

The President's Roles, Activities, and Private Office (1986-87): Patterns of Practice and Management Principles

ROMEO B. OCAMPO*

The President's manifold roles, time budget, and the organization and management of his Office are herein described. Data on the President's time budget are analyzed based on President Aquino's appointments from March 1986 to April 1987. Tremendous powers, responsibilities, and popular expectations converge on the Presidency, as shown by the great demand on Mrs. Aquino's official time by various groups. While not marked, her preference tended to shift over time from liberal to more conservative groups—a shift accentuated by critical incidents and the departure of her original advisers. These in turn indicate management as well as political problems due partly to the loose organization of the Office of the President (OP), particularly the "gate-keeping" units. The author goes a step forward by outlining a set of general principles to guide future efforts at reorganizing the OP.

Introduction

The President has had manifold roles, as national leader, chief executive and administrator, leading legislator, foreign and domestic policymaker, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, overseer of local governments, and, equally important, head of his political party. Tremendous powers are thus reposed in his office. But his responsibilities as head of the nation-state and government are also legion. People look to the President to lead the nation in solving a wide variety of problems, through a constitutional framework, a governmental machinery, and political processes that have grown increasingly complex.

*Professor and Dean, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines (UPCPA).

This article is drawn from two sections of the organization and management report, "Organization Study: Office of the President," Vol. 1 (dated 10 July 1987), prepared by the Office of the President (OP) Study Group of the UPCPA. These two sections were written by the author, who assumes responsibility for their publication and whose views do not necessarily represent those of the UPCPA, nor the rest of the OP Study Group. However, the assistance of Zinnia Godinez, Gina C. Israel, Reynaldo S. Aguas, and Dr. Gabriel U. Iglesias, who was Dean and Project Director when the study was conducted, is gratefully acknowledged. A number of significant changes in organization, personnel, and procedures have been made in the OP since these reports were prepared. Nonetheless, it is hoped that the published sections have generally instructive lessons to impart.

Thus, the Office of the President (OP) must be organized and managed so as to enhance his capacity to govern effectively and efficiently. It must have the structures, staff, and procedures that can help him focus his attention on the most important matters of state, i.e., to provide advice and assistance in the formulation, adoption, and execution of policies and programs, and in the performance of the President's symbolic functions as leader of all the people.

Although such a system has evolved in the OP, some improvements seem to be in order in view of the apparent imbalance in the allocation of presidential time to groups and policy issues of different kinds, delays and deficiencies in the settlement of such issues, confusion of certain technical and operating functions, and lack of coordination in the "private offices" that directly serve the President in arranging his activities.

This report generally describes the various roles of the President, analyzes the activity patterns of the present incumbent, and evaluates the manner by which the organization and management of the OP have helped shape them since Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino took office in 1986. Although other related elements (such as the presidential advisers systems) are touched upon, the analysis and recommendations of this report are focused on the President's time budget and the structure and processes for private services to the President.

While this report has particular reference to President Aquino--this will be made apparent by explicit mention of her name and by the use of the pronoun "she" or "her"--our concerns extend to and indeed start from the office itself; hence, the customary pronoun "he" is used for general statements about the Presidency. Amenable as the office must be to different presidential styles, a major challenge is the reinstitutionalization of the Presidency so that it can withstand the vicissitudes of politics and better serve different Presidents and the Filipino nation.

This report is based on interviews conducted by staff members, the documents collected by them, publications of popular (i.e., newspapers) and scholarly kinds, and the impressions gained by the main author from events of the past few months. The study is premised on the assumption, among others, that the President--any President--needs and wants balanced and otherwise well-informed advice and assistance in key areas of policy and administration, and an immediate staff that can help focus and facilitate presidential attention, deliberation, decision, and action.

Roles, Activities and Private Staff

Roles of the President

The President has multifarious roles as head of the nation-state, government and administration, and political party. He is viewed as the leader of the nation to a degree

July

that his American counterpart has to gain and maintain through extra-constitutional means (Romani 1954: 1). Similarly, the American President had to gain ascendancy as "chief executive" over time, a position his Philippine counterpart has had almost from the beginning, at least from the Commonwealth period. The preeminence of the Philippine President owes much to the legacy of the American Governor-General, the earlier colonial tradition of centralism bequeathed by the Spaniards, and the authoritarian, "super-presidential" regime that just preceded the Aquino administration.

Aside from being chief executive, the President is also a leading legislator by virtue of his powers to veto or certify bills and to present his own legislative agenda in his annual state-of-the-nation report and subsequent messages to Congress. He likewise has leading roles in policymaking and administration in key areas of foreign and domestic affairs. These include national defense and security by virtue of his constitutional authority as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The President has another power not shared by his American counterpart: "general supervision" of local governments, which, in effect if not in law, can be exercised as control under the unitary system of Philippine government. Last but not least, he typically serves as titular and effective head of his political party, a role that he can expand to dominate his own and competing parties.

However, with the powers of the President go equally weighty responsibilities. Various sectors of national society, not to mention growing sections of the international community, look to the President for solutions to a wide variety of the country's basic and specific problems. To many Filipinos, the President has responsibility not only for leadership in generating solutions, but also for direct, personal interventions and ministrations. Such perceptions, which underpin the symbolic value of personal presidential gestures (as demonstrated in their effectiveness in election campaigns, aid-giving to victims of calamity, gift-giving to the poor), are deeply ingrained in the psychology even of government officialdom and influence the patterns of presidential activities.

