

# Leadership and Political Stabilization in a Post-Aquino Philippines

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## Abstract

*This paper inquires into the nature of political stability as a basic challenge to Philippine political authorities. Its main thesis is the centrality of political leadership in addressing this concern. The political leadership succeeds in initiating and sustaining political stability to the extent that it is able to engage other groups in coalition work, to strengthen the state and its political institutions, and to effect basic political reforms which increase the overall capacity of government for governance.*

*The main analytical frame employed in this study calls for understanding the presence of a weak state in a society where strong, well-organized social forces operate to penetrate the state and expropriate its governmental and other political institutions for vested-interest use. The political leadership, operationalized as being mainly the President and his administration, must contain the aggressiveness of these largely oligarchic groups, and harness all available resources towards the modernization and democratization of the state.*

*The paper has three main parts. The first looks briefly into the analytically separate concepts of stability and leadership and their mutual relationship as discussed in the professional literature. The second part explores the specific Philippine context within which these two political concepts and their operational realities must be further understood. The last part explicitly considers the most urgent tasks of the present administration as it attempts to politically stabilize the Philippines and build a modern democratic state.*

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## 1.0 Introduction

Political stability continues to elude the Philippines. Politically and economically, crisis conditions persist. The popular expectations generated by President Aquino's rise to power in 1986 have not been met and now pass on to the incoming administration. Filipinos nationwide struggle to retain their optimistic outlook and, even as they appreciate the role President Aquino has played in the last six years, a change in administration has been much anticipated and widely perceived to be beneficial to the country (Social Weather Stations' [henceforth, SWS] National Survey, April 1992).

Political leadership in the Philippines is the pivotal variable of political stabilization. Strong and effective leadership can bring about high-level government performance and thereby pave the way for national stability. Poor leadership, on the other hand, exacerbates the country's multiple crises and aborts the experiment in Philippine democratization.

The vital role of the current leadership, in particular the administration of President Fidel Ramos, is obvious. Even as the formal institutions of democracy are now in place, their ability to dynamically function has not inspired much confidence among Filipinos. Problems of public order and safety and hindrances to popular empowerment and socio-economic development continue to undermine the legitimacy of the present political system. The Ramos administration has to take the initiative even as it involves the other political institutions in the political governance of the country, a challenge which the Aquino administration apparently did not quite understand and therefore could not really confront. To succeed in this undertaking, President Ramos would have to develop a coalition of political forces among various interest groups, and facilitate political institution-building in the form of political parties, non-governmental organizations and other structures through which popular empowerment could be operationalized.

Failure in political governance towards stabilization and sustainable development would open possibilities for a drastic regime change in the Philippines. Civilian regimes with highly visible military involvement (as in the case of Peru under Fujimori or the Philippines under Marcos) or outright military regimes (as in the case of Indonesia and, until very recently, Thailand) could be alternative scenarios among possible Philippine futures. It is remarkable that President

Aquino's six-year administration has not been able to rule out these political scenarios for Filipinos even within the short term. It remains for President Ramos and his administration to be successful where others have failed. His success will even be more remarkable than Aquino's failure.

## **2.0 Political Stability and Leadership**

Political systems are endlessly subject to stresses and shocks which originate both internally and externally. Its ability to weather these shocks, accommodate conflict and adapt to changes is the measure of a system's stability. Political stability exists when the development of political institutions manages to keep pace with rapid socio-economic change and the mobilization of new groups into the political system. (Huntington 1968:4) Transformations in the quality of life of citizens bring with it new expectations which lead to a broadening of political participation. Instability results from the inability of political institutions to develop in response to, if not ahead of, evolving societal demands.

Political stability has many dimensions and three of them have attracted scholarly attention: legitimacy, durability, and the management of conflict. (Roth and Wilson, 1980:446) A stable political system is one where institutions and leaders are perceived as legitimate by the citizenry. Legitimacy is conferred when there is widespread acceptance and approval of the manner by which political power is exercised by government institutions and personnel. This acceptance, however, is the function of societal political norms—such as historical traditions, cultural identification, contemporary values and ideology, effective government performance, and occasionally, even charismatic leadership—which over time substantially define the basis of regime legitimacy (Wurfel, 1988:37).

Regime durability is the second element of stability. The continued persistence of a political system tends to build support for itself, thereby ensuring the continued existence of the system. This is particularly true in the case of democratic polities (Lipset, 1963:29). Consistent success in dealing with crises builds public confidence, and allows political leaders to improve their skills and develop institutions with the flexibility to respond to future crises.

The third element of stability is the management of conflict. All political systems are faced with conflicts of various kinds and intensity stemming from competition among the different sectors and groups in society. (Roth and Wilson, 1988:446) Stability results not from the eradication of conflict in society (which is impossible), but rather, from the keeping of conflict within manageable levels. The definition of "manageable levels" of conflict, however, depends on many variables—the prevalent political culture, historical antecedents, or even the state of stability itself of a given country—and varies from one system to another.

In all these, political leadership is the central variable which underpins political stability. Its consistent and effective performance enhances the legitimacy of the government as well as the regime, and increases the probability of regime durability. The political leadership is at the crossroads of all national conflicts. Strong and effective leadership can organize groups and institutions towards an acceptable consensus, thereby assuring stability and keeping conflicts within manageable limits (Waterbury, 1989:46-55). Conversely, poor leadership can lead to chronic instability by being timorous and leaving problems unresolved or aggravating political differences and outright conflicts among various political groups (Boeninger, 1991:275).

Leadership has been defined as the process of "inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations — the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations — of both leaders and followers (Burns, 1978:8-9)." Various studies on leadership have brought about the conceptualization of a number of typologies which categorize leadership styles and forms, largely corresponding to the kind of society it operates in (Smith and Peterson, 1989; Higley and Burton, 1989). Within the context of developing societies, however, there is an increasing trend towards what has been called "transactional" as opposed to "transformational" leadership. The transactional political leader motivates followers by providing palpable rewards for services rendered. The transformational political leader inspires followers by working for structural reforms and, at times, even revolutionary changes (Burns, 1978:3ff). A Southeast Asian analyst noted that leadership acts in the region have increasingly tended towards "transactions, bargaining or exchange relationships between individuals, groups and larger collectivities", which depend to a large extent on the "availability of [an] exchange of values (Chee, 1991:5)." The increasing trend towards power-sharing between the

traditional elites and major sectoral groups reinforces stability by increasing the number of significant stakeholders in society.

### ***2.1 Stability and Leadership in the Philippines***

For much of the past twenty years, stability has been an elusive goal for the Philippines. The country has experienced social conflicts which the political system itself has not been able to manage well. The most evident of these is the prevalence of armed opposition to the state, the most persistent among which is the revolutionary armed struggle being waged by the National Democratic Front and spearheaded by the CPP-NPA. The secessionist movement in Mindanao and the lingering threat of a coup d'etat led by the RAM-KSP-YOU also continue to present a threat to the country's stability.

The prevalence of popular unrest like strikes and demonstrations is another indicator of political instability. Quite a bit of this unrest is a reflection of failed public expectations and has dangerous implications where sustained inequities of material wealth and political opportunities have persisted for quite a while, as has been the case in the Philippines. Much of the more active manifestations of popular unrest could be traced to the workings of increasingly politically articulate and organized interests in Philippine society. There is, therefore, much that could be viewed as progressive and democratic in the political stresses posed by these groups. Nevertheless, even as active, independent organizations might serve popular empowerment and pluralistic democracy, their very independence enables them to impact negatively on the stability of the political system (Dahl, 1982:32). Without being necessarily subversive of the political system, labor unions, transport groups, sectoral organizations and other associated interests have at various times in the last six years contributed to a general perception of Philippine politics as an exercise in anarchy. In times of suddenly expanded "democratic" space, a national leadership reneges on one of its primary functions if it is unable or unwilling to politically manage the activism of proliferated interest groups.

The manner and frequency of change of the constitutional framework is another factor indicative of the persistence of instability in the Philippines. Since 1972, the Philippines has had three constitutions. The significance of this fact is made even starker by a comparison of the "sovereign-spatial age" (the period when a nation-state is generally acknowledged to have jurisdiction over a defined

area) and "constitutional age" (the number of years that the present constitution of a nation-state has been in effect) of the Philippines with that of other ASEAN states (Emerson, 1986:150). Such a comparison (See Table 1) shows that the Philippines' second-ranked position in "sovereign-spatial age" does not stand well with its "constitutional age" ranking. It may have been the first ASEAN state to gain political independence, but it still has the most recently promulgated constitutions. The development and adoption of an appropriate constitution is important to the achievement of stability, particularly within a democratic context. Frequent changes in the constitutional framework, however, prejudice the chance for institutional durability and hinder the natural development of popular support.

Table 1. The Constitutional and Sovereign-spatial Ages of the ASEAN states

| State       | Year of <i>de jure</i> independence | Rank | Year present constitution was promulgated | Rank |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|------|---|------|
| Thailand    | 1782                                | 1    | 1991                                      | 6    |
| Philippines | 1946                                | 2    | 1987                                      | 5    |
| Indonesia   | 1950                                | 3    | 1959                                      | 2    |
| Malaysia    | 1957                                | 4    | 1957                                      | 1    |
| Singapore   | 1965                                | 5    | 1965                                      | 3    |
| Brunei      | 1984                                | 6    | 1984                                      | 4    |

Adapted from Donald K. Emerson, "Rediscovering the State: Political Institutionalization in Southeast Asia," in Robert Scalapino, et al., eds. *Asian Political Institutionalization*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1986).

In the last six years, another factor which also probably contributed to some instability in the country is the extralegal means by which President Aquino had come to power. This concern has little implication for the Ramos administration which gained its political mandate through the normal electoral process. However, it is a strong reminder of a strong legalist element in perceptions of political legitimacy in the Philippines. President Marcos, recognizing this feature of Philippine politics, consistently emphasized the "lawful" character of his rule. He skillfully made use of provisions in

the 1935 and 1971 constitutions to justify the declaration of martial law and his stay in power beyond 1972. Where his critics played up Marcos' destruction of "constitutional democracy," Marcos responded with "constitutional authoritarianism." It was imperative for both Marcos and his opponents to press constitutionalist claims precisely because of the legalistic construction of legitimacy so popular with the Philippine elites.

Before and even during Marcos' rule, periodic elections had not only allowed for the circulation of elites in power but also reinforced the legitimacy of the political regime. Although there was strong popular recognition and support for President Aquino, especially during the first three years of her administration, the unconstitutional means by which she became president laid her administration open to political challenges. The July 1986 Manila Hotel take-over, for instance, and the subsequent swearing-in of Arturo Tolentino as president was a clear attempt to underscore the extralegal nature and, presumably, the illegitimacy of the Aquino administration. In subsequent coups participated in by rebel military men, the issue of her "illegal" rise to power invariably became part of rebel propaganda. As her popularity waned, the legitimate basis of her presidency attracted even academic attention (Aquino, ed., 1991).

Given the context of these conditions, the task of political leadership in the Philippines is to activate the process of reforms which would establish national stability. Two imperatives for the Ramos administration become evident. First, the administration must work to enhance the legitimacy of the overall regime as well as that of the authorities to most Filipinos. This was largely neglected in the previous administration. While President Aquino had come to power with vast support from the people, this political asset had been much dissipated by 1992 due to the perceived indecisiveness and ineffectiveness of her administration. The Aquino administration's inability to make extensive use of available consultative mechanisms and its widely-trumpeted allergy to "unsolicited advice" further constricted the political base which could be identified with its national policies.

The electoral process helps give provisional legitimacy to an administration, and indeed, some legitimacy benefits from the 1987 and 1989 elections could be argued as having been gained by the Aquino administration. However, such political capital cannot persist without being buttressed by effective governance, the visible

expansion of political participation, and the widespread application of distributive justice. By the end of its term, the Aquino administration, while popularly perceived as an improvement over that of Marcos in the area of general democratization, failed to make a favorable impression in the critical dimension of effective governance. SWS surveys towards the end of the Aquino period chart much of this popular disappointment (SWS National Surveys, 1991, 1992).

Secondly, the incumbent political leadership must strengthen the state and its political institutions, making these more responsive to citizen demands. Much of the disaffection which Aquino suffered from the people has its roots in the inability of government agencies to efficiently provide basic services—particularly in transportation, water and, more recently, power. Institution-building not only reinforces legitimacy by improving the delivery-system for basic services; it also strengthens the country's socio-economic development processes. As a rather influential analyst observed quite a while ago, a "society with highly institutionalized governing organizations and procedures is more able to articulate and achieve its public interests" (Huntington, 1968:24). More recent examinations of the linkage between the political and the economic variables of development, more precisely the political institutional and leadership requirements of economic structural reforms, confirm the earlier insights (Boeninger, 1991:267-286; Nelson et al., 1989).

Thus, political leadership in the Philippines will remain the focal point of development and stability. However, it will have to operate within the context of the political system which itself demands certain conditions for the successful operation of leadership. The success or failure of the Ramos administration in establishing political stability will depend to a large extent on recognizing these conditions and being able to work through them.

## *2.2 Leadership in the Philippine State*

Contemporary Philippine conditions pose a challenge for the present leadership to decisively attain stability within a largely formal democratic system. The extent to which the political leadership is able to manage the conflicts of the dissonant dynamic system and initiate a national condition where social conflict is minimized and sustainable democratic development becomes possible, would reflect the visionary, willful and programmatic character of that leadership.



At least one candid politician has remarked that unless this "capacity for long-term thought" is developed among the Filipino elites, there is little chance that there could be national prosperity. Members of the political leadership as well as other influential members of the elite "must talk, debate, assess, plan and build a national consensus for the future we want." And then, "[h]aving set our goals, ... we should pursue them aggressively and in a sustained, unwavering manner (Ople [a], 1988)."

Unfortunately, this sound advice is not heeded often enough by Philippine presidents. In one of his rare assessments of the Aquino administration, O.D. Corpuz noted that, aside from the restoration of formally democratic institutions, it seemed "to have no purpose, ideal or *layunin* (*Newsday*, May 28, 1990)." Such a politically unguided leadership could not have led the nation towards substantive democratization and its necessary condition, the repudiation of oligarchic politics.

In the Philippines, the purpose of political leadership has often been summed up in a politician's classic response to the rhetorical question "what are we in power for?" Much historical evidence has accumulated showing that political power has primarily been used to serve not democratic but oligarchic rule and that it has sustained the grossly unequal distribution of political power and economic wealth in the country. President Ramos, in his first State of the Nation Address last July 1992, drew attention to the inequity of the uppermost 20 percent of Filipino families controlling more than 50 percent, and the bottom 20 percent making do with 5 percent of the national income. The citizenry affirms their sense of political marginalization or inefficacy, with less than a third of adult Filipinos disagreeing with the characterization of the political system as oligarchic (SWS National Survey, February 1992). More focused scholarly probes confirm what the public suspects. The most recent study of family-based political power in the Philippines suggests that perhaps no more than a hundred out of ten million families nationwide control the political and economic life of the country. (Gutierrez *et al.*, 1992:4)

During the early days of the Commonwealth, Quezon's extensive use of government resources for the gain of allies and friends was evident (Caoli, 1987:65-106). This executive patronage was characteristic too of the post-war republic all the way to martial-law Philippines. The abuses of executive power in Marcos' time are only the most imaginative as well as the best documented (Manapat, 1991).

