Life after the Coup: The Military and Politics in Post-Authoritarian Philippines

Patricio N. Abinales*

Abstract: *This article re-examines the relationship between military intervention on the one hand, and civilian supremacy over the military and the enduring popularity and potency of suffrage and legislative politics, on the other. It shows how these two enduring features of Philippine politics have proven to be quite effective deterrents in neutralizing extremist acts like the coup. As "performative acts," they help stabilize the Philippine polity by providing an alternative outlet for mass resentment or protest and help to neutralize rival radical rebellions. These also enable a weak state to reform or rejuvenate after periods of profound political crisis, albeit only partially. The coup, however, is a poor rival: its history is far shorter and littered with failures. It has since ceased to be a weapon of choice by military actors who now prefer cacique democracy as the arena in which to pursue their interests. This was evident during the term of Pres. Fidel Ramos and while the military leadership did launch a de facto coup by withdrawing its support for Pres. Joseph Estrada, it immediately reverted to the proverbial backroom deals and patronage relations with its civilian superiors under Pres. Gloria Arroyo.*

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In the Philippines, the waning moments of authoritarian rule and the first three years of transitional democratic governance were characterized by what one scholar called "a season of coups." In those years, a core group of ideologically slippery, Hollywood-esque military officers planned eight spectacularly unsuccessful coup attempts. Despite the collapse of

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Marcos' authoritarian state and the years of administrative inefficiency and political fragility that followed, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) never managed to capture direct political power.

Moreover, in the 1990s, the season of coups was replaced with seasons of rumors and threats of coups, usually spreading like wildfire at moments of national political crisis. These rumors prompted concern in the international community but resulted in only indifferent, almost mechanical compromises among elite political forces in Manila. The latest and perhaps most evocative example of the peculiar shape of military politics and democracy in the Philippines was the January 2001 ouster of President Joseph Estrada. In the final showdown between the corrupt president and his opposition, military leaders threw their support behind the opposition led by elected Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. They did this by temporarily resigning their commissions and making public appearances alongside the leaders of the "People Power II" movement to bring down Estrada.

In other countries, these acts might smack of military adventurism, and might perhaps even be called a coup d'etat. However, in this case, the AFP's leadership went to great lengths to justify their behavior in constitutional terms. According to then AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Angelo Reyes:

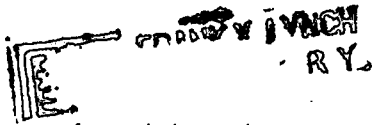
> [We] did not grab power. Did we think about it, did we even try? We did not. That was why when we withdrew support [from Estrada] we said, we were withdrawing our support and placing our support behind the constitutionally mandated successor, the vice-president [Arroyo] who went with us to EDSA [Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, the main thoroughfare where the mobilization against Estrada occurred]. I made sure she was there, so that there would be no mistake. We know only too well that an unconstitutional and not popularly backed regime can not take over.[1]

The withdrawal of military support was decisive in Estrada's decision to abandon the demand for "a clean and honest elections" and to leave the presidential palace. A few days later, the Supreme Court legalized the succession of Vice President Arroyo to the presidency.

Reyes' explanation shows the distance traveled since military rebels repeatedly tried to overthrow Marcos and Aquino in the 1980s. Then, disgruntled colonels and lieutenant colonels formed an association called Reform the Armed Forces of the Philippines Movement (RAM). They saw themselves as forced by circumstances to disobey the chain-of-command and civilian leadership in order to save the Republic, first from a dying dictator and then from his allegedly inept post-authoritarian successor.[2] Employing language similar to that of their Latin American and Southeast Asian counterparts, RAM unequivocally vowed to seize power through eight unsuccessful coup attempts, one against Marcos, the rest against Aquino. RAM's final attempt was carried out in conjunction with its protege, an organization of lieutenants and captains that called itself the Young Officers Union (YOU) (Coronel 1990: 51-86).

In the 1990s, however, coup plotting had become passé and the AFP was back in the barracks. The flamboyant RAM colonels and YOU lieutenants had ceased to be icons of military prowess, and were being upstaged by officers more at ease with constitutional politics. By the beginning of the presidential term of former AFP Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos (1992-1998), both RAM and YOU had made peace with the government, and their leader, Colonel Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, had been elected to the Senate. Still, judging by the events of January 2001, the AFP had not discarded all of the tactics associated with RAM. In the post-authoritarian Philippines, the threat of a coup became a handy tool to enhance the position of the military in times of serious crisis.

This paper traces the transformation of the AFP's involvement in politics from the end of the Marcos period to the present. I argue that the politicization of the military under Marcos was less potent than what the existing scholarship portrays it to be – i.e., an institution like the Indonesian military under Suharto, the Thai military throughout most of the 1970s, the Chilean military under Pinochet and the Argentine soldiery during the *Proceso*. I would suggest that while the military under Marcos experienced an unprecedented degree of involvement in politics, thereby undermining its professionalism and apolitical tradition, this participation was restrained by Marcos' exploitation of the principle of "civilian supremacy over the



military." Marcos feared the military even as he used it as a weapon to consolidate his dictatorship, and as such he took the necessary steps, including a constitutional justification for military subordination to civilian authority to keep it under his firm control. By keeping the military on a tight leash, Marcos thus set the stage for dissension to grow inside the AFP.

In the early 1980s, as the regime became increasingly isolated politically and Marcos relied more on a smaller circle of allies and cronies, disgruntled middle and lower level officers began to organize against the regime. They initially came together to present their grievances to the president, but later on – in part because Marcos began to mistrust them – they began to plot the dictator's overthrow. RAM became the concrete representation of this dissension and consequent attempts to seize political power. Even so, RAM's politicization was limited in scope as a result of Marcos's mistrust of the military organization. Marcos may have brought in the military to consolidate his rule, but he also kept it under tight control, mainly through a coterie of officers loyal to him by virtue of provincial and old school ties.

Officially, Marcos – who insisted on a legal or constitutional imprimatur for his political acts – maintained control by invoking the principle of civilian supremacy. This tactic denied RAM the vital experience to show and convince the Filipino public that they were competent alternatives to the dictator. Furthermore, civilian supremacy kept the officers corps divided, with RAM unable to muster enough support among the officers' corps to have the necessary "critical mass" to ensure the success of their rebellion.

RAM's failed coup against Marcos in 1986 and its later inability to topple President Aquino paved the way for a different kind of military-politician to occupy center stage. This group was typified by the respect its officers had for the potency of constitutional processes and by their awareness that a RAM victory could reverse directions back to the polarized and unstable political conditions of the Marcos period. These officers chose to pursue their political ambitions and try to defend the military's corporate interests by using the rituals and instruments of the constitutional process, particularly elections and the legislative process. Military involvement in the 1990s has since become synonymous with these officer-politicians, who left the AFP and ran for public office even as they maintained ties with their respective

service units, subordinates or academy classmates still on active duty.[3] Still, these officers also found that involvement in constitutional politics limited their ability to defend their personal interests and the military's stake in the system. Institutional drawbacks and an inability to defeat the many insurgencies afflicting the country further limited these officers' maneuverability. In this context, even constitutional loyalists among the officers' corps use the coup threat as a last resort to ensure that the AFP will not be completely undermined or exploited by constant civilian interference.

Military involvement in Philippine politics is therefore more nuanced than previous commentators have suggested. The failure of the coup as a political tactic ensured that the kind of interventionism that occurred in Indonesia in 1965 or Thailand in 1973 could not happen in the Philippines. And while the military's political presence declined in the post-authoritarian era, politically ambitious officers discovered that the state's restored democratic rituals were conducive to their aspirations, with the more successful winning election to national positions. Constitutional democracy trumped military interventionism, but it also opened space for the military politician. In the following sections, I will elaborate on these themes: continuity in civilian supremacy; the role of suffrage and legislative politics and the rise of the soldier-politician; and institutional constraints on the AFP's political involvement. The paper concludes with some reflection on why military intervention seems to fail in the Philippines despite the persistence of a kind of state weakness that in many other cases has attracted repeated military coups.

