

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Helicopters and Promotions

- I. Helicopters
- II. Promotions and Retirements

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Dear Peter,

I made a passing reference in my last newsletter to the ten helicopters that were recently delivered here. Their arrival one day before the visit of Secretary of State George Shultz on June 12th was dramatized in almost all of the local papers with front page headlines and eye-catching photos. This newsletter will briefly touch upon two disparate topics: the role of helicopters in dealing with the insurgency, and recent trends in the Philippine military, most notably dissatisfaction with its leadership and the slow pace of reforms.

The ten UH-1H (Huey) helicopters formed an impressive lineup on the tarmac at Villamore Air Base. Each of the dark, olive drab airships sat with its rotor pointing forward and tipped down as if in salute. In front of each craft a four man crew stood at attention facing the assembled dignitaries.

The presentation ceremony was short. In the absence of the Ambassador who was, and still may be, held up in Washington, Embassy Charge d'Affaires Philip Kaplan gave a brief speech in which he pointed out that in an unusual step the helicopters had been taken directly from U.S. Army stocks for rapid delivery. He said that, "ten helicopters alone will not turn the tide against the communist insurgency, but they do represent another important step in President Aquino's program for restoring security and stability in the Philippines."

Next, Defense Secretary Rafael Ilete accepted the helicopters, noting that they were Vietnam War vintage airships and had probably first been here two decades ago on their way to

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Vietnam. After a blessing by military chaplins, Secretary Ileta poured a small amount of champagne on the nose of the middle helicopter and saved the rest for the reception following the ceremony.

The ten helicopters are part of a specific request made by President Corazon Aquino in her visit to Washington last fall. Although they are not brand new, they are quite durable and were delivered quickly as part of a larger package of some 36 helicopters. Last October, eight Hueys were delivered, ten more are expected in October or November, and the C-5 that brought this batch flew back to the U.S. with eight crash-damaged Hueys that will be rebuilt in Corpus Christie and returned early next year. The UH-1H is a durable utility helicopter that can carry 11 to 14 troops and is the backbone of the Philippine helicopter fleet.

This year, the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) procurement plan emphasizes boosting mobility and airlift capability to deal more effectively with the insurgency. As one U.S. official put it, "right now air mobility is the key."

For new equipment, spare parts, and maintenance, the AFP is almost completely dependent on U.S. security assistance. For example, last year's \$103 million in military aid was 22% of the AFP's total budget and covered most capital outlays, maintenance costs, and operating expenses. Because this year's military aid has been cut to \$50 million, unless the U.S. Senate pulls a rabbit out of the hat, the AFP has had to curtail planned procurement of trucks and armored cars to increase air mobility.

Col. Arturo Castro, AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Policy, is an articulate Air Force officer. A graduate of the Philippine Military Academy class '59, he has previously worked in civil relations and likes to wax philosophical on what it means "to have been a colony for so many years" and "value formation since the second Philippine revolution." He is a man on the way up. Last week, he was one of the 24 officers who were interviewed by President Aquino and will probably be promoted en masse to general.

According to Col. Castro, the delivery of ten Hueys brings the total AFP inventory up to 71 helicopters, of which 56 are Hueys. The Air Force tries to hit an operational rate of 70% to 75%, he says with 40 to 45 helicopters currently operational. As Col. Castro and U.S. officials point out, these helicopters are not primarily used as gunships. Rather, they are used for medical evacuation, which he deems essential "to maintain the will of soldiers to fight;" troop transport; and civic action programs.

Given the Philippines' mountainous terrain, helicopters are crucial in ferrying troops quickly over land that might take days to traverse on foot. Col. Castro also believes that

the expanded use of helicopters will help prevent the frequent NPA ambushes. Currently, he says, it often takes a day for a relief party to reach an ambush site. By early next year, the capability of the AFP to rapidly move troops by helicopter will be almost double the present level. In addition, helicopters are now no longer sitting at Villamore Air Base, as in the past, and have been deployed in a more effective manner say U.S. officials. What happens once troops arrive in the field is another matter.

Not everyone agrees that helicopters are the solution. One AFP general, whose units are short of trucks, believes that first providing for the basics in ground mobility is more important than air transport. A high-ranking U.S. Defense Department official is skeptical about depending on helicopters and points out that the two counterinsurgency strategies that used helicopters most extensively were, and are, in Vietnam and Afghanistan. And a State Department official believes that the AFP is "too high-tech minded." Yet, lower ranking U.S. officials maintain that the AFP needs more helicopters just as it needs more of everything else.

The procurement of U.S. equipment by the AFP, whether helicopters or operating manuals, is facilitated by the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG). JUSMAG and its staff of 23 Americans operate on an annual budget of \$2½ million that is paid for by a modest 3% surcharge placed on all procurements handled by the office. JUSMAG's role, officials are quick to point out, is not to advise the Philippine military on what items to obtain, but merely to process requests, conduct some initial pricing surveys, and facilitate delivery. It is the various military attaches at the Embassy who have more input on procurement decisions say JUSMAG officials.