Even without such added burdens, the President has enough work to occupy him in performing the official functions of determining and implementing policies and programs, in an institutional context that has itself grown complicated. But under the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos, political and governmental powers were concentrated in the hands of the President. This made it easier for him to stay in and wield power, if not to govern effectively, and made the person and office virtually one and the same. Governance at the highest levels became pretty much a private affair, what with secret presidential decrees being passed, laws promulgated for particular individuals, public funds diverted to favor private parties, government projects designated "His" or "Hers" and presented as birthday presents to the President or the First Lady, and with the First Lady herself assuming key offices and often serving as alter ego of the President.

This personalized Presidency has tended to persist under the transitional regime of Mrs. Aquino, also because of the extraordinary legal powers (for example, to enact laws

on her own) that she has enjoyed under the Freedom Constitution and the pre-Congress 1987 charter, and because of her own personal style with the public. Whether or not she has also privatized public projects and the potential pelf from her position, however, is an entirely distinct question. In this respect, she has taken pains to be different from her predecessors, and her integrity and reputation as a sincere and honest person and official have remained intact so far. This is so despite the fact that some of her zealous followers and admirers may have engaged in political and bureaucratic practices that are redolent of the past regime, such as the use of the government budget as a campaign carrot and billboards proclaiming "Cory's Reforestation Program."

At any rate, the Presidency will have to be reinstitutionalized to pave the way for liberal democracy, if only because this is imperative under the 1987 Constitution. This Charter has formally restored the broader institutional framework of government and politics in which the President is but one, albeit the most important, participant. The separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers has been put back in place; a multi-party system has been instituted; and participation in politics and government has been broadened.

Still, the President is expected to lead and govern effectively. Although the present President has demonstrated her popularity and staying power through the recent political exercises (i.e., the February 1987 charter plebiscite and the May Congressional elections), she has been confronted with basic socioeconomic problems and persistent threats to the stability and integrity of the nation. These include the long-standing issues of land and labor reform, economic recovery, renewed insurgency, regional separatism, and rightist attempts at *coup d'etat*. The President would have to aggregate and use power to deal effectively with difficult national problems, therefore, in a context of greater political as well as constitutional constraints.

In these circumstances, the Presidency must be strengthened to enable the incumbent to discharge her constitutional, statutory, and administrative powers and responsibilities competently despite the centrifugal forces that have beset the transition. The Office of the President must be structured, staffed, and guided so that she can devote her energies to the formulation and execution of policies that need and deserve her attention. There must be a system by which she can be adequately advised and assisted in performing her functions, although her priorities must ultimately be a matter of her own choosing.

The Presidency has certain institutional as well as constitutional resources to build on. It has an immediate and sizeable staff that had been fairly well developed and established even before its American counterpart came into being. This is headed by an Executive Secretary who, from the time of Manuel L. Quezon, has been given an almost equally preeminent role in government that derives from the role of the President himself. In relation to the Cabinet and other councils of government, the "Little President" represents a "strong model" compared to the chief of staff or staff coordinator that have been conceived as alternative roles for the head of the Presidential staff.

Whether or not this strong staff system should remain is again a matter of presidential preference. Tradition, institutional experiences, and contemporary circumstances in the Philippines suggest that it should probably be maintained to provide effective service to the President. But staff strength must derive from more than legal powers; it must also be drawn from rational organization and procedures, technical competence, and the ability of the staff members to supply sound policy advice and effective management assistance.

Patterns of Presidential Activities

While the supporting staff could prove crucial in the performance of presidential roles, functions, structure, and resources must be basically determined by the directions and inclinations of the President himself. This section attempts to glean a profile of the President's roles from Mrs. Aquino's schedule of activities during her first 14 months in office. The next section examines the organization, processes, and problems of the immediate staff assisting the President, particularly the "private offices."

There has been a great demand on President Aquino's time and attention from various official and non-official groups and individuals. This was only to be expected with the symbolic reopening of Malacañang to the people, an expectation partly met and diverted with the conversion of the opulent main Palace building to a museum.¹ Still, many people would want to see the President herself for various kinds of official and non-official purposes. According to her staff, of the total number of requests made for appointments with Mrs. Aquino, only 30 percent can be accommodated during any given period.

Shortly after occupying Malacañang, the President found her schedule crammed with appointments, and by mid-1986, her official time had been booked at least a month ahead. She and her staff tried to accommodate as many engagements as possible by giving 15-minute audiences, but the President found this pace so taxing that fewer though longer (30 minutes on the average) appointments were subsequently granted to visitors. The continued pressure on her time was reflected by complaints about the restrictions imposed by Palace gatekeepers--a *cordon sanitaire*--on access to the President and about the influence supposedly exercised by a select few--a "Council of Trent"--who "had the ear" of the President.

An analysis of the President's appointments on record from March 1986 to April 1987 would tend to confirm the great demand on her attention and show how she allocated her official time among various activities and groups during the pre-Congress periods of Mrs. Aquino's incumbency. The official record (summarized in Table 1) would generally show some patterns in presidential activities but suggest no marked preferences for any particular groups or individuals. Any such preferences appear to have shifted over the periods reviewed here. Certain critical incidents, however, do point up some inclination on the part of the President to attend to certain groups rather than others, and provide some inkling of problems in organizing and managing the President's time, deficiencies in communications with and within the Palace, and the cross-pressures on the transitional Aquino Presidency.