Military Politicization under Marcos: Reconsiderations

Scholarly and activist interest in the Philippine military is fairly recent, with most of the best studies written in response to the exceptional growth of the AFP during the 22-year rule of Ferdinand Marcos. While differing in their focus and analytical premises, most studies agree that the AFP was transformed from a professional establishment into a political player that shared power with Marcos. When the dictatorship's grip on state and society began to loosen in the late 1970s, factionalism also broke out within the AFP. The literature details increasing antagonism between officers loyal to Marcos, who were less exposed to anti-state insurgencies and had very little

combat experience, and officers who wished to restore the AFP's "professionalism" while they defended the state from a growing communist threat.[4]

RAM and Gringo Honasan emerged from these internal conflicts. Starting in the early 1970s, Honasan and his cohorts were responsible for implementing martial law and subsequently defending the dictatorship against Islamic separatists and communist rebellions. (Miranda and Ciron 1988:170-173). While the AFP successfully neutralized the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), it faced more difficulty in its war against the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The same officers who eventually formed RAM were the first ones to realize that the regime was losing the internal war; they blamed this failure on incompetent military leadership, pervasive corruption to pervade the government, and the regime's inability to counter effective communist propaganda about military abuses and violations of human rights.

As lieutenants who supervised the imposition of martial law, these future RAM members came to appreciate state power and the vital role of the army as defender and one of the main implementers of its "development programs." This politicization was reinforced by the on-going counter-insurgency wars. Exposure to the CPP's anti-imperialist and radical rhetoric impressed upon these colonels the value of ideology in guiding and justifying military action. Once it became obvious that Marcos had lost the strategic initiative to the communists, these officers began plotting to take over state power in order to restore the centralized efficiency and ascetic developmentalist leadership for which the early years of martial law was noted. In light of civilian incompetence and corruption in other state agencies, RAM argued that only the military—the dictatorship's most reliable partner—could restore the country's stability.[5]

RAM fumbled its first coup attempt in February 1986, and only the massive popular mobilization that became known as "People Power I" saved its leaders from imminent capture or death at the hands of pro-Marcos forces (Arillo 1986). Although it was then forced to work together with Corazon Aquino, RAM did not stop plotting. RAM decried her government's alleged pro-communist leanings, its incompetence, and corruption, and

attempted to overthrow President Aquino seven times, promising a junta that would stabilize the political system and lay the foundation for a transition to full democracy.

Through these coup attempts, RAM became etched in the minds of scholars as the Filipino version of Samuel Finer's "men on horseback" who changed the way of doing politics.[6] Indirectly, RAM's coup attempts and the AFP's response to these also reinforced the impression that the military's authoritative presence remained despite the shift to constitutional politics after Marcos. The explanation of a Filipino scholar typifies this resilient impression:

> Beneath the veneer of the presidency, the realpolitik of February is the potent influence of a militarist ideology that now crucially bears on national policy formulation and decision. Effectively, the military under Ramos had delivered an unmistakable message to Aquino: it would play a decisive role in politics (A. De Dios 1988:293-294).

This image, however, is not entirely accurate. All of its coups failed for the simple reason that RAM could not unite the military against Aquino. With the failure of each coup attempt, Honasan et. al. became increasingly aware that they were only one of many power blocs inside the AFP contending for the loyalty and support of the entire armed forces. Given the tendency of the majority of officers to sit on the fence during coup attempts, RAM discovered that each time it fell short of its goal; its influence inside the AFP waned. The civilian government became stronger against military predations but so did the military factions that were opposed to RAM's military adventures. In 1992, two years after its last coup attempt, RAM entered negotiations with Aquino's presidential successor, Fidel Ramos, bargaining to end its rebellion and to reinstate its officers to the service. RAM also switched tactics after realizing how politically isolated it had become after the aborted coups. It sought to broaden its ties with other opposition groups by opening dialogue with the Left and civil society groups, and by also joining them in peaceful protests against government policies and programs. Meanwhile, Gringo Honasan ran for and was elected to the Senate.

In short, pace the standard explanations about what the AFP experienced under Marcos, its involvement in martial law did not necessarily place the

military or its various factions in an advantageous position after the dictator fell from power. The most ideological and most politically ambitious group among the military factions – RAM – likewise turned out to be a disappointment. The literature has failed to account for the failed coups and the subsequent election of Honasan to the senate because it did not subject the notion of "military politicization" to critical scrutiny. Indeed, even when it functioned as the main instrument of martial law, the AFP was never allowed to be an equal partner to the dictator.

Marcos distrusted the military even as he deployed it to consolidate his rule.[7] He centralized and tightened command control over the military organization and created a pool of loyal officers and units to protect himself and his family. In the lower levels of the regime, Marcos replaced provincial and local strongmen who opposed martial law with military officers, but only selectively. Where civilian political leaders acquiesced to martial law, Marcos kept them in their posts, allowed them to retain local power, and in 1977 gave them back control over their police forces, which the AFP had taken over when martial law was declared (Abinales 1998:115-116). However, instead of ensuring that no military challenge to his rule would arise, these preventive measures precipitated the factional conflicts that eventually splintered the AFP, gave birth to RAM, and helped end authoritarian rule.

The manner in which Marcos justified his control over the military is also relevant. Unlike Suharto or the Burmese generals, who affirmed an intimate relationship between their respective militaries and the political systems they controlled, Marcos insisted on the primacy of civilian control. His personal mistrust of the military became combined with his effort to portray his dictatorship as a constitutional regime installed to preserve the nominally democratic foundation of the Philippine state. One crucial element in his rule was civilian supremacy over the military, which Marcos turned into a legal justification for limiting military involvement in politics and an ideological foil to any possible challenge from the army. Dictatorship was thus civilian and constitutional – hence Marcos' public pronouncements that his was a democratic revolution from the political center.[8]

Administratively, civilian control deprived the AFP of experience at governing. At the top, Marcos relied on allies and cronies, with loyal generals

consigned to implementing presidential orders. The nearest experience military officers had to governing and making political decisions was at the local level, when, serving as surrogate governors or mayors, they controlled provinces and towns suspected of being havens of the anti-Marcos opposition. Since local military rule was not general policy and was applied only selectively, it was inadequate to expose the entire establishment to the privileges and problems of governance. Once Marcos brought back local elections in the late 1970s to bolster his image, even responsibility for local governance was taken away from the small group of officer-administrators (Abinales 1998: 117-118).

So embedded was the principle of civilian supremacy that Marcos was never seriously threatened by the military. Even RAM, when moving against Marcos, was forced to retreat from its public declaration in favor of a junta. As these colonels jockeyed for position in the last months of the dictatorship, it became obvious that beyond their rhetoric favoring a "government of reconciliation" (i.e., a junta), they did not have any experience at all in governing. Honasan and his comrades helped Marcos consolidate martial law, but Marcos never gave them the opportunity to govern. Unlike Burma's field commanders, who implemented martial law in the Shan States in the 1950s, Honasan and company never went through the experience of negotiating with local elites, entering into compromises with provincial clans, and even giving up military prerogatives to warlords who were allies of Marcos.[9] In many cases, their involvement with martial law was limited to using force against the dictatorship's opponents. Thus, when it came to forging a political revolution, RAM had only the vaguest of notions as to how to rally the officer corps and forging coalitions with civilian forces. It was unable to amass the necessary governing experience under martial law, which in turn opened it to criticism for being unable to elaborate on its political alternative. On a broader scale, without the benefit of experience or ideology, AFP officers were unable to determine whether they had the capability replace civilian leaders. Civilian control was thus preserved because the army was never given the chance by Marcos to test its administrative mettle (Nemenzo 1986: 6-7).

