

The February coup against the Marcos government: an eyewitness account

by Paul Goldstein

The events in the Philippines which forced President Ferdinand Marcos from office were planned by the U.S. State Department and the bankers' faction of the CIA long before the events of Feb. 22-25 in Manila. As an eyewitness to the developments that occurred during the days when Marcos was ousted, and having met leaders of what was then the opposition as well as of the Marcos government, I can report with absolute accuracy that without the support of the State Department and Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, along with those elements of the CIA supporting the "official line," there never would have been a coup d'état against Marcos.

Many of my Filipino friends and contacts, both civilian and military, who were caught up in anti-Marcos campaign frenzy, were motivated by a desire to improve the situation in the Philippines, hoping and praying that the removal of the "corrupt dictator" would permit the Philippines to renew its existence. However, as I told both pro-Marcos and pro-Aquino forces, the real control over the direction of the Philippine crisis did not lie within the Philippines, but with forces outside the country—in London, Geneva, and New York. Despite many Filipinos' best intentions, the February events were pre-calculated; even the funding for the Catholic Church's Radio Veritas was provided by the State Department, prior to February. This revelation came as no surprise to *EIR*, when Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Michael Armacost made this point to officers at the Foreign Service Institute last May.

Our friends on both sides of the fence were simply pieces of the chessboard, to be discarded if necessary.

I happened to be meeting with some of the key people who supported Cory Aquino when her new cabinet was announced. With the report of the re-appointment of pro-International Monetary Fund banker José (Jobo) Fernandez in the Aquino cabinet, my friends went into shock, realizing that *EIR*'s assessment of how the game had been played was correct.

Although the Soviet intelligence services have been at work within the labor unions, among students, and the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army, Moscow has not yet fully exploited the insurgency, preferring the approach it took in Nicaragua, where the Jesuit-led Theology

of Liberation forces succeeded before the Russians "decided" to provide political and military support. The Philippines is slated for the same treatment.

Upon my arrival in Manila one week after the Feb. 7 elections, I found that the single most significant fact about the election was the role of the international media, especially the U.S. media, in shaping the environment for Marcos's overthrow. Nearly 1,000 journalists and media technicians gathered at the historic Manila Hotel. They scurried around like frantic ants, looking every which way to discover a new scandal about the election. Their assigned role: Keep the pressure on the Marcos forces; pressure Marcos into making mistakes; and breathe new life into the Aquino forces, which were committed to a massive civil disobedience campaign in protest of the election.

The operational role of the media had actually begun when Marcos agreed to a series of U.S. television interviews. This culminated in Marcos's decision, announced in an interview with NBC's David Brinkley, to hold "snap elections," a decision that later proved to be the beginning of his downfall. Marcos had been backed into the decision throughout the previous weeks by the combined, and at times conflicting, efforts of the State Department, his CIA channels, and Sen. Paul Laxalt's (R-Nev.) trip to Manila in September as a special emissary for President Ronald Reagan. Once Marcos made the decision to hold the election, the decks were cleared for the next phase of the operation.

Observer teams were sent from the U.S. Congress and from think-tanks sponsored by the special operations branch of Project Democracy, a faction of the Wall Street-controlled elements of the intelligence community. The political circus generated by the media, surrounding the deployment of various senators and congressmen to Manila, fueled the pressure campaign. I ran into several members of these observer teams, including Allen Weinstein, a former executive director of Project Democracy and ally of Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.). Weinstein had bitterly complained to members of the Philippines parliament about *EIR*'s coverage of his role.

The observer teams promptly moved to give full backing to the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) headed by José Concepcion, now a cabinet minister under Aquino.

no. Originally established in 1953 and financed by the CIA to help bring Ramon Magsaysay into power, Namfrel acted as the institutional rallying point for the Marcos opposition, completely backed by the State Department, Congress, and the Cardinal Sin-led Liberation Theology forces. Between the announcement of the snap election and Feb. 7, Namfrel chief Concepcion traveled to the United States at least three times, working with the Federal Election Commission, Congress, and the State Department's Philippine Desk officer, John Maisto.