Table 1. Appointments of President Aquino, March 1986 - April 1987

Activity	Period		Mar-Jne		Jly-Sep		Oct-Dec		Jan-Apr		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>Meetings with Official Bodies and Individuals</i>												
Cabinet Meetings	12	4.7%	8	5.1	6	3.7	12	5.3	38	4.7		
Sub-cabinet Meetings	2	0.8			3	1.8			5	0.6		
OP Staff	2	0.8	7	4.5	6	3.7	17	7.5	32	4.0		
Agency Heads	102	39.8	82	52.2	84	51.5	115	50.9	383	47.8		
Line Departments	(62)		(44)		(40)		(37)		(183)			
Support Agencies	(24)		(15)		(17)		(40)		(96)			
Other Offices	(16)		(23)		(27)		(38)		(104)			
Armed Forces/Security	9	3.5	9	5.7	13	8.0	12	5.3	43	5.4		
Foreign Dignitaries	71	27.7	37	23.6	43	26.4	34	15.0	185	23.1		
Filipino Diplomats	11	4.3	9	5.7	3	1.8	12	5.3	35	4.4		
Local, Reg'l Off'ls	18	7.0			1	0.6	24	10.6	43	5.4		
Oath-taking Rites	29	11.3	5	3.2	4	2.5			38	4.7		
Subtotal	256	100%	157	100.0	163	100.0	226	100%	802	100%		
Ave. per month	64		52		54		57		57			
<i>Meetings with Non-Official Groups and Individuals</i>												
Party, Pol. Leaders	9	5.6	7	7.1	16	13.6	7	6.8	39	8.1		
Press	55	34.4	24	24.5	32	27.1	28	27.2	139	29.0		
Bus./Econ. Missions	27	16.9	49	50.0	35	29.7	29	28.2	140	29.2		
Civic/Prof'l Groups	17	10.6	6	6.1	13	11.0	5	4.9	41	8.6		
Cause-oriented Groups	17	10.6	3	3.1	4	3.4	8	7.8	32	6.7		
Religious Groups	17	10.6	7	7.1	12	10.2	18	17.5	54	11.3		
Labor Groups	8	5.0	2	2.0	3	2.5	1	1.0	14	2.9		
Farmers Groups							1	1.0	1	0.2		
Urban Poor/Commission	1	0.6			1	0.8	3	2.9	5	1.0		
Academics	5	3.1			2	1.7	2	1.9	9	1.9		
Others	4	2.5					1	1.0	5	1.0		
Subtotal	160	100%	98	100%	118	100%	103	100%	479	100%		
Ave. per month	40		33		39		26		35			
<i>Other Activities of the President</i>												
Ceremonies	12	25.0	6	15.8	3	8.3	25	39.1	46	24.7		
Forums	3	6.3					3	4.7	6	3.2		
Foreign Trips**			3	7.9	1	2.8			4	2.2		
Local Trips**	1	2.1	1	2.6	2	5.6	10	15.6	14	7.5		
Campaigns, Rallies							5	7.8	5	2.7		
Socials	15	31.3	17	44.7	26	72.2	15	23.4	73	39.2		
Church Activities	3	6.3	8	21.1	4	11.1	6	9.4	21	11.3		
Others	14	29.2	3	7.9					17	9.1		
Subtotal	48	100%	38	100%	36	100%	64	100%	186	100%		
Ave. per month	12		13		12		16		13			

Source: Appointments Records, Office of the President

*Percentages are based on subtotals. Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding off. Average monthly frequencies are given because the periods covered vary in number of months.

**The President's trips outside Malacanang, of course, took considerably more time than her other engagements.

**Table 2. Appointments of President Aquino (Summary)
March 1986 - April 1987**

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Period</i>		<i>Mar-Jne</i>		<i>Jly-Sep</i>		<i>Oct-Dec</i>		<i>Jan-Apr</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Meetings with Official Bodies and Individuals	256	55.2	157	53.6	163	51.4	226	57.5	802	54.7		
Meetings with Non-Official Groups and Individuals	160	34.5	98	33.4	118	37.2	103	26.2	479	32.6		
Other Activities of the President	48	10.3	38	13.0	36	11.4	64	16.3	186	12.7		
Total	464	100%	293	100%	317	100%	393	100%	1467	100%		
Ave. per month	116		98		105		99		105			

Source: Appointments Records, Office of the President

* Percentages are based on the totals. Average monthly frequencies are given because the periods covered vary in number of months.

This analysis is limited by the nature of the supporting data. These pertain to the President's appointments in her office and engagements outside as scheduled in her appointments book and files, not as they actually took place. These documents do not show how much time the President actually gave each group or individual, let alone what was said or done. They probably do not include many other engagements of the President outside the Palace, after office hours, and during weekends, although some evening "socials," local and foreign trips, and campaign sorties in the provinces have been recorded. The information available does not precisely indicate the President's time budget for each major role. To compensate partly for these deficiencies, we use other sources of information, including interviews with OP staff members and news accounts, to supplement the record.

According to Mrs. Narcisa "Ching" Escaler, the President's Appointments and Social Secretary, Mrs. Aquino typically puts in eight to ten hours of work each day, from 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. up to as late as 8:00 P.M. (Mrs. Escaler said she did not know whether the President works at home as well.) The President takes a lunch break of 45 minutes to one hour. In the evening, she may attend a social event or a cultural performance. Her weekends are at her personal disposal, but some official or semiofficial activities may be undertaken even then.

The President's schedule in 1986 had been a loose list of hectic activities. Since January this year, however, her weekly schedule has been generally set so that segments of each working days are blocked off for regular meetings, diplomatic or courtesy calls, press interviews, and other recurring activities (e.g., taping of the President's weekly TV dialogue, 2:00-4:00 P.M., Wednesdays). There are 13 to 14 such time slots of one hour to two hours duration each. Other slots are left open for appointments and other non-recurring engagements or as free periods in line with the President's request for "more private time for work and study." Cabinet meetings are held every Wednesday morning for two hours or so. More recently, a regular slot has been blocked off for weekly dialogues with local and regional officials, and for alternate meetings with the three sectoral groups into which the Cabinet has been divided for more intensive discussions with the President.