Corazon Aquino restored constitutional processes and reinstated the democratic moorings of civilian supremacy, forcing RAM, a late addition to

the Aquino coalition, to promise not to violate the principle. Once RAM broke away from Aquino and restated its desire to form a junta, however, its cause was lost. Portrayed by Aquino as a threat to hard-won democracy and civilian rule, RAM lost the popular goodwill it had amassed via its participation in the 1986 People Power uprising. It did not help that the majority of the AFP corps of officers remained loyal to the principle of civilian rule. While Aquino may have had problems governing or was unable to stop corruption, most officers "believe[d] that these issues [were not] enough grounds for undertaking a coup."[10] The shallowness of the interventionist mentality and of RAM's political alternative eventually forced military officers, including RAM colonels, to explore and exploit another path to power that was less confrontational, extremely popular, and enjoyed better chances of success – electoral office. In pursuing this path, they would also alter their political goals.

The Emergence of the Military Politician

Most studies on Philippine politics view elections as rituals defending the interests of the most undemocratic, repressive and patrimonial elements in society; others highlight their role in the fall of Marcos and the subsequent stabilization of post-authoritarian politics as an indication that the democratic "rules of the game" have been restored (Anderson 1996:20-26). However, the scholar-activist Jennifer Franco charts what amounts to be a middle course, arguing that while the electoral process was dictated by deceit and coercion, "less-than-democratic elections did contribute to an unintended rise of democratic opposition" even during the authoritarian period. She sees this trend continuing into the post-Marcos era with the "partial erosion of regional authoritarian politics" (Franco 2001:2-3). Franco suggests that elections in the Philippines embody discrepant features: their corrupt and politically instrumentalist currents co-exist and sometimes even blend with more progressive and ethically-driven elements. Elections are not simply episodes in vote-buying or intimidation; they are also occasions when reformists can gain the upper hand against entrenched patronage-driven or authoritarian opponents. These moments of transformative potential, she points out, are particularly prominent during periods of crisis in which elections are one of the means employed by contending forces.

The classic example that fits Franco's hypothesis is People Power I in 1986, in which a variety of forces – from "traditional" politicians to moderate Left forces to the Catholic Church – formed a broad alliance to support the candidacy of Corazon Aquino against Marcos, who was trying to use the February "snap elections" to restore his regime's credibility. On both sides of the barricade, political instrumentalism and opportunism intermingled with progressive intentions (democracy on the side of Aquino; legitimacy on the part of Marcos). Franco's study shows that this dynamic can be played out on the local level as well. In her field research area, Cotabato province, a leftwing politician backed by the underground communist movement, the Catholic Church, non-government organizations, and citizens' groups was able to win a congressional seat against political clans rich in largesse and backed by their own "private armies" (Franco 2001: 277-362).

Benedict Kerkvliet likewise argues that elections in the Philippines cannot be simply described as exercises where those with the "guns, goons and gold" are expected to win. Filipinos had in fact tried to make elections be "about legitimacy, fairness and democratic processes" (Kerkvliet 1996: 148). He cites a couple of cases where voter-organized volunteer movements "to keep watch over the polls in all precincts" have turned out "clean and honest elections." While acknowledging that these may be limited cases, he argued that they nevertheless reveal "people trying to preserve or create some integrity and honesty in elections and to turn them into expressions of actual sentiments or evaluations of candidates and issues." He adds: "In so trying, they engage and oppose those who have different, often sinister understandings of what elections are all about. From time to time, these conflicting views of elections burst onto the national scene as major confrontation" (Kerkvliet 1996: 150).

Building on Franco's and Kerklviet's arguments, I would add that these post-authoritarian electoral coalitions are not simply the result of tactical or opportunistic considerations, or even the hope – on both sides – that such arrangements will ensure stable governance (Abinales 2001:154-161). Neither do we need to simply limit ourselves to critical elections to witness the bursting of "conflicting views" of voters and candidates. I would suggest that all elections are occasions where discrepant meanings contend with each other, resulting in the election of leaders with diverse interests and

ambitions. The trend is particularly evident in the Senate, whose at-large members are elected in nationwide campaigns. The post-war Senate has always been a mixed bag of political preferences and ideologies, ranging from the most corrupt and pro-American politicians to the most avid reformists, nationalists, and democrats (Pobre 2000: 200-326).

Table 1 gives a rough presentation of the social and economic origins as well as the political positions of elected Senators since 1947 to illustrate this jumbled composition that Filipino voters appear to prefer. It shows that while conservatives may have dominated the Senate, Filipinos have also elected liberals, leftwing sympathizers, actors and comedians, orators, demagogues, and military officers frequently enough to pose a challenge to entrenched conservative elites.[11] And while in other societies, nationalists may also turned out to be corrupt or opportunistic, the case histories of leading Filipino nationalist senators show, among other things, that they were voted to the Senate because of their perceived incorruptibility. Again Kerkvliet:

> If one scans the recent landscape of national elected officials, one sees Senators Jose Diokno, Jovito Salonga, and Lorenzo Tanada, among others, whose campaigns, while not devoid of distasteful practices, were generally respectable and upright. These politicians attracted genuine support and enthusiasm for their stances on issues, their character, and their reputations as decent and fair public servants.[12]

The politics inside the Senate have, in turn, come to reflect this diversity. Alongside blatantly interest-driven, reactionary and frivolous laws passed by the chamber have been the most progressive ordinances of the country's legal system. Alongside laws that renamed streets after politicians or families, the Senate has also approved one of the most stringent regulations against rape and domestic abuse in Asia.. A family legal code contains some conservative provisions that represent the powerful influence of the Catholic Church (anti-divorce, for example), but it also includes provisos that strongly protect the rights of the child. And while the country's legislature has generally sided with the president when it comes to maintaining the close alliance between the United States and the Philippines, the Senate had also

shown remarkable independence at certain periods – it voted in 1991 to terminate the military bases agreement between the two countries despite the intense lobbying of Corazon Aquino for retention (Salonga 1995).

More importantly, the Senate has functioned as a "tempering platform" where extreme and antagonistic political interests are compelled to find the middle ground in order to pass a law, define the parameters of a debate, or conduct a legislative inquiry. For a politician or reformist to succeed, he/she must learn how to scale down his/her objectives. The Senate represents voters' desire that their political representatives reach a middle ground to enable the country's politics to move forward.[13] A leader who would continue to stand by his/her extremist political position (e.g., openly advocate the overthrow of the state either by radical revolution or the coup) generally never survived the electoral process. Such was the case of the communist-backed *Partido ng Bayan* (Party of the People) in 1987, when none of its senate candidates got elected despite the Left boasting of a mass base of 1 million people.[14] In the Senate, the radical is often compelled to learn the art of accommodation and negotiation with more conservative counterparts in order to prepare bills and pass laws.

The political fortunes of Honasan and Ramos are another example of how military politicians were affected by this tempering influence of the electoral and legislative processes. The failure of the RAM coups and the subsequent election of the retired Ramos as Aquino's successor drew Honasan and RAM onto electoral terrain, aided by extremely liberal electoral rules for candidates. And with Ramos promising a full amnesty for RAM rebels in 1992, Honasan and his comrades saw no legal obstacle to shifting tactics from the coup to the ballot box (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 2, 1992).

There are two explanations for the strange makeover of Honasan from failed coup plotter to senator.[15] Alfred McCoy attributes this transformation to Honasan's "charm," the patronage of senior officers, a campaigning "cadre corps" in RAM and YOU, and support from his home province (McCoy 1999:316-318). McCoy also points to the military's successful preservation of its ascendant role since the Marcos era, and the impunity with which it abuses those powers (McCoy 1999). Others attribute Honasan's success

to an opportunistic shift in tactics by a power-hungry group. Marites Danguilan-Vitug, a journalist who followed Honasan's military and political career after 1986, explained to me that:

> Opportunism is what Gringo is all about. He failed in his violent plots so he tries peaceful means. It's his refusal to fade away from the scene. Yes, he built an organization but not that extensive, not even nationwide. His looks and charisma work for him. [Filipinos] would rather see him doing constructive work in a democratic setting, give him a chance to be a senator, rather than let him be in the dark fringes, always trying to topple governments. An invitation to be in the mainstream.[16]

For Danguilan-Vitug, this lack of ideological scruples explains why Honasan abandoned the coup and shifted to electoral politics: his opportunistic elitism "could easily come to terms with the agenda of a government that is neither too bad nor too threatening to military interests as to deserve its soldiers' disobedience." (Gloria 1999:2). New opportunities for RAM to pursue its self-serving ambitions opened up after its subsequent "peace agreement" with the government. (Gloria 1999:3).

