistent Secretary of State George Shultz, articulating the views of the foreign service officers, who persuaded the president that the United States could no longer abide Marcos.

(2) *Think long term.* America's short-term interest in warm relations with the incumbent government was served when Nixon acquiesced in Marcos's declaration of martial law, when Carter said little about Marcos's dictatorial ways, and when Reagan assiduously courted Marcos. But the growth of the NPA indicates the damage to our long-

term interest in stability and democracy. When Marcos declared martial law, there were barely enough NPA guerrillas to knock off a bank. Today there are some 15,000 well-armed, well-trained guerrillas, and they enjoy widespread support.

(3) *Remember the opposition.* When Reagan declared, during a 1984 presidential campaign debate, that the communists were the only alternative to Marcos, he spoke a grain of truth. There were very few democratically inclined politicians of any stature to replace Marcos. Their ranks had been thinned by more than a decade of dictatorial rule. The United States contributed to the shortage of democratic politicians by doing little to nurture them. During Carter's first year in office, contacts with the democratic opposition did increase. But after Vice President Walter Mondale visited the Marcoses in May 1979, American officials in the Philippines sharply curtailed their meetings with critics of Marcos.

The best example of the United States's coolness toward Filipino democrats was its treatment of Benigno Aquino Jr. Aquino is now regarded as a democratic martyr in the United States. Yet while he was alive, he received little attention or respect from the American government. When Marcos threw Aquino in jail in 1972, there was no official Washington protest. In 1975 a retired foreign service officer, Paul Kattenburg (whose career had suffered when he had spoken against the Vietnam War), sought to act as an intermediary in securing Aquino's release. He was unsuccessful. When Aquino was released from prison in 1980, the Carter administration did help arrange for him to come to the United States. But when Aquino was invited in December 1980 to appear at the State Department's Open Forum (designed to expose foreign service officers to alternative policy views), top State Department officials objected. They feared, correctly, that his presence would anger the Marcoses and would make the incoming administration's relations with the Philippine government more difficult. Aquino was ultimately allowed to speak, but only to a restricted audience.

A corollary to this lesson is to learn to distinguish between nationalists and communists. The United States ignored Aquino and accepted Marcos's seizure of power in 1972 in part because they viewed Aquino and other opposition politicians as strident nationalists. They were, but they were not therefore anti-American or pro-communist, as Washington assumed. There is not just a moral imperative behind this lesson. There is also a very practical one: the opposition might someday become the government. The goodwill that President Aquino and her Cabinet show toward the United States may well depend on how willing they are to forgive the treatment they received when they were on the outs.

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(4) *Don't meddle in another country's domestic politics.* To some, the toppling of Marcos proves the opposite: that we should meddle. Yet our meddling in the Philippines did not begin last month or last year, but several decades ago, and it did not serve us well. In the 1950s and 1960s the CIA doled out hundreds of thousands of dollars to candidates, raised even more funds from American businesses, wrote candidates' speeches, set up organizations to support them, and orchestrated press coverage. According to intelligence sources, the CIA assisted a presidential candidate named Diosdado Macapagal in 1961. Macapagal won, but when he ran for reelection in 1965, Philippine military and intelligence officials who worked with the CIA asked the agency not to help him. It is not clear whether the United States then helped his rival, an ambitious young senator named Ferdinand Marcos. In any case, Marcos was elected in 1965, and by the time he declared martial law, he knew he could count on the support of the United States.

This kind of interference has tended to do us little good in the long run. We helped depose President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam in 1963, only to find ourselves with Nguyen Cao Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu. We helped oust Salvador Allende in Chile, and got Augusto Pinochet. We clandestinely helped elect Forbes Burnham in Guyana in 1964, then watched him move closer to the Soviet Union. We plotted the overthrow and assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, turning Zaire over to Mobutu Sese Seko, whose only rival in ostentatious corruption is Imelda Marcos.

It's disingenuous to counter that our granting or withholding of economic or military assistance always affects domestic politics, that we are always meddling to some degree. The principle of nonintervention doesn't rule out normal relations or aid. But it does mean that we don't clandestinely involve ourselves in elections, and that we don't go around trying to overthrow governments—of whatever political orientation. Reagan's call for Marcos's resignation, though perhaps justified by our long support for the dictator, went too far. Reagan should have said only that the U.S. wouldn't supply military or economic aid to a

Marcos government. The rest was up to the Filipinos.

(5) *Banish the fear of being charged with being soft on communism.* This lesson is primarily for Democrats. What the Reagan administration finally did two weeks ago, the Carter administration could have done eight years ago. The problem was its excessive fear that by speaking out against Marcos in the Philippines it would be criticized by conservatives in the United States for somehow playing into communist hands. The triumph of Corazon Aquino has proved how foolish that fear was.

J **RAYMOND BONNER**

Raymond Bonner is working on a book about the U.S. relations with the Marcos government, to be published by Times Books.