So far, no Philippine administration has been able to immunize itself against the virus of oligarchic politics. Under the Aquino administration, the poor performance of the Presidential Commission on Good Government and the emasculation of the agrarian reform law indicate that the oligarchic dynamic continued to work. Indeed, no historical rupture in the application of this political principle appears to have taken place between 1986 and 1992.

### 3.0. The Philippine State and Its Environment

Even as some scholars now press for methodological rigor and "the scientific study of political leadership" (Paige, 1984; Blondel, 1987), classical writers like Plato, Machiavelli and Weber explored leadership in the context of specific times and cultures. Many contemporary scholars still follow the classical lead (Smith and Peterson, 1989; Migdal, 1988:207-237). This paper's discussion follows mainstream leadership literature and outlines some features of the Philippine state and civil society which impact on the formation and exercise of political leadership.

Using this approach, it might be possible to understand the constraints and opportunities which the current political leadership must manage in working for political stability. In politics it must be emphasized that practically nothing is permanently given, any specific constraint or opportunity being simply a management challenge to a willful political leadership. The various conditions attending the Philippine state and its general environment set the limits within which the political leadership must initially operate, but over time a functional leadership will manipulate these conditions to maximize opportunities and minimize constraints within the political system. The Aquino administration postponed the political management of many national concerns like substantive political institution-building (e.g., building up and managing an administration political party), public safety, graft and corruption, and the American military bases; or surrendered the political initiative to conservative elite interests, as in the case of agrarian reform. With time, President Aquino's administration dissipated its opportunities and increasingly became vulnerable to multiple political challenges. It is not surprising that during her term much national instability persisted.

The basic challenge indicated by this analysis may be summarily

stated. Given the basic weakness of the state and the relative strength of organized groups in Philippine society and beyond, how may the present political leadership consolidate and increase its own political resources, coordinate when possible with aggressive, self-seeking social groups to strengthen the weak state, neutralize its armed challengers, and finally, minimize the influence of powerful transnational actors in the Philippines? The answers to this challenge are the very same things which will politically stabilize the national state.

### *3.1 The Weak Philippine State*

The state has consistently been a major focus of political studies. In addition to the classical explorations of its theoretical foundations and operational dynamics, there is much contemporary scholarship looking into the state and its primary agency, government, in relation to concerns such as the relative autonomy of the state and its capacities, political stability and economic development (Nelson, *et al.*, 1989; Migdal, 1988; Crone, 1988; Scalapino *et al.*, 1986; Evans, *et al.*, 1985). With the formal independence of Third World countries, expectations built up around the state as the critical architect of political and social orders in developing societies. However, as problems of stable governance, economic development, and social cohesion intensified in these societies, the capability of the state to successfully intervene has also been skeptically treated. State capabilities, operationally understood as "the ability of state leaders to use the agencies of the state to get people in society to do what they [the leaders] want them to do" (Migdal, 1988, xiii), have merited much scholarly interest and resulted in both approval as well as skepticism by concerned academics. Migdal suggests that this "odd duality," the incompatible images of strong and weak states in current social science literature, could be due to the fact that scholars are emphasizing different aspects as well as targets of state capabilities. He also alludes to the possibility that "the particular events and history of each state" might explain the differential capabilities of various states (Migdal, 1988:5-10).

While there might be some controversy regarding the capacities of states elsewhere, in Southeast Asia the available evidence points mostly to the rise of strong states with successful copying mechanisms. In a review of several comparative studies of states in the region, the analyst (Crone, 1988:252-268) could note:

*... the state in Southeast Asia has been vital to both economic growth and political stability. Despite some liberal economic policies, the weight of state intervention has been heavy and consistent. In addition, state elites have had to struggle to construct and maintain political stability, which is not simply a derivative of found cultural values. The state has been a central and essential actor in economic and political arenas.*

The ASEAN region, in particular, appears to have states which cope adequately with the twin imperatives of political stability and economic development. The Philippines, however, cannot be subsumed under this overall appraisal of state capacities in the region. Using Migdal's continuum of weak and strong states, the Philippines is a weak state in a region where increasingly strong states have become the rule.

State strength is related to its "capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources in determined ways" (Migdal's underscoring, 1988:5). The Philippines fares badly in these dimensions of state strength.

The capacity of the state to penetrate Philippine society is not well developed. The informal economy, estimated to be between 30% to 40 % of the national economy, largely ignores and often outrightly defies the formal rules of the government in its operations. State presence in the normal lives of the citizenry is largely nominal. Required social security registration for those who are employed and residence certificates for the adult citizenry are but a fraction of what they could be. State educational programs, albeit required constitutionally up to the secondary level, are unable to reach the majority of their target population.

Strong states regulate social relationships effectively. They are able to devise and enforce rules to govern behavior and keep societal conflict within manageable levels. The Philippines is not able to do much in this area of state capacity. Its weakness is indicated in some cases by the inability or unwillingness of government to (1) clearly define the rules of involvement by some social groups in political affairs and/or (2) reduce state vulnerability to aggressive manipulation by established business and economic interests.

As regards the first point, although there is a constitutional provision recognizing the separation of church and state in the Philippines, powerful religious groups have found it relatively easy

to involve themselves in political concerns either publicly or behind the scenes. One could note the willful involvement of religious denominations and personalities in endorsing specific politicians during elections. On such crucial issues as population growth, the political authorities have not been particularly keen to undertake policies which might antagonize powerful religious sects.

As for the second point, economic policy-making has historically shown the marked permeability of the state to various oligarchic interests (Manapat, 1991; Hutchcraft, 1991; De Dios, 1990; Hawes, 1987). In a study of the country's agricultural exports and the Marcos administration, it has been persuasively argued that the Philippine state was unable to develop its own coherent corporate identity but was used by influential groups primarily for private gain (Hawes, 1987). An earlier study on elites in the martial law period provides empirical evidence of the resourceful use of state power by a select number of people without governmental positions but with close connections to the Presidential Palace (Doherty, 1979). While state permeability has been true for all administrations, a recent study of Philippine economic policy-making shows the state probably at its weakest in the last Aquino administration (De Dios, 1990:117-126).

The persistence of armed movements such as the CPP-NPA, the MNLF and, since 1986, the various rebel military groups is another indicator of the state's weakness in regulating social conflict and social relations within Philippine society. In areas where the communists and the Muslim secessionists actually had control, taxation as well as legal administration ceased to be monopolies of the state and its various agencies. The dramatic eruption of violent conflict in the form of rebel military coups is a clear demonstration of state weakness even where it succeeds in neutralizing these challenges. A strong state would not have had six to seven attempted coups occurring in five years. Its perceived capabilities would have intimidated coup plotters.

The Philippine state is also much wanting in its capacity for resource extraction. Its ability to raise revenues through taxation is much behind its ASEAN counterparts, as shown by Table 2 (below). Furthermore, the ability of influential groups to evade taxes as well as to impose their own resource extraction systems on many sectors of society points to much state impotence in this area.

Table 2. Selected ASEAN Countries' 1988 Tax Revenues (as a percentage of GNP)

| Country     | Total Tax Revenue |
|-------------|-------------------|
| Philippines | 13.7              |
| Thailand    | 17.4              |
| Indonesia   | 18.6              |
| Malaysia    | 25.8              |

Source: *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 April 1991.

A final test of state strength is its ability to appropriate and use resources in ways determined by the state itself. The diversion of public funds from officially designated public-interest projects to private corporate or personal schemes has been much documented (Manapat, 1991; Hawes, 1987). The continuity of this practice well into the Aquino period has been explored by a recent unpublished study of several mining firms (Faustino, 1992). The extended public controversy over the selective repudiation/repayment of the Philippine foreign debt reflects the popular belief that much of the contracted debt has served primarily private groups and interests, not so much the debt programs' formally avowed public-interest objectives.

The relative autonomy of the state—its ability to act independently of, or in opposition to, the more powerful groups in society— is grossly undermined by these typical features of weak states. A political leadership embedded in a weak-state, strong-society setting experiences greater demands on its resourcefulness simply to survive and eventually strengthen the state. In this frame, feckless administrations invariably become pliant instrumentalities of aggressive social interest groups.

### **3.2 A Structurally Strong Presidency**

Paradoxically, a structurally strong and dominant Presidency is historically embedded within this context of a weak Philippine state. Scholarly treatments of the Philippine presidency have often focused on the vast powers of the executive in Philippine politics (Brillantes, 1988; Wurfel, 1988; Romani, 1956).

The powers of the presidency were pushed to their very limits (and beyond) when President Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. By abolishing the legislature and the independence of the judiciary, Marcos was able to govern the nation and direct the operation of the entire government by decree (Brillantes, 1988). Had Marcos used his political powers to re-structure Philippine political institutions, and made them truly much less vulnerable to the predatory activities of vested interests, a strong state (with significant promise of becoming eventually democratized as appears to be happening in Singapore) could have emerged in the Philippines. The accumulated evidence during his two decades of political stewardship suggests that, despite his patriotic and visionary rhetoric, Marcos simply was the leader of a group of buccaneers which plundered the country by capturing political power (Manapat, 1991; Hutchcroft, 1991). The Philippine state was clearly further emasculated by Marcos' political leadership.

The experience with Marcos led the framers of the 1987 constitution to direct their efforts at curtailing the powers of the President. Hence, the term of the President was limited to six years without re-election. An anti-dynasty provision was also included to ban the President's spouse and relatives from being appointed as public officials. Furthermore, presidential powers on the declaration of martial law were subjected to active congressional and judicial evaluation and approval.

In spite of these provisions, however, the Presidency continues to be the single most influential political position. The source of its power are in the three formal-legal roles assigned to the office. First, the President is the Head of State. Although largely a ceremonial role, the power to project the unity of the nation both nationally and internationally gives the Presidency a significant symbolic function. A second role is that of lobbyist and legislator. Despite the separation of executive and legislative functions, the President, through his power to initiate legislative items and to veto approved bills, has substantial influence over legislation and legislators. A third role is as chief administrator over the nation's bureaucracy. This role operationally enables him to control the distribution and release of key personnel and material budgetary resources for the implementation of government programs nationwide. Furthermore, one must not forget that this third role also makes the Philippine President the effective leader of the military, the state's primary institution of coercion. As Marcos demonstrated, a willful civilian

leadership with adequate control over the military can do much to intimidate even strong social groups in Philippine society.

Thus, even within a weak-state, strong-society frame, the extensive powers of the presidency make it possible for a willful executive to consolidate much political influence within the state machinery. This influence could enable him to focus state power and other resources to encourage, or even coerce as a last resort, the other influential groups in society to undertake collaborative work with government and assist in achieving political stability and economic development. On the other hand, a timorous executive would shy away from the political governance of the nation and, through its attendant fecklessness, invite political destabilization.

### *3.3 Politicized Military*

The politicized military is an undeniable reality in contemporary Philippines. Both official and professional academic studies establish the military's well-developed awareness of contemporary politics and its interest in political governance which has at times been dramatically expressed. The political leadership in the Philippines has to reckon with a military which gained much political experience in the dictatorship of Marcos and thus views governance functions with little intimidation (The [Davide] Fact Finding Commission, 1990; Miranda, 1992).

From its inception in colonial times to the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, the Philippine military played a traditionally subordinate role to the civilian authorities. Remarkably, even as Philippine society got involved in the process of modernization and consequent politicization, the military remained strongly constitutionalist, despite having an officer corps recruited mainly from the politically-informed and, socio-economically speaking, relatively better-situated families in the country (Miranda, 1992). During martial law, the military's political influence expanded as it became one of the main regime supports. From the early 1970s, the scope of its activities had broadened to include socioeconomic functions like managing state corporations and other agencies without direct connections to national security concerns as well as coordinating regional economic development work (Miranda and Ciron, 1988; Miranda, 1985; Abinales, 1982; Hernandez, 1979).



The military's already significant political role became more crucial as it played a pivotal role in the 1986 overthrow of Marcos and the subsequent installation of Aquino as President. The military continues to exert its influence on national politics even as one of the most serious threats to the stability of the country emerged from within its ranks. After being involved in eight coup attempts within the last six years, the politicization of the military has become widely recognized. Formal studies reveal widespread military sentiments which are critical of the national administration and civilian politicians and, equally significant, much confidence in the military's capability to manage civilian functions at the highest levels (Miranda and Ciron, 1988; Ciron, 1988). The implications of these sentiments for the stability of civilian regimes are obvious. Given a legion of corrupt politicians and non-performing authorities, the barracks are only the most temporary quarters for restive, even patriotic military men.

For the near future, any President will have to confront this genie of a politicized military. How to keep such a military within constitutional bounds and dissuade it from forcibly taking the option of political rulership is a vital national concern.

The last 1989 coup could have failed because of timely foreign intervention in behalf of the Aquino administration. In the 1990s, it would be foolhardy to rely on a similar foreign intervention to ensure the political stability of the country and its civilian regime. Besides being unpatriotic, calls for explicit foreign (i.e., American) intervention in Philippine politics would probably not result in timely assistance for a beleaguered administration. The Philippine-American security calculus has changed much with the removal of the American bases in the country. Interventionist responses, both as a matter of American executive decision-making and operational field execution, would probably take long enough to make academic the issue of foreign assistance in the event of another coup. Furthermore, the next American President could be much less sanguine about playing uncle to a perennially vulnerable ally.

It would be much better for the national political leadership to depend on its own resources and capabilities in managing the politicized military towards constitutionalism. There is no necessary contradiction in the military being politically aware and demanding of civilian authorities, on the one hand, and being constitutionally supportive of the same authorities, on the other. A civilian political leadership which governs effectively resolves what might appear to

be the military's dilemma between constitutionalism, understood primarily in terms of the supremacy of civilian authority over the military, and the patriotic responsibilities of the military to its people as underscored in the same constitution which military men appear to have only reluctantly supported in a national plebiscite.

### ***3.4 A Weak Political Party System***

An institutionalized political party system strengthens the state by channeling the articulation, aggregation, and organization of various interests into formal political machineries of the state, its political parties. Political stability has been persuasively argued as resulting at least in part from the successful organization of strong, broadly-based political parties. States without such political parties are ever fragile and much too permeable to the forays of well-organized, aggressive social groups (Huntington, 1968:397-461).