Despite their contributions, these accounts do not explain why people voted for Honasan. Nor do they shed light on how a senate career has affected Honasan's political goals. The tendency of the above scholars is to focus on RAM as the crucial mechanism in Honasan's victory, rather than on the crucial factor that led to Honasan's success—the Filipino electorate. What Franco's study would suggest is that Filipino voters were equally if not more significant in compelling Honasan to shift from armed insurrection to electoral politics. He won not only because of his charisma and because the coups had failed. He got elected also because voters preferred him in the Senate than in the streets or the urban jungle planning conspiracies against the government. This popular preference, in turn, has something to do with voters recognizing that Honasan has certain principles with which they can identify.

A recent survey of voters' preferences for the Philippine Senate exemplifies this sentiment. Asked to rank the qualities of a senatorial candidate,

respondents listed and ranked the following answers: (1) intelligent and knowledgeable; (2) fights anomalies in government; (3) relates well to others; (4) pro-poor; and, (5) has integrity.[17] Note that the qualities listed had nothing to do at all with political preferences or ideological positions. And while two answers approximate a political position – i.e., the integrity and honesty of a candidate and his/her "pro-poor stance " – these are also postures that can be effortlessly appropriated or included in any political program, be it right, left or center. Gringo, as a candidate for the Senate, had all these attributes – at least to the popular mind – and thus people voted for him.[18]

Moreover, a trait like "relates well to others" is so broadly defined that it could easily apply to a political leader versed in the art of patron politics or a champion of human rights who is deeply connected to the community. The phrase "has integrity" could mean either a RAM plotter committed to overthrow a regime he perceives to be corrupt, pro-communist and ineffective, or a nationalist defending Philippine sovereignty against an "imperialist" United States. For these voter-respondents, these were the main criteria for rating candidates. The respondents see the politicians' positions on policy issues, laws, etc. as mere derivatives of these character traits. Honasan was voted to the Senate because he had "integrity," was perceived to be incorruptible, and because of his charisma, was someone who could "relate well to others." By electing Honasan to the Senate, Filipino voters gave him the opportunity to recover politically and retain his high profile. However, they did so by placing him in a political arena not of his own choosing, thereby neutralizing him politically. His continuing relevance was now dependent on his acceptance of this condition.

In choosing to enter the electoral arena, Honasan was forced to accept that conditions had changed. He placed ninth in his first electoral campaign, surprising even his critics. But a ninth place finish in a 24-place senate slate also suggested Honasan had lost some of the support that he had when he launched his coup against Marcos and helped install Aquino as president. His ranking further suggested that he was no longer the center of politics as he had been when he led RAM. Instead he had become one voice among twenty-four, restrained by institutional norms and forced to negotiate with fellow senators – including those he once tried to overthrow – to have his programs and projects be subject to public scrutiny and debate.

Unschooled in the formalities of Senate work and unfamiliar with the typical backroom deals that enabled laws to be passed, Honasan looked lost in the Senate in his first year. Journalists who covered the Senate described his contributions as modest and his participation in deliberations as minimal.[19] He somewhat recovered in his second year, only to be faced with "damning criticisms from his former comrades, who [felt] he [had] done little as senator to advance RAM's programs" (Gloria 1999:4). The laws Honasan supported were directed more at broader social welfare (rent control, housing law, solid waste management and the highly contested Clean Air Act), and less to the particular needs of his organization or even that of the military. Moreover, with the exception of the Clean Air Act, Honasan was never an active champion of any of the above laws; he was content in being just one of the collaborators or co-signatories supporting their ratification.[20] In the Senate, Honasan became increasingly content in his marginalization.

At the height of the impeachment battle between President Estrada and his opponents, Honasan supported the former, thus "reinforc[ing] the suspicions of his unbelievers that he remained a hardcore fascist" (Dalisay 2001). Journalists who sought his views in the Senate, however, also noted that in interviews, Honasan continuously insisted that his support for Estrada had something to do with his new-found respect for the constitutional process.[21] While there is no way in determining which of these two views stood closer to the truth, one thing was clear: Honasan preferred to fight within the legislature rather than take up arms again this time in defense of a political ally. His decision to stand behind Estrada may have caused him some votes. In May 2001 Senate elections, Honasan managed to retain his Senate seat, but just barely, placing thirteenth among the candidates for the thirteen open seats (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 23, 2001).

Honasan was the only RAM colonel who successfully found a niche in electoral politics. His closest comrades failed to replicate his success. In 1998, Colonels Eduardo Kapunan and Billy Bibit and Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Noble ran for the lower house of Congress from their respective provinces. Their national profile was not prominent enough to get them the votes. All three lost, as they did not have the crucial component of elite

support to get them elected to local seats (in contrast to Honasan, who ran for a national seat). Being non-members of established political clans, their participation in Marcos' attempt to get rid of provincial political families during martial law did not ingratiate them to those who had outlasted the dictator.[22]

The only exception was RAM's Colonel Rodolfo Aguinaldo, who became governor of his home province of Cagayan. Aguinaldo's success was marked by the reorientation of his image from the national to the provincial. He matched his political opponents' resources by organizing his own private army and using it to take over illegitimate businesses like smuggling and the illegal cutting and sale of timber. He changed his image from that of a RAM leader to that of a defender of the local public good against the provincial elite and its national backers. By turning his back on RAM's political agenda and seeking claims on resources via the "traditional way" – "guns, goons and gold" – Aguinaldo got himself elected.[23] An unlikely source also aided Aguinaldo's campaign for governor. The split in the local organization of the communist movement over strategy and tactics, and a subsequent purge and execution of cadres suspected of being military agents, shifted popular support from the Left to the charismatic Aguinaldo. With his image as the sole alternative to a brutal and extreme Left and the degenerate local political clan, Aguinaldo managed to become the people's candidate, the "Eagle of the Mountain" who would steal from the rich and give to the poor while protecting democracy from revolutionary extremism.[24]

The failure of most of Honasan's comrades suggests that the shift to "parliamentary struggle" can also be politically perilous for those unfamiliar with and ill prepared for this political terrain. These RAM officers likewise realized how local elections follow a different dynamic from their national counterparts. On the one hand, voters may praise a RAM colonel challenging a local political clan for elected office, but on the other, they may also be realistic enough to accept that the clans – with their resources and longer history of being part of the local community – can better serve their interest. And expanding Jennifer Franco's argument, I would suggest that when weighing two contending candidates, running on the basis of principles -- the consistent anti-Marcos democrat or the lieutenant colonel whose

immediate past record included trying to overthrow a constitutional government – local voters might have leaned towards the former. Honasan's colleagues failed because they lost on both counts; against entrenched local political clans that had an array of resources, including coercive ones, to respond to an electoral threat, and against local politicians or activist-leaders with a less blemished political record in defending constitutional democracy. Aguinaldo won because he possessed and deployed the same resources as his opponents, and expropriated the image of being a "man of the people," which the Left had abandoned because of its political troubles.