Meetings with certain Cabinet or high-level officials have been more or less regularly held with the President; for example, the finance-economic group and the Monetary Board. The President also used to meet with the senior members of the OP staff (including Messrs. Arroyo, Saguisag, and Locsin, Mrs. Escaler, and Ambassador Rubio, chief of Protocol) every morning. Such staff meetings have been scheduled every Monday from 9:00 to 10:30. But in practice, senior members have met individually with the President for about 15 minutes each. The Executive Secretary can see her daily at any time of the day. Other staff members also enjoy free access to the President, although before going to the President, they (including the Executive Secretary) make it a point to check with her Private Secretary (Ballsy Cruz, Mrs. Aquino's daughter) to see if the President is free at the moment. The President herself may call in a staff or Cabinet official for urgent meetings or consultations. She uses part of her free time to seek out and consult both her official and informal advisers.

There are no fixed criteria for determining who could see the President. According to Mrs. Escaler, Mrs. Aquino's schedule reflects an effort to balance the interests and biases that might be represented by different groups. She would see anybody important enough to see. The rules of protocol are followed, particularly for diplomatic and other official groups, but they are not strictly applied in all cases. "She used to see a great deal of foreign investors," the Appointments Secretary recalls by way of example, "practically everyone indicating a desire to invest in the country, even when they were less than company presidents. But now she is more selective and would rather refer investors to other officials like the Finance Secretary."

Official and non-official visitors may be granted audiences of about 30 minutes with the President. Those desiring merely to pay their respects are given 15 minutes, while those with more important business to discuss are granted more time. Requests for appointments or other engagements with the President must be made in writing through the Appointments and Social Secretary. Requests must be made at least two weeks ahead, but this rule is not faithfully followed in practice, except by the diplomatic people, who do

submit their requests 2-3 weeks ahead. These requests are complied with and screened by a committee of senior OP staff members, including the Protocol Officer; this body then submits its recommendation for approval, "regrets," or deferment to the President about twice a week, who goes over the original list and indicates her approval. Occasionally, she also approves certain requests recommended for rejection or deferment by the committee.

Table 1 summarizes the frequencies (but not the varying durations) of the President's meetings and engagements during the three-to-four-month periods for which appointments data were available at the time this study was conducted. On the average, President Aquino spent more than half of her time to meetings with the Cabinet and other official bodies and individuals; a quarter to a third, to non-official delegations; and the rest to ceremonial (e.g., inaugurations), church, social and personal activities (dinners, attendance at cultural performances) and foreign and local trips (counted as single units in Table 1 although the trips of course lasted much longer than other engagements.) Aside from the Cabinet meetings, each of which consumed about two hours, the President met frequently with individual or small groups of department heads; those of Local Government, Health, Finance, Tourism, Agriculture, National Economic and Development Authority, Defense, and peace negotiating teams (i.e., Commission on Audit Chairman Guingona) were among the most frequent visitors.

The President also gave considerable portions of her time to: foreign diplomats and dignitaries presenting credentials, paying courtesy calls, or discussing some official business; foreign and local media people conducting interviews, press conferences, or video taping and photosessions with the President; business delegations and economic missions; social or personal engagements; and, church-related activities. The President's party and other political activities seem to be relatively infrequent, but the quantitative count is probably no adequate measure of the time she has actually devoted to politics.

Mrs. Aquino has not only been an effective power center but also energetic campaigner during the recent political exercises, i.e., the 1987 charter plebiscite and the Congressional elections. It is public knowledge that Mrs. Aquino had to make difficult political choices from the outset because of the imperative need to remove the stains and vestiges of the Marcos regime and to bring about progress in the nation's conditions--to name only the most outstanding cases: her decision to free political prisoners, the abolition of the Batasang Pambansa, the replacement of local elective officials, the reshuffling of the judiciary, the adoption of the Freedom Constitution, the formation of the Constitutional Commission, and the inauguration of peace processes. In these admittedly agonizing moments of choice, Mrs. Aquino has not been known to be a particularly decisive leader, but she has been a determined one. Yet her determination to pursue certain lines of policy has been weakened by pragmatic compromises and reverses, as suggested by her land reform program and her shift from reconciliation to all-out war against communist rebels. Nonetheless, her invariant virtues of sincerity and honesty have helped sustain her popularity.

What has been noted above--about how little the data on record may show of the President's actual practice--may be said also of her meetings with the military and national security officials, since her conferences with military officers and policy speeches on national security have been a particularly visible part of President Aquino's public appearances.

These "average" patterns of presidential activities have shifted in certain respects over the periods under review. Official meetings have generally increased in frequency since July 1986, while those with non-official groups have declined. The President has met more often with sub-Cabinet officials, local and regional officials, and the OP staff since October. She had working meetings with her Human Rights Commission three times per period from July 1986, but audiences with military and security officials seem more frequent, partly because they included oath-taking rites for promoted officers. Audiences with foreign dignitaries declined, while those with local businessmen became more frequent than meetings with foreign business and economic delegations.

The patterns of the President's non-official activities are worth noting further because they are indicative of her role and priorities as national and social leader as well as premier politician and policymaker. In particular, they provide insights into the attention she has given to outstanding social problems of the Filipino nation.