Without a strong party system and deprived of its own administration party, a political leadership is much disadvantaged by its forced reliance on other social groups for political survival and governance. This handicap is particularly acute in conditions of persistent national crises, and may be considered contributory to the continuing fragility of the political system. The Aquino administration, in refusing to consolidate and build a strong political party, either arrogantly or naively chose to govern without an institutionalized political base. Much political instability understandably marked her term of office as President.

### **Politically Undifferentiated, Oligarchic Parties**

Reflecting the strength of political elites and clans, political parties in the pre-martial law period were predominantly coalitions of politically influential groups and individuals. (Gutierrez, *et al.*, 1992) Party platforms and programs were indistinguishable and rarely implemented. Without distinct ideological and programmatic underpinnings and lacking party discipline to keep them in line, candidates were able to jump from one party to another without much difficulty. The tradition of political turncoatism is a venerable one, going back to colonial American times and reaching out to the present, and has served well the political ambitions of many national leaders like Roxas, Magsaysay, Marcos, and quite a few other well-known politicians.

Under martial law, the abolition of Congress allowed Marcos to concentrate the mechanisms of patronage, rewards, and sanctions in the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* (KBL). The shallowness of the institutionalization of the KBL, however, was revealed when the President was ousted in 1986. Many of the KBL members successfully negotiated their transfer to the new majority political party, the *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (LDP) (Gutierrez, et al., 1992).

The LDP failed to develop a programmatic identity for its numerous members and, with President Aquino's refusal to formally join and head it, could not consolidate party discipline. The LDP thus became a paradox, a majority political party which could not rule. It could not even bind its leading members to observe a party decision on who would be its standard bearer in the 1992 presidential elections.

The trend in the latest elections (May 1992) and soon after shows that political parties continue to be established around political personalities and networks as opposed to issues, platforms, and programs. In the period just before elections, politicians freely broke party ranks and joined other parties as their political interests and convenience dictated. It appears that during elections itself, the LDP, the Nacionalista, and the Liberal parties were not spared from this cavalier attitude of many of their lead members. In the particular case of the LDP and its presidential candidate, the suspicion is rife that many party members betrayed party loyalties during the actual elections and worked only for their individual political interests.

In the wake of President Ramos' election, the on-going re-definition of party loyalties for many politicians is completely predictable as part of traditional political rituals. Unless the new administration is able to invest these loyalty rites with substantive party programs and party discipline, it is doubtful whether the growing popularity of a political party like the Lakas-NUCD could lead to the formation of political machineries which help stabilize the country.

Political parties should be understood not only in terms of the party leadership. There is need to mobilize a party mass base if democratization and popular empowerment are operational concerns of the organizers. Even if one takes the most amorphous sense of party membership, there is probably less than 10% of an estimated 32 million voters in 1992 who would think of themselves as members of any political party in the Philippines. In addition to the failure of political parties to design distinguishable party programs and exact

party discipline, the low number of party members might be accounted for by the general distrust of Filipinos for all political parties (SWS National Survey, 1991). This could be due to the perceived lack of utility of political parties in the lives of the citizens. Except probably during brief intervals during election campaigns, the political parties appear to have little to do with serving the interests of even its nominal members. A major re-orientation of political parties is indicated, one which would make the party, hitherto an oligarchic institution, a mechanism for the more democratic interaction of its leaders and followers.

The Ramos administration has pledged itself to the successful management of national concerns leading to the rise of a modern state in the Philippines. The previous administration leaves President Ramos a legacy of vital political lessons. Foremost among these is that a political leadership which insists on modernization (i.e., economic development and political democratization) but spurns the organizational work required to build a reliable mass political base, a political party, invites aggressive challenges from many quarters and maximizes the risks of national destabilization.

### *3.5 Strong Civil Society*

The weakness of the Philippine state is reflected in the relative strength of Philippine civil society and its organized groups. The latter compete for pre-eminence in the nation's political and economic life. Political-economic clans, religious groups, domestic and foreign business interests, sectoral organizations, professional associations, and other powerful aggroupments are active in the country. Together with these more traditional groups are more recent non-governmental and people's organizations as well as outrightly subversive organizations which pose armed challenges to the state.

All of these groups represent management challenges to the present political leadership. They engage the state in a competition for pre-eminence in Philippine society. The pressures exerted on the state and its governing mechanisms by these multiple forces are tremendous and need active regulation. Unless a political leadership evolves which is able to involve most of these groups in coordinated political work and re-channel their often parochial interests towards the more comprehensive objectives of national development, a stronger Philippine state and national political stability may not soon come about.

## *Political Clans*

Even as these organized groups represent multiple foci of influence, one may note the persistence in the last century of diffused power centers in Philippine society. Governmental centralization has not really broken down the strong influence of regional and other local elites as nationally prominent and influential personalities emerged over the years. (Abueva and de Guzman, 1969) Although linkages have developed between national and local/provincial politics and their respective elites as noted by some observers (Cullinane, 1989:103), there has been no marginalization of the political influence exerted by local families and clans. Even the May 1992 elections reflected this reality of dominant local political clans. In many areas, national politicians have had to depreciate party loyalty and drop party colleagues to gain this vitally needed local support.

The Philippines before Marcos' declaration of martial law and his New Society had been the preserve of oligarchs, with functional dyarchic relationships among those who are influential (Lande, 1965), with at best the-magnanimous-patron-and-marginalized-client kind of political reality passing for a nominal democracy. Marcos vowed to destroy the influence of oligarchs in Philippine society but actually largely worked to emasculate traditional groups selectively and create yet others beholden to him in their stead (Anderson, 1988:22; Manapat, 1991).

Recent findings indicate that a primarily oligarchic ethos continues to be sustained in Philippine society. A 1984 study seeking to design a framework for analyzing Philippine political stability reduces the number of politically influential groups to no more than 45 and, with further filtering, only 25, inclusive of the CPP-NPA and the MNLF (Druckman and Green, 1986:15-29). Another study estimates the number of currently influential political families to be between 60 to 100, those who "dominate and influence the process of selection of the holders of the country's elective and appointive government positions (Gutierrez, *et al.*, 1992:4). The authors of this 1992 study acknowledge that among the present notables are some "60 families inside and outside the Marcos government which controlled economic empires in the country (Gutierrez, *et al.*, 1992:16).

Thus, despite the restoration of formal democratic institutions in the Aquino administration, the oligarchic structure of Philippine politics persists. Intra-elite competition has resurfaced even more aggressively, and the legislature as well as the executive now serve

as an arena for the various elite groups, the diffused power centers of society, to compete in. The democratic facade of Philippine politics has been refurbished but, without taking into account the development of other social forces and groups in Philippine society, one might be tempted to describe the present system as not significantly different from pre-martial law Philippines. At the time, anyone might recall, most Filipinos were politically and economically marginalized.

There are other groups in Philippine society which often impact on the state and the country's political governance. The political leadership runs much risk in not taking note of them and involving them whenever possible in national administration.

### *Religious Groups*

Organized religion has a long tradition of association with the Philippine government. At one time or another, the Catholic Church, the *Iglesia ni Kristo*, the Philippine Independent (Aglipay) Church, and other Christian Protestant and Islamic sects have all impacted on the country's political processes. Political endorsements during elections, political resistance during periods of rebellion, as well as political pressures and influence over key social and political issues reflect on, at times, the various courtships, trysts, marriages, and separations between churches and state in the last 200 years of Philippine history.

### *Business Groups*

Business has always been organized and the bigger the businesses, the more powerful and influential have their organizations been. The various chambers of commerce, the cosmopolitan business clubs and other social associations of businessmen have always found ways and means of getting the ear of administrations in the Philippines. The focal interest of business, domestic as well as foreign, has always been what makes for profitable business. However, in addition to their traditional obsession with profit-making, some groups have also taken much interest in defining the legitimate social and even political responsibilities of businessmen and their companies. The Bishop-Businessmen Conference, the Philippine Business for Social Progress, the Makati Business Club and other groups have involved themselves with key political and economic issues in the country.

## *Labor Organizations*

Organized labor comprises a small proportion of the active labor force in the country. Yet, the Trade Union Confederation of the Philippines, the *Kilusang Mayo Uno*, the Federation of Free Workers, and the various transport and teachers' groups have increasingly become more militant with their public demands as well as their negotiating styles. A general strike has been threatened several times in an effort by organized labor to force government and the private sector to make concessions to workers. Hunger strikes, traditionally reserved as it were for political detainees and similarly situated people, have been resorted to by customarily docile teachers.

## *NGOs and Other Groups*

Recently, yet other social groupings have come about. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proliferated, with some 17,000 currently listed in the Securities and Exchange Commission. Environmental and other cause-oriented groups have actively organized, and politically aware people-organizations have also formed. Many NGOs have evolved from doing development and service-oriented work, becoming more overtly political by the 1980s. NGOs are widely believed to have the potential to significantly alter the balance in Philippine electoral politics in the near future. Former President Aquino and President Ramos, together with other political figures, eye NGOs as capable of much political support for their respective political agenda. Publicly, these agenda are often briefly projected as cause-oriented, as chiefly aimed at popular empowerment. The dynamics of NGO mobilization by key politicians might, however, have less noble ends in mind.

## *Armed Challengers*

Largely due to basic inequities in Philippine society, a long tradition of dissidence and rebellion has plagued the country's history in the last four hundred years. With widespread poverty, political oppression, social injustice, cultural insensitivity, and the development of democratic political ideas, numerous groups have organized and armed themselves to challenge the state or its government during this period.

Currently, three major armed groups politically challenge the authority of the state. The only significant communist insurgency in

the ASEAN region is sustained by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA). A persistently volatile secession-minded Muslim rebellion is spear-headed by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). And since 1986, coup d'états have been waged by various military rebel groups, the most prominent being the Reform-the-AFP Movement (RAM), the *Kawal ng Sambayanang Pilipino* (KSP), and the Young Officers Union (YOU).

Armed rebellion has cost the country much in terms of human and material resources; badly needed for the political and economic build-up of the country, they had to be diverted to counter-insurgency and anti-coup military operations. Political stability, economic growth, and even military modernization has suffered as the government dealt with the symptoms rather than the root causes of these uprisings. The military itself is first to acknowledge that military force is a poor and costly way of dealing with the rebels, whatever uniform they might be wearing. It is a good sign that the new administration now appears seriously concerned with the need for a political resolution of these armed rebellions.

The political leadership currently enjoys much advantage in dealing with rebel groups. The dramatic dissolution of Soviet communism and the non-interventionist inclinations of other communist countries faced by domestic economic challenges tend to minimize "cold-warriorism" in communists and military rebels as well as among the military and civilian authorities. These twin developments focus the attention of protagonists on the domestic dimensions of the Philippine communist insurgency problem. For the first time, the grant of amnesty to communist rebels and the legalization of the Communist Party appear to have a realistic chance of gaining civilian and military approval. The communists themselves have already shown signs of interest in a negotiated political solution to their rebellion. Dialogues between government representatives and communist leaders here as well as abroad are currently taking place.

There is also much to be optimistic about as regards the issue of military rebels. The military background of many people in the national leadership (not only in the executive but also in both Houses of Congress) as well as the military's apparent willingness to be accommodating to rebel military men make it easier for the authorities and the military rebels to undertake much needed political initiatives in negotiating this issue of military rebellion. With former military



men gaining political influence through elections and various appointments, many military rebels could contemplate working within the political system, presumably through channels they could feel confident about.

Finally, the political leadership has a good chance of getting the leaders of Muslim rebels to consider a political solution, too. The recently approved local government code makes it possible for organized political groups to gain political influence within the region without having to engage in armed rebellion. Political power by Muslim leaders and the prospects of real and effective local autonomy in Muslim areas might be attractive incentives for rebel Muslim leaders to at least reconsider the policy of intractable secessionism.

### *3.6 Strong Transnational Influence*

Yet one more feature of the political environment of the Philippine state is its vulnerability to strong transnational influence. The dominance of the United States over Philippine economic and political matters carried over from colonial times well into the post-war period. The Philippine 1935 Constitution as well as its post-war amendments reflected this American suzerain function. From the value of its national currency to the direction of its national economy, from the institutional character of its military to the permissible parameters of its security relations, and from the election down to the political survival of its most influential national leaders, the Philippines has been too often the object of American involvement and, at times, outright intervention (Schirmer and Shalom, eds., 1987; McCoy and de Jesus, 1982; Owen, 1972).

For most of this century, Philippine relations with the United States had been anchored on the latter's military facilities. Despite the rejection of the RP-US Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security by the Philippine Senate in 1991 and the impending departure of American forces, other factors ensure that the United States will continue to play a prominent role in Philippine politics. Philippine dependence on American markets for many of its products, American foreign assistance, American military hardware and training programs for the Philippine military, as well as a sizable reserve of pro-American Filipino sentiments (SWS surveys, 1986-1992) enable American policymakers to readily penetrate a weak Philippine state.

Transnational influence does not issue from the United States alone. Multilateral lending institutions, such as the World Bank and, more particularly, the International Monetary Fund, constitute another set of influential transnational actors. With the onset of the debt crisis in 1982, the influence of these international financial institutions grew considerably. The Philippines, saddled with a burgeoning foreign debt and a balance of payments crisis, has been under the close supervision of the IMF since then (Broad, 1986). Macroeconomic programs and targets set annually by the national government's financial institutions are negotiated with, and require approval from, the International Monetary Fund (De Dios, 1990:128-130). The "conditionalities" set by these institutions represent the current vulnerability of the Philippines to international lending agencies.

Until such time as a political leadership is able to harness all the domestic political and economic resources of the Philippines and bring them to bear on the country's political stabilization and economic development, transnational influences on the Philippine state will continue to be strong. The only reliable defense to the virus of transnational intervention is a strong political constitution. A resourceful and decisive political leadership can do much to bring this about.

#### **4.0 An Imperative for A Stabilizing Political Leadership: Coalition-Building for Policy Reform**

The analysis of stability and political leadership in the Philippines (sections 2 and 3, above), contexting them in the framework of a weak state and a strong society (section 3), points to the most basic challenge of any political leadership concerned with stability in the country: the need to consolidate a political base which will enable the political leadership to effectively govern as its vision and programs of action dictate.

There are people who express concern over the relative weakness of the Ramos political leadership because it comes with a mandate of only 24% of the popular vote in the last elections (Ople[c], 1992). Unless it is a politically-inspired, perhaps even brilliantly provocative move, this is a rather superficial way of delineating the problem of how a strong and effective political leadership is built up in the Philippines.

Given the permeability of mostly nominal political parties and the long tradition of overall political opportunism in the Philippines (Pacis, 1992), plurality Presidents do not find it all that difficult to court opposition political personalities. Indeed, without distinguishable political ideologies and devoid of mostly all political convictions except that of political survival and materially providing for their future, many Filipino politicians have not had to be courted by plurality Presidents at all. As a knowledgeable political columnist satirically noted recently, Filipinos of different political colors quickly realized soon after the May 1992 elections that they had been for President Ramos all along.

