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Asia Pacific: Perspectives is a peer-reviewed journal published at least once a year, usually in April/May. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities with relevance to the Asia Pacific region.* In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

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* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

The Quest for Power: The Military in Philippine Politics, 1965-2002

by Erwin S. Fernandez, M.A.

Abstract

This article traces the involvement of the military or the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Philippine politics beginning 1965 during the presidency of Marcos until 2002, a year before the Oakwood Mutiny happened when a group of soldiers tried to overthrow the present Arroyo administration. It provides a brief overview on its history before 1965 from its colonial beginnings during the American regime until the Macapagal administration. During the time of Marcos, the involvement of the military was a crucial factor in the making of a dictatorship. After the overthrow of Marcos in 1986, a politicized section of the military staged eight coups to topple Aquino's government. Ramos, a military man and Aquino's own choice won the election and successfully negotiated for peace with the rebels. In the short-lived Estrada administration, the military was the critical element of its downfall in 2001 that led to the assumption into power of Vice-President Arroyo. Rumors of coup plots, however, were in the air only three days after Arroyo's assumption into office. This article concludes that the specter of military interventionism would always haunt Philippine body politic as long as there are no efforts to exorcise the ghosts of the past.

From 1965 to 2002, the Philippine military or the Armed Forces of the Philippines underwent major and minor transformations that shaped its present image and character. From a mere adjunct of the US Army called the Philippine Scouts, a Filipino auxiliary army was created to fight the Philippine Revolutionary forces, up to the establishment of the Philippine Army during the Commonwealth regime, the Philippine military today showed a remarkable resiliency and steady growth after its formal creation in 1946 although constrained by little financial allocation for its modernization. Such condition resulting from budgetary constraints placed AFP's responsibility in the domestic sphere while defense against external threats could be relied on US bases in Clark and Subic before the Philippine Senate refused to allow its continued stay in the Philippines in 1990. However, this reliance on US bases was not an assurance for the US to support the country in case of war. AFP was preoccupied in the late 1940s and early 50s in fighting the Huks and containing the rebellion in Central Luzon. During the time of President Quirino, AFP deployed the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK) in the midst of the Korean War. During the Vietnam War, President Marcos sent the Philippine Civic Action Group to Vietnam (PHILCAGV). The role of AFP in civic action for the purpose of nation-building during the time of Pres. Magsaysay that was carried through intensely in the twenty-year rule of President Marcos was beginning to create an image of the AFP as partner in national develop-

ment. It was also during this period that AFP was notorious in being a protector for few big people, hence a big private army notable for the oppression it caused to ordinary people.¹

This article looks into the transformation of the role the military, individually speaking or the institution itself, from the time of President Ferdinand E. Marcos until the presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, but a year before the Oakwood mutiny in late July 2003. President Marcos transformed the AFP into a state-sponsored private army to perpetuate himself to power. Marcos was crucial in the politicization of the Philippine military years before his proclamation of Martial Law and it reached its peak after, as Marcos needed the military to suppress opposition to his rule. Thus, this article discusses the role of Marcos in the politicization of the Philippine military as well as an elaboration on how a politicized segment of the military wreaked havoc during President Corazon C. Aquino's administration when she faced more than six coup d'états to topple her government. During the time of President Fidel V. Ramos, an ex-military man, Aquino's former Defense Secretary and Marcos' former Philippine Constabulary chief, the government issued amnesty proclamation for those who were involved in the failed coups d'état. There was an assumption that the military was again back in the barracks, thus depoliticized and seemingly rendered apolitical. However, during the rule of President Joseph E. Estrada, the critical factor that led to his overthrow was the military and hence, the military was also the critical factor in the assumption into power of Arroyo. From the start of her presidency, her government faced rumors of takeover or power grabs months before a group of junior officers mutinied.

The Role of the Military in Government

Modern political systems enhance their legitimacy when they have the capacity to instill discipline and enforce the law. The military as an institution of power and coercion serves the purpose of ensuring the protection of the nation-state against lawlessness and violence. In every government that is mandated to guard its people from harm, the police and armed forces play a prominent role. The Philippine military, like any other military in the world, responds to its constitutional obligation as guardian and protector of the Filipino people.²

In the same article and section of the constitution, it states "civilian authority is, at all times, supreme over the military." The inclusion of this provision anticipates the tendency of the military to engage in military adventurism. At all costs, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) shall abide by this provision, to carry out its responsibility of protecting the state. Still, its interventionist stance would manifest in conditions that allow it to happen. There are four environmental factors that shape the political role of the armed forces. Welsh Jr. & Smith state these as follows: "the nature and extent of political participation within the society, the relative isolation of the armed forces from social and political currents, the extent to which the military serves as a direct

support for the government, and the legitimacy enjoyed by the government."³ Internal variables within the military i.e. mission or level of politicization among the enlisted men, interact with environmental factors to create a situation that either maintains its subordination to the executive power or disregards it and engage in outright intervention. Military intervention usually arises from a government that has lost its legitimacy or in conditions that nurtured and even pampered it. The case in point is the Marcos regime.

