

Philippine military: A politicised force

Even elite units of the Philippine armed forces have turned against President Aquino. And it has taken American jets from the well-known Clark Base to tame them. How long, however, can such methods work and more important, how long can Aquino survive?

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RECURRENT rebellions in the Philippine Armed Forces (AFP) in the 1980s heralded it as the creator, preserver and destroyer of civilian governments. The AFP kept Marcos in power for 16 years (1970-1986), jettisoned him for Aquino in the 1986 "Edsa Revolution", and has since erupted in seven abortive coups.

The politicisation of the AFP, composed of the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Provincial Constabulary (PC) was initiated during the martial law years (1972-1983). Prior to 1972 civilian control over the military was shared by Congress and the Executive.

The AFP, which historically used to suppress peasant revolts and ethnic minorities like the Muslim Moros, became Marcos's power base when martial law was in force. The AFP, composed mainly of infantry, was easily deployed in rural and urban areas as a super-police while its centralised command structure allowed Marcos to extend his influence over far-flung communities.

Marcos used the AFP to control the populace and coerce dissidents. He also extended the authority of military tribunals to cover civilians.

As Marcos needed the AFP to rule, he increased the military

budget from approximately \$82 million in 1972 to more than \$1 billion in 1980, expanded personnel from 58,000 to 146,000 in 1983, and increased the base pay of all commissioned officers by 150 per cent to ensure their loyalty to him.

In 1974 Marcos instructed the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) "to train soldiers not only in the art of war, but also in the function and affairs of civilian government." The AFP was given control of Posts, telecommunications, ports and railway while generals attended cabinet meetings and party con-

claves. Marcos set up two military businesses - the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea-Investment and Development Corporation and the Philippine Veterans Investment Development Corporation in 1975 for retirees with assets of more than Pesos 70 million. The AFP also took control of privately-owned companies including 14 companies belong-

ing to the Jacinto family, Marcos' rivals. Besides, senior officers controlled illegal logging and drug smuggling while smaller rackets like gambling and prostitution were controlled by junior officers and enlisted men.

To institutionalise loyalty Marcos reorganised the AFP into 12 Regional Unified Commands (RUCs) which, bypassing their services superiors, reported directly to Marcos's hand-picked chief of staff, General Ver. Loyalists were positioned in key posts regardless of professional considerations. Marcos simultaneously split the AFP by aggravating ethnic and service rivalries in the officer corps. He favoured the graduates from the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) over those from the PMA with two successive chiefs of staff being ROTC graduates. Special considerations were given to officers from Marcos' home-area, Ilocos, (Northern Luzon) over those

from other areas, especially Visayas (Cebu).

The AFP was further divided by disputes over the spoils of office, nepotism in promotions, rivalry between combat veterans and court favourites, and anxieties over demands for investigations into military atrocities. From this discontentment sprang a peculiarly Filipino phenomena - the military fraternities.

The Guardians Brotherhood is the AFP's largest military fraternity. It evolved from anti-communist death squads which Marcos encouraged in the Manila area in the late 1960s. The Guardians is a broad-based organisation consisting of commissioned, non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel. Seniority and status within the Guardians outweigh seniority and rank in the AFP. Fraternities like the Brotherhood flourish having their own constitutions; elaborate secret ceremonies, initiation rites and even corporate logos.

The PMA graduates founded RAM (Reform the Armed Forces) which publicised itself as a reformist organisation whilst from within it acted as a clandestine coup group. RAM was used by its godfathers, Secretary

Aquino.

Inheriting a politicised and fragmented officer corps, Aquino has survived by playing one faction against the other. Under Aquino, the Secretary of Defence, the Chief of Staff, the Service chiefs as well as most of the regional commanders are PMA alumni. This spurred the ROTC graduates to establish the Integree Reserve Officers Group (IROG) to counter what they see as a discriminatory policy which treats them like "second class citizens." The seven coup attempts since Aquino was installed are signs of frustration within sections of the AFP on being denied the spoils of office.

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Socio-economic tensions and spreading communist insurgency have spread disenchantment with Aquino in the AFP. Enrile with RAM supporters revolted against Aquino in September 1987 and the Generals who suppressed the revolt forced Aquino to drop Joker Arroyo, a leftist in her cabinet and renege on a ceasefire with the Communist New People's Army. Yet disillusionment with Aquino grows. In the last coup attempt in December 1989 elite units known for their loyalty to Aquino like the Marines and Scout Rangers revolted against her.

The political dynamics that led RAM and other organisations to be independent from constitutional authority is still prevalent. A new group has been formed within the AFP, called the Young Officers Union (YOU). It is not clear whether YOU is a more radical successor to a failed RAM.



of Defence Juan Ponce Enrile and his flamboyant security chief, Lt Col "Gringo" Honasan, initially to counter the influence of Chief of Staff Gen Ver (an ROTC graduate) and later against Marcos himself. In the 1986 Edsa Revolution Enrile and Gen Ramos, the acting Chief of Staff, with RAM support, launched the coup that ousted Marcos and ushered in