At the start, President Aquino gave "equal time" to civic-professional, cause-oriented, and religious groups (though, as might be expected she met more often with Catholic than with other groups). In subsequent periods, presidential audiences with the secular organizations declined. So did those with labor and farmers' groups, which had fewer occasions to see the President to start with than business and other groups. Mrs. Aquino had in earlier months granted audience to delegations of the mass-based labor organization, KMU (*Kilusang Mayo Uno*), and once to the peasant organization, KMP (*Kilusan ng mga Magbubukid sa Pilipinas*), but they apparently fell from favor as they maintained their radical stance on economic and social issues. Their association with the President was only occasionally revived later, as when Mrs. Aquino commiserated with the widow of assassinated KMU leader Rolando Olalia or with the survivors of the Escalante massacre.²

In the case of the KMP, strains in its relations with the government culminated in a violent confrontation with armed forces at Mendiola in January 1987. This was attributed by KMP leader Jaime Tadeo partly to his group's inability to get an audience with the President as well as an adequate hearing with the Minister of Agrarian Reform (MAR) on the land reform program that the KMP was pressing on the government to adopt. Although the confrontation was also blamed on provocations by the demonstrators, including Tadeo himself, there seems at hindsight to have been a failure by MAR officials to communicate the determination of the rallyists to see

the President and by Malacanañ officials to anticipate the gravity of the situation. The ensuing protest rally finally got the KMP an audience with the President, but the so-called "Mendiola massacre" had cost the government a great deal in terms of lives lost, the breakdown of peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front (NDF), the resignation of human rights officials, and reduced prestige for the Administration.

This incident was probably the most dramatic result of the uneven attention given by President Aquino among certain groups and areas of policy. A similar disparity may be noted in the relative neglect, after the initial months in office of the Aquino administration, of groups associated with human rights and radical labor, who were able to attract the President's personal attention only occasionally, especially after critical incidents. By comparison, she seems to have given freely her time to the military and other establishment-type groups, gracing not only the former's promotion rituals but also their command conferences and frequent anniversary celebrations (including those of lesser service units like the logistics command). The President has also been selective in peace negotiations, apparently willing to deal personally with the Cordillera and Moro National Liberation Front rebels, but keeping the NDF at arm's length.

These aspects of the President's activities are highlighted because of their implications for the President's scope of attention and policy preferences and for the sorts and sources of advice and assistance that she was getting through the organizational setup and processes of the OP. They suggest a partiality that may have been derived from biased sources, or at least significant shifts in such patterns. The activities indicated by the available data may be deceptive on this score, since the President had several close advisers, in the OP and the Cabinet, who had been associated with human rights and labor, for example. But these advisers were eventually eased out of their vantage points as "left-leaning" individuals by right-leaning ones, and some have been drawn into the congressional elections. Aside from reducing the number of presidential advisers at her beck and call, the departure of the group also revealed the lack of a definite organizational structure for advisers in the OP that could generate more comprehensive and balanced policy advice short of that available from the Cabinet or Departments themselves. There remain political, legal, military, security, and Cabinet-management advisers in the OP, but none for other substantive areas like land reform and foreign policy. There are presidential commissions on human rights and the urban poor, but they seem to be comparatively remote from the center of action. For other critical policy areas, the OP has relied on *ad hoc* arrangements such as the Cabinet Action Committee on agrarian reform and the peace negotiating panels. Such lack of organization for in-house advisers may be a reason for the President's getting, as she puts it, a lot of "unsolicited advice," although, as the top official of the government, she is likely to get much un-asked-for advice internally or through the press whether such a structure exists or not.

Otherwise, the President's time seems to have been well enough managed overall, considering the difficulties that have attended the transition from a dictatorial regime of more than a decade's standing. The "Mendiola massacre" represents a singularly sordid episode that, according to some Palace officials, did not really result from presidential neglect of the age-old issue of land reform. The President had been anxious to confront such issues but for the disruptions occasioned by the efforts of extremists to destabilize the government and society. She had been concerned with land reform even early on, although she wanted to make sure that it would work before she announced her policy and program on the matter. When, on the eve of the opening of Congress, she did eventually emerge with her proclamation and executive order on Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), however, it seemed to many critics that her action came too late and produced too little.

Other problems in the management and organization of presidential activities pale in comparison with the above-mentioned issues, but they do exist.

The Private Offices

The President's activity priorities and the relative emphasis given by the President to each role and line of policy are shaped partly by the work of senior advisers in the OP and by the President's immediate staff composed of the so-called "private offices." They are ultimately determined by the President himself or herself. As mentioned earlier, for example, President Aquino personally reviews staff recommendations on her engagements, including requests that have been recommended for rejection or deferment. The Executive Secretary likewise insists that the President herself makes all final decisions on policy issues and management questions of general consequence. No one in her Office preempts this presidential prerogative, and even Cabinet decisions become final only when they get the President's *imprimatur*, which she may independently choose to withhold or withdraw.

Nonetheless, proximity to the central seat of power in the land helps in influencing presidential decisions. Criticisms of a cordon sanitaire in the OP thus constitute a grudging acknowledgment of the clout that Palace gatekeepers could have in directing the President's activities and, thence, the thrusts of her decisions and actions. Whether they do service or disservice in helping regulate access to the President is a debatable matter of opinion and viewpoint. Strident criticisms of their influence, though, often imply the existence of a tightly-knit and well-organized gatekeeping machinery that is more apparent than real.³

Like the presidential advisers "system,"⁴ the private offices consist of a loose collection of small staff units within the OP. These units are formally under the administrative supervision and control of the Executive Secretary but in practice report directly to the

President. The President's engagements are arranged mainly by the Appointments and Social Office (ASO), the Protocol Office (PO), and the Private Secretary of the President. The ASO receives and compiles requests, some of which are sifted from the mail sent through the Correspondence Office; assigns time slots for approved and confirmed appointments; and otherwise handles the details of the President's schedule including her social engagements. The PO takes charge of the diplomatic types of appointments, guest lists, invitations, and seating arrangements at social events. Requests are screened by a committee composed of top officials in the OP including the senior Deputy Executive Secretary, the heads of Appointments, Protocol, and the Presidential Security Group, and the President's private secretary. In addition, there are units that receive, sort out, and help prepare the President's correspondence; operate and maintain the "households" (guest houses and associated housekeeping activities) within the Malacañang complex; or maintain a Malacañang museum.