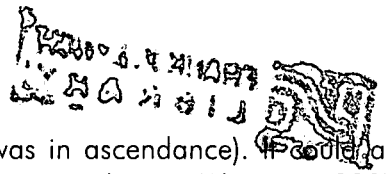
RAM's political presence today has waned, while YOU "now remains just a name in history that makes noise every election period" (Gloria 1999:4). Confined to "tactical" alliances with the NGO movement, these marginalized symbols of the Filipino *caudillo* occasionally threaten a coup to challenge the ineptness or corruption in government (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 28, 2000). They participated in the movement calling for Estrada's ouster, but Arroyo denied them an important role in part because Honasan stood by Estrada's side until the end. RAM and YOU had become a spent force, their leaderships broken up, their funds depleted and their members effectively neutralized by their reintegration into the military organization.[25]

Where RAM (with the exception of Honasan and Aguinaldo) faltered, Ramos prospered. In defending Aquino against RAM, Ramos' political value increased and his association with the dictatorship became less and less of a liability (McCoy 1999:284-295). This political option enhanced his image as a military professional (which in the Filipino political vista is also associated with being non-interventionist) and a protector of the restored democracy. The latter perception, in particular, boosted his chances once he decided to cast his candidacy as president. Ramos won by a slight majority, which was enough to strengthen his conviction that electoral and constitutional politics was the best pathway for an ambitious military officer and for the post-Marcos military as a whole. Ramos' election likewise assured the Filipino electorate that the days of military interventionism were over; the soldier politician had replaced the coup plotter as the symbol of the military in politics.

As president, Ramos was described by his liberal and leftwing critics as being cut of the same cloth as his predecessors, i.e., conservative and very much beholden to powerful domestic and international (especially United States) interests. At the same time, however, these detractors conceded that his regime was the "consolidation of a new form of elite rule," no longer dominated by the political clans of the traditional landed elites (Hutchcroft 1998:242). This latter image was precisely what Ramos wanted to project, as he vowed to end oligarchic control of the economy and implement "reforms" to liberate market forces, reduce government involvement in the economy, and propel the Philippines into recovery (Ramos 1993). If Aquino was the president who brought back democracy, Ramos portrayed himself as the successor who broke oligarchic rule and showed the way to economic recovery through the judicious use of state power.[26]

The question still remains: why didn't Ramos join RAM when it mobilized against Marcos, or take over the government completely given its lack of direction under Aquino? Why did he prefer to silently expand his influence inside the government and allow a rickety constitutional process to plod ahead? The most popular answer in Manila points to his supposed professionalism, supported by the fact that he entered politics only after retiring from the military. A Filipino officer observes that retired officers tend to "go into politics rather than [stand] aloof and contemptuous of the democratic political process as they do in some countries." He adds that there is no "deep division between politicians and military men, for they share roughly the same value system" (Ciron 1993: 42). Ramos supposedly epitomized this kind of military officer, someone who possesses impeccable professionalism yet is unafraid to get his hands dirty in politics.

Then there was Ramos' supposed appreciation of what election-based politics and the presidency could do for his political career. As mentioned above, electoral victory imparts a high degree of resilient legitimacy to a political leader. Ramos and his allies witnessed how elections led to the unraveling of Marcos' rule and provided crucial ballast to the instability of the Aquino period. The coup option, either in league with RAM or on his own initiative, was thus anathema to Ramos' ambition, because it threatened to bring back the instability and polarizing atmosphere of the late Marcos period (during which the regime was weakened and the opposition, including



communists, was in ascendance). It could also have spelled the end of Ramos' career as a politician (Almonte 1993).

Ramos could not ignore the tremendous enthusiasm for the ballot and the enduring impact suffrage could have on regime survival and sustainability. As another observer of the military has pointed out, the elections of 1986 and 1992 had "sent a clear and very significant message to [Ramos] and the rest of the military [that] a soldier could seize political power through peaceful and democratic means." Moreover, through his involvement with "People Power," Ramos became aware that the political capital he could draw "from sectors that wanted to preserve the democratic gains in the post-Marcos era yielded far better benefits than an alliance with RAM" (Gloria 1999:7). While he adopted the style of all previous presidents – depending on a small coterie of family, cronies and trusted advisers – unlike Marcos he also recognized that a tightly-knit governing circle could be reinforced by popular backing.

A crucial element in post-authoritarian politics that Ramos recognized for its political and propaganda value was the Filipino middle class. This broadly described section of the community has always premised its political involvement in the anti-Marcos resistance on the restoration of elections as the focal point of re-democratization. At every political crisis during the Aquino presidency, the latter relied on the political forces identified with the middle class to counter RAM's political sallies as well as the anti-state propaganda of the Left. (Rivera 2000:1-12). To succeed, Ramos had to inherit the mantle from Aquino as the defender of middle class interest. This he did by showing that he was of the same lineage as they are, and shared their values and aspirations. He touched all the right buttons – the middle class' aversion for corruption and "vested political interests," their desire for economic mobility and their preference that government keep out of their lives even as they reserved the right to question and even oppose its policies. His economic vision was their economic vision – a national economy unburdened by "rent-seeking" activities, committed to the competitive essence of the free market and a limited state presence in the economy. It was no surprise that in the 1992 presidential elections, middle class votes for Ramos had a higher percentage compared to the more marginalized majority (Rivera 2000:11).

As president, Ramos reasserted control over the AFP by reintegrating RAM and YOU officers into the armed forces, a move, which, while not well received by officers who were directly involved in fighting them, was regarded by a larger number of officers and soldiers as restoring institutional unity in a fragmented military organization (Cueto 2000). Ramos was not able to eliminate factionalism completely, but by getting RAM and YOU to sign a peace pact, he effectively brought an end to the effective use of the coup option. Following Aquino, he also refused to extend the service of senior military officers beyond the term of their appointed positions, thus ensuring smooth turnover and minimizing friction over promotions and appointments (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Nov.12 & 28, 1996). Finally, over the opposition of the civilian-controlled local police forces, Ramos reassigned to the military the primary role of fighting the two insurgencies still confronting the state (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*: May 13, Sept.5, 1997 & Feb.27, 1998). Having rejuvenated the military, Ramos sought to protect the AFP's institutional interests against "countervailing institutions such as Congress [or] the political parties" (Coronel 1990: 84-85). He increased the military budget and tapped other sources of revenue so that the AFP, for the first time since Marcos, could launch a "modernization program" to upgrade its antiquated firepower (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*: Aug.21, & Nov.18, 1992; Dec.16, 1996). He also placed loyal officers in government positions. Over thirty officers — active-duty and retired — were appointed to non-military posts, purportedly because of their management skills, no-nonsense attitude at implementing government programs, and loyalty to Ramos (Gloria 1999:8).

In his first two years, Ramos was hailed for stabilizing Philippine politics and restoring some semblance of effective governance. In the hands of a "military professional," the Philippines seemed headed for economic recovery and even growth (Hutchcroft 1996). Ramos had likewise found a way to strengthen the presidency and still avoid criticism that he was reintroducing authoritarian measures. He did so by the extensive use of executive agencies and executive orders to implement projects, thereby sidestepping the legislature. As a supporter noted, Ramos had "all the powers he needs to become an imperial president...and this, without becoming dictatorial."[27] This political posture did not escape the eyes of many military officers. Ramos had demonstrated an alternative route to power, in contrast to the polarized

politics that RAM practiced. Clearly, his was a better alternative. As one Filipino analyst put it:

> The Armed Forces have a stake in the continuity of the Ramos policies. Sustained economic growth has permitted the increase of budgetary allocations for military modernization. Senior military officers, especially retired generals, have been drafted into key government posts...The recruitment of retired generals for key civilian positions in the government and in the private sector has co-opted the military and has given it a stake in the successful management of the economy...The generals are happy over this co-optation and have identified themselves with Ramos policies and reform. With fewer [instances of] domestic turbulence to put down and their co-optation into civil politics, the military has had fewer reasons to think about coup de etats [sic] (Doronila 1996).

The analyst concluded that the military was "now a politicized institution" with an "interventionist mentality" in situations where it wishes to defend its interests or expand its influence. This conclusion, however, is not entirely accurate. For in choosing elections as their main arena of struggle, military-politicians like Ramos and others in the AFP were inevitably affected by the antinomies associated with voting. They would find their influence considerably clipped by their engagement with politicians and likewise by institutional weaknesses that were, because of the non-authoritarian context, subject to public inquiry and criticism. This relationship, in quite an ironic way, mitigated any attempt to resurrect the RAM option of the 1980s even as the AFP became increasingly used to the coup threat as an attempt to gain concessions, influence political decisions, or express its institutional displeasure about "excessive politicking."