Plurality electoral mandates have little to do with the success or failure of political leadership in the Philippines. Astute politicians, including Presidents like Marcos who scored impressive majority victories in national elections, realize that the name of the game in any polity (and particularly so in an oligarchy) is coalition-building. Political leaderships, whether they have plurality, majority, or even powerful minority mandates, need to consolidate their initial political resources and draw much more from other powerful political and social groups. Otherwise, they do not survive for long and either disintegrate completely or become captives of powerful interests.

Beyond survival, a political leadership may target pre-eminence, if not dominance. But first it has to survive. A political leadership operating within a weak-state strong-society frame and confronting multiple, intensifying crises, must maximize its chances of survival by undertaking coalition work to enable it to avoid capture by aggressive vested interests and their powerful organizations. Only later, with sufficient political resources to take on other groups, may a political leadership move more firmly towards significant political and economic reform. Many scholarly studies have explored the tactical and strategic importance of coalitions for political leaderships seeking to reform strong societies where the state itself is weak. Coalitions, however fragile and however difficult to effect, are invariably indicated by these studies as most crucial for the concerned political leaderships to succeed (Boeninger, 1991:272-274; Haggard, 1989:73; Waterbury, 1989:39-56; Migdal, 1988:206-307; Wright and Goldberg, 1985:704).

#### 4.1 The Legislature

Coalition-building needs to be undertaken by the present political leadership within as well as beyond government. The forging of a coalition with the legislature and its various political groups ensures that executive programs do not get to be unduly harassed but rather find critical budgetary as well as more general political support for their effective implementation. Beyond this tactical objective is a strategic concern for more functional political institutions to evolve and assist the political leadership in its task to stabilize the nation.

Although its initial performance could stand some improvement, the Ramos administration appears to be headed in the right direction on this matter of legislative coalition building. It has managed to crystallize enough support within the lower house through its successful attempts at forming a "rainbow coalition" among congressional members of Lakas-National Union of Christian Democrats, Nationalist People's Coalition, as well as affiliates of the other political parties. The fight for the Speakership of the House, recently won by Pangasinan representative De Venecia, charts this process of coalition-building.

Although much less successful with the Senate, where the majority *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* senators manage to resist political consolidation into a pro-administration group, continuing political bargaining by the Ramos administration may yet result in an acceptable *modus vivendi*, that which Philippine political terminology refers to as "critical collaboration." Senator Blas Ople, a ranking LDP senator, already speaks of how the LDP majority in the Senate "will extend to him [President Ramos] the hand of cooperation and support an agreed agenda, while reserving to itself the right to scrutinize his acts" (Ople[b], 1992).

The majority in the Senate has been flexing its political muscles, as suggested by the pointed attacks of LDP senators on some cabinet members, the dramatic defense of executive agency officials against their own departmental superiors (which could be construed as a veiled offer of alternative political patronage to those within the executive who might weaken in their administrative loyalties), as well as the initiatives taken as part of its own legislative agenda, even the LDP senators expressed their impatience, in areas where the administration expressed an early interest (e.g. the creation of a Department of Energy, the repeal of Republic Act 1700 outlawing the

Communist Party of the Philippines, the grant of amnesty to leftist, military, and other rebels [*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 22, 1992:9]). The Ramos administration must recognize the Senate's muscle-flexing as a constitutionally-mandated role, but even more so, the administration must continue its current efforts not to alienate even politically-inspired members of the Senate. The President does well in moderating what might be misconstrued as unproductive arrogance by some cabinet members in dealing with the Senate.

The President has quite a bit of resources at his disposal in effecting coalition work with the legislature. For instance, with a sizable base in the Lower House, his ability to influence the budget process is markedly enhanced. On budgetary matters, a patently dilatory or obstructionist Senate majority would risk a backlash from resource-hungry local politicians who materially influence senatorial chances in national elections. By 1995, the elections would magnify presidential clout among congressmen as well as re-electionist senators. But well before 1995, a resourceful President ought to be able to draw the attention of most legislators to the practical implications of this political reality.

The awesome powers of the executive discussed in section 3.2 (above) can all be employed by a President who does not have an aversion for political management. Such powers and the resources they command enable a political President to effect at least initially, tactical coalitions with members of the legislature. The first days of the new administration are crucial in establishing the mood which could prevail in the longer run in executive-legislative relations. The President must exert every effort to project his administration as having both the political initiative insofar as a clear program of governance is concerned, and a hands-on orientation regarding the management of political issues.

A leadership suspected of lacking vision and being unclear in its priority programs invites much political depreciation by experienced politicians. This handicap is naturally compounded when a President no less is perceived to shirk from political involvement. President Aquino's administration suffered much from her well-known preference to be above politics precisely at a time when a political management of the country was called for. Some analysts have commented on this hands-off attitude as regards many political issues, and often attributed it to her largely apolitical background before she became President. (Aquino, 1990:24-27) As a reflection of this

dislike for political involvement by President Aquino, tactical political alliances were not actively sought during much of her administration. Instead, some of her cabinet members, lacking the appropriate sense of political timing and thus prematurely yielding to their crusading biases, alienated prospective political allies fairly early in her term. Only Aquino's vast popularity with the people kept aggressive politicians at bay for some time. However, by late 1989 when this base of popular support had significantly eroded, the President and her administration became fair game for political critics. Even then, President Aquino appeared unimpressed by the need for tactical coalitions, if only to ward off increasingly dangerous political attacks against her administration.

The strategic concern in executive-legislative relations must not be neglected. The ability of these two agencies to do collaborative work is crucial to any enduring political stability. Extensive evidence based on a study of more than 100 countries indicates that legislatures, on their own, have very limited contributions to make towards stabilizing the political system. Only when legislatures have become more developed (i.e., more representative and democratic) are they able to significantly contribute to national political stability (Mishler and Hildreth, 1984:25-59).

Thus, executive leadership effectively makes a strategic investment in initiating coalition work with a legislature which must be helped towards greater representativeness and democratization. A developed legislature is an institution where the organized interests of a strong society may have access but are not able to capture the legislature and systematically use legislative functions to make vested interests dominant in society. Since political stability is positively affected by this strengthening of the legislature, the political leadership, guided by a strategic vision, must initiate and help sustain the process of legislative development.

Given this strategic concern, the political leadership would do well to involve Congress in its programs of governance. The executive and the legislative could do collaborative work on a regular basis through some formal agency like the proposed joint executive-legislative council. Such a mechanism would permit the reconciliation of possibly conflicting positions on some crucial governance issue. Even where conflict ultimately turns out to be temporarily unavoidable over some concern, the presence of a consultative mechanism could serve to moderate positions and, at the very least,

buy necessary time for the executive to muster needed resources to prevail.

In its dealings with the legislative and particularly the LDP majority in the Senate, it is important for the executive to be perceived as a unified team, with no significant intramurals or basic policy disagreements among cabinet members. The influence of the President is critical in this regard. He has to project competence as a leader and, more critically perhaps, being comfortable with leadership. He directs his political family even as he seeks to coordinate with and, at critical times, even lead the legislature. Failing to reflect this political control over his own people, the President cannot be expected to succeed much in influencing legislators.

Much more could be done in this area, judging from the Ramos administration's initial months of rule and its preliminary contacts with Congress. If it desires to maintain its political momentum and initiative (to "hit the ground running," as a parachutist President might be wont to say), the administration's political learning curve would have to be much steeper than that of the previous administration. President Ramos' political honeymoon with Congress (as well as other politically significant sectors) promises to be much shorter than President Aquino's.

The Ramos administration needs to steer a course in executive-legislative relations midway between President Aquino's veritable abandonment of political initiatives in this area and President Marcos' willful usurpation of legislative functions. One promotes legislative anarchy or dominance, the other simply works to destroy a legislature. Neither promotes political stability.

#### ***4.2 Political Parties***

Political parties are crucial to successful governance and thus, to political stabilization. As pointed out in section 3.4, this is a fact often documented by political scientists in their works. Two things need to be discussed in relation to the role that political parties would play in Philippine political stabilization. First is the political leadership's need for a consolidated political base which will enable it to survive competing political groups. In addition to building up or strengthening its own political party, this concern relates to coalition-building by the political leadership. Second is the development of political parties with strong popular participation. This involves

political parties as mechanisms and eventually institutions for popular empowerment.

With the exception of President Aquino and, at the height of his political power, President Marcos, Filipino presidents invariably recognized the need to be identified as a political leader with a strong political party. As they ruled, governmental resources were predictably used to strengthen the presidential party's position relative to other political parties. It is a testimony to the insatiability of politicians in power, the porosity of Philippine political parties, and the widespread disillusionment of the voters with corrupt politicians that national administrations mostly failed in their re-election bids. A willful Marcos had to plunder the treasury to an unprecedented scale in 1969 to break this tradition of manifest public dismay with their leaders.

President Ramos comes to power with a political party, *Lakas-NUCD*, which cannot be said to be all that strong. Despite its Christian Democrat and *Lakas EDSA* tags, its current membership shares no fundamental interest yet except perhaps a productive identification with the current President. *Lakas* may be considered at this stage to be an improvement over the previous majority but paradoxically non-ruling party, the LDP. *Lakas* party members, like those of LDP during Aquino's term, are still a motley group pledged to support the programs of the administration. Unlike LDP then, however, *Lakas* enjoys the official leadership of President Ramos. (President Aquino, to the end of her term, was not willing to be formally a leader of the LDP.) Without their own distinguishable party programs and platforms, however, and with party discipline shot or still untested, both *Lakas* and the LDP are better described as prototype organizations which could be, but are not yet, substantive political parties.

Given its currently advantageous position, *Lakas* with the full prestige of the President behind it and the material resources of government to fall back on, could be developed into a functional political party. Should the President exert himself towards the structuring of a political party now, it is quite likely that he would find a critical mass of people who are even now ready to work for an ideologically-definable political party. With this hard core membership and others who could be actively recruited subsequently, the President could develop a formidable party organization with a machinery ready to run in time for the 1995 elections.



The risk he runs, of course, is that a definitive political program for the *Lakas* at this point in time could drive away some of its current members. Still, this risk is most manageable earlier rather than later in his presidential term. With a Constitution which forbids presidential re-election, lameduck status for an incumbent President maximizes towards the end of his tenure.

Furthermore, this risk could be safely met if *Lakas* party structuring is made concurrently with political moves to build coalitions with other political parties and social groups. The operational result of this exercise would be to consolidate a core of political support—the re-structured *Lakas* with a definite political line—even as a broader base of political support, the umbrella coalition for the Ramos administration, is also simultaneously brought about.

The concern with strengthening political parties as part of an overall political institution-building campaign could be pursued by the administration in collaboration with the legislature. Laws could be enacted and strictly enforced which minimize party permeability through summary penalties for political turncoatism (e.g., politicians changing parties could be summarily barred from running for any elective position within at least five years), in addition to rigorous specifications relating to differentiated party programs and platforms for party registration and accreditation.

### **4.3 Local Governments**

With the passage of the Local Government Code, the greater autonomy of local governments and their authorities is to be expected. To the extent that this progressive development appears to be much assured, with significant planning, administrative, taxing and regulatory functions devolving to local governments, some basic changes must be anticipated in the traditional relationship of dependency by local governments on the national administration. Local government empowerment and the greater public accountability of local authorities to their immediate constituencies are predictable developments, according to one analyst (Brillantes, 1990:3-5).

Indeed, as local governments develop and improve on their capabilities to respond to the needs of their constituencies, their credibility and legitimacy to the latter would be enhanced. Local political power centers are bound to develop which, being more performance—and public constituency-oriented, have the potential

to modify existing patron-client patterns of local (as well as national) politics. The Ramos administration would do well to assist this process of local government build-up as it is contributory to the strengthening of the state in relation to already powerful interest groups which often capture and dominate Philippine politics.

By facilitating the generation and release of material resources earmarked by law for local governments, the Ramos administration would be building a national network of appreciative and politically sympathetic local government authorities. This network could be a significant pool of critical political resources for a President. As a transactional political leader, he binds members of this group to support his administration through legitimate preferential assistance to the local authorities. More crucially, as ultimately a transformational political leader, he secures their active support for national administration efforts at a political restructuring which threatens the traditionally strong interests. This political collaboration between the willful national leadership and the empowered local authorities is critical for the rise of a strong Philippine state. It is certainly vital for the Ramos administration's drive towards political pre-eminence.

#### *4.4 Other Internal Constituencies for Coalition Work*

Although coalition-building might be most urgent in relation to the legislature and political parties, the survival and pre-eminence of the present administration also depend on its ability to engage in collaborative political work with the other organized groups in Philippine society. These groups have been explored as part of the weak state's strong society environment in section 3.5 (above).

#### *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)*

NGOs, including the more politically active people's organizations (POs) have learned to design and pursue their respective agenda without much government support and often with a great deal of government resistance. This is largely due to the historical neglect by government of its most basic functions in relation to the citizenry's primary needs. Beyond this neglect which forces citizens themselves to take care of their concerns, government has also often shown predatory tendencies in its agencies and among its political authorities.

Because of their historical experiences, NGOs and POs are not going to be easy targets for coalition work by any political leadership. The Ramos administration will have to undertake confidence-building measures (CBMs) to impact positively on these groups. These groups' interest in good governance was clearly reflected in their concerted efforts to clarify public issues, delineate policy recommendations and, in a few cases, support certain candidates in the last elections. Given their strong civic sense, the administration could involve them in the design and eventually the implementation of a national program of action. The extensive studies and operational programs put together by these groups prior to the May 1992 elections, together with NEDA and other government agency plans, could serve as the initial for a multi-sectoral dialogue where government and those who have not been exactly impressed by government in the past could now get together and attempt coordinated work.

Other CBMs could be attempted by the administration in the areas defined by the functional interests of many NGOs. Environmental NGOs could be impressed by policy actions which clearly reflect the administration's serious interest in and purposive management of ecological concerns. Although human rights groups would be among the most wary of administration initiatives, summary action by the Ramos administration on some of the more blatant cases of human rights violations would go far in developing confidence in this government and starting human rights groups on their first little steps towards collaborative work with the national administration. Other NGOs reflect a broad range of sectoral interests, functional issue and cause orientation. It would be good for the President if a matrix were made of NGO groups, their primary interests, and the most immediate policy actions which would impact most on each of their interests. Then, at selected strategic times, the administration could dramatically show its interest and effectiveness by activating the mapped policy actions.

Legitimate NGOs (for there are many which are simply fronts for the shady interests of lucre-obsessed businessmen, opportunistic politicians, etc.) clearly reflect the citizenry's concern with organizing themselves around specific interests and causes. The experience of organization and collective action moves citizens beyond their impotent individualism and prepares them for organized political competition as well as outright conflict.