Although the screening committee serves as a mechanism for coordinating the President's schedule of activities, its membership has shifted and the Executive Secretary and Presidential Counsel have only intermittently, if at all, attended its recent meetings. Moreover, there is no formal structure or position for coordinating the specific functions and activities of the different units designated as "private offices." While the Appointments and Social Secretary oversees the work of what used to be two distinct units under the previous Administration, no one in particular is in charge of coordinating these and other units like Correspondence. In fact, there is no formal organizational chart that would show how they are interrelated and no formal statement prescribing and delineating their functions. A draft of such a statement was prepared on 31 March 1986 by Mrs. Escaler for the Appointments, Social, and Household units. But the Executive Secretary had not acted on the draft at the time of this study.

Perhaps as a result of this lack of formal structure, the basic format of the President's activity schedule has not been strictly followed. Her schedule has been organized into blocks of time so that the issues brought to her attention would be more logically grouped together. But this system gets upset whenever individual members of the OP staff intervene, or when the President herself wants to see them immediately. The committee screening procedure was organized only in December 1986, at least insofar as diplomatic requests made through Protocol are concerned. Such requests used to be taken up directly with the President by the Protocol chief. Up to now, some requests for appointments may be handed directly to the President, who may approve them on the spot and instruct Mrs. Escaler to fit them in her schedule. Even after the President has already approved recommendations from the ASO and from the committee, however, their decisions (particularly "regretted" requests for appointments) may be appealed through other channels (e.g., Cabinet Secretaries, relatives of the President).

The absence of clear delineation of authority and functions has caused some strain in working relations among the private offices and between them and other offices. The Households Office, for example, appears to resent its being under the Appointments and Social Office for budgetary and disbursement purposes; the latter has to clear its cash outlays with the former, when such authority might be better exercised by an administrative unit located elsewhere in the OP. Headed by an architect-interior designer, the Households Office also performs a function--physical maintenance of the guest houses--that could be better handled by another distinct building maintenance unit in the OP.

Some of the functions of the immediate staff of the President are shared by the different units. The President's correspondence, for example, is handled not only by the Correspondence Office but also by the ASO with respect to her appointments in general and the Protocol Office with respect to her diplomatic engagements in particular. This does not seem to pose any significant problem. But some gaps may be detected in other shared functions. For instance, agenda are prepared and notes taken by the Cabinet Secretary for Cabinet meetings and by the Protocol Officer for diplomatic meetings with the President. But there appears to be no regular system for recording other conferences with the President, according to her Appointments and Social Secretary, except perhaps through the effort of the Special Presidential Assistant (Atty. Florida Ruth Romero) in those instances where the latter is present.

The workload among the different private offices seems to be unevenly distributed. The ASO has about a dozen employees, a staff complement that its chief feels is adequate for present purposes. Some juggling of assignments, however, has had to be resorted to between the Appointments and Social portions of their tasks. Our impression is that the Appointments unit has more duties to perform than the Social unit, which had been organized and staffed to serve a much more socially active First Couple under the previous dispensation. Since Mrs. Aquino does not have as frequent social engagements as they did, the Social unit is reduced to doing some minor things, such as listing VIP's birthdays and conveying anniversary greetings and gifts from and to the President. One important ASO function that does bear formal acknowledgment, according to its chief, is its assistance in the preparation of the President's foreign trips. For its part, the functions of the Protocol Office overlap those of the ASO in a substantial way albeit with particular respect to diplomatic and related social and ceremonial events involving the President. But Protocol must make do with only six employees. Besides, the authority relations between the ASO and Protocol are unclear.

The private offices may require more personnel if and as their activities expand, as might be expected with the opening of Congress and the need for legislative liaison with the OP (a function that the ASO chief would want added to her present duties). Some of the problems now existing may be attributable to "personalities" rather than formal

organization; the key people drawn into the immediate precincts of the Presidency, having probably enjoyed important roles in their previous organizations, are bound to experience status problems when placed in uncertain ranks and hierarchies such as those that characterize many units of the OP. These problems are not likely to be settled by standardization and institutionalization of what must be primarily confidential positions, so close as they are to the President.

Yet a clearer organization can help alleviate many of the problems mentioned above. The situation is summed up rather well by the President's Appointments and Social Secretary as follows:

One of the main complaints and causes of demoralization here is the unclear area and scope of responsibilities of each member of the staff. Despite the draft memo that I prepared to delineate our functions, we have not received any memo indicating our organizational structure and functions and showing where we fit in the entire organization (of the OP). In the absence of such a table of organization, one thing that is also unclear is the pecking order or relative ranks of the people involved, e.g., between Protocol and Appointments.

One source of problems is the President's tendency to give staff assignments to whoever is within her immediate reach. A staff member may thus be given an assignment that is not within her area of responsibility or competence. Yes, it may be possible for us to have an understanding among ourselves to pass on assignments to where they belong. But we don't have anybody immediately above us who can coordinate such assignments (Arroyo: 1987).

