

@CHAPTER = THE PHILIPPINES

The Bush administration continued its predecessor's policy of praising President Corazon Aquino's human rights achievements while downplaying ongoing serious human rights problems and permitting U.S. economic and security interests to take priority over human rights concerns. The administration was preoccupied during the year with paving the way for renewal of the agreement on Clark Air and Subic Naval Bases and with securing a \$10 billion aid package for the Philippines called the "Multilateral Assistance Initiative," or MAI. A key meeting on MAI took place in Tokyo in July 1989, and negotiations on the bases agreement, due for renewal in 1991, were to begin in December 1989, although they appear to have been postponed in the aftermath of the December coup attempt. The gravity of that attempt, and the use of U.S. planes to keep rebel air power grounded, are likely to reinforce the posture of praise for Aquino and dismissal of human rights criticism as an effort to undermine her government.

At a state dinner for President Aquino in Washington in November, President Bush said that a long-term security agreement would preserve bipartisan support for continued economic and military aid. He said nothing about human rights. The administration continued to provide substantial military aid for the country's counterinsurgency efforts, and Vice President Quayle even urged that a Congressional ban on U.S. aid for internal security forces be waived for the Philippines, despite the poor human rights record of the Philippine military and police.

Both sides in the 20-year conflict between government forces and the communist-led New People's Army ("NPA") were responsible for grave human rights violations during the year. Neither the government-appointed Commission on Human Rights nor independent monitoring groups had reliable statistics, but numerous cases of politically motivated killings, torture, disappearances and unfair trials were documented.

Allegations were legion of abuses by members of the government-trained paramilitary force, Citizens' Armed Forces -- Geographical Unit ("CAFGU"), suggesting that its recruitment and screening measures were little changed from those of its discredited predecessor, the Marcos-era Civilian Home Defense Forces. The abuses included several beheadings in Negros and Mindanao of suspected NPA supporters, in collaboration with anti-communist "vigilante" groups, and politically motivated killings elsewhere. Army regulars were reportedly responsible for several summary executions of suspected rebels in Negros during military operations there in April and May. Prosecutions of soldiers continued to be rare, and 24 were acquitted by a military court in July 1989 in the so-called "Lupao Massacre" case. Seventeen civilians in Lupao, Nueva Ecija, including an elderly couple and several children, died when the army opened fire on a village from which an NPA attack was believed staged in February 1987.

For its part, the NPA stepped up attacks on U.S. citizens believed engaged in the war effort, continued to kill members of the police and military, and in some regions undertook a purge of its own ranks, assassinating suspected informers.

The U.S. response to these abuses was to underscore the NPA threat to the Philippines' stability while refraining from public criticism of abuses by government-backed forces, despite U.S. military aid used to equip the latter. Throughout the year in different forums, Bush administration officials stressed the importance of the paramilitary organization CAFGU as a counterinsurgency force and emphasized the difference between it and earlier abusive civilian militias. The State Department's country report on the Philippines, written by

the Reagan administration and issued in February, implied that abuses by "vigilante" groups would end with the establishment of CAFGU, which is supposedly highly trained and disciplined. This line was echoed by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, David Lambertson, in testimony before the House Foreign Operations Subcommittee on February 8. Lambertson stated that CAFGU was formed in part to stop the abuses attributed to "vigilante" groups and that it would have a "more formal relationship" with the military than the latter had. He acknowledged that U.S. aid would probably be used to equip the CAFGU.

In April, the State Department submitted a special report to the House Appropriations Committee entitled "Citizens' Self Defense Groups in the Philippines." The report typified the administration's approach. Noting the "dramatic positive transformation" of the human rights situation under President Aquino, it cited legal and administrative reforms which were intended to protect human rights. It then outlined the characteristics of CAFGU which make it different from earlier paramilitary groups: screening of recruits in consultation with civilian officials and rejection of abusive or criminal elements; human rights and values training; deployment in the community from which the recruits are drawn; and careful supervision by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The report acknowledged isolated instances of abuse but without citing examples. It then stated: "[These reports of abuses] suffer the same distortions present in any argument which relies on an accounting of individual cases to make broader generalizations. Further, as noted above, there is credible evidence that some individual cases are fabricated by the [Communist Party of the Philippines]."