The Ramos administration has an interest in seeing to it that legitimate NGOs function well and gain even more experience as organized groups. The democratic origins of many NGOs make them natural components of any popular empowerment campaign. Ultimately, where the weakness of the state derives from the aggressiveness of strong oligarchic forces in society, a democratically-minded administration must align itself with all democratic groups to weaken oligarchy and maximize the possibility that a strong, democratic state would indeed arise. The Philippine state is not demonstrably stronger in the last six years. One possible reason for this condition is that the previous administration was unable to distance itself from much that is oligarchic at the same time that it allowed the gap between itself and the citizenry to become wider.

### *Labor and Business*

Organized labor has a significant capacity for political destabilization. Unless skillfully involved by the present administration in coalition work, labor groups and their sympathizers could paralyze sizable sectors of the economy and literally bring transportation in the the main urban areas to a standstill. Historically suffering oppressively low wages, poor working conditions and other inequities, labor groups have taken to progressively more dramatic ways of expressing their discontent. Some of the labor groups have also gone beyond economic considerations and included political concerns in their bill of particulars. Still, confronted by recessionary times, with unemployment running between 8.7% in 1991 to 9.1% at present (*Manila Bulletin*, June 21, 1992:1), a burgeoning labor force has realistically had to effect compromises and settle for much less than its initial demands. The relatively subdued mood of labor in the last three years is indicated by the fewer number of labor strikes which took place last year.

With the installation of a new administration, labor has predictably called attention to its needs. Given the currently depressed state of the economy, one may find the wage increase demanded by labor groups easy to sympathize with but hard to give. The administration has expressed its opposition to the magnitude of wage increases considered necessary by organized labor.

The private sector or business, on the other hand, has been largely suffering from the economic slump in both the international and national economies. The perceived political instability in the

Philippines, indicated by coups as well as by much deterioration in the state of public safety, has not inspired enough foreign investment to enter the country. The breakdown of the nation's power supply, the uncertainties attending the activation of alternative energy sources, the political ineffectiveness of the previous administration, and even natural calamities which have taken place, all dampen the entrepreneurial spirit of domestic as well as foreign businessmen.

The country's political stabilization would do much to reverse these negative developments. The cooperation of organized labor and the private sector with government is vitally needed to stabilize the country and entice both domestic and foreign investors to help build up and energize the economy. The Ramos administration has to take the initiative in forging an agreement between labor and business which would secure industrial peace. Tripartite consultations involving labor, business and government are fine, but they must have material results in terms of binding agreements that both workers and businessmen can live with at least provisionally, until such time as the economy has improved so that new negotiations would be in order.

The administration walks a political tightrope in bringing labor and business together. Neither one nor the other, alone, effectively contributes to national stability. Both have to go together while the political leadership must project firmness and fairness if it is to maintain its hold on both labor and business. Without this hold, the Ramos administration will fare much like its predecessor and, through much indecisiveness, contribute to more instability in the country.

### *The Religious Groups*

The religious groups in the country have a long tradition of involvement in political affairs, despite five Philippine constitutions demarcating a line between the state and the church. President Ramos is the first Philippine President in the last 94 years who happens to be a non-Catholic. In the last elections, religious personalities from several church groups, in communion with their flocks as well as with media, expressed incompatible biases as regards the candidacy of the current President.

Public opinion surveys generally do not support the idea that Filipinos like their church leaders to be involved much in politics

(SWS National Capital Region Survey, August 1990). Neither do they appear to vote in line with expressed or unexpressed preferences of their church leaders (SWS National Survey, February 1992). Members of the *Iglesia ni Kristo*, a very closely-knit religious group, might be the exception to the general rule.

Political leaders appear unwilling to test the influence of the religious in politics and find out whether indeed Filipino voters would desert even a reputable politician who has somehow incurred the displeasure of an influential church. (Marcos is not a legitimate test in this sense because of his widespread unpopularity with the people.)

Given the political realities, Philippine Presidents have had to make peace with the religious. Powerful as Marcos was, he learned how costly it could be not to have enough religious support behind him. President Ramos, pragmatically concerned with broadening his political base, has already tried to make peace with the religious, however the latter might have lined up in the last elections. At this stage of political resources consolidation for the Ramos administration, this is probably a prudent thing to do.

However, as President Ramos improves his political position (i.e. as his coalition-building work becomes more and more successful), there is need to be more wary about the closeness of religious and political authorities in the Philippines. It is arguable that the modernization and democratization of national polities are not well served by the close involvement of the religious in the affairs of the state. As a matter of fact, where the religious succeed in penetrating the state and wielding undue influence over the political authorities, a more sophisticated version of Marcelo del Pilar's *frailocracia* may yet evolve.

It would also be catastrophic if any President, in an effort to neutralize what he perceives as a strong religious bias against him, deliberately created a political base which is largely religiously defined. Pursued to its logical and historical end, such a policy would regress a nation back to the Dark Ages when religious wars were taken up by the state as a matter of course. In the 1990s, there are enough countries gripped by the terrible curse of religious conflicts. President Ramos cannot possibly stabilize the Philippines by backing Filipinos into its dark past.

## *Media*

Precisely because in politics what is projected to be real is the controlling reality, media plays a vital role in facilitating or obstructing the work of the political leadership. No one is probably more aware of this than President Ramos. Soon after the May 1992 elections, the President did his rounds of media institutions and influential figures in media.

Targeting media in the leadership's coalition work means getting media to practice its traditional craft of reporting and analyzing developments (or lack of them) which the leadership must be held responsible for. For media to be able to do this, the administration must make available the necessary information and, whenever possible, involve media people in reasoned analysis of developments which prudentially could be publicized.

At the same time, given media's irrepressibility (and at times, outright irresponsibility in over-sensationalizing sensitive developments or yielding to imaginative fabrication), the national administration would do well to involve media and the legislature in designing measures that would put a premium on media responsibility.

It is a frequent complaint by the authorities that media is obsessed with negative developments and fails to properly underscore the positive achievements of the administration. Discounting political malice, the administration might try making it easier for media to access the positive things referred to, or even more primary, simply really have positive things that could be properly projected. (In the last administration, even a sympathetic media person would have found it difficult to objectively report more positive than negative accomplishments by the leadership.)

Where a balance of negative situations persists, the best a responsible political leadership can hope for is to educate media people regarding the possibly intrinsic difficulties encountered. (For instance, in the case of government efforts to protect concerned people against lahar, the magnitude of the challenge involved as well as the available resources for meeting the challenge, among other things, might be clarified such that miraculous positive achievements could not reasonably be expected. The focus of reporting might then be the heroic struggle being waged by government despite the probability of a negative outcome.)

Within the political leadership, a system for sorting out confusing, even contradictory versions of what might have happened would help media in the accurate reporting and analysis especially of sensitive developments. Without this control system, media people could easily misjudge the import of impressionistic and possibly even emotional comments of officials who, scant minutes earlier, might have engaged each other in heated debate.

Ultimately, ruling out authoritarian politics as well as deliberate disinformation campaigns by the political leadership, coalition work with media has only one legitimate purpose: to be able to persuade media in its representation of the political leadership and its environment to be guided by much fairness and at least some patriotism.

#### ***4.5 External Constituencies***

The dramatic overthrow of Marcos in 1986 focused international interest on the Philippines. Political leaders and international media competed with each other in extending their best wishes to the struggling but proud country. Offers of assistance for economic rehabilitation and political reconstruction came from many quarters. But since then, in a fast-changing world, the Philippines has once again been relegated to near oblivion. Other countries have become much more interesting. Many of the reasons for the shift in attention are attributable to events beyond the control of the national leadership, like the break up of the former Soviet Union and the deepening recession in most parts of the world. There are factors, however, which have contributed to a growing marginalization of international interest in the Philippines. Among the most important of these are the poor use of foreign assistance, the lack of coherent planning, and the ambiguity and inconsistencies of government policy in some critical areas.

From the few countries which are still interested in the Philippines, the message is clear. The Philippines must get its act together or take responsibility for its actions. For example, in a talk before the press, outgoing Japanese envoy Toshio Goto commented that Japanese investments along with Official Development Assistance would contribute significantly to the country's economic growth, but Japanese investments would not come if widespread unrest continued (*Business World*, February 11, 1992:1). Goto, like other foreign diplomats and policy makers, *adds* that, although they respect the



sovereignty of the Philippine government on the issue of the U.S. military facilities, feasible alternatives were not undertaken. In essence, the Aquino administration "did not consider the consequences."

The Ramos administration must now address the challenge posed by these problems. The internal priorities and structures of the government have to be clearly established, and there will have to be more efficient use of external resources. Secondly, work must be done on improving the international image of the Philippines. Thirdly, the effects of the debt problem must be eased.

As a result of the May 1992 elections, the Ramos administration enjoys a strong legitimate mandate in the international arena. With this improved stature, the administration could review its policy options as regards the country's foreign debt. The need to invest in human and physical infrastructure, one of the pillars of long-term stability and growth, cannot be satisfied with economic policies which have not stemmed the outflow of resources. In its effort to negotiate with international donors, the next administration must make explicit the link between debt payments and the poor delivery of basic goods and services. External constituencies for this kind of policy exist to a certain extent, but more can be created with proper management of the issue.

Finally, the Ramos administration must take note that the relationship with the United States promises to be quite different due to the withdrawal of American forces. The departure of the Americans presents a unique historical opportunity to assert a constitutionally-mandated independent foreign policy.

#### *4.6 Creating New Constituencies*

Political leaders generally enter into coalitions with groups which are already organized and can support particular policies. Such groups often have clear positions on issues which affect them. One of the key concerns of a political leadership is the feasibility of forming new groups into a constituency for desired policy reforms. Clearly the Ramos administration must invest some time looking into this matter.

Coalitions are always created for specific purposes. The coalition which brought the administration to power is not necessarily the same coalition that would be supportive of policy reforms. This became particularly evident in the case of the Aquino administration. In the

early part of her term, President Aquino had to balance the interests of the different factions which composed the coalition of forces that toppled Marcos from power. The difficulty of doing so became evident in the inability of the administration to identify and pursue clear policy directions. For instance, President Aquino affirmed her commitment to free enterprise and people power, signifying the intention to reduce the government's managerial role, even as it assumed the task of "orchestrating the rise of the economy from the ruins and the promotion of equity and social justice to the people" (Cariño, 1990:2).

President Aquino's initial core support had been largely comprised by business and land-owning groups whose principal interest was a "return to pre-martial law order and property rights and to normal business conditions" (De Dios, 1990:121). Yet, to strengthen her challenge to Marcos, she eventually had to make common cause with more populist and radical anti-Marcos groups. The presence of irreconcilable interests in the Aquino coalition and the inability or unwillingness to resolve this situation underpinned the lack of clear policy directions for her administration.

The Ramos administration has to learn from the Aquino experience. As in the imperative for building up a political party base, the attempt to winnow coalition groups and separate from the rest those who could be core supporters for basic policy reforms is a delicate operation. The challenge here is to be able to keep for as long as possible the cooperation of those groups who may oppose the reform. With time, a skillful political leadership could bring its resources to bear on these groups and try to make them change their position. Where this is impossible due to basic and irreconcilable differences, the political timing of the separation of ways for these groups and the administration is crucial. The fatal mistake for a reform-oriented political leadership is to fail to understand the eventual necessity of such parting of ways, or, understanding the inevitable, to fail to act at the most opportune moment.

Identifying the groups which could support or hinder policy reform is not difficult in a pluralistic society. Difficulties arise when groups or individuals believe that: 1) an issue does not affect them; or 2) an issue affects them but they are unwilling to act; or 3) they understand what affects them but they think they do not have enough power to do anything to effect change. A diligent political leadership can do much to change the attitudes of groups from indifference and inefficacy to participative action.

New constituencies can be developed from existing groups which have not identified any position on specific issues. Class-based organizations or groups are perhaps the easiest to identify inasmuch as class interests are to a great extent homogeneous and fixed. Furthermore, the structure of a capitalist society tends to differentiate social classes, making it simpler to identify areas where government programs could find class support or opposition. Equity-thrusted programs, for instance, would gain much favor among the poorer classes even as the better-off would not be as supportive. And, at least in the initial stages of implementation, productivity-oriented policies may excite the owners and managers of business firms significantly more than their poorly-paid workers.

New constituencies could also be built around sectors. Sectors are a more varied grouping of interests and do not have the same advantages as class-based constituencies—that is, their interests are not as fixed as the latter and thus, it is not as easy to define where support could be gained for governmental programs. Nonetheless, sector-based constituencies could mean a wider support-base for policy reform since varied interests are involved. The difficulty is in packaging the policy in such a way that sectoral interests are addressed advantageously. For instance, it is clear that the removal of the minimum wage would generate further employment in the long-term. Nonetheless, members of the labor sector generally refuse to support it principally because up to 90 percent of labor remains unorganized. On the other hand, the removal of minimum wages would also put pressure on workers to organize themselves much better in order to provide better working conditions for their members through collective bargaining agreements. This would be to the advantage of the labor unions and groups over the long term.

Conceptually, interest groups are less clearly differentiable than either classes or sectors. To a great extent, they are also less organized. Interest groups are collectives based on the mutuality of interest on specific issues. Constituencies built around specific interests cannot be expected to stay as a whole for long because they are in general single-issue coalitions. They may, however, be useful for particular issues where the political leadership may need to build temporary coalitions.

An example of a successful strategy in building an interest-based aggrupation from various groups is provided by the experience of the Chilean government. The Chilean strategy to sell the idea of new

taxes centered on creating constituencies for reform. Business taxes were to be doubled and the income to be spent on education, medical care, and housing. Instead of a small group of technocrats pushing for legislation, the strategy made otherwise politically neutral groups (like the various organizations of students, teachers, the elderly, the urban poor, unionized labor, and transport workers) stakeholders in the reform program. The businessmen, on the other hand, were convinced that this kind of investment in human development would return to them in the form of a more highly-skilled and peaceful labor force.

## **5.0 Urgent Policy Reforms for National Unity and Stability**

Coalition building has been looked into (section 4, above) precisely because in a weak state any political leadership leads a precarious existence. Confronted by powerful social interests, this political leadership has to initially consolidate its own political resources and actively seek out other groups in society and government to bring into alliances with it. Even latent interests are assiduously sought out and new groups are carefully activated in this quest for vitally needed political allies.

The political leadership seeks to strengthen itself through alliances with others in order to capably address the urgent concerns of society. In this part of the paper are examined some of the issues which have made for much failure of governance and the political alienation of the public. All these issues impact on the stability of the political system, and their successful resolution implies the activation of the virtuous circle syndrome among the earlier discussed parameters and dimensions of political stability.

### ***5.1 Establishing Civic Order***

The President himself acknowledged this area of reform as the most primordial and thus the most urgent. No government worth the name shirks the responsibility of providing its citizen at least some minimal level of peace and order. The credibility of government itself is threatened when it fails to manage the challenge of maintaining public order and safety.