Marcos and the Politicization of the Military

The politicization of the military was carried out with intensity and impunity during the Martial Law regime of President Marcos. Before Marcos, past administrations had engaged the military in civic action duties, which gradually increased their role in politics, only to be disrupted by President Macapagal's belief that the military should not engage in civic action for it encouraged them to participate in politics. Military officials were appointed to head government agencies. He consolidated his power by strengthening the right arm of totalitarianism by raising pay for enlisted officers, greatly expanded their services in government, and promoted their welfare and the prestige in the uniform. Likewise, by patronizing the military, Marcos developed close and intimate relations with them, and as their commander-in-chief, gained their loyalty. In the course of the Martial Law, an arrogant military had begun to emerge under the auspices of the dictator. Felipe Miranda contends that linking the military's politicization to Marcos is rather simplistic because, as he argues, "does not pay enough attention to the general trend towards mass politicization in Third World countries and the involvement of their military establishments in national political management after the end of the Second World War." Granted that such was the case, yet one could not discount the fact that Marcos accelerated the process of politicization in the Philippine military and it goes against the grain to say that "it did not have to be Marcos who surfaced and personally benefited from politicization within the military" for this conclusion is tantamount to empty speculation that runs counter to historical processes. It is enough to say that Marcos had helped nurture the already politicized consciousness of some sectors of the armed forces.⁴

Evidence from the database culled from survey questions for cadets enrolled at the Philippine Military Academy from 1951 to 1991 suggests that cadets' demographic characteristics showed an already politicized crop of neophytes in the military before they entered the academy. They usually belonged to the lower-middle to upper-middle class that indicates an upbringing that promotes political awareness. Although they were being initiated into an organization that instills discipline and loyalty, inculcates values that promote cohesion, these, however, do not constitute primarily the reasons for the politicization of military personnel. The degree of political awareness that would lead to their politicization depends on individual and external factors. During the time of Marcos, internal threats to stability and security furthered

the need to mobilize military men against the communist insurgency of the New People's Army (NPA) and Moro secessionism led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in Mindanao. Personal ambition and the lust for power reciprocated Marcos' intentions for militarization.⁵

A pampered military was born during the Marcos administration. The growth of enlisted men and personnel in the military showed a dramatic increase from the time Marcos assumed the presidency till the advent of Martial Law. From mere 53,000 in 1965, it increased to 62,715 in 1972 and reaching as high as 142,490 in 1976 and its peak in 1986 with a manpower of 156,139. Consequently, military budget shares a substantial portion of the general appropriations between 1972 and 1986 with a 4.54 % of its budget over GNP in 1976 amounting to P 6 billion. From 1977 up to 1985, the general trend was a significant increase annually if compared it to its pre-1972 levels.⁶

After the Marcos regime was overthrown in 1986, the newly installed government faced a threatening challenge against its legitimacy as nine months after Aquino's presidency, Juan Ponce Enrile, the Defense Minister, tendered his resignation giving credence to coup rumors that eventually culminated in the August 1987 coup attempt led by Colonel Gregorio 'Gringo' Honasan of the Reform the Armed Forces of the Philippines Movement (RAM).

Unsettling Cory: The Anatomy of a Politicized Military

Wary about the return of a military regime and the threat that a politicized military poses, the framers of the 1987 Constitution enshrined in it the sanctity of the civilian supremacy over the military. Yet, the residue of politicization in the military remained and became the leavening agent for its aggressive postures against the Aquino government. Before the inauguration of Aquino as the new head of the republic, certain sectors in the military plotted to overthrow Marcos and establish a civilian-military junta. The turn of events prevented them to carry out their plan of attacking Malacañang as Marcos had been tipped off about it. This led them to stage a rebellion that did not shed blood for the people on the streets shielded them against Marcos' formidable tanks and armories and the rest is history. No doubt Aquino's presidency rested on a very slim chance should the coup plotters succeeded in their plans of taking over the reins of government.⁷

In the six years of Cory Aquino, her presidency was always on the brink of military takeover. Seven or eight coups had undermined her credibility to run the government in its most crucial period after the nation's plunder by her predecessor. Top military men had aided, in one way or another, these coups. In order to dissect the anatomy of a politicized military, it is necessary to understand the complexity of factors that interplay to produce the necessary conditions for the emergence of military intervention. Therefore, answers to questions like what were the motivations of the plotters to engage in coups, demand attention and elaboration.

Military intervention has been dealt with in a number of scholarly writings. According to Welch, Jr. & Smith, the likelihood of military intervention rises (1) when armed forces shift its attention to domestic rather than foreign policy concerns; (2) when the government in power orders the armed forces to subdue its opponents; and (3) when a differentiation occurs in the armed forces' understanding between service to the nation and service to the government. The other internal factor, the organizational characteristics of the military include cohesion, autonomy, structural differentiation and functional specialization and professionalism. Each of these components affects the probability of a military intervention. The same authors said that the possibility of military intervention increases (1) when armed forces have high internal cohesion; (2) when curtailment of their decision-making occurs; and (3) when external assistance expands its role in the domestic scene. The last factor, political awareness contributes to the likelihood of military intervention. A politically aware military could arrogate unto itself the legitimacy to supplant a corrupt regime. The following conclusions hold true for the general aspects of military intervention. Military intervention (1) is more likely to be initiated by junior officers than senior enlisted men; (2) as part of conspiracies, officers are linked to groups or individuals that oppose the government; and (3) results from specific policy grievances. These internal factors when in tandem with the environmental factors could produce the stimulant for intervention. A government with low levels of legitimacy, accompanied by a failure to reform a deteriorating economy, is highly susceptible to military intervention. Against these postulates, we will formulate certain conclusions in the context of coups d' état during the Aquino administration.⁸

The Nature of Coup d'état

An old joke in Columbia relates an Army officer asking a retiring colleague: 'And what will you do now?' He replied without batting an eyelash, 'Conspire, of course, man!' A joke like this speaks a lot about military men's inclination to engage in coups d' état or any other form of military intervention, not only when they are about to retire but as long as they are in active service with circumstances before them that might provoke them to do it.

Coups d' état against the Aquino regime was one of the many staged coups against governments, legitimate or otherwise, in the Third World since the Second World War. Third World countries had become witnesses to assassinations and conspiracies, of military coups, the institution of military regimes and the erosion of democratic rights. In the Middle East alone, between the years 1945 and 1972, there were a total of eighty-three coups and attempted coups. In Latin America, the fact that it has become such a commonplace for coups, it has become part and way of life, which might perplex outsiders. Yet, Jack Woodis aptly warns that "the clearly established prevalence of military coups and military governments in the Third World, especially in the last thirty years should not lead us into thinking that the direct or indirect political intervention of the military into politics is a phenom-

enon confined to these countries" for outside pressures with ulterior motives may have given rise to these.⁹

Coercive force of the state also lies in the hands of the army.¹⁰ Any threat against the sovereignty of the nation-state demands the exercise of coercion. Standing armies in the world had defended their respective countries against foreign intruders. However, when a particular section of the army wields this power to overthrow its government, then coups d'état enters the picture. What is coups d'état; what is its nature and how it manifests?