Military-Politicians and Military Corporate Interests: Drawbacks

No sooner was military unity reestablished in late 1992 than did Ramos' government came under heavy criticism for pervasive corruption, especially involving his family and allies.[28] His "rainbow coalition" of leftwing reformists, military officers, and patronage politicians unraveled as soon as he resorted to deals and concessions – strategies the public associated with the

corruption of "traditional politics" – to push his development agenda through Congress (de Dios 1999:142-146). His "military professional" image was further damaged by his inability to contain an upsurge of kidnappings of Chinese-Filipinos by gangs composed mainly of ex-soldiers (Hau 1999:128-151). Ramos' promised economic recovery likewise failed to materialize. At the end of Ramos' term, instead of the assured surplus, the government was faced with a 24.5 million-peso deficit resulting from "a budget bloated by a P54 billion allocation for pork barrel funds – a 189 percent increase from the 1997 pork barrel of P19 billion" (Gutierrez 1998: 61).

Ramos' policy to promote high growth by opening up the economy, privatizing public enterprises, and enhancing exports by devaluing the Philippine currency, the peso, attracted over $16.4 billion in investments and led Ramos in 19 3 to declare the Philippines "Asia's new tiger." But by his last year in office, this success was mitigated by a public debt that had reached 170 billion pesos (roughly US$ 3.3 billion at 1998 peso-dollar conversion rate) and a national treasury with only P8 billion pesos (US$ 155 million) left after debt repayment, pork barrel projects and other expenditures (Arillo 2002:58-59). Economic reforms were also discovered to have disproportionately benefited the richest of Filipinos. A University of the Philippines journal quoted one government study as admitting that "inequality [had] in fact worsened [during] the boom years of the Ramos regime" and that "while average family income of all households [had] grown, the gap between the rich and the poor [had] widened. [Between] 1988 and 1997, the average annual family income of the poorest 10 percent of all households grew from P8,160 to P20,621 [but] the magnitude of the income growth for the richest 10 percent [was] much bigger: from an average annual family income of P144,800 in 1988 to P491,658 in 1997" (Diokno-Pascual 1999:153). Then the 1997 Asian economic crisis destroyed all hopes of salvaging the economy.

The AFP was not immune to these entanglements. Its ambitious modernization program had to be scaled back when the Asian crisis broke out and allegations of corruption made legislative leaders hesitate to give their full support to the program.[29] Military prestige, still trying to recover from the damaged done by the RAM coups and allegations of corruption, suffered further when a newspaper report cited a government intelligence

study admitting "that most of the wanted criminals engaged in kidnappings and armed robberies are either former soldiers and policemen or are under the protection of some ranking officers from the AFP and PNP [Philippine National Police]." Aggravating this already-dire portrait was the admission that inter-service rivalries and incompetence had hampered the military's efforts to rid itself of "hoodlums in uniform" and reduce the country's crime rate (Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 29, 1992). The first report of the Presidential Task Force on Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence was published in 1992. Six years later, as Ramos was about to step down, the same Task Force disclosed the fact that "1,842 soldiers and policemen linked to crime are in active service while 581 were formerly in uniform." The special agency further revealed that nine of the 10 most wanted criminals engaged in armed robbery used to belong to the four branches of the AFP – Army, Navy, Air Force and the defunct Philippine Constabulary" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 8, 1998). Not much had changed within the AFP after six years of a "military professional" presidency.

"Democracy" likewise made it possible for the media and the legislature to expose and investigate military corruption.[30] The most serious of these cases occurred under Ramos but became a full-blown controversy under Estrada. It involved the mismanagement of the AFP's Retirement and Separations Benefits System (RSBS), an agency meant to handle the retirement and other related funds of military personnel. As the inquiries by the Defense Department and Congress began to yield indications that senior officers allied to Ramos were involved in the scandal, some generals hinted at a coup plot against the newly-elected Estrada in order to put a halt to the investigations in 1999. The threat never materialized because a compromise was struck between military and civilian leaders. The AFP conceded that some officers had to be prosecuted for the RSBS "mess," while the politicians agreed to bail out the plundered state agency (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Nov.12, 1999) Officers who were in Ramos' circle of loyalists and cronies were not charged in court, and Ramos escaped prosecution because of presidential immunity. Those who had threatened a coup were admonished, with Ramos and the government compelling them to reiterate their fealty to the supremacy of civilian rule (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Aug.22, 1998).

The RSBS case was particularly significant because it indicated both the military's power under constitutional democracy and its limitations. When

the initial investigations led to a coup threat by the above senior officers, observers were quick to note that such responses still represented the "process of adjustment of the military [which] having developed a rebellious tendency during the Aquino regime and not being used to a civilian head at the [Department of Defense is] finding it difficult to go back to the old pre-martial law tradition of civilian supremacy" (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 22, 1998). Still, the haste with which military leaders withdrew their threat and conceded to civilian prosecutory prerogatives suggested how much they had adapted to the compromise-driven nature of constitutional politics, and, in doing so, had also acknowledged the limits of their power.[31]

For the AFP to continue playing politics, it has had to school itself in the art of negotiation and backroom dealing. It cannot simply depend anymore on more militant acts like the coup (or coup attempt); instead it must act like any other patronage politician operating in a structurally weak state. Ironically, what allowed it to take advantage of tactics associated with patronage politics was the imposition of martial law and the RAM revolts. These episodes in the AFP's history gave the military room to maneuver, something it had never had until Marcos placed the country under "constitutional authoritarianism" and RAM launched its aborted coups. This contradictory legacy enabled the AFP to maintain a political profile, albeit one constrained by the new rules of the post-authoritarian political game.[32]

If reduced largesse, criminality, corruption, and inefficiencies took the edge off military autonomy from civilian interference, the communist and separatist rebellions acted as the last restraining element to a possible return of military adventurism and a reaffirmation of the Ramos path to the presidency. In post-colonial societies confronted by insurgencies, these internal wars often become the convenient excuse for military takeovers of weak civilian regimes. The Philippines, however, is an exception. The CPP and the MNLF thrived under the polarized politics of the Marcos dictatorship as the latter drove thousands of young men and women to support and become part of their respective causes. The MNLF was eventually forced to negotiate with Marcos, but the CPP continued its remarkable growth largely because of the military's brutal but unsuccessful counter-insurgency program.[33] Dictatorship and an incompetent military were a bane to the state and a boon to rebels (Abinales 1997:33-34).

What happened after Marcos fell, however, was a more important lesson for Ramos. The CPP, habituated by the militarized politics of the dictatorship, was unable to make the necessary strategic and tactical adjustments under Aquino and began to falter. It became evident that one reason for this was the preference of the majority of Filipinos for the ballot and constitutional politics. Suffrage and other democratic rituals have had an overwhelming effect on the CPP, causing internal fissures that eventually precipitated the first major split after its formation in 1968.[34] Thus, despite the warnings of RAM that the government's weak infrastructure would reinvigorate the communist movement and hence make military intervention imperative, most AFP officers have accepted this ironic situation, in which a "weak" but democratic state is actually the more effective deterrent to communism than its authoritarian counterpart.

This approach was further validated by the military's success in handling the MNLF's successor — the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). This splinter group, which broke away from the MNLF in the 1980s, began to expand considerably in the last years of the Ramos administration, and even dared newly-elected President Estrada to attack its camps in the southern Philippines in 1999. The latter obliged and sent the AFP to destroy MILF strongholds in the southern Philippines, a military action that was strongly supported by the majority of Filipinos. Observers praised the AFP for its "professional handling" of the war, i.e., its strategy of engaging the MILF with minimal collateral damage in the communities surrounding the camps. Human rights violations were likewise minimized (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 12, 2000). Thus it became evident that counter-insurgency operations conducted with executive and legislative guidance and oversight, and constant media scrutiny, tended to be more effective than when these were conducted under the secrecy and top-down supervision during the Marcos dictatorship.[35] The media and the civilian leadership, and by extension the informed public, acted as deterrents to the tendency of the military to violate human rights; they also indirectly helped legitimize a military action by defending the state's right to eliminate armed threats to the Republic and attempts to fragment the nation-state.

