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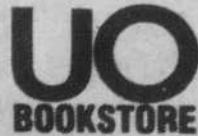


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# Philippines dilemma

## Island's situation analyzed by professors

By Lois Yoshishige  
Of the Emerald

About two weeks ago, Gerald Fry, assistant director of International Studies, said Pres. Ronald Reagan should delay his visit to the Philippines because the government of Pres. Ferdinand Marcos is suspected of having a direct hand in the slaying of opposition leader Benigno Aquino.

However, "with the tensions there now," Reagan could renege on the trip by questioning whether he could be assured of protection, Fry says.

Last Sunday, White House officials announced that Reagan would postpone his trip, citing lack of effective security as the reason.

More recently, the administration cited the anticipation of ample congressional activity during the planned week of the trip as an additional reason.

Now that Reagan postponed his visit, Fry says the president has taken "the easy way out." The United States is reticent about alienating the Philippine government — after recently investing in vital air and naval bases in the Philippines — by overtly condemning it for human rights violations, he says.

Noncommittally postponing the visit for security reasons also gives the United States a chance to see who's guilty, Fry says. "If Marcos or his aides are found not to have been actively involved by an impartial investigation, Reagan could more legitimately visit without looking like he supports a total violation of human rights."

At a time when the Marcos dictatorship is weakening and the country faces economic crisis, Marcos had welcomed Reagan's visit as a way to legitimize his government, Fry says.

Despite Reagan's failure to do so, if Marcos is overthrown, a new ruling party is still likely to be "anti-American" because of "U.S. support of an unpopular Marcos regime."

While Fry sees Reagan's visit from the diplomatic perspective, International Studies Research Assistant Edward Comstock, who has lived in the Philippines, sees the postponement from the human rights standpoint.

The Aquino murder called attention to a longstanding situation in the country, and Reagan is finally — if not overtly — recognizing the human rights violations of the Marcos regime, Comstock says. "But it's unfortunate to have to club Ronald Reagan to get his attention."

Marcos' "tradition of promoting inequality" in the distribution of wealth and power among his people has long been ignored by the Reagan administration as well as by previous administrations, Comstock says.

A reason for this blindness is a military one. After the Vietnam war, the United States was "afraid that if it didn't support Marcos and Imelda, it wouldn't have a geographic military position to oversee Southeast Asia," Comstock says.

The United States was thinking more of their national and political interests than of their moral duty to call attention to the abuses of the regime, he says.

The Philippine people were not always so oppressed. From 1965-68, when Comstock lived in Ormoc (a city 400 miles southeast of Manila), he found the Filipinos had a "vibrant democracy. The people had definite attitudes on issues and were active members of their political parties." Comstock says they changed their political leaders regularly — until

Marcos was elected.

In 1965, when Marcos was elected, the people had great hope, Comstock says. "The presidents had been laconic up till then, and no president had been reelected after one term."

At the beginning, Marcos dealt with issues that were important to the people, but he soon shifted his energies into consolidating his power. The president imposed martial law in 1968 to ensure his position as the leader of the country, he says.

The Philippine people did not oppose the Marcos regime because he took control slowly, says Comstock, who has a friend whose parents still live in the Philippines. They had said they were pleased with martial law because it reduced the crime rate considerably.

"Marcos took control little by little," Comstock says. "People would say, 'Oh, this is not so bad', until at the end, he had total control of the country. I don't know how they feel about the Marcos regime now."

As to the future of the Philippines, Comstock says it's a fluid situation. He says there is "strong talk" that Imelda Marcos, the first lady and a powerful force in the Marcos administration, would succeed her husband in the presidency.

If Imelda ruled, the current situation would be the same "at all levels," Comstock says. "It would be an attempt by Marcos and his governing cronies to maintain power."

Other scenarios may be an overthrow of the government by the military or by Maoist communist groups such as the New People's Army. However, Comstock does not see a communist revolution brewing in the Philippines. "My own instincts are to trust the democratic and humanistic instincts of the Philippine people. If there is an explosion of the Marcos government, I hope the people will revert to an earlier time, when the democratic processes were introduced and made workable."

But History Prof. Glen May says only the urban middle class support a democratic government. The New People's Army has gained support in the countryside within the past five to seven years and is a more serious threat to Marcos than the urban protest, May says.

Poverty in some areas, such as in Luzon, is unbelievable, May says. "With ineffectual government programs and the disastrous economic situation, people in the country have just given up on the Marcos government."

The urban Filipinos were the ones who supported Aquino, May says. Aquino was probably the only candidate who would have won a national election against Marcos. May says the middle class is embarrassed that the Marcos government blatantly assassinated an opposition leader and that there is now such an obvious absence of an investigation.

Although he does not think Marcos ordered the assassination, May says it is clear that someone in government killed Aquino. He cites rumors that Imelda Marcos and Gen. Fabian Ver, armed forces chief of staff, were involved with the assassination.

If Marcos is overthrown, urban businessmen would want a capitalist government with "one of their own kind to rule". But if it were up to the poor in the countryside, they would institute radical social reform, May says.

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