Originally, a French word, coup d'état literally means "stroke of state", which refers to the "vigorous action, usually violent and usually military or involving the use of military force, to overthrow a legal government and replace it with a new governing authority."¹¹ Michael Glazer adds that it is "unconstitutional seizure of power of governmental power by a small group that employs tactics of planning and surprise, and often of limited violence" [underscoring supplied].¹² Members of the armed forces, aided or headed by civilian allies, seize political control of a government in power. It is planned, well-coordinated move in an effort to avert any opposition in their motive of supplanting a regime. Both a political and a military action, it is an overt declaration of assuming the legitimacy of power by displacing an allegedly corrupt government. Edward Luttwak, however, was quick to point out that for a coup d'état to be successful; it does not need to be carried out either by the masses like in revolutions or by military forces. He also distinguished it from other types of effecting change of leadership such that it does not hint a kind of political orientation. Luttwak provides a more rational and balanced definition of the term with the following: "A coup consists of the infiltration of a small but critical segment of the state apparatus, which is then used to displace the government from its control of the remainder."¹³

There are indispensable pre-conditions to mount a coup, and after determining its feasibility, coup plotters ponder on the strategy, planning and the execution of it. Strategy considers the direction in which the coup should be carried out, which is two-pronged: the necessity of a maximum speed in executing the plan is directly proportional for the time allocated for the neutralization of would-be enemies before and after the coup. Infiltrating sources of state power by neutralizing opposition is also a part of the strategy. Planning requires the neutralization of political forces outside the government. The execution of the plan "takes place in one short period of time... all...forces must therefore be used in the one decisive engagement."¹⁴

The Pre-Coup Situation. Months after the People Power Revolution, the country faced instability. Some doubted the legitimacy of the Aquino presidency. Marcos loyalists believed that Marcos would definitely return and assume his post again. In the Ilocos and nearby provinces, Marcos has considerable support. This transition period was marked by confusion between the duly constituted government and some local officials in provinces, cities and towns in the countryside. Three years before the collapse of dictatorial regime, the economy was in shambles with inflation rates soaring as

high as 50.3 percent in 1984. Although positive economic changes happened in 1986 and three years afterward, these were minimal improvements from the previous administrations economic slippage and economic reforms were wanting. The political climate, at least politically, was sufficient enough for the coup leaders to embark on politicizing some sections of the armed forces and ride on popular disenchantment on the status quo. The following is a summary of the eight coup attempts.¹⁵

The February 1986 Coup Attempt. Since 1982, Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile had organized the Reform the Armed Forces of the Philippines Movement (RAM) for his personal political agenda. Marcos had been planning to assassinate him. For fear of his life, Enrile began creating his own security group led by Lt. Col. Gregorio Honasan. This group underwent rigid military training in Quezon Province. Marcos eventually knew this, which Enrile denied his involvement. By August 1983, Aquino's assassination triggered the creation of an 11-man Ad Hoc Steering Committee within RAM that asked for the promotion of genuine reforms in the AFP. RAM membership grew and by March 1985, its objectives were known with the formulation of its nine-point "Statement of Common Aspirations." Enrile, however, was beginning to utilize RAM as a political vehicle of preventing Mrs. Marcos & General Fabian Ver, the AFP Chief of Staff, from assuming the presidency should sick Marcos dies. Preparation and planning for the coup were beginning to ripen since September. Then, the call for a snap election derailed their plan to carry out the coup on December. Massive cheating in the snap election hinted them to pursue their plan with consultations with civilian leaders like Cory Aquino about the proposal for a civilian-military junta. Marcos, however, foiled their plans. One of their plans was to capture Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos by crossing the Pasig river with a commando squad. The outpouring of people in EDSA prevented Marcos and his men to launch an attack against the rebels. In the phenomenon called People Power, this side of the story was little known.

The Manila Hotel Incident. On the basis of the alleged unconstitutionality of the February 1986 People Power, Arturo Tolentino was sworn in as the interim President in a ceremony inside Manila Hotel on July 6, 1986. Attended by military men loyal to Marcos, civilian personalities were also present during the ceremony. The Aquino government was caught unaware of this coup plot. Immediately, an ultimatum was set for the surrender of the people involved on July 8. The government's policy of maximum tolerance paved the way for the issuance of amnesty and clemency for them. Tolentino for his part disclaimed any responsibility for it.

God Save the Queen. Juan Ponce Enrile, the Minister of National Defense, has a hand over this plot, which was executed by his RAM boys led by Honasan. Fidel V. Ramos, the AFP Chief of Staff, did not waver in his commitment to the Aquino government although the pressure was so great to defy. Under his command, the AFP as a whole did not allow the rebels to succeed over their plan. The plot was arranged to happen when Pres. Aquino left for Japan on state visit on

November 11, 1986. Leaks about this coup attempt preempted the execution of the plan. Nonetheless, it was moved on the 23rd of November and at this time, supported by Marcos loyalists. There was a plan to seize the *Batasang Pambansa* building in Quezon City and establish the said parliament, elect a President, nullify the snap election for Aquino to step down and call for another election. On November 22, a day before the execution of the plan, Ramos declared that all government forces were on red alert. On the 23rd, the plan was foiled. After the incident, Enrile was sacked as Defense Minister.