For a sense of how much easier JUSMAG's job has become one only has to look back a few years. Under the Marcos administration, the equipment processed by JUSMAG generally went into a black hole. The AFP simply did not have a functioning logistics system. Retired and active AFP officers have horror stories about finding a million dollars worth of spare parts rusting on the customs pier or wondering what to do with two warehouses full of U.S. items that had no known recipient.

One of the better known examples of misspent funds was the 1983 purchase of 19 Sikorsky helicopters for \$63 million. The helicopters were purchased with U.S. sales credits reportedly at the behest of Marcos. Seventeen of the helicopters were the sleek S-76, a luxury, VIP transport helicopter, that has never before or since been sold to another nation's air force. A retired Philippine Air Force officer who headed logistics described the S-76 as a "bad aircraft for combat operations." During critical maneuvers the main rotor has a tendency to hit the tail assembly and "eat its own tail." A few weeks ago, one of the S-76s, which had been lent to film maker Chuck Norris, crashed in Manila Bay. One U.S. official said half-jokingly that there are plenty of spare parts for the S-76

because the Air Force "keeps cannibalizing the ones that crash."

Those days are over. According to a JUSMAG official who has worked in the Philippines since 1985, there have been "major improvements" in Philippine Air Force logistics. He cites changes in four main areas. First, equipment is no longer shipped by private freight, but by the U.S. defense transport system. Second, there is a new automated logistics system that can rapidly request spare parts. Third, there is better inventory at warehouses so that "now when we go to a warehouse [to track down an item] with our people and the Air Force we have been able to find it." Finally, there is more accountability and less corruption.

In addition, working relations with AFP personnel have improved. "We have a lot more meetings and dialogue now," he said. "Our relationship since the revolution has become a lot closer." But the officer is not certain whether some of these changes are because AFP personnel "are more professional now, or the fact that [there is] less money and people know that they have to be a lot more careful."

In other areas, however, improvements in the AFP have been less pronounced, or at least less acknowledged by internal critics.

## II. Promotions and Retirements

Promotions and retirements of top ranking officers have been in the wind lately. Last week, AFP Vice Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Salvador Mison, retired along with Maj. Gen. Rodolfo Canieso, head of the Philippine Army. In the next few weeks, President Aquino is expected to promote some 24 officers to general, which will increase the AFP's 74 general and flag officers by about one third. And for a while there were reports that AFP Chief of Staff, Gen. Fidel Ramos had tendered his resignation pending Aquino's acceptance. These are all indications that the AFP leadership is undergoing a period of transition: about half of the generals and flag officers are due to retire early next year.

Promotions in the AFP have come a long way from the time when all of the deputy chiefs of staff were reportedly incompetent save one. Back then, the President of the National Defense College of the Philippines would take his students to GHQ so they could embarrass the Marcos loyalists with tough questions. Despite the upward movement of capable officers, the government is still faced with the dilemma of what to do with senior officers of questionable loyalty due to their close association either with Marcos and his Chief of Staff Gen. Fabian Ver, or former Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile. There are basically four paths for these officers.

Some officers are sent to school. The graduating class of the National Defense College of the Philippines (NDCP), is comprised of about 50 officers and a few civilians. Most of the officers in the graduating class, says NDCP President Commodore Jose Lansangan, are Marcos loyalists who enrolled shortly after the February 1986 revolution. It was a convenient way to "cool off" by taking the one year MA program in national security studies.

This year's entering class, however, does not include that kind of student says Commo. Lansangan. In fact, NDCP's 22nd class boasts several promising young officers and "Ting Ting" Cojuangco, the elegant wife of Jose Cojuangco, President Aquino's younger brother, who is widely regarded as something of a kingmaker.

A second path, is for some officers to be transferred to "safe spots" where they are not in control of critical units. "Later, [these officers] can be brought in and resocialized," explains a Philippine Army colonel at GHQ. One prominent example is Brig. Gen. Artemio Tadiar, the former Commandant of the Philippine Marines who led the armor which was supposed to crush the revolt by Enrile and Ramos. He is now Deputy Base Commander for Subic Naval Base Command. Another is Brig. Gen. Roland Pattugalan, the former head of the powerful 2nd Infantry Division near Manila who is related to Marcos by marriage. He is now commandant of the Command and General Staff College. After good behavior at these posts they may be given positions of greater responsibility says the Army colonel.

A third possibility is for competent commanders of slightly questionable loyalty to be transferred out to the field. Brig. Gen. Felix Brawner was Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations under Marcos and "didn't jump quite fast enough in the revolution," according to a U.S. official. He is now in Northern Luzon and, according to this official, is doing a good job of "running his war up there."