While constitutionalist officers and soldier-politicians regarded the decline of the communist movement and the fall of the MILF as victories of the state, these trends also made them aware of the limits of extremist politics —

on either the Left or the Right. For these officers (retired and/or active), RAM's coups were clearly as destined to failure as the CPP's "national democratic revolution." Their resolve was strengthened when it became clear that the only realistic path to power was through the civilian-dominated, compromise-driven, often-inefficient, corrupt, and popular constitutional process. This recognition of the limits to the military's political clout puts into context General Angelo Reyes's denial that the AFP launched a coup in January 2001 to remove President Estrada and his emphatic assertion that he and the military "know only too well that an unconstitutional and not popularly backed regime can not take over."[36] There is enough evidence now to show that the AFP did not play any role in instigating the events that led to the downfall of Estrada. Up to the very last minute, its leaders reaffirmed their respect for the constitutional process that was unfolding (i.e., the Senate trial) and for Estrada as the constitutionally-elected head of the nation (Tordesillas and Hutchinson 2001:178-179).

In fact, the anti-Estrada coalition – an unusual alliance of patronage politicians, civil society groups, liberals, social democrats and Maoists – also knew that the success of their extra-constitutional campaign depended on convincing the military to join them.[37] When Reyes informed the military command that it was time to abandon Estrada, however, the AFP Chief-of-Staff also gave notice to both pro-Estrada and anti-Estrada forces that no resolution of any major political crisis would happen without the involvement of the armed forces. Thus by successfully persuading the military to enlist with them, the anti-Estrada forces had unwittingly reinforced and given more legitimacy to a new feature of Philippine politics – the indispensable presence of the military on the domestic political scene.

Conclusion

How has a weak state like the Philippines weathered the challenge of military takeover? And how did coup rumors and plots come to be seen as a functional and healthy component of democracy? This paper has suggested that this condition was made possible by the preservation and perseverance of two features of the Philippine polity: civilian supremacy over the military, and the enduring popularity and potency of suffrage and legislative politics. The Philippine state may be weak in a number of areas –

notably with regard to its lack of efficient governance, its recurring inability to collect revenues and maintain its political autonomy in relation to social forces, and its failure to contain corruption and patrimonial plunder. But it is also remarkably strong in others, especially when it comes to generating popular support or renewing popular mandate.

Elections and legislative politics are the most prominent examples of the unusual vigor of the Philippine state. With their origins in the American colonial period, these two state practices have a long history and are more embedded in the political system than radical politics, or, for that matter, state authoritarianism. Along with the principle of civilian supremacy, elections dampen radical political options and also neutralize or limit the capacities of the extreme Left or Right. As "performative acts," they help stabilize the Philippine polity by providing an alternative outlet for mass resentment or protest and help to neutralize rival radical rebellions.[38] They also allow the state to reform or rejuvenate itself especially after a particularly profound political crisis (Thompson 1998:109-115). Even Marcos, when he was at his most dominant, recognized the potency of these rituals, utilizing them, albeit under tight control, to embellish his dictatorship with constitutional trappings. Retaining them ironically proved to be his undoing; the "snap elections" he called on December 1985 created the opportunity for the anti-dictatorship movement to overthrow him.

Compared to suffrage and legislative politics, the coup has been a poor rival; its history is far shorter, and each of the seven times it has been deployed as a political weapon, it has failed. RAM's and YOU's image suffered with each coup, for instead of being regarded as forward-looking leaders, they were typecast as symbols of an age that repressed democratic desires, including the right to vote and to place one's representative in parliament. The politically ambitious and more strategic military officers saw not only the folly of the coup, but also the value in tapping the vote. Soldiers like Fidel Ramos realized much earlier that their own personal ambitions and the interests of the military could be better served by taking advantage of both the weaknesses and strengths of constitutional politics. Ramos exploited weaknesses in the party system to craft a winning electoral coalition; he also correctly anticipated that the strong middle class preference for the ballot would get wealthier opponents on his side. As president, he distributed

patronage resources to pass laws, while relying on specific state agencies known for their efficiency and honesty to implement policy.

Under Ramos and even Estrada, isles of state efficiency emerged amidst a sea of patronage politics, and this condition would become one of the defining features of post-authoritarian politics. This system is also the reality that the AFP as a corporate body and as a political actor has come to accept. And even if the military does employ the coup threat once in a while to help settle a crisis situation, as Gen. Reyes and his staff did in January 2001, it cannot imagine itself operating effectively without this constitutional mantle. Yet, given that such involvement now almost always includes references to and warnings of a coup threat to gain advantage or resolve crisis situations, the chapter on RAM-type interventionism also cannot be fully closed. Coups, in short, have ceased to be a weapon to overthrow post-authoritarian regimes; they have been integrated into the political process in the Philippines as parleys in post-authoritarian, elite level political games. ❖

Notes

[1] "Interview with Gen. Angelo Reyes," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 15, 2001.

[2] Listen to how YOU leader, Capt. Danilo Lim explained why he joined the December 1989 coup against Aquino: "I cry every time I see the ubiquitous and stark faces of poverty, injustice and misery being experienced by so many even as the few who wallow in luxury hunger for more." Marites Danguilan-Vitug, "An Endless Vigil: Philippine Democracy under Siege," in *Kudeta: The Challenge to Philippine Democracy* (Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and Photojournalists' Guild of the Philippines, 1990): 155.

[3] Similarly to the American constitutional system, military officers seeking to run for office need either to resign their commission or be retired. This new status, however, did not necessarily mean a diminution of their influence inside the military organization. Ramos and Honasan, for example, were top on the list of the so-called "military votes."

[4] Marcos was elected president in 1964 and then re-elected in 1969. He declared martial law in 1972, a year before the end of his second term he-ruled the country autocratically until his ouster in 1986. Among the pioneer works on the AFP are Sherwood D. Goldberg, "The Bases of Civilian Control of the Military in the Philippines," in *Civilian Control and the Military: Theory and Cases from Developing Countries*, ed. Claude W. Welch, Jr. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976); and Carolina Hernandez, "The Extent of Civilian Control of the

Military in the Philippines, 1946-1976," (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1979). Additionally, see Felipe Miranda, "The Military," in *The Philippines after Marcos*, eds. R.J. May and Francisco Nemenzo (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1985); and Donald L. Berlin, "Prelude to Martial law: An Examination of Pre-1972 Philippine Civil-Military Relations," (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1982); Carolina Hernandez, "The Role of the Military in Contemporary Philippine Society," *The Diliman Review* 22 (January-February 1984); and Patricio N. Abinales, "Militarization in the Philippines: A Country Report," paper presented at the Workshop on Militarization and Society, sponsored by the UNESCO and the International Peace Research Association, Tokyo, Japan, March 1983.

[5] The best account of RAM's evolution is Alfred W. McCoy, *Closer than Brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): 183-221.

[6] Francisco Nemenzo, "A Season of Coups," *Diliman Review*, 34: 5-6 (November-December 1986); and Carolina Hernandez, "Towards Understanding Coups and Civil-Military Relations," *Kasarinlan: Journal of Third World Studies*, 3:2 (1987). Media portraits of the military ensured that this view persisted even beyond the RAM coups. See, for example, Amado Doronila, "Military: Questions on Loyalty Resurface," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December 22, 1996.

[7] Hernandez, "The Extent of Civilian Control." While Hernandez presents a rich picture of how the military became a powerful apparatus under Marcos, she misinterpreted this empowerment to mean a decline in civilian control. On the contrary, the ultimate power was still with the civilian Marcos.