January 1987 GMA 7 Incident. Another coup attempt that involved Honasan and RAM and the Marcos loyalists, the rebels attacked GMA 7, hostaging 43 employees of the said broadcast network, Villamor Airbase, Sangley Point in Cavite and Fort Bonifacio. After negotiations between the government and the PMA officers, which the latter accused the former of softening its position over communism and communist insurgency, the rebels decided to lay down their arms, surrender and return to barracks in the third day of their siege while the ringleaders were arrested. To avert a similar coup crisis, Pres. Aquino created the Cabinet Crisis Committee headed by the National Security Director, Dr. Soriano. Likewise, another unit, National Capital Region Defense Command, was formed tasked to maintain security around Metro Manila.

April 1987 'Black Saturday' Incident. Situation in the country favored the rebels led by a certain Col. Cabauatan to justify their coup. They denounced the government's ineptitude, as shown by the intermittent electric power outage, the rising cost of petroleum products, the water crisis, breakdown in peace and order and other woes that plagued the country during that period. On this day, April 18, two bombs exploded, one after another, at the Colgate-Palmolive in Makati and at Philippine Refining Company. No one was injured but investigators linked this to the coup attempt only as a diversionary tactic. The rebels attacked Fort Bonifacio releasing detained soldiers who participated in the January 1987 coup attempt but out of the 108 men, only 48 joined them. They proceeded to the office of the Army Chief of Staff and made it their headquarters. The next day, government troops began firing at the rebels and security measures were made to prevent the rebels from calling for reinforcements. By noon, after negotiations by phone, only 45 rebels surrendered out of the 56 mutineers because ten escaped and one died. Cabauatan was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment while 41 non-commissioned officers were acquitted.

July 1987 MIA Takeover Plot. Before this plot called 'Oplan Inang Bayan' could be carried out, it was nipped in the bud. The plan was to hostage foreigners at the Manila International Airport (MIA) and takes control of it and destroys air forces defense at the Villamor Air Base. The plot was linked to Enrile. The plan was foiled at the very start and surprisingly no one was arrested.

August 1987 Coup Attempt. A month after the aborted coup, another coup attempt was to be launched on August 28. Preparations were under way since July when reports

showed Col. Honasan and a certain CPO Raquion were seen frequently at Signal Village in Fort Bonifacio and on late July, a massive recruitment of police and military men by RAM was monitored in Nueva Ecija for insurgency operations as their pretext. Col. Honasan again was implicated in this that was identical to the 'God Save the Queen' plot. On August 28, the rebels attacked and tried to occupy Malacañang, Camp Aguinaldo, PTV-4, Camelot Hotel, Broadcast City, Villamor Air Base, RECOM 3 at Camp Olivas in Pampanga, RECOM 7 - Cebu and Legaspi City Airport. Of these eight areas, the rebels occupied all for a time except Malacañang. It lasted for only a day and a half but its aftermath revealed the gravity it caused to the parties involved accidentally. Damage to properties amounted to more than P 50 million. For example, the burning of the General Headquarters building of the AFP costs over P 41 million. Fifty-three people were dead while more than 200 were wounded. Majority of these were unarmed civilians.

December 1989 Coup Attempt. Although the government was serious enough in addressing the grievances of the soldiers after the August 1987 coup, for instance, Congress passed a bill for across-the-board wage increase for AFP personnel, disgruntled soldiers under the leadership of Honasan were unappeased by such amends. The rebels on December 1 bombed Sangley Point and subsequently attacked Manila by noon. Because of the seriousness of the situation, Pres. Aquino was forced to ask for the help of the United States. The US sent Phantom F-4 fighters. The rebels were compelled to surrender after the third day of the encounter.

To sum up, these eight coup attempts underscored the increased politicization of the military that was sown during Martial Law. Certain personalities and interest groups emerge as crucial and pivotal in the emergence and execution of these coup plots. Juan Ponce Enrile is one. The other is Gregorio Honasan. What binds the two is the organization called Reform the Armed Forces of the Philippines Movement (RAM). At first, the motivation of the people behind RAM was to reform the AFP because of the latter's perceived inefficiency and corruption and lost ascendancy due to its excesses during Martial law. It turned out only to be the staging point of people like Enrile to aspire for and acquire power through military intervention. It was the same group that led Honasan to lead at least five of these coups in an attempt to grab power and replace Aquino's government with a military junta. Besides RAM, Marcos loyalists were also instigators of some of these coup plots. The common denominator between this group and RAM is their quest for political power that either was lost during the overthrow of the dictator or was overtaken by events like EDSA People Power Revolution that spoiled their February 1986 coup plot. Partly, it is legitimate to put the blame on the government because of its failure to dismantle organizations within AFP like RAM and others that erode the cohesion of the military as a whole. The laxity that it showed to the rebels only displayed the apparent weakness and lack of political will of the Aquino administration. Only in this kind of approach will engender again in the minds of veteran coup plotters that

when opportunities should arise, no other recourse but to strike!

From Ramos to Arroyo: The State of the Philippine Military

Fidel V. Ramos, who became the Defense Secretary of Aquino, was a military man. His track record shows his integrity for constitutionalism as he steadfastly supported his beleaguered commander-in-chief during the crucial period of coup attempts against the government. During his presidency from 1992-1998, he endorsed and promoted constitutionalism among AFP personnel. The emphasis on civilian supremacy over military was given due consideration in the military's effort to cleanse its image from the previous perception as the den of power-hungry military officers. Therefore during the Ramos administration, there were initiatives to remedy civilians' alienation towards the military establishment.¹⁶

One of the setbacks in the process of insulating the military from politics was Ramos' inclination of designating retired military officer to government offices. Although these people were retired military men, after retirement, they were still identified as belonging to the military establishment. Appointing retired military men to government offices is a minus rather than a plus in the effort to shy away the military from politics. Still, another setback was the emphasis on the role of the AFP in national development projects. The participation of military men in policy-making only contributed to the increase in their political participation in government. Furthermore, Ramos began accommodating some people to the AFP by offering a general amnesty program. Those involved in the coup d'état got the chance to be enlisted men again with accompanying benefits like back wages or promotion.¹⁷

On top of these, Ramos was credited for pursuing the AFP Modernization program that was sidelined during his predecessor's term. The program aims to professionalize the AFP by modernizing its facilities, naval, air force, marines and army.