Available evidence indicates that across the years, from the time of Marcos to the present, Filipinos had felt unsafe wherever they might

be. Even the much-vaunted Cory magic failed to work its wonder on the concerned citizenry. During her administration, about 40% of Filipinos nationwide felt unsafe walking the streets of their own neighborhood or feared break-ins and robbery when they were at home (SWS National Surveys, 1986-1991). Illegal drug use, robberies, kidnapings, and other forms of criminality became widespread although, interestingly, the officially monitored level of index and non-index crimes was supposed to be decreasing and official crime fighters were feeling good. The extent of human rights violations in the Aquino years has also drawn much criticism from local as well as international agencies.

Beyond the crimes against persons and property, there are the dramatic attacks on the regime itself and its authorities. Communist rebels and Muslim secessionists frequently committed acts which were disruptive of the public order. Military rebels contributed their share of "unauthorized military exercises" and exploded several times into stressful coups.

So much widespread criminality and the precariousness of public order itself create more than simple apprehension among the citizenry. It also makes them resentful of authorities who cannot secure, much less improve the lives of people in the community. The national administration must exert itself to re-establish law and order before anarchic, criminal elements gain the upper hand and make of state power and the authorities a captive government. The political returns are impressively high for any political leadership who can turn the situation around in this area of governance. No less than the loyalty of a citizenry is pledged to a national administration perceived to be doing well in the fight against crime and the protection of civic order.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Immediately commit the national administration to a well-publicized campaign against crime in general and against specific syndicates and personalities known to be deeply involved in criminal activities. Make this campaign one which the public itself could monitor for success or failure. Clearly specify targeted actions and anticipated results within defined periods of time.

2. Use as public examples the willful, summary prosecution and conviction of powerful personalities known to be much involved in

criminal activities. This will have a salutary effect on those who thrive off crime, and build confidence in the seriousness of government and its political leadership.

3. Establish a Fact-Finding Commission which will undertake a comprehensive study of the genesis as well as the environmental factors nurturing crime and criminals in the Philippine society. The same body must also look into the linkages between criminal elements and people in government. Finally, the commission must recommend mechanisms for the effective eradication of criminal activities in this country.

4. As regards the political rebels, the Ramos administration should look closely into current local and international developments which make political initiatives unlikely to take off in a cold-war setting.

5. The President must take the initiative in jump-starting a Philippine peace process. A negotiated political solution must be the initial assumption in any attempt to defuse the problem of rebellion in the Philippines.

6. Make available to all kinds of rebels a comprehensive amnesty program as part of the overall confidence-building measures (CBMs) which negotiated political solutions demand from the government as well as the rebel groups.

7. Help do away with all legal impediments to the peace process, such as the Philippine anti-subversion law which penalizes membership in the Communist Party of the Philippines and prevents a communist from being elected by the people.

8. Strengthen, professionalize, and modernize the integrated Philippine National Police as well as the Philippine military. When everything else has failed, one must also be able to employ institutions which legally have a monopoly on the application of physical force in society.

## *5.2 Managing the Military*

As discussed in section 3.3 (above), the politicized military is one of the sectors which requires political management by the national administration. There is no reversing the politicization of the military, and it is doubtful whether this would be best even if it were possible. Given that the military training does not prescribe patriotism and

that it inclines people towards decisiveness, specially under conditions of marked stress, a politicized military is necessarily impelled towards political action when a political leadership appears vacillating and ineffective for a long time.

The firmest guarantor of military constitutionalism has always been a functional civilian administration, not a series of constitutional provisions which assumes the military to be inherently interested in wresting political control. There is hardly any post-war instance of a military takeover where the civilian authorities governed with some degree of effectiveness.

However, the Ramos administration could undertake some measures which, in conjunction with high performance government, might more effectively keep the military in the barracks. The following recommendations for military management might bear looking into.

### Recommendations

1. Weaken the objective basis of military perceptions which reflect poorly on civilian authorities and civilian governance. The inaugural speech of the President properly emphasized to every one that a government need not be corrupt nor a bureaucracy ineffective. Military men would be favorably impressed if indeed civilian regimes, even one with a former military man for a leader, should make legitimate claims to effective governance and patriotism.

The question of effective leadership is particularly important for military men. The President and his administration must be able to project capabilities for decisive governance. Some confidence building measures could take such dramatic forms as the summary prosecution of prestigious civilians and military men with criminal connections.

2. Strengthen civilian supervision of the military, primarily through the civilianization of the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, the NICA, and other intelligence/security agencies beyond the military. This measure operationally could require such agencies to be headed by civilians or even former military men, provided they had retired at least six years ago. This would discourage senior military men about to retire from consorting with powerful politicians for possible patronage. It would still be possible for competent retired military men to be considered for these positions

when their active linkages with the military would no longer be as strong.

3. Weaken or completely remove civilian overseer functions which increase the military's vulnerability to political partisanship, as in the case of the Commission on Appointments (CA) passing over military promotions at the level of the colonels. Professionalism is best left to the military itself to supervise, and the promotion process for military men retained completely within the military. What might be maintained at the level of the CA is only the power to review a presidential recommendation for the Chief-of-Staff.

4. Activate a system of checks and balances within the military itself by having a joint Chiefs-of -Staff replace the present Chief-of-Staff system.

5. Assist the build-up of the national police as a professional force. With more political contacts between the national police and local government authorities, the former could develop into a relatively strong counterforce which a coup-minded military could overcome only with much difficulty.

6. Reduce the size of the military in terms of manpower, but at the same time give it a significantly bigger budget to indicate the administration's commitment to military modernization. Make the military better trained, better armed, and better paid.

7. Undertake through the National Security Council (or a strategic studies center tasked to look into strategic national security concerns) regularly updated, classified studies of the AFP and its various concerns. These studies must be automatically disseminated to the President and the Secretary of National Defense.

### *5.3 Improving Bureaucratic Performance*

Improving bureaucratic performance must be among the most important priorities of the political leadership. Efficient delivery of services will establish performance legitimacy for the administration, thus generating political resources which could be exploited by the political leadership in its attempts to implement reforms. At the same time, it would in particular cases—such as tax-collection—generate material resources which would allow the government to underwrite more of the reforms it has to initiate in order to establish political stability.

8



Bureaucracies generally exist to "institutionalize and strengthen the supportive services needed by any government committed to implementing its own policies" (Riggs, 1987:432). In essence, the bureaucracy is the mechanism by which the policy decisions made by political leaders are carried out. Bureaucrats have however, also gained political influence because of the extensive social and economic responsibilities of government.

Bureaucrats themselves make policy on a daily basis. This in itself is not a bad thing insofar as the execution of laws requires bureaucrats to "apply abstract statutes to real-life situations" (Roth and Wilson, 1980:272). Bureaucracies, however, often act as interest groups, lobbying government for policies they support. This was evident, for instance, in the way that the Philippine military had pressed for the retention of the U.S. facilities in the Philippines prior to the Senate decision to reject the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security on September 16, 1991. More importantly, bureaucracies can disregard decisions made by the political leadership which are contrary to their interests, as shown in the stance of the Department of Trade and Industry's resistance to the implementation of the tariff liberalization program as defined in Executive Order 413. Lethargy and outright resistance to policy can be noted in the experience of the Aquino administration; it even lead to diminishing the legitimacy of the government in power.

The Philippine bureaucracy, plagued as it is by inefficiency and graft and corruption, needs to be reformed. Its inability to efficiently and effectively deliver basic services had adversely affected the credibility of the Aquino government, thereby diminishing its legitimacy. This public disaffection with government for its lack of efficiency in the delivery of basic services was highlighted by the energy crisis which has become an annual event every summer for the past three years. An SWS national survey made in November 1990 showed a strong correlation between the people's evaluation of government and the government's top leadership (Arroyo:1991). It showed that while 63 percent of those who indicated satisfaction with government performance were also satisfied with President Aquino, 82 percent of those who had been dissatisfied with the general performance of government were dissatisfied with President Aquino. The performance of the bureaucracy under Aquino has, therefore, been a major factor in the diminishing of her government's credibility.

8

Among the most significant problems concerning the bureaucracy are:

### *1. Inefficiency*

Inefficiency continues to be a characteristic of the Philippine bureaucracy. This is shown by the persistence of red tape, defined as the condition wherein the "succession of goals and ritualized procedures become ends in themselves and are adhered to regardless of their inappropriateness" (Reyes, 1982:272-273); a bloated bureaucracy; an over centralization. The Aquino administration, in an attempt to improve the performance of the bureaucracy, undertook the reorganization of the government service by streamlining its personnel complement and strengthening the regional units by decentralizing the bureaucracy's structure. This whole process, however, had largely negative results.

The bureaucracy has grown in size since February 1986 when President Aquino came to power. One study (Cariño, 1990:39-40) showed that between the first quarter of 1986 and January of 1989, an increase of 11 percent in personnel was recorded for fourteen departments which had completed their reorganization. A Civil Service Commission survey (Esleta, 1988:14-17) also indicated that two persons were taken into the government service for every separation, with the bulk of these (52.1 percent) being original appointment. From 1.3 million employees in the government service in February 1986, the bureaucracy is now 1.5 million strong.

Using data from the department of Budget and Management, one study of the 25 government agencies which had completed their reorganization by 1989 showed a 38 percent decrease in the ratio between personnel at the central office and the regional offices between 1986 and 1989 (Cariño, 1990:39-40). The passage of the Local Government Code of 1991 makes it likely that this will increase further.

The new Local Government Code presents opportunities for the next administration to transfer from the central administration to local government units much of the administrative and operational responsibilities for the delivery of basic services. The expansion of the functions of local government, however, means that the local government units will require assistance from the central bureaucracy in terms of the required manpower and technical and managerial skills to successfully implement the intent of the Local Government

Code to "provide for a more responsive and accountable local government structure."

Inefficiency is also evident in the disposition of cases in the judiciary. One study conducted in 1988 shows that litigation time for criminal cases had increased between 1977 to 1987 from 202 to 478 days (a 137 percent jump). Litigation for civil cases, however, had gone down by 97 or 21 percent (Legada and Rayal, 1988). A significant reason for delays was the congestion of cases in the courts. In 1990, only 243,439 cases were resolved out of 615,968 filed cases (292,133 of which were already pending from December 1989), or 40 percent of the total (The Supreme Court, [1990]). This is already a significant improvement from previous years wherein decisions were handed down in only 35 percent (1986) to 38 percent (1989) of the cases newly filed and those pending from the previous year. Nonetheless, there were still 306,945 cases pending at the end of 1990.

The *Katarungang Pambarangay* has considerably diverted thousands of cases away from the court system (Fernan, 1990:5-6). In its first ten years of operation from 1980 to March 1990, 1,076,207 disputes were brought to the barangay courts of which 953,608 (89 percent) were amicably settled. However, 72,112 (7 percent) cases, were still passed on to the courts. In 1990, a total of 50,586 cases were pending with the barangay courts.

In responding to the problem of inefficiency, bureaucratic reform should be geared towards the improvement of government services which directly affect people, the simplification of the systems and procedures by which these services are delivered, and decentralization.

## ***2. Graft and Corruption***

Graft and corruption in government continues to be a problem. *Gising Bayan*, an anti-graft group, estimated in 1987 that graft and corruption cost the government the amount of P100 million a day, or P36 billion a year (Office of the Ombudsman, 1991:7). Using this figure as a base, it was estimated that P162.5 billion or 37 percent of tax revenues collected from 1987 to 1990 went to grafters. As it is, the Office of Ombudsman investigates and sifts through some 4,000 graft complaints a year. The prevalence of graft and corruption has been noted by the public. The SWS Report of July 1991 showed that "dissatisfaction [over government's efforts at fighting corruption] both

prevailed and had grown significantly since November [1990]" (Mangahas, 1991:3-4).

Reasons for the existence of graft and corruption vary. There are references to structural causes exemplified by the low salaries of employees and the high cost of running and maintaining an elective post; cultural causes, or values which are considered to be part of the societal norm, such as *pakikisama*, and attitudes on material wealth and status; and systemic, or those factors related to the mechanisms of value-allocation in society, which include excessive taxes, slow delivery of justice, and heavy regulatory requirements and red tape imposed on business and other industries (Office of the Ombudsman, 1991:7).

Among the reasons given for the prevalence of graft and corruption at the lower levels of the bureaucracy is the low salary of employees. In spite of the Salary Standardization Law (SSL), there is still disaffection with the Aquino government in the ranks of the civil service inasmuch as the SSL had put "the welfare of those already far above the poverty line first over the thousands of its extremely underpaid civil servants" (Cariño, 1990:26).

Statutory efforts as well as administrative measures to curb graft and corruption have been present, as shown by R.A. 3019, R.A. 1379, P.D. 749, and P.D. 46. Even the Presidential Commission for Good Government is in itself an indicator of the Aquino administration's efforts to fight graft and corruption.

Accepting the idea that graft and corruption cannot be totally eradicated, the new administration must nevertheless actively minimize its occurrence to ensure government legitimacy.

### Recommendations:

1. The Ramos administration must make an unqualified commitment to simplifying the operations of the bureaucracy and streamlining it in terms of cutting off unnecessary and unproductive functions and personnel.

2. The President should direct the Commission on Audit to organize and chair a task force which would study and, guided by its findings, present guidelines for the simplification of processing mechanisms in government agencies.

3. Commensurate with the declaration of his commitment to decentralization, the President should instruct the new DILG Secretary to attend to the following concerns:

3.1 Together with the Secretary for Education, Culture and Sports, to coordinate with the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) on the establishment of managerial skills development programs for local government executives similar to the Career Executive Service Development Program (CESDP).

3.2 To form a committee of experts to examine federalization as an optimal mechanism for realizing the goals of decentralization, and to make appropriate recommendations to the administration.

4. The President, through the Department of Justice, must coordinate with the Supreme Court in examining different means for decongesting cases in the courts.

5. As a further measure which could also alleviate the overcentralization of power in the executive, the President should direct the Department of Justice to coordinate with the Supreme Court on the implementation of fiscal autonomy for the Judiciary, as decreed by the Constitution.

6. A monitoring and coordinating office chaired by the Commissioner of the Civil Service, with the Commission on Audit as its technical arm, should be created to look into the efficiency of government service.

7. Training seminars and workshops geared towards the development of technical skills and capacities at the local government level, in response to the powers devolved to Local Governments by the Local Government Code, should be extensively organized and implemented by the DAP in coordination with the DILG and the DECS.

8. The Department of Justice and the Supreme Court should study and implement mechanisms which would ascertain the effective operation of the barangay justice system.

9. Direct the Civil Service Commissioner to enforce R.A. 6713 providing for a Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees.

10. Establish Community-based Corruption Prevention units (CPUs) and Citizens Committees for Good Government which will ensure participation of the widest cross section of the community.