After the elections, as the media and observer teams continued their activity in Manila, the White House arranged for Ambassador Philip Habib to come to Manila to aid in working out "power-sharing arrangements" between Marcos and Aquino. Habib's trip was arranged from Marcos's side by the public relations firm of Black, Manafort, Stone, and Kelly of Alexandria, Virginia. Marcos had been led to believe by White House officials and President Reagan himself, that his primary problem in dealing with Congress was "bad publicity."

A Marcos confidant gave me a listing of Habib's meetings in Manila. Habib's primary purpose was to profile Marcos's ability to govern under the condition of "tainted elections," civil disobedience, and an increasing communist insurgency. The content of Habib's meetings was reported to me by several of Marcos's circle, including cabinet ministers. It was evident that a coup was in the works.

'Plausible denial'

On Friday morning, Feb. 21, I had two meetings—one with a member of Marcos's inner circle and the other with leading military officers. In the first, I was shown a copy of an unsigned message sent to President Marcos by the CIA station chief, on behalf of CIA chief William Casey, denying any coup plot or assassination operation against Marcos. In the parlance of the intelligence community, this message is called "plausible denial," intended to throw off Marcos from thinking that the United States would back Aquino. According to the source, Marcos had Reagan's guarantee that he would be backed all the way, provided he made certain concessions.

Later on, I received a profile of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, indicating those individuals on whom Marcos could count if a military coup erupted. The U.S. embassy estimated that Marcos had at most 1,500 loyal troops. In the second meeting, I was asked if there was a coup in the making by forces associated with Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Acting Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos. Marcos's military forces were clearly preparing to prevent a coup.

On Saturday morning, Feb. 22, the day Enrile and Ramos occupied Camp Aguinaldo and later Camp Crame, I discovered that a "contract employee of the CIA" had already prepared the way for the occupation by proceeding, ahead of Enrile and Ramos, to Camp Aguinaldo. Once the occupation

began, U.S. embassy personnel were shuttling back and forth between Aguinaldo and Malacanang Palace, meeting with Marcos as intermediaries for Enrile and Ramos, advising the avoidance of bloodshed. The State Department-funded Radio Veritas was broadcasting calls to the population to come out in support of Enrile and Ramos. Nearly 1 million people from the Metro-Manila area came to the scene. A special psychological warfare unit was created under the control of General Ermita, with U.S. advisers planting disinformation into those armed forces units still loyal to Marcos. One example was the story that Marcos had left Malacanang Palace on Sunday morning, well before his actual departure.

The turning point in the military side of the coup was the defection of the Air Force units from Villamor Air Base, who took two planes and a helicopter and bombed Malacanang Palace. This broke Marcos psychologically. He was also told that the U.S. forces at Subic Bay and Clark had aided the "rebel" forces. At that point, he knew he was finished; he then received a phone call from Senator Laxalt, who asked him to leave Malacanang, to avoid bloodshed, given that certain loyalist troops had moved into position at Aguinaldo under Marine General Tadjier.

At each phase of the operation, notwithstanding the popular mobilization within Metro-Manila, the hand of the United States was directly involved. The key to the operation was to play the politics of the capital city, the Aquino forces' stronghold, including the takeover by the rebel forces of the government TV station. With a solid portion of leading military officers having swung over to Enrile and Ramos, coupled with the seizure of both the civilian and military communication grid, the Marcos forces were routed without a fight.

It should be kept in mind that if Marcos had gotten the upper hand, the same U.S. intelligence networks which were aiding the opposition were also in a position, if needed, to maintain their lines of communication and contact with Marcos. But no matter who emerged in power, the economic and financial policy was not going to be altered; the IMF and the U.S. commercial banks were not going to permit any break with their stranglehold on the Philippines economy.

I met Mrs. Aquino about a week after the change of government, to warn her about the consequences of retaining the IMF austerity policies that had destroyed Marcos. For nearly three years, Marcos had planted the seeds of his own downfall by adhering loyally to the dictates of the IMF; rationalizing this with the belief that he had to do this to keep in the good graces of the United States. Mrs. Aquino was polite, but declined to indicate the direction her government would take, except that she had already appointed Marcos's central banker, Jobo Fernandez, to the same job he had under Marcos. I insisted that the fate of her government would depend upon how she dealt with the IMF; no matter how much good will she thought she had, unless she changed economic policy, she would be as doomed to the same fate as her predecessor.