The Estrada administration's handling of the military was hinted as the beginning of civilian control over the military when Orlando Mercado was appointed as the Secretary of National Defense. On the course of Mercado's term, a disagreement appeared between him and the AFP over his management style. Some sections of the AFP did not appreciate his approach on the issue of mismanaged funds of the AFP Retirement and Separation Benefits System (RSBS) by his taking it to the media instead of approaching it internally within the AFP. They misunderstood him because they did not consider his background as a media man. Mr. Estrada was chided for being so cold to the military especially when he, as the Commander-in-chief of the AFP, should have attended the centenary celebrations of the Philippine Military Academy in 1999, instead of attending the wedding of a former sexy star. A year before this, Estrada was given a cold-shoulder treatment from the military when he decided to suspend the buying of weapons for AFP's modernization program because of

the Southeast Asian financial crisis that also affected the economy.¹⁸

In 1999, after more than a year of cold relationship with the military, Estrada gained a considerable military backing when he allowed the purchase of weapons under the modernization program and allocated some Php 5.4 billion for this alone. His military policy of an all-out-war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the subsequent year, which the AFP had successfully waged war against the secessionist rebels and even retook MILF camps especially Camp Abubakar, MILF's main camp, made a big boost of support for him coming from the military. Estrada also ordered military operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) after the ASG took and hostages 21 people from a resort in Sipadan Island in Malaysia. The rescue of some hostages was carried through military operations while others were freed after the ransom was paid. AFP's role during these operations was highlighted in both print and broadcast media but still it was marred by the alleged collusion between the military and ASG.

The honeymoon phase of Estrada with the military was over when the AFP withdrew its support with the influx of people in EDSA known as People Power II demanding the resignation of their Commander-in-Chief after 11 Senator-jurors during the Impeachment trial refused to open the second envelope that purportedly contain evidences in support of four charges against the President - bribery, graft and corruption, betrayal of public trust and culpable violation of the constitution. AFP's role on this drew mixed reactions. Some pointed out that this might lead to a presidency that will and cannot rely anymore on the military. Others were skeptical that this indicates "that a president's hold on the presidency is now dependent on the support of military, something which the military may exploit and take advantage of."¹⁹ In other words, AFP's role is a critical factor in the making and unmaking of a president, a critical factor that led to the assumption into office of Vice-Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as the 14th Philippine President.

Fresh mandate from the people after the EDSA II gave credence to AFP's new look as the protector of the people and defender of the constitution. The Arroyo administration took advantage of people's support to strengthen its hold over the presidency. Arroyo's legitimacy to the presidency was seriously questioned by Estrada's camp in the Supreme Court (SC). Although the SC affirmed its decision of vesting legality over Arroyo's assumption into office on January 20 by declaring that there existed a vacuum of power during those crucial moments in EDSA, still Arroyo's ascendancy into power was still very precarious and uncertain. By renewing and reinvigorating its ties with the military, the Arroyo government was not keen on letting any chances pass and wait for day of reckoning when opportunistic groups would take advantage of a very volatile situation. Arroyo tried to court the military's support by visiting military camps, supported AFP's effort for modernization although allegations of anomalous purchase of military equipment were rife, and appointed outgoing AFP Chief of Staff Gen.

Angelo Reyes as head of the Department of National Defense (DND) amidst the bitter infighting among high ranking military officers in the AFP. When the *Sandiganbayan* ordered the arrest of Estrada in late April 2001, Erap loyalists marched into EDSA and called for the military's intervention by withdrawing its support from the Arroyo administration. Pres. Arroyo declared that a state of rebellion exists in the country against persons who were participants and instigators of a destabilization plot against the government. AFP did not relent its position as it stood beside its Commander-in Chief. Yet, three days after she took office, coup rumors were being peddled around in mass media.

Arroyo on Shaky Ground: Destabilization Attempts before July 2002

Arroyo's presidency stood on very shaky ground. When the military withdrew its support from Estrada, it could only mean two things. One, which the military has found its justification in the removal of Estrada by invoking the people's will as shown in EDSA. Secondly is the accusation of the Estrada camp that what happened was really a coup d'état in support of Arroyo. This reason alone point to the fact that Arroyo's hold over the presidency is tenuous and portents of what is to come after her inauguration were already in the air. Corollary to this, the loyalty of the military to the presidency is being tested anew.

After three days of assuming the presidency, President Arroyo woke up to find out that a coup plot graced the headlines of newspapers. According to the headline report, allies of Estrada were plotting a move to put the deposed president back in Malacañang. Senators Juan Ponce Enrile and Gregorio Honasan and former Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Director General Panfilo Lacson were identified to be the instigators of the plot. Movements of at least five army companies with allegiance to Enrile and Honasan from Cagayan Valley with intentions of heading for Manila were monitored only to be thwarted in Nueva Ecija by loyal government troops. Honasan denied his involvement in it but admitted meeting with Lacson. He supposedly talked to Lacson to discuss ways in how to strengthen military and police support for the new administration. However, *Akbayan* Party-list Representative Loretta Ann Rosales warned the authorities about Estrada's strong political clout in his efforts to regain his position by consolidating his political and military supporters. Besides, Enrile, Honasan and Lacson, names of Speaker Arnulfo Fuentesbella, Cagayan Representative Rodolfo Aguinaldo and businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco were implicated in the plot in varying degrees. Cojuangco was pointed out as the one funding this destabilization attempt. Defense Secretary Orlando Mercado issued a denial about the veracity of the coup plot. AFP spokesman Brig. Gen. Generoso Senga declared as untrue that army companies were moving toward Metro Manila.²⁰