11. Include a member from the Office of the Ombudsman in the Commission on Audit's efficiency monitoring and coordinating committee to underscore its also having a graft-busting function.

#### *5.4 Resource Generation*

Historically, the Philippine state has not been able to generate enough revenues to pay for its expenditures. This deficit is largely due to: (1) inadequate tax collections; (2) large debt payment which results in a net resource outflow; and (3) financial support for government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs). Table 3 reflects the size of the national deficit over time.

Table 3. National Government Cash Operations, 1980-1990  
(in billions of pesos)

| Year | Revenue | Expenditures | Deficit |
|------|---------|--------------|---------|
| 1980 | 34.8    | 38.1         | -3.3    |
| 1985 | 68.9    | 80.1         | -11.2   |
| 1986 | 79.3    | 110.5        | -31.2   |
| 1987 | 103.2   | 119.9        | -16.7   |
| 1988 | 112.8   | 136.1        | -23.3   |
| 1989 | 152.4   | 172.0        | -19.6   |
| 1990 | 180.8   | 218.0        | -37.2   |

Source: Department of Budget and Management, 1991.

Thus incapacitated, the national government has continued to turn to foreign and domestic borrowings. This debt-driven growth strategy has made for much inequity. While it has made a few comfortably rich, the majority of Filipinos (in the current as well as the coming generations, one might add) struggle with the burden of repayment. Under the last two administrations, the government was caught in a dynamic which borrowed new money to pay back an old debt. This desperate policy simply postpones the inevitable, the total breakdown of the system of public finance and the subsequent economic and political dislocation of the nation.

Given a strong-willed political leadership, this terrible dynamic could be altered. Several countries have succeeded in generating enough resources to finance their development projects. For example, the Mexican government, through (1) increased tax collections, (2) the privatization of over 1,000 state-run enterprises, and (3) a successful debt reduction plan, has for the first time since the 1960s, registered a budget surplus. The reforms have not only brought praise and financial assistance from international creditors and investors, but a large mid-term electoral victory for the ruling party. That electoral victory can be seen as an indicator of the importance of a government that generates and utilizes resources appropriately.

One cannot underscore enough the necessity of political will which would be demanded by a similar set of policies in the Philippines. All of the policies needed to generate significantly larger revenues for the government and its reform programs would hit traditionally privileged vested interests. Only a political leadership with the appropriate vision and program of governance, backed by a coalition of political and other groups which it had worked to build, can succeed in maximizing the government's capabilities for legitimate revenue-extraction from the powerful and the wealthy.

### *Challenges and Responses*

It is important to have at least the most elementary idea of the specific problems which attend the general issue of increasing government revenues in the Philippines. Then the policy actions which might be explored could also be more clearly outlined.

#### *Inadequate Tax Collection*

Tax collection over the years has been inadequate. One of the first efforts to improve the government's performance was undertaken in 1965, when the Chairman of the then Joint Legislative-Executive Tax Commission, Senator Gerardo Roxas, commissioned the first comprehensive "Study on Tax Administration in the Philippines."

Under the Marcos administration, the ratio of taxes collected to GNP improved to 14 percent in 1974. That ratio was not sustained as the average for the rest of the 70s hovered at 12 percent. By 1981, the ratio dropped to 11.2 percent and slipped even further to 10.49 percent in 1984 ([National Tax Research Center,] 1987: "Introduction").

Since the EDSA revolution, the Aquino administration improved on tax collection. By 1989, the ratio of tax to GNP stood at 14.3 percent. Although an improvement, the Philippines still lags behind several ASEAN countries. For example from the period 1972 to 1989, the Thai national government increased the percentage of GNP to taxes from 12.5 to 17.4 percent while the Malaysian government recorded an increase from 20.3 percent to 25.1 percent (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 10, 1991:11).

The basis of the Aquino administration's improved performance was a "Study of Philippine Tax Administration" done in 1986. The reforms had two components. The first focused on internal reforms designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the bureaus. The Bureau of Internal Revenue's (BIR) five-point program included the new Taxpayer's Identification Number (TIN) and the development of the new national payments controls system (NPCS). The TIN gave each taxpayer just one permanent number for tax accounts, value-added tax registration, withholding tax, assessment tax, and other transactions. Designed to help centralize tax information, the NPCS simplifies payment by coursing them through banks under a one-stop shop scheme.

Recently, the Department of Finance embarked on an ambitious computerization project to help the efficiency and effectiveness of the BIR and the Bureau of Customs (BOC) (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 2, 1992:1).

The second component, designed to plug loopholes and put more teeth into existing tax laws, required legislative approval. As of early April, 1992, some of the administration-sponsored bills had congressional approval but had not been signed into law. One bill, the Simplified Net Income Taxation Scheme (SNITS), is designed to make the income tax more progressive by targeting professionals and self-employed individuals. Another bill aims at exempting all fixed income earners from filing tax returns. This is designed to reduce the amount of paperwork processed by the BIR and allow the bureau to concentrate on tax collections from corporations and individuals with high incomes.

Some of the administration-sponsored bills relating to more efficient resource generation have not been approved thus far. Among these bills is a measure that would create a special unit for large taxpayers. This bill, a consolidation of House Bill No. 35398 and Senate



Bill No. 1954, would centralize all tax payments especially those from big corporations (*Business World*, October 7, 1991:1).

In view of the existing situation which leads to markedly reduced tax revenues for government and the emasculation of badly needed reform programs, the following might be considered for appropriate action by the national administration:

**Recommendations:**

1. The President must himself facilitate the enactment of any legislation now pending or yet to be sponsored which clearly improves equitable tax distribution and effective tax collection.

2. The President should announce a policy of strict and summary treatment of perennial tax evaders and, pursuant to such a policy, direct the Secretary of Finance and the BIR Commissioner to prepare a list of key government agencies, private sector companies as well as individuals to be subjected to regular tax audits.

3. The Bureau of Internal Revenue, the Bureau of Customs and other agencies with related tax-gathering functions should formally be committed to set annual collection targets which are significantly higher than in the past.

4. The President should continue demonstrably effective reform programs such as the computerization of records and collection at the BIR and BOC.

5. A continuing tax education of the citizenry needs to be undertaken. The administration could use the schools as well as the local barangay network to regularly transmit to the people information regarding tax revenues and their expenditure.

***Government-Owned and Controlled Corporations***

In 1970, there were only 65 GOCCs. By 1985, that number had mushroomed to 296. While the Aquino administration disposed of several GOCCs, the remaining ones continue to represent a drain on the national government's budget. For example, in 1989, budgetary support for GOCCs stood at P640 million. This does not include other fiscal aspects such as: (a) the tax and duty exemption privileges of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), Social Security

System (SSS), and the National Power Corporation; and (b) the equity investments and subsidies (Sy, [n.d]:14).

To monitor the GOCCs, the Government Corporation Monitoring and Coordinating Committee is responsible for establishing and monitoring the financial and physical performance targets. Based on Memorandum Order 263, the Committee is empowered to look into the affairs of 25 GOCCs. This number is only a fraction of the number of GOCCs (Sy, [n.d]:14).

The number of GOCCs should be reduced while strengthening the financial and economic performance of the remaining ones. The government should examine the creation of new GOCCs such as the Mindanao Development Authority in light of a policy to reduce their number.

#### Recommendations:

1. Announce a policy to vigorously continue the privatization program. Privatization would provide the government with non-recurring revenues and set the trend for private sector-driven growth.

2. The President should expand the jurisdiction of the Government Corporation Monitoring and Coordination Committee to cover all the GOCCs.

3. Beyond the GOCCs privatized under the office of the President, the President can continue to pursue the privatization of several big-ticket items. These would include the National Steel Corporation, the Manila Hotel, and the remaining shares at the Philippine National Bank. Finance Secretary Estanislao estimates that the sale of the National Steel, the Duty-Free Philippines, and the Manila Hotel can raise 2.05 billion pesos (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 30, 1992:17).

#### *Debt Servicing*

The government has continued to finance its budget deficits through increased domestic and external debt.

Table 4 presents a breakdown of the debt and, in particular, the growing importance of domestic debt used to finance the budget deficit. Part of the reason for the increasing domestic debt is the reluctance of foreign commercial banks to grant new loans. Table 5

documents the net resource transfer by type of creditors. It is clear that foreign commercial banks and foreign financial institutions are largely responsible for the negative net resource transfer. Between 1986 and September 1991, this group has been responsible for an average of 91 percent of the resource transfers (Central Bank, Table 2a Net Resource Transfer, 1986-Sept 1991). For example for 1991 and 1992, the net resource transfer is estimated to be US\$4 billion (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 9, 1991:1).

**Table 4. Philippine Foreign and Domestic Debt**

| Year | Foreign debt<br>(millions of US\$) | Public Domestic debt<br>(millions of pesos) |
|------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1986 | 28,256                             | 144,352                                     |
| 1987 | 28,649                             | 161,100                                     |
| 1988 | 27,915                             | 207,179                                     |
| 1989 | 27,616                             | 237,250                                     |
| 1990 | 28,698                             | 254,457                                     |

Source: *Ibon Facts and Figures*, vol 14 No. 6 (31 March 1991): 4.

**Table 5. Net Resource Transfer, 1986-1990**  
(in millions of US \$)

| Type of Creditor/FI | 1986  | 1987  | 1988  | 1989  | 1990  |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Total               | -1341 | -1836 | -1923 | -1096 | -1036 |
| Multilateral        | -248  | -476  | -542  | -48   | -47   |
| Bilateral           | 93    | 263   | 91    | 229   | 378   |
| Others              | -360  | -401  | -393  | -129  | 5     |

Source: Central Bank, 1991.

### Recommendations:

1. The President should immediately appoint the executive members of the Joint Executive-Legislative Debt Council and direct them to formulate a clear policy on foreign financing. In particular, the cases of fraudulent loans should be reviewed.

2. Based on the report of the Debt Council, the President should set the government's policy on foreign financing and debts. The policy must clarify, once and for all, the government's position on the fraudulent loans awarded to such corporations as the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, Cellophil, Planters Products, Inc., and Construction Development Corporation of the Philippines.

### *Increasing Taxes*

An increase in taxes is one clear option for the new administration. However, domestic political support for new taxes is weak, although there is strong pressure from international financing agencies for this measure.

A survey conducted in 1986 on taxpayers attitudes revealed that respondents felt that the taxpayers cheat because: (1) tax revenues go to the pockets of some people in government; and (2) government spends tax money on worthless projects (National Tax Research Center, 1986:12).

On the other hand, there is strong political and financial international support for reforms aimed at improving revenue generation. Gautam Kaji, the World Bank's Vice-President for East Asia, said that the Philippines "cannot forever go on asking for aid in order to bail itself out. It is only the Philippines which can help itself." He further stated that "the problem has something to do with domestic resource mobilization, meaning your country's difficulty in generating internal resources" (*Business World*, October 17, 1991:12).

The attitude of both government and those governed needs to be significantly modified. The government has to convince the citizenry that the resources collected from them are indeed largely being used for the general welfare. Meanwhile, the people, particularly the business persons and high-income professionals, should realize that prompt payment of taxes is required of responsible citizenship.

### **Recommendations:**

1. To build domestic support for increased taxation, the President must link that effort to the financing of actual projects with the greatest socio-economic impact. For example, the Chilean government embarked on a successful policy of doubling business taxes to 10

percent and using the funds to support projects for education, health, and housing.

2. Any policy which increases taxes for the general citizenry must be clearly progressive. The national administration must be able to show that any tax increase is equitably distributed and that equity also attends the utilization of the revenues thus gained.

### *5.5. Resource Utilization*

The manner in which governments use resources has profound implications on the political stability of the nation. Towards the end of the Marcos regime, the misuse of state funds contributed much to the loss of the government's legitimacy. Stable political systems involve citizens who feel that the government is responsive and responsible to the needs of the governed. In many cases, the erosion of this sentiment provokes political challenges that can lead to instability.

The proper and effective use of the resources collected from citizens has a dual function. On the one hand, government expenditures can foster growth. On the other hand, a good expenditures program enhances the support of the citizenry for the government. These two functions are mutually reinforcing. The effective use of public funds for given projects impact positively on the public perception of bureaucratic efficiency as well as graft and corruption; it ultimately feeds into the public's perceptions of the government's legitimacy, and to that extent influences the political leadership's ability to address the more general concern of political stabilization.

There are less circuitous ways of establishing the benefits of a good resource utilization program. An example of increased stability that is directly linked to government performance is provided by recent experiences in Latin America. On the basis of these experiences, according to Oscar Altimir, director of the Economic Development division in the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, "the thinking is that there will be stability as long as the poor see the Government is making an effort (*New York Times*, November 13, 1991:A-4)."

Projects geared towards reform must be implemented. To maximize the positive effects for the administration or government, the criteria for the choice of projects should be based on:

- (1) the socio-economic impact and visibility of the project;
- (2) the feasibility of funding the project; and
- (3) the project's feasibility in terms of political and bureaucratic support.

These criteria make it likely that the chosen reform programs and projects would benefit a significant number of people, and that the political leadership's national constituency would be familiar with them. At the same time, the criteria would ensure that every project proposed would run the gauntlet of political and economic benefit-cost analysis. A national administration that undertakes this careful appraisal of reform projects and the overall programs which consolidate them is definitely involved in the nation's political management. When the projects are actually run, the likelihood of actual hands-on management by a concerned political leadership will be high.

Some of the reform projects/programs which would meet the criteria set above and thus would be good for both the nation and a leadership seeking to strengthen itself and the other state institutions are in the following areas:

1. infrastructure (roads and bridges, rail transport, communications and the LRT)
2. energy generation and distribution
3. social services development (health, nutrition, education, and housing)
4. Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program
5. military modernization

The investment or utilization of public resources in these areas serves to provide the necessary prerequisites for economic growth and political stabilization. Any political leadership that commits itself to the effective implementation of programs and projects in these areas undertakes the most basic political coalition work, the involvement of its citizenry in government and the maximization of its citizenry's support for the government precisely because that government serves its people and its political leadership works.

However, one must not go into these areas of concern without some idea of the problems which make resource utilization in these areas also fairly difficult. Even a strong-willed political leadership has to acknowledge the limitations which are imposed by current conditions in these areas. There is no choice for a reform-minded

administration, however, except to go ahead and activate needed programs in the areas identified above.

### *Challenges and Problems*

#### *Infrastructure investment*

Infrastructure investment has had a lower priority than the debt payment.

Investments in infrastructure have a large positive net effect on the country's economic and political development. For instance, improved farm to market roads translate into increased economic activity and stimulate higher rural incomes. A World Bank study in Bangladesh shows that the development of infrastructure such as roads, school centers, and health clinics spurred increases of rural incomes of as much as 33 percent (World Bank, [1991]:60). Moreover, according to the World Bank the biggest obstacle for the poor in gaining access to health and education is the lack of physical infrastructure (World Bank, [1991]:84). Efficient infrastructure development also enhances the peace and order situation.