[8] See for example, Ferdinand Marcos, *The Democratic Revolution from the Center* (Manila: Marcos Foundation, 1973).

[9] I am grateful to Mary Callahan for this insight.

[10] Ruben Fulgeras Ciron, "Civil-Military Relations in the Philippines: Perceptions of PMA-trained officers," (Ph.D. diss., University of the Philippines, May 1993), 61. RAM cited the following issues as the reasons for launching the coups: "failure of the government to deliver basic services; graft and corruption; too much partisan politics; bureaucratic inefficiency; poor and unresponsive military leadership; lack of genuine reconciliation; uneven treatment of human rights violation committed by the military and the communist armed group; absence of good government; softness on the communist and left-leaning armed groups; and, failure of the leadership to address socio-economic problems." Ciron, 39. Ciron has since then been promoted to one-star general and is in charge of the AFP's "strategic planning" program.

[11] The description of these individuals' politics is based on the political positions they took before they were elected to the Senate and during their tenure. On the Senate's post-authoritarian performance, see Olivia C. Caoili, "Assessment of the Performance of the Philippine Congress, 1988-1992," in *The Post-EDSA Vice Presidency, Congress and Judiciary: Self-Assessments and External Views and Assessments*, eds. Jose V. Abueva and Emerlinda R. Roman (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1998): 103-125.

[12] Kerkliet, "Contested Meanings of Elections in the Philippines," 161. On the stories of these two of these foremost nationalist senators, see Agnes G. Bailen, *The Odyssey of Lorenzo M. Tanada* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001); and Jovito Salonga, *A Journey of Struggle and Hope: The Memoir of Jovito R. Salonga* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Center for Leadership, Citizenship and Democracy, and Regina Publishing, 2001): 79-114, 419-478. See also the case of a predecessor, Senator Claro M. Recto, in Renato Constantino, *The Making of a Filipino: A Story of Philippine Colonial Politics* (Quezon City: Renato Constantino, 1991).

[13] Dennis M. Arroyo, "The Mind of the Filipino Voter," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 28, 2001. See also the comments of newly-elected senator Francis Pangilinan on how "new" and "old" politics have blended effortlessly in the mix-bag of people voted to the Senate. *The Philippine Starweek*, July 22, 2001.

[14] See Kathleen Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines, 1968-1993: A Story of its Theory and Practice* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2001): 194-196.

[15] Honasan's Senate victory drew this wry comment from *Asiaweek* magazine: "Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos, Jr., must have wondered how ex-rebel colonel Gregorio 'Gringo' Honasan did it. After hobbling the Philippines with bloody coup attempts in 1987 and 1989, Honasan went on to win a senatorial seat in the May elections, placing ninth among 12 victorious candidates. All but forgotten by the voters were the 166 deaths in his two misguided uprisings, the hundreds of millions of dollars in investment he scared away, and his veiled threats to take to the hills again if peaceful avenues for change prove, in his view, futile. For the electorate, Honasan has turned his back on his violent past, is giving politics a chance - and deserved one himself. Well, Bongbong might ask, why not me? The late strongman's son came in 16th in a field of 34 senatorial hopefuls." *Asiaweek*, August 25, 1995.

[16] Marites Danguilan-Vitug, e-mail correspondence, April 15, 2001. See also Rigoberto Tiglao's "Rebellion from the Barracks: The Military as Political Force," in *Kudeta*, 14.

[17] *Images*, April-June 2001. The survey was conducted by the poll group *Pulse Asia* for the May 14, 2001 elections.

[18] Interview with Glenda Gloria, January 21, 2002.

[19] Interview with Ares Rufo, *Newsbreak Magazine* reporter who covered the Senate. January 4, 2002.

[20] "Profile of the Honorable Gregorio B. Honasan, Senator of the Republic," information sheet distributed by the office of Senator Honasan. I am grateful to Aries Rufo for providing me a copy.

[21] Interview with Rufo.

[22] Marcos dispossessed political families who opposed him of their private armies, confiscated their lands (under the guise of land reform) and took over their businesses. However, he was unable to sustain this campaign and eventually entered into some form of mutual accommodation with most of them. See Mark Thompson, *The Anti-Marcos Struggle: Personalistic Rule and Democratic Transition in the Philippines* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995): 57-63, 106-109.

[23] Gloria, "The RAM Boys," 4-5. On Aguinaldo, see McCoy, *Closer than Brothers*, 304-308. Aguinaldo was assassinated in June 2001 by a communist hit team for his "blood debts."

[24] McCoy, *Closer than Brothers*, 305-308. On the breakdown of the local communist organization, see Robert Francis Garcia, To Suffer thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated its Own (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, 2001): 2-49.

[25] In 1993, RAM received P33.2 million pesos from the government as amnesty funds for the livelihood needs of its members. The fund was used to send 200 children of RAM's rebel soldiers to school, but was depleted by 1998. The foundation set up to manage the funds also tried to publish a weekly broadsheet where RAM could elaborate on its political program. After 27 weeks of publication, the newspaper closed. In 1999, the foundation itself was closed down due to lack of funds. Gloria, "The RAM boys," 5.

[26] "Putting the Country in Order: Interview with Presidential Security Adviser Jose Almonte," *Singapore Business Times*, July 9-10, 1994. See also Rigoberto Tiglao, "Right-hand Man," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 11, 1995.

[27] Joaquin Bernas, *A Living Constitution: The Ramos Presidency* (Pasig City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2000): 9-10. See also Jose T. Almonte, "Building State Capacity for Reform," speech given at the 33rd annual conference of the Philippine Economic Society, Manila, 9 February 1996.

[28] Ellen Tordesillas and Sheila Coronel, "Scam," in *Pork and Other Perks: Corruption and Governance in the Philippines*, ed. Sheila Coronel (Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1998): 83-111. See also Chay Florentino-Hofileña, "The President's Tribal Grounds," in *Boss: Five Case Studies of Local Politics in the Philippines*, eds. Sheila Coronel and Jose F. Lacaba (Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Jounralism and the Institute for Popular Democracy, 1995): 121-123; and *Betrayals of the Public Trust: Investigative Reports on Corruption*, ed. Sheila Coronel (Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2000). Ramos' reputation was tarnished when a Senate investigation indicted his political party for allegedly accepting a P2 billion bribe from a construction firm competing for the right to reclaiming parts of Manila Bay. *Far Eastern Economic Review 1998 Yearbook*, 185.

[29] Congress cut the AFP modernization program from 330 billion pesos to a "realistic" 170 billion pesos, citing the need to allot 161 billion pesos to "pressing nonmilitary educational, social and development projects." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 30, 1996.

[30] *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 3, May 9-10, 29, August 21, October 21, 1992, and January 7,.18, February 12, 16, 18-19, 24, March 18, July 3, 15, August 3, October 24, 1993.

[31] On the need for state leaders and agency to compromise, see the essays in *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, eds. Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli and Vivienne Shue (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[32] I am grateful to Rachel Epstein for suggesting this line of analysis.

[33] On the history of the communist rebellion against Marcos and after, see Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989). On the MNLF, see the exceptional book by Marites Danguilan-Vitug and Glenda Gloria, *Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao* (Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, 2000).

[34] On the crisis and split inside the CPP see the various essays in *The Revolution Falters: The Left in Philippine Politics after 1986*, ed. Patricio N. Abinales (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1996); and Weekley, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 219-258.

[35] See, for example, Victor Corpuz, *Silent War* (Manila: VNC Enterprise, 1989).

[36] "Interview with Gen. Angelo Reyes," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 15, 2001.

[37] On the tenuous legal standing of the anti-Estrada opposition, at least until the Supreme Court sanctified the transfer of power from Estrada to Gloria Arroyo, see Cecilio T. Arillo, *Power Grab*, 66-315.

[38] The concept "performative act" was originally discussed by John Austin. See Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: York