The fourth and least desirable outcome from the government's perspective, is to become a renegade and engage in coup attempts. Brig. Gen. Jose Zumel, the former commandant of the Philippine Military Academy, is a classic example. He was one of only three generals who took part in the abortive Manila Hotel coup last year. Since then, he has been suspected in several coup attempts or related incidents including the bombing of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) last March. Despite an arrest order out for him and two associates, there are persistent reports that they have been sighted at various military camps negotiating for their return. At the same time, however, their lawyers are arguing that the military arrest orders against them are invalid since they have been removed from the AFP active list.

I recently asked Brig. Gen. Alexander Aguirre, head of the Capital Command, why his unit hadn't apprehended Gen. Zumel and company yet. Gen. Aguirre graduated in the top of his PMA class ('61), received an MA from NDCP, numerous citations for merit, and now commands the 2,000 Constabulary and 13,000 police personnel in Metro Manila. He says that many officers "continue to be comrades" with Zumel because of their days at PMA and are "pakikisama" with him. Pakikisama, literally the ability to get along with others, represents a cluster of values such as comradeship, knowing how to get along, and not causing embarrassing conflicts, which are stronger than the chain of command.

Before Gen. Zumel went underground, Gen. Aguirre says he explained the post-February situation to Zumel and others thus: "It's simple. There was a revolution and you were on the other side. In Iran and other places you would be shot." He encouraged them to "relax" and slowly work their way back into the fold like generals Tadiar and Pattugalan, telling them that "although you were on the opposite side of the fence, regardless of your commitment and duty [to Marcos], it's alright. We will treat you like a professional." Gen. Aguirre optimistically predicts that "the three will do it the legal way" and eventually turn themselves in to the authorities.

Many U.S. officials are not so charitable towards this laid back approach. Says one, "it's the typical thing, ignore it and hope it goes away." Another officer, who is considered a keen observer of the AFP due to his three years here, which included advanced training with AFP officers, believes that the AFP doesn't really want to catch Zumel and the others. Although the AFP doesn't believe that Zumel would actually bomb his own academy, if he talked, they "might not like what they would find."

The forthcoming promotion of some 24 colonels and Navy captains to star rank will be one of the larger mass promotions under the Aquino government. In following the promotion procedure, the officers were recommended by the Board of Generals, which is composed of the AFP Chief of Staff and the heads of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Constabulary. Their brief interviews with the President completed, the officers are now awaiting her final approval.

Although the group is regarded as highly qualified, there has been significant criticism of the possible promotion of a certain Navy captain. Earlier, 120 Navy officers signed a petition to Aquino protesting the promotion of Capt. Virgilio Marcelo and some others. The petition stated: "his promotion this early militates against the efforts to restore discipline, decency, honor, and integrity [in the AFP] by faithful compliance to [sic] the standards of professionalism." It further claimed that "the selection of Captain Marcelo is reminiscent

of the blatant abuses during the Marcos regime" and raises "doubts over the sincerity to instill professionalism in the Armed Forces of the Philippines."

The promotion is opposed on two grounds. First, Capt. Marcelo is number 28 on the Navy promotion list and thus is junior to many other officers not recommended for promotion. Second, during the Marcos era, Marcelo wielded considerable power in the Navy as commander of Naval Intelligence and was close to Gen. Ver. Fellow Navy officers describe him as sharp and extremely competent, but also consider him "a part of Marcos." Navy officers also claim that the Navy chief, Rear Admiral Tagumpay Jardiniano, opposes the promotion.

The petition is not earthshaking, but it is significant. Innumerable petitions, leaflets, and fake orders circulate in the military. But this one, which its sponsors say was not supposed to be leaked to the press, has the weight of its petitioners, in particular Brig. Gen. Brigido Paredes, Commandant of the Philippine Marines, and Capt. Felix Turingan.

The two represent opposite ends of the spectrum in the AFP. Gen. Paredes is known as a strictly professional soldier who has little to do with politics. He led Marine units against Muslim successionists in Mindanao in the mid-70s, retired after he was assigned to a powerless administrative post, and was called out of retirement to assume his current position. On his desk is a well-thumbed copy of the new constitution. He says that his loyalty is to that document and not to any one personality. Capt. Turingan is a sharp and highly politicized officer, who as a former aide to Enrile, was a leader of the military reform movement that helped topple Marcos.

The petition is but one more sign of the dissent in the AFP directed towards the Chief of Staff. Outside the military, criticism of Gen. Ramos for allegedly weak leadership and lack of a firm hand in dealing with coup attempts is legion. One paper ran a week's worth of headlines that Ramos was being eased out of office and had offered to resign. Whether true or not, such reports have undermined his credibility say some officers. Part of the decline in his popularity can be attributed to the natural wearing off of the gloss surrounding last February's events. As one U.S. official said the contrast with Gen. Ver was so stark that people didn't realize that reality is checkered.