Although the military establishment denied the existence of such reports, President Arroyo, on the 11th day of her office, went on national television and delivered a serious and unerring warning addressed to the "enemies of the

state" referring to persons attempting to destabilize the government. She said unequivocally "to the destabilizers", "... I am not a happy warrior, but if forced, I have sworn duty to protect and defend the Constitution above everything else. I shall crush you." The editorial of a national newspaper commented unsparingly that "unless the President has superior intelligence information not available to the public, her statement sounds like a case of nervousness or overreaction." Towards the end of the same, it says that "there's no need to be jittery over exaggerated coup rumors", which sooner or years later, it was to be proven guiltily wrong.²¹ In a gesture of support, the AFP through their Chief of Staff Gen. Angelo Reyes assured President Arroyo that the military is strongly behind her administration. Reyes, however, confirmed that there were, according to his own words "very, very raw reports" on destabilization activities.²²

No other person would be very critical in the launching of any destabilization attempts than the ousted President and his loyalists. His assurance that they "will not commit acts of destabilization or any other acts that are outside of what the constitution allows..." could be trusted for the time being but Senate President Aquilino Pimentel believed that there is "the possibility that mobilization can be mounted for other purposes like destabilizing the government." He added that "this may not necessarily come only from President Estrada. Some of his supporters can very well do that."²³ Three months after, his assessment of events came true when a five-day demonstration of some 50 000 Erap loyalists that started on the day of Estrada's arrest on plunder charges, culminated on May 1 as they laid siege to Malacañang. The Palace declared a state of rebellion. After the incident, four people were dead, others were wounded and hundreds were arrested, which includes Senator Juan Ponce Enrile and former Ambassador Ernesto Maceda. Enrile, three months before, was caught saying, "I don't think that is going to happen" referring to rumors of destabilization but it turned out that he was part of one. Yet, Enrile has been released on bail and government considered the dropping of rebellion charges on some of those arrested purportedly in the "spirit of reconciliation."

In an investigation that followed after the "May 1 Rebellion", the PNP intelligence report disclosed the involvement of businessmen associated with the deposed President and former PNP chief Panfilo Lacson. Mark Jimenez and some Chinese-Filipino businessmen were tagged as the financiers of the said power grab attempt. An estimate of more than Php 1 billion supposedly "dirty money" was contributed for with the end of staging the rebellion. Lacson, Senator Gregorio Honasan and Army Brig. Gen. Marcelino Malajacan were named as persons behind the effort to include a military role in the power grab plot. Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Dionisio Santiago, commander of the anti-coup Task Force Libra, gave credence to the hearsays that huge sums of money were being offered to some military officers for them to join the move against the government.

Amidst these destabilization reports, on the night of June 21, President Arroyo reassured the Filipino people on a brief

taped message aired over PTV-4 that "the government is in full control" such that "no destabilization plot will succeed."²⁴ The following day, she revealed that there was another attempt to topple her administration. The plotters, she said explicitly, were to stage it on June 26 and 27 in time for the arraignment of Estrada. Again, the loyalty of the AFP and PNP officers were being checked to at least thwart the motives of the plotters in soliciting military backing on their bid to overthrow Arroyo.

In the wake of Senate investigations on the alleged involvement of Senator-elect Panfilo Lacson in money laundering, kidnapping for ransom and illegal drugs trafficking, Col. Victor Corpus, chief of the Intelligence Services of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) testified before the Senate Committee on Public Order and Security that there were intelligence reports regarding a military plot to takeover the government. During the Senate inquiry, Senator John Osmeña said that this plot gives the impression that "the people [has] no alternative but to accept a coup and the installation of a military dictator." He alluded to Renato de Villa, former Defense Secretary as the one being groomed to be the dictator. Even Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes was implicated in the attempt to overthrow Mrs. Arroyo, which he denied this before the said committee.²⁵ On a similar tone, Senator Lacson confirmed reports on a coup plot to overthrow GMA by leftists and other groups. He also said that preparations for the coup are under way with the objective of enticing the military to launch a coup. On the other hand, Senator Gregorio Honasan admonished anonymous groups to abandon their plan to topple the government and replace it with a civilian-military junta. He also urged the AFP and PNP officers to shy away from politics in order for them "not...to be used by some groups out to grab power once again."²⁶ Now, they are really talking.

Amidst these confirmations coming from government intelligence circles and outside sources, AFP Chief Gen. Diomedio Villanueva "brushed aside" reports that restless military officers were behind the move against GMA (Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) although he expressed his assurance that "the AFP will remain vigilant against those kinds of threats." Even President Arroyo tried to hide her fears by calling her visits to military camps and offices as only "social calls."²⁷ Yet, these visits only confirmed that GMA was making sure that the military is on her side.

Coming from a summit abroad, GMA arrived at 2 a.m. on October 22 only to be back to confront rumors about a destabilization plot. In a closed-door meeting with Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, GMA learned about the plot called "Black October", which involves key players in EDSA II with a plan to set up a civilian-military junta. Two days after this meeting, National Security Adviser Roilo Golez confirmed the existence of a destabilization plot but it was not clear from the report if he was referring to the "Black October" plot. Golez revealed the name of one besides other groups as the "Urban Poor Liberation Front" and described it as the "paramilitary wing" of the People's Movement Against Poverty (PMAP), an

organization led by a known Erap loyalist, Ronald Lumbao. He further elaborated that this group has been training for the past two months under the supervision of an army colonel, whom he refused to identify. Nonetheless, he said that authorities had talked to the colonel to desist from what he has been doing or face sanctions. About the group, he belittled its capability since it is “just a fledgling group” “that could not muster a hundred members.” Regarding the “Black October” destabilization attempt, the opposition claimed that former President Fidel Ramos and former National Security adviser Jose Almonte, which the former denies vehemently, have hands in this plot saying the two were contriving a crisis situation to force the Supreme Court to affirm the constitutionality of the plunder law as Estrada faces his charges before the Sandiganbayan. Earlier than this, the opposition even accused the government of hatching these destabilization plots to divert public’s attention to the allegations of corruption against the First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo with regards to his alleged Jose Pidal accounts.²⁸