What the country report, Lambertson's testimony and the April report all did was to focus on the Aquino government's commitment to reform on paper while downplaying or discrediting clear evidence of actual abuses. Abusive elements have not been screened out of CAFGU; there is forced recruitment in some areas; civilian officials in many areas have had no say in the selection process; and human rights abuses go unpunished. Moreover, a "Special CAFGU Active Auxiliary," established in early April 1989 and composed of employees of private companies trained by the military but funded by the companies to protect their property, amounts to privatization of the counterinsurgency effort. In Zamboanga del Norte and elsewhere, Special CAFGUs have reportedly been used by private businesses to clear peasants off land needed for logging. The Bush administration has an obligation to ensure that U.S. military aid is not used by groups or individuals who violate human rights. Careful monitoring of CAFGU performance is essential, but nothing the Bush administration has said or done indicates that such monitoring is taking place.

The implication that CAFGU has somehow replaced "vigilante" groups is wrong. In 1989, new vigilante groups, called "Greens," "Whites," "Reds" and "Blacks" after the color of their headbands, appeared in southern Negros Occidental together with members of CAFGU and the regular army, and in April and May were reportedly responsible for the murder and mutilation of at least four people in the course of the military's "Operation Thunderbolt."

Lambertson, in his February testimony, insisted that the administration had raised human rights issues both privately and publicly with the Aquino government. But if such statements were made, they were negated by other actions. In an inexcusable honor to a man widely believed responsible for several disappearances of suspected NPA supporters in Manila, the U.S. embassy in July gave an award to Lt. Col. Romeo Maganto of the Western Police District, citing his "assistance extended to the U.S. mission on matters of mutual consideration." Turning a blind eye to his setting up of vigilante groups in

Manila to attack suspected front organizations, the award also cited his "professionalism."

Vice President Quayle travelled to the Philippines in September, carrying a letter dated September 19 from 22 members of Congress which urged him to raise the problem of CAFGU abuses in his talks with President Aquino. Just as he arrived, the NPA killed two U.S. technicians and warned of more attacks to come. The Vice President properly expressed outrage and grief, but he then went far beyond the limits of propriety by suggesting that the Bush administration would ask for a waiver of the Congressional ban against U.S. foreign aid being used for police and other internal security forces. "This waiver will help protect American lives," he said. Providing aid to security forces who in the past have shown little respect for Filipino lives will not aid the cause of human rights, and even suggesting such a waiver was misguided.

Upon his return, the Vice President sent a letter to Rep. Ted Weiss, one of the signatories of the September letter, saying:

@QUOTENOIND = While it is our duty to hold the democratic Philippines Government to high human rights standards, we must focus our attention on condemning NPA terrorism and providing Mrs. Aquino's government with the material and training required to defend democracy. At the same time, we should and are considering ways to help the Philippines Government in its continuing effort to improve the human rights performance of its military and police forces.

@NOIND = Criticizing abuses by the government is clearly not on the Vice President's agenda.

The Bush administration's loud and clear message to the Philippines is that the administration does not consider Philippine human rights abuses to be a problem. Levels of aid are one indication. In July, the U.S. led a meeting of donor countries in Tokyo to pledge \$3.5 billion in aid to the Philippines. Secretary of State James Baker said the U.S. alone would seek \$1 billion from Congress over a five-year period to assist the Philippines. Even before the Tokyo meeting, the administration had asked Congress for \$481 million, including \$200 million in military aid. (In November 1989, the House of Representatives approved a package of \$160 million for the Philippines in the foreign assistance bill.) Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Renato de Villa, returned from Washington in early September, saying the U.S. had agreed to deliver \$64 million worth of helicopter gunships and patrol boats by mid-1990 to help fight the guerrillas. And in November, during President Aquino's visit to Washington, the U.S. pledged \$25 million more in economic assistance. Aid was clearly seen as a carrot for a favorable agreement on the bases. "The base presence and our ongoing security cooperation conditioned the atmosphere for investment," according to Richard Solomon, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, who sat in on the Bush-Aquino meeting.

With such levels of aid, the Bush administration should be far less circumspect about criticizing the human rights record of the Aquino government. Such criticism is necessary if the administration is to avoid underwriting abusive armed forces.