As documented in the section on resource generation, the Philippines suffers from a comparatively low ratio of taxes collected to GNP. In addition, the Aquino administration pursued a policy which honored all debts, including contested fraudulent loans incurred in the past regime. According to Benjamin Diokno, former budget undersecretary, a policy change adopted in 1991 reflects the priorities of the government. Under this policy, the Bureau of Treasury allocates cash for the entire bureaucracy only after setting aside payments for debt-servicing (*Manila Chronicle*, March 26, 1992:1). The combined effect of low tax collections and the primacy of debt payments resulted in a significant decrease in infrastructure expenditures.

For example, in its 1991 year-end report, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) stated that, of the programmed 9,025 foreign-assisted projects, only 850 were completed. Some 372 projects are on going while 7,983 have yet to be started. Out of the 33,242 locally funded projects on-line for implementation, only 13,696 were completed while 8,830 remain on the drawing boards (*Business World*, December 31, 1991:4).

According to the Coordinating Council of the Philippine Assistance Plan the poor performance of infrastructure development can be traced to the lack of peso counterpart fund and the problem of relocating the squatters in the project areas. For example, for the ongoing foreign assisted projects, the government allocated 13 billion pesos. Of this amount, 10 billion pesos was allotted for existing projects while 3 billion was set aside for new projects. However, the government agencies planned for projects amounting to P19 billion (*Business World*, February 20, 1992:1, 5). The result is a shortfall of P7 billion. In short, if the government does not raise the needed revenue, these projects will never touch ground.

The two PAP pledging sessions raised over \$6.67 billion. The formal granting of aid and loans has only amounted to \$4.77 billion. However, as of the end of September 1991, only 1.28 billion has actually been disbursed (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 10, 1992:20).

Investment in infrastructure is a critical element in providing the basis for long-term economic and social development. Shortchanging investments in infrastructure only retards the country's development.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The President should announce the prioritization of economic growth in the development agenda over debt service payments. The resources saved from reduced debt payments will be used to fund vital infrastructure projects and socio-economic programs.

2. Toward this end, the President should direct cabinet members from the NEDA, the DOF, the DPWH and DTI to plan priority infrastructure projects and identify particularly the high-visibility ones for urgent action.

3. *Energy.* Under the current program, the energy requirements of the nation will outpace supply until 1995. According to the planned expansion of the National Power Corporation, no new plants will provide electricity until 1995. The brown-outs experienced since 1990 indicate that the NPC underestimated the country's energy demands. The costs of the poor delivery of electricity are numerous. They include: 1) outright economic loss due to lower productivity and output; 2) loss of investor confidence in a critical infrastructure



requirement; and 3) loss of credibility of the government and, in particular, the National Power Corporation.

In the short- to medium-term, the government, whether through build-operate-and-transfer schemes or large outlays for turbines and barges, must address the energy shortfall.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The President should appoint an independent commission of experts to examine the Power Development Program of the NPC in terms of its feasibility. The recommendations should be finished by the first 100 days. A critical issue that needs to be addressed is the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant. The decision must take into consideration the safety and environmental impact of the project, its implications on the debt strategy of the next administration, and the formal litigation of the case.

2. To implement the recommendations of the independent commission, the administration should sponsor a bill to create a Department of Energy to oversee all major aspects of energy policy and implementation in the country.

### **Reduced Government Investment in Human Resources**

#### ***Education***

There has been a gradual deterioration in the quality of education and access to educational opportunities.

#### ***Inadequate health and nutrition services***

Today, nearly 4 out of every five pre-school children are severely malnourished. From 1989 to 1990, the budget of the Department of Health was cut from P9.7 to 7.5 billion (*Ibon Facts and Figures*, November, 1991). In addition, the availability of potable water is extremely limited. Out of the 42,000 barangays in the country, 30,000 do not even have wells for potable water.

### *Inadequate housing*

With the unabated migration to the cities, the problem of urban housing has assumed critical proportions.

### *Poor monitoring*

The national census does not allow government agencies to closely monitor the impact of programs over time. Therefore, the effects of programs, specially those with strong equity elements on the bottom 30 percent of the population, cannot be determined with any degree of reliability.

The country must invest in the development of human resources. To ignore the problem is to insure that future generations of Filipinos will continue to live in a grossly inequitable and politically unstable country.

### **Recommendations:**

1. *Education.* The President should announce that the recommendations of the Senate Education Commission will be adopted as official government policy.

2. *Health.* The President should prioritize the provision of infrastructure and related services and training for primary health care. As an immediate impact project, the government should provide potable water supply to all of the 18,000 barangays within the next four years.

3. *Housing.* The President should direct NEDA to head an inter-agency committee to formulate a national land-use policy and program for the urban poor and squatters. The other members should include the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and the Department of Justice.

One of the important issues that needs to be addressed by this inter-agency committee is the relocation of squatters to clear the way for infrastructure projects. In this regard, the DOJ, the DAR, and the DPWH, as lead agencies, must find the most equitable and appropriate solution.

4. *Monitoring.* The appropriate government agencies and programs will have to conduct more specialized surveys on the status, condition, and effect of government projects, particularly those with the greatest impact on the lower 30 percent of the population. Moreover, these government agencies must also generate baseline data on socio-economic indicators at the level of the municipalities and provinces. One project toward this end is exemplified by the 1985 NEDA study on the Low-Income Group Study Project.

**The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.** The targets of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) are behind schedule.

On June 10, 1988, the government declared that it would distribute some 10.3 million hectares to 3.9 million farmer beneficiaries over a ten-year period. Total lands distributed under the CARP totaled 1.22 million hectares from July 1987 to June 1991. This was only 57% of the government targets (*The Manila Chronicle*, October 31, 1991:1).

The completion of CARP is a decisive step towards a more equitable and democratic country.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. The President should establish an independent body to include representatives of farmers and peasant organizations in order to examine the successes and failures of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). The performance report should be submitted to the President within the first 100 days of the administration.

2. Based on the report of the body, the President should organize an inter-agency body headed by the Agrarian Reform Secretary to set clear annual targets for the implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL). This inter-agency body should also identify additional local and international funding sources for the program.

#### ***5.4 Reforming Government Institutions***

While the establishment of stability is the principal concern of the political leadership, the new administration must also consider the need for initiating reforms that would insure the continued

maintenance of stability beyond the administration's lifetime. This concern can very well lead to the transformation of political and administrative practices and government institutions. Within this context, three principal issues come into consideration as possible areas which the next administration may have to address. These are the questions of parliamentary against the presidential form of government, the unitary system against federalism, and centralization against decentralization.

### *Decentralization and the Effects of the Local Government Code*

The passage of the Local Government Code on October 10, 1991 marked a watershed for decentralization and local government autonomy in the Philippines. This document "significantly devolves powers and authorities to the local governments and substantially increases autonomy" (Brillantes, 1992). The Code itself is a manifestation of the Aquino administration's desire to address a fundamental problem of the Philippine bureaucracy—excessive centralization.

President Aquino had clearly stated at the beginning of her term that decentralization would be among the most important programs of her administration. This plan, however, had met with strong opposition from national officials whose political influence would be significantly diminished. The eventual passage of the Code therefore signified a noteworthy success for the Aquino administration.

Under the Code, substantial powers are to be devolved to the local government units. These include responsibility for the delivery of basic services—including health, agriculture, social services, and public works—and regulatory functions such as the granting of permits and licenses. The Code also includes provisions for the institutionalization of the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations in local governance.

Devolution has significant implications for stabilization. First, it will free the national government from administering local demands and allow it to concentrate on those areas which fall under its jurisdiction. Secondly, government will be more responsive to the people's demands. Thirdly, it will force local government units to develop their capacities to exercise their new powers.

Nonetheless, the extensiveness of the Local Government Code's grant of powers will have a significant effect on the Philippine state.

Amidst a clear need to strengthen state institutions, the removal of certain powers, particularly taxation, would make it more difficult to institute reforms in the state structure.

### *Transformation into a Parliamentary System*

During the deliberations of the Constitutional Commission of 1986, among the most debated issues was the question of parliamentary versus the presidential system of government. This issue was decided then in favor of a presidential form of government, which was adopted by the Philippines when the 1987 Constitution was promulgated. Yet, it continues to surface as a question which faces the current administration as well as the legislature.

The Philippines has maintained a presidential form of government since 1946. While the 1971 Constitution provided for a ceremonial president, amendments made by President Marcos ensured that the president would remain the most dominant figure in Philippine politics. For this reason, parliamentarism in the Philippines has mistakenly been associated with the Marcos authoritarian government. This unfortunate experience with the trappings of parliamentarism under an authoritarian government strongly militates against the adoption of a parliamentary form of government in the Philippines.

The parliamentary system adopted by the 1971 Constitutional Convention stipulated that the Prime Minister would be the head of government with the President merely a symbolic head of state. Executive power was supposed to be vested in the Prime Minister who was also to be the chief legislator and the commander in chief of the armed forces. This system, however, never took effect as Marcos used the transitory provisions of the 1973 Constitution (which basically was the result of the 1971 Constitutional Convention) to make himself a constitutional dictator (Brillantes, 1988: 122-123). It is therefore not correct to associate the parliamentary system with the Marcos administration.

The classic form of the parliament is that in Great Britain. Its principal attributes are: a) the union of executive and legislative bodies where the Prime Minister is the head of the executive branch and at the same time is the chief legislator; b) a strong party system—parties stand on platforms and not on their most popular candidates; and c) a unicameral legislature dominated by the party of the Prime Minister.

ter. The government, that is, the Prime Minister and his cabinet, is responsible to parliament and can be brought down by a vote of no confidence from the members of the legislature. Thus, a Prime Minister with weak party support could never survive for long. The opposition party acts as a true opposition party insofar as it tries to check and balance the incumbent government. Thus, the parliamentary system facilitates the establishment of a strong party system and a strong mechanism of accountability.

The Philippine presidential system, on the other hand, is characterized by a structurally strong president and a bicameral legislature which provides constant checks on the executive. The system, however, has allowed the emergence of a weak party system and drawn-out stalemates between the executive and the legislature on important issues, such as what happened with the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) before it was modified and passed as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law (CARL). The 1987 Constitution provides for a multi-party system which has proven to be as problematic as the two-party experience in the Philippines.

The parliamentary form of government has a number of strong points that are worth considering for the Philippine political system. Its most attractive feature seems to lie in its potential for nurturing a more decisive political leadership and strong party structure in a system that is, at the same time, immediately and democratically accountable to both the political opposition and the general electorate.

### *Prospects for Federalism*

The Federalism movement launched by Senator John Osmeña in 1990 hit upon a major source of potential instability in the country — regional disaffection over perceptions of the national government's bias towards a Tagalog-based national development. These sentiments have long simmered among regional groups who have felt neglected by the national government. Various political parties have realized this and recognized the adoption of federalism as a "possible local autonomy strategy to unleash the potentials in the countryside" (Brillantes, 1992:4). Nonetheless, the question of federalism has a more significant side to it based on the social development of minority groups in Philippine society, specifically, the Cordilleras and the Muslims in Mindanao. Maintaining a unitary state in the face of the quest for autonomy by various groups is a serious question that the new administration will have to address. The Philippine unitary state

structure is premised on the concept of "one-nation, one-state". Various studies have shown the existence of a "multi-nation" in the national polity which had been the result of historical struggles against colonialism (Buendia, 1989:121). The Cordilleras and the Muslims in Mindanao developed a culture and social system significantly distinct from that of the majority society. The superimposition of the unitary system, however, stifled their growth and development.

The option for a federal form of government in the country revolves around the following perceived advantages of such a system (Iglesias, [n.d.]):

- 1) It accords equal status and treatment for the needs of all parts of the country regardless of ethnic, religious, linguistic, or geographical location.
- 2) It leads to less pressure for separation from the nation-state as the peculiar needs of various cultural groups are defined in accordance with their own customary and religious practices, and enhances the development of their resources based on their own identified priorities.
- 3) It serves as an equalizing factor since it promotes a more balanced socio-economic and political development attuned to the needs of the region, thus, the people's participation in the decision-making process is enhanced.
- 4) It brings the government closer to the people since it becomes more sensitive to their problems and needs.
- 5) It enhances national integration and unity.

It is arguable that the federal system is more in keeping with Philippine political and geographic realities than the unitary system of government. It offers a resolution to the nationality question and the lack of economic development in the countryside, and at the same time maintains the integrity of the Philippine state. It is possible that a federal structure might enhance stability by mitigating the sense of neglect felt by different regions and cultural groups in the country.

## **Recommendation**

Given the unfamiliarity of most Filipinos with the operational meanings of the terms used in the political discourse on alternative political arrangements, only one responsible recommendation may be made. This acknowledges the role of the administration in

educating its national constituency politically. If this function of tutelage is undertaken well by the administration and its various agencies, then when citizens participate in referenda or plebiscites, theirs would be informed choices.

1. The Ramos administration must create presidential commissions which will prepare authoritative white papers on the history, merits and demerits to each alternative political system. In appropriate form to facilitate public comprehension, these studies and their findings should be disseminated to all adult citizens of the Philippines.

## 6.0 "To Win the Future": Political Leadership for Our Times

This paper has looked into political stability and the role of leadership without so much emphasizing the personality factor. The exploration of the structural and environmental contexts of Philippine political stability does not immediately sound a high note for the political leadership of the country, even as one might be strident in castigating a leader who, in the words of Mr. Lee Kwan Yeu, had "the chance of a lifetime" and somehow unfortunately resolutely avoided making anything out of this splendid occasion.

Yet, as one might deduce even from a casual reading of this paper, the kind of person a Filipino President is largely defines the kind of political leadership the country would have. The most prominent feature of even a weak-state, strong society analysis of the Philippines is the structural strength, the political primacy of the President. It is from this rampart that one most logically expects the dramatic reversal of the country's negative conditions.

As long as the President chooses to govern and politically take charge of his administration, there is hope that the country would be turned around.

Close to half a thousand years ago, a Florentine spelled out the formula for political pre-eminence. It was a conjunction of political skills (*virtu*), the occasion for greatness (*necesita*) and fortune (*fortuna*) which made for successful political leadership, said Machiavelli. *Necesita* has been with Filipinos in the last three decades and never as much as now. *Virtu* is something which the lions and foxes of Philippine politics had always had. But *fortuna* has always been and continues to be problematic. She makes for more than half of



Machiavelli's formula for success and thus neither occasion nor political virtuosity will avail.

No one masters *fortuna* without seizing her. No one wins the future without a strong will.

In the last analysis, it could be that political stability is but another name for the willfulness, the audacity of the political leader. If that be so, and if President Ramos indeed is determined to seize *fortuna* by the hair, then the hope may not altogether be quixotic.

We could win the future too.

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