In two unrelated cases reported on the month of January, two separate angles on alleged destabilization plots were revealed. The first angle involved Sen. Panfilo Lacson. Col. Victor Corpuz, chief of the Intelligence Service of the AFP (ISAFP), said that close associates of Lacson in the former Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force (PAOCTF) were suspected of plotting a destabilization attempt against the government. Corpuz specifically named Lt. Senior Grade Donn Anthony Mirafior, head of the defunct Special Reaction Unit as one of those plotting “destabilization efforts using C4 and TNT explosive devices.” For his refusal to turn over C4 and TNT explosives and other paraphernalias to Special Warfare Group (SWAG) Commander Rosauro Sarmiento, Mirafior allegedly ordered Petty Officer I Ruben Sotto to keep them. Mirafior also acquired explosives more than twice he originally procured from the Philippine Navy. On this basis alone, Corpuz intimated about Mirafior’s motives other than to destabilize the government but still pending to investigation. The other angle came out when former Lt. Baron Alexander Cervantes, self-appointed spokesman of Young Officers Union (YOU) was shot and killed on New Year’s eve. Boy Saycon, president of the Council for Philippine Affairs (Copa) did not discount the fact that YOU has motives for killing Cervantes because the latter earned the anger of some YOU members when he disclosed on radio that some members of YOU and *Rebolusyunaryong Alyansang Makabayan* (RAM) had a secret meeting in Puerto Azul, Cavite for plans to stage a coup codenamed “Oplan Noche Buena.” YOU’s name, however, was once associated with destabilization attempts against GMA when its president, Supt. Rafael Cardeño was invited by the police in his alleged link to coup rumors. Retired Brig. Gen. Edgardo Abenina, head of the RAM, was also implicated in the killing of Cervantes. Yet, instead of facing squarely the issue that his group was involved in a coup plot against GMA, Abenina put the blame on former President Ramos. Ramos, he said, and his group were hatching a coup plot against the President. FVR’s response was predictable. He denied he has

anything to do with the plot arguing that he won’t let himself into a fix that would destroy his legacy as former president of the Philippines. The following day, Abenina disowned what he has supposedly said about his accusations against Ramos.²⁹

As January 20 was fast approaching to mark the first year of GMA’s presidency, the PNP assured the public that coup rumors were nothing but psychological warfare concocted to create panic in people’s minds such that there was nothing to worry about. Yet, it also disclosed another group “Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino” as having an alliance with a faction of the YOU headed by Senior Supt. Diosdado Valeroso. In its statement, it urges among its members “an uprising of the masses in fusion with a mutiny of soldiers” with the aim of establishing “a government of the poor.” On the other hand, some quarters in the political scene called for a snap presidential election to stop coup rumors once Arroyo won and questions regarding her legitimacy will die down. The government refused to accede to this clamor because besides being unconstitutional, it was also a political ploy on the part of the opposition to let the government eat its own word when its legitimacy was already affirmed by the highest court of the land. GMA also expressed her confidence in her government that any planned mass demonstration on the 20th would not entail tight security measures to foil any coup attempts on this day.³⁰

Government efforts to foil any attempt of coup and destabilization drives seemed successful but some political groups and individuals, in their private capacities, raised doubts about its validity and fostered apprehension to the public. Retired Commodore Domingo Calajate, chairman of the executive committee of the RAM, dismissed the allegations that his group had something to do with a coup plot and even took the challenge of thwarting one. His move at least calmed the already tense political climate. This was coupled with the announcement of GMA that destabilizers have been thwarted in their move to sow anxiety and announced that the government is ready in any eventuality should Erap loyalists be mobilized in an effort to show support for Estrada since the latter dismissed his lawyers, which brought stalemate in court proceedings. Yet, here comes Retired Maj. Gen. Ramon Montaña, former chief of the defunct Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National Police (PC-INP) accusing the government of concocting coup plots, which were, according to him, “product of imagination” of the intelligence community. Here comes another in the person of Linda Montayre, one of the convenors of the People’s Consultative Assembly (PCA) singling out GMA’s top officials as planning to stage a “house coup” with the participation of Boy Saycon of the Council on Philippine Affairs (Copa) in an attempt to replace GMA with a civilian-military junta. All these accusations, although some may have a hairbreadth of evidence, only demonstrated the fragility of the current administration and also showed its apparent weakness in dealing with matters that affect national security.³¹

What has caught the public’s attention from May to July was the filing of charges against top military officials who

allegedly staged a coup d'état against deposed President Estrada. Defense Secretary Angelo T. Reyes, AFP chief of staff Gen. Diomedio P. Villanueva, and two retired generals were charged with coup d'état in a case filed before the Office of the Ombudsman. Although the case hypothetically has substantial evidence against the respondents in support of Article 134-A of the Revised Penal Code or Republic Act 6968, a decision favorable to the complainants will prejudice the legitimacy of the present administration and hence, begs the reversal of the Supreme Court's decision in upholding the constitutionality of Arroyo's presidency. Acting Press Secretary Silvestre Afable also has this in mind when he said that "it would be very difficult for this case to prosper because to give validity to (the complainants') arguments would in effect (to reverse) the legitimacy of the entire administration." Then, on July 4, the Office of the Ombudsman dismissed the coup d'état case against Reyes et. al citing three reasons with one reason stating that "the act of Reyes and his group should not be separated from the legitimacy of EDSA II because the event had already been declared legitimate by the Supreme Court."³²

From the moment Arroyo assumed the presidency, her ascendancy to power was subject to questions of legitimacy that escalated into destabilization moves and even coup plots to overthrow her administration. Feisty at first, such that she minced no words when she said that the government shall, her word, 'crush' 'the enemies of the state' but still coup rumors swirled around in media, which led her unpredictable temper to accuse the media of fanning the fire of destabilization attempts. Instead of forging alliance with the media towards government's effort to thwart any coup plots, GMA alienated herself from the media that stood as the fourth estate, a strong pillar in any democracy. This presidential lapse, the failure of her government to implement genuine reforms when it could have done something for the betterment of Filipino society as a legacy for EDSA II and the illusion of a total military support for her regime created the fertile conditions for a plot to be hatched in July that eventually gave birth to a mutiny in the same month the following year.