Conclusions and Recommendations

From our discussion of the roles and activities of the President and the organization, processes, and problems of her immediate staff, it would seem that the President's time has been generally well distributed among her various official and non-official concerns in terms of groups and policies. Official functions, however, have received slightly more attention than non-official ones, and some groups, including underprivileged ones, and certain lines of policy have suffered preterition. At any rate, there have been shifts of some significance and consequence in presidential attention. As a result, the initial populist image of the Aquino regime has been marred by unfortunate turns of events such as the "Mendiola massacre."

The changing attitude of the President appears to have been due to a combination of personal conviction and preferences by Mrs. Aquino and organizational deficiencies in the senior and private staff of the OP. Ranged against the powerful forces that have impinged on the Aquino Presidency, the relation of staff organization to the substantive social and policy priorities of the Administration may be a tenuous one, but it seems to have been a contributory factor just the same. This is not to give credence to charges that a cordon sanitaire has bred a select group of grey eminences who exert undue influence on presidential choices. The OP has been sufficiently open to advice, so much so that

unsolicited ones have assailed the ears of the President to the point of irritation. At the same time, the President's capacity to develop and project even-handed or coherent policies has probably been inhibited by a poorly articulated structure for policy advice and shortcomings in the organization and procedures of her immediate support staff.

While we must defer to Mrs. Aquino on matters of substantive policy, we can give some suggestions to improve the capacity of her Office to perform the distinctive role of the Philippine President more fully: as leader of all the Filipino people with a historic commitment to "reconciliation with justice," before this got translated into "reconciliation with honor" with the breakdown of the peace process.

First, the organizational structure for presidential advisers should be more clearly laid out and defined so that more adequate and better balanced information and opinion could be immediately available to the President in making her own decisions. Gaps in the existing system, such as foreign policy, critical areas of domestic policy, and general government management, should be filled in the process.

Second, the organization of the private offices should be improved so that it could help provide a well-rounded schedule of presidential activities and develop capacity to respond to demands on the President's time--and indeed to anticipate demands of a critical nature. The organization should be explicitly formalized through a chart and statement defining and delineating the functions of each of the units involved. These units should be placed under a common immediate superior, preferably with the rank of Assistant Executive Secretary, who should have authority to direct and coordinate the activities of the constituent units. This group should include the Appointments, Socials, Protocol, Households, and Correspondence units. However, the Socials unit and its functions should be combined with Protocol for more even distribution of workload. Extraneous administrative and physical maintenance functions should be removed from the units performing them and transferred to the other units in the OP that can better discharge them.

Third, the system and procedure for scheduling presidential activities should be streamlined and complied with more faithfully. The blocked weekly schedule of the President should be followed to observe some logical order in her meetings and engagements and to preserve her private time and energy for work and study. The screening committee's designated members should meet more regularly; otherwise, its membership should exclude those who cannot attend its deliberations although they may remain participants in the decisionmaking process in some other ways, e.g., through appropriate routing of committee recommendations.

The previous section analyzed the roles and activities of the president and the organization of her private staff. This section presents general recommendations for the reorganization of the OP which are derived from the integrated findings and recommendations of the various reports.

Principles for Reorganizing the OP

In general, the following principles were developed by the author to guide the formulation of one of the alternative organization and management schemes recommended by the UPCA Study Group for the Office of the President.

1. The Presidency should be strengthened as an office to help its incumbent effectively and efficiently perform his multifarious roles as national leader, chief executive, and policymaker. This objective is in line with the traditional functions of the President and is justified by the restoration of political freedom and the separation of powers under the new Constitution, on one hand, and by the centrifugal forces that challenge the stability and integrity of the nation, on the other.

2. In view of the practical constraints on the President's time and energy, his Office should be so staffed and organized as to help focus attention on priority issues of general policy and executive management. Moreover, the President should have the advice and assistance of officials and employees who are immediately accessible and responsible to him in the formulation, implementation, and integration or coordination of public policies and programs, particularly those for which the President bears explicit constitutional responsibility, that are of cross-sectoral or interdepartmental consequence, or that are of urgent concern and priority for the nation.

3. To ensure the formulation of responsible and effective policies, the President should have access to as wide a variety of information, opinion, and options as are necessary and practicable. Within the Executive Branch, the Department Secretaries should be the primary source of information and advice on policies within their respective areas of competence. In addition, the President should have free access to advisers or assistants within his Office to help interpret, reconcile and resolve policy issues.

4. In order to facilitate Presidential decisionmaking and action, the leadership and organization of the Office of the President should provide coherence and direction in policy formulation and implementation.

- 4.1. An Executive Secretary who has clear authority to speak and act for the President, rather than a chief of staff or a staff coordinator without line authority, is in the best position to help provide such coherence and direction within and outside the Office of the President.
- 4.2. While the OP should be open in policy formulation, it should have a unified command structure for policy implementation. Other presidential advisers and assistants should enjoy direct access to the President, but the Executive Secretary should be considered as his chief policy adviser and deputy administrator who alone has authority to sign promulgations and issue orders for the President. Technical and administrative units that assist the Executive Secretary and the President in policy formulation and executive management should be integral rather than loosely attached to the OP.

5. The Office of the President should perform primarily those functions essential to general policymaking and administrative direction and supervision of the Executive Branch. It should avoid directly performing or duplicating the functions appropriate to the other Departments, agencies, and bodies in the government.

- 5.1. The OP should concentrate on the coordination and integration of policies and--in regard to policy implementation--the direction, supervision, and control of substantive functions involving routine or field operations, rather than the direct performance of such functions.
- 5.2. OP advisers should serve as "honest brokers" and interpreters of the views of non-OP advisers, rather than substitutes of the latter, but they should also help reconcile or supply policy options for the President.
- 5.3. OP units performing nominally similar functions as other departments or bodies should do so in a substantively or qualitatively different fashion for the President. OP monitoring and evaluation, for example, should be more integrative and systematic than that done by other agencies or bodies; at the same time, such functions should be geared to the need of the President to make definite policy or legislative decisions and take executive actions. The OP should thus stress policy analysis and synthesis, with an eye to the political and administrative as well as social and technical implications of policy options.