One general has consistently been calling for the retirement of all officers whose term is up: 56 years of age or 30 years of service, whichever comes later. (The extended tenure of overstaying officers was one of the major complaints against Marcos). Now that two of the three overstaying generals have retired, the Vice Chief of Staff and the head of the Army, this general says that the final overstaying general, Ramos, should "step down," but "on his own." He claims that the AFP as an institution is more important than any one person, however

indispensable he may seem. "If you cannot guarantee a succession of leaders, the armed forces will be in trouble. The military establishment must have this stability of regular succession." He has also called for reforming the promotion system by creating a larger panel to replace the Board of Generals and more openness in announcing the criteria for promotions.

This officer is also concerned about what he perceives as the lack of field experience at the top two slots in the AFP. According to him, both Gen. Ramos and Maj. Gen. Renato de Villa, the new Vice Chief of Staff who like Ramos is also a Constabulary officer, have "never had field experience handling large troop formations." He maintains that without such experience it is more difficult for them to understand the needs of the men in the field and they are "hampered in reacting to events" since they "cannot predict how field commanders will react" to their instructions. Other officers, however, claim that these posts at GHQ require less combat experience and more political acumen.

The extent to which these perceptions are shared by others in the AFP is murky. Recently, however, a small survey of officers and enlisted men was conducted privately for the Department of National Defense. The sample was not of the size that would inspire absolute confidence and there was some difficulty interviewing Army and Constabulary personnel. However, the willingness of the respondents was increased by using civilian women instead of officers as the interviewers. A senior officer connected with the survey is confident in its two strong and surprising findings. First, the President, the Chief of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense all received an approval rating of less than 50%. Second, over 70% of the respondents wanted stronger disciplinary action taken against soldiers who participated in coup attempts or violated military justice.

This officer, who respects and supports all three of these superiors, provided what seemed a cogent interpretation of the results. Regarding the Commander in Chief, he said that many in the military do not see her as looking after their interests and protecting them. Although she has raised salaries and regularly attends military functions, she reveals her lingering distrust of and ill ease with the military through little incidents.

For example, in June, Dante Buscayno, the founder of the NPA who had renounced violence and unsuccessfully ran for the Senate, was ambushed in Manila by armed men. He escaped relatively unharmed but two of his companions were killed. Soon afterwards, President Aquino expressed her shock and anger at the incident. Yet, in the months prior to this, NPA assassination teams in Manila had, by their own count, liquidated over 20 policemen and the President had remained silent. Later, she condemned the killings and met with some of the widows. But for the AFP, the damage had been done. (For an insiders description of the sense of isolation and unacknowledged sacri-



fice felt by many soldiers see The Scalawag by R. Octaviano).

Secretary of Defense Iletto, this officer emphasized, has been out of the military for 14 years and "has not been able to develop a following." The founder of the elite Scout Rangers in 1950, Iletto later rose to Lt. Gen. and AFP Vice Chief of Staff. He was the only senior officer who opposed the imposition of martial law and was subsequently sent into diplomatic exile, first as Ambassador to Iran and later Thailand. Although the troops "know him to have been a fighting general," he is a remote figure, said the officer. He tends to stay at Camp Aguinaldo, Defense headquarters, and unlike his predecessor does not visibly tour the country.

As for Gen. Ramos, the officer claimed that soldiers looking to Ramos for decisive leadership and strong discipline are disappointed. That 70% of the respondents wanted stronger discipline indicates that it is "our own people who say that there is 'weak and vacillating leadership.'"

It's not hard to find examples of what can be termed weak leadership or indiscipline. His orders forbidding soldiers to participate in the short-lived election protests organized by Enrile have been disobeyed with impunity. An anti-graft board has been formed but only a handful of officers have been charged and no one has been convicted. And only now are the men involved in last February's coup attempt being arraigned for court martial. One U.S. official who does not expect military justice also notes that "nobody has been convicted for [Benigno] Aquino's death."

Lest one get swept away by the current wave of criticism of Ramos, one should keep in mind that it is part of a cycle. Earlier, the cigar chewing general was larger than life and received unstinting praise. Now, with memories of Ver more distant, some of the shine has worn off. In reforming the AFP Gen. Ramos faces a task larger than the military. As an Army colonel pointed out, "you can't expect us to reform overnight when your outside orientation [of society] has not yet reformed." On Ramos' management style, the U.S. officer who had trained with the AFP offered this assessment: "He is the Eisenhower of the Philippines. He is not a brilliant general, but he gets it done." Just as revisionist historians are now giving the American President more credit as a shrewd and successful leader, so too observers may later reassess the present verdict on Ramos.

Sincerely,



Erik Guyot