Conclusion

The legacy of military interventionism in Philippine politics will always haunt the government as long as its leaders lacked the political will of penalizing people involved in any coup plot. For sure, Marcos had been very crucial in the politicization of the military and it was a good move on the part of the framers of the 1987 Constitution to take note of this but its politicization in order to be mitigated does not end in dead letters. The Aquino government has failed to crack down organizations within the AFP that endangers the cohesion it needs. This failure encouraged organizations like RAM and YOU to foment and stage coup d'état against the government. Although Aquino insisted that they surrender unconditionally and demanded her generals to capture and arrest them, negotiations and in the end, compromises were made not long after the rebel organization collapsed as one

rebel leader after another was arrested. Soon after with the election of Ramos to the presidency, the National Unification Commission (NUC) granted "absolute and unconditional" amnesty to all RAM rebels. Instead of being punished as the instigators of the coup d'états that wreaked the economy and going back to the time of martial law, they were the right-hand men of the dictator, they were easily integrated into Philippine society, some were even elected to top positions in government.

During the time of Aquino up until Ramos, the expose and the redress over the excesses of the military in the affairs of the state were never considered to be a part of the reconciliation process. Reconciliation was looked upon as letting go of the past afraid to confront the horrific crimes committed against the Filipino people. Thus, the collective memory of a people falters as historical memory becomes distorted, perverted and subverted because a national catharsis has been postponed and then forgotten but it unconsciously remained.

Again, the phantoms of the past kept on resurrecting the fears of the present. Estrada, although accusations against his administration were legitimate, had been a victim of a military intervention in politics that helped his Vice-President to power. Without a critical support from the military, the protests in EDSA could not have led to what is now called as People Power II. Arroyo, therefore, benefited from the switch of allegiance from the top officials of the AFP. Months after her assumption into office, Estrada loyalists attacked Malacañang forcing her to decree a "state of rebellion" and arrest some familiar personalities like now Senators Honasan and Enrile, the two were involved in coup d'états against Aquino. Enrile who was arrested, posted bail and later released in "the spirit of reconciliation." These same people were said to be the instigators of a plot only three days after Arroyo took over. If one adds these two to the list, there were at least five coup plots from the moment she took power until July 2002. Of these five plots, four had military and police involvement either to lend legitimacy or as a method of tactical alliance with other interest groups. The May 1 Rebellion involved an Army brigadier general and retired officers of the AFP while the Black October plot, a colonel whom they refused to identify oversees the training of the paramilitary wing of the PMAP, the Urban Poor Liberation Front. Names of the RAM and YOU resurfaced for they were tagged as part of the destabilization attempts against Arroyo government. This was not surprising for Honasan and Enrile who were founders of the RAM and once RAM had tactical alliance with YOU during Aquino's turbulent regime.

The involvement of the military in Philippine politics will always be there as long as the government is not serious in confronting some of its men, guilty of numerous crimes against the people. Now that the military establishment has learned how it can make or unmake a presidency, it will in the near future arrogate unto itself the taking of power and the likelihood of a military takeover is not farfetched.

ENDNOTES

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3. Welch, Jr. & Smith, *Military Role and Rule*, 3-4.
4. Republic of the Philippines, *The Final Report of the Fact-Finding Commission (Pursuant to R.A. No. 6832)*(Manila: Bookmark, October 1990), 33; Felipe B. Miranda, "The Politicization of the Military," *Discussion Paper presented at the UP-CIDS' Seminar on Military Politicization*, 4 May 1990: 9, 10.
5. Miranda, "The Politicization of the Military," 8, 12-14.
6. Felipe B. Miranda & Ruben F. Ciron, "Development and the Military in the Philippines: Military Perceptions in a Time of Continuing Crisis," in *Soldiers and Stability in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988), 168-171.
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8. Welch, Jr. & Smith, *Military Role and Rule*, 10-12, 13-20, 21-24.
9. Jack Woddis, *Armies and Politics*, (NY: International Publishers, 1978), 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 17.
11. *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, 1999 ed., s.v. "coup d'etat"; *Dictionary of Military Terms: A Guide to the Language of Warfare & Military Institutions* (1986), s.v. "coup d'etat."
12. Michael Glazer, "Coup d'etat," in *Encyclopedia Americana* (2002).
13. Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 27.
14. *Ibid.*, 146.
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16. Raymund Jose G. Quilop, "Waltzing with the Military: From Marcos to Arroyo," *Kasarinlan* 16 (2) 2001: 95.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
19. *Ibid.*, 98.
20. *Philippine Star*, 23 January 2001.
21. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 1 February 2001.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Philippine Star*, 22 June 2001.
25. *Philippine Star*, 18 August 2001.
26. *Philippine Star*, 4 September 2001.
27. *Philippine Star*, 6 September 2001.

28. Isabelo T. Crisostomo, *The Power and the Glory*, (Quezon City: J. Kriz Publishing, 2002), 290; *Philippine Star*, 25 October 2001; *Philippine Star*, 26 October 2001.
29. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 2 January 2002; *Philippine Star*, 26 October 2001; *Philippine Star*, 5 January 2002; *Philippine Star*, 6 January 2002.
30. *Philippine Star*, 7 January 2002; *Philippine Star*, 8 January 2002; *Philippine Star*, 10 January 2002.
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