6. The lines of authority within the OP should be clear and streamlined with respect to both technical assistance for policy formulation and administrative direction for policy execution. However, the flow of communications need not strictly conform with the hierarchy, so that advice and information may be freely accessed by the President and other key members of her staff. The private offices, for example, may report directly to the President on routine activities involving her or him personally.

7. Nonetheless, the flow of communications through and within the OP should also be rationally structured so that it would facilitate the generation, transmission, storage, and retrieval of information and the appropriate response to it, with as high a degree of accuracy as possible.

- 7.1. Communications should flow freely within the OP and to the public without upsetting the lines of authority and compromising confidential information. The Executive Secretary and other OP officials and units who need to know should be apprised of policy advice or information given to the President, if only after the fact. Confidential policy options and information should be available only on a clearly defined "need- to-know" basis.
- 7.2. Confidentiality should be balanced by consideration of the constitutional right of the public to information of public interest and in accordance with the principle of "transparency" in government transactions. Approved laws, policies, and administrative issuances should be published as promptly as possible so that they may be properly complied with.

8. The structure and processes of the OP should be flexible enough to suit the particular style of the President, but should also be sufficiently institutionalized to maintain continuity and stability in OP operations and to facilitate political transitions.

8.1. The structure and staffing pattern for presidential advisers and special assistants should be readily adjustable to the President's preferences, while that for technical and administrative units within the OP should be fairly stable though amenable to changing conditions.

8.2. The President should have a free hand in the choice of OP personnel for policy-determining, highly technical and primarily confidential positions, whose occupants should be coterminous with the President's term. To the maximum extent practicable, however, other positions in the Office should be classified as career positions and should be filled according to the principles of merit, tenure, and neutrality embodied in civil service laws, rules and regulations.

Endnotes

¹The President and her immediate staff, including the Executive Secretary, have retired to the relative privacy of the more modest Guest House, which has housed their offices.

²During her first few months in office, Mrs. Aquino met nine times with Mrs. Galman, the widow of the man accused by the Marcos government of assassinating Senator Aquino. These meetings are not counted in Table 1.

³This is not to minimize the tremendous weight carried by the advice of the Executive Secretary and the technical work performed by other OP staff units like the Presidential Management Staff. The fact that they can put finishing touches on draft decrees (Executive Orders), or even hammer out new versions, goes a long way in pointing presidential choices in certain directions.

⁴This term is more a euphemism than an accurate designation.

References

Arroyo, Jose

1987 Memorandum from the Executive Secretary to N. L. Escaler dated March 31.

Cabinet Assistance System

1987 The CAS Agenda, 22nd CAS Meeting, 23 April.

1987 Summary of Discussions of the 21st Meeting of the CAS. Situation Room, Executive House, Manila. 9 April.

The Cabinet Secretary

1987 Memorandum for the Cabinet Assistance System, From the Cabinet Secretary, Re: Issuances Proposed for Repeal.

Constitutional Commission

1986 Closing Report of the Constitutional Commission. Republic of the Philippines.

Factoran, F. S. Jr.

1986 Memorandum To: All Administrative Staff Office of the President Re: Signing Arrangement. 18 August.

Office of the President

1986a (Draft 1-4) Reorganizing the Office of the President and for other purposes.

1986b Executive Order No. 100, Creating the Philippine Information Agency.

1986c List of Issuances, Dates and Subject Matters.

1986d Memorandum No. 13, Amending Memorandum Order No. 1 dated 7 January 1958: to delegate to the assistant executive secretaries the authority to sign correspondence which under the order are to be signed by the Executive Secretary.

1987a Executive Order No. 130, Reorganizing the Presidential Management Staff, Merging and Consolidating All Offices and Agencies Whose Functions Overlap and/or are Interrelated, Defining Its Powers and Functions and for Other Purposes.

1987b Executive Order No. 708, Reorganizing the Office of the President and Creating the Office of the Prime Minister Pursuant to the 1981 Amendments to the Constitution.

1987c Memorandum for Cabinet Secretary Jose de Jesus re: Matrix of Issues on 3 Draft Executive Orders on Government Corporation (GOCC). 21 April.

1987d Organization Chart of the Office of the President.

1987e Presidential Action Summary. 12th Cabinet Meeting. 22 April.

1987f List of Issuances, Date and Subject Matters.

n.d. List of Agencies Attached to and/or Under the Administrative Supervision of the Office of the President.

Office of the President Study Group

1987a Notes on Presidential Powers, Roles and Duties. UP College of Public Administration.

1987b Proposed Work System/Structure of the Office of the Deputy Executive Secretary Paper Flow. UP College of Public Administration.

1987c Summary Report on the Insights from the President's Appointments from March 1986 to April 1987. UP College of Public Administration.

Ordonez, Victor M.

1987 Memorandum to Cabinet Assistants Secretariat re: Implications for Constitution Mandated Changes in Education Policy. 29 April.

Presidential Commission on Government Reorganization (PCGR)

1987a Report of the Office of the President Task Force.

1987b Survey Team Report to the Minister, PCGR Office of the President (Priority Recommendations).

Romani, John H.

1954 The Office of the Philippine President: Organization and Function. Manila: Institute of Public Administration, University of the Philippines.

The Undersecretary, Presidential Management Staff

1987 Memorandum for the Honorable Cabinet Secretary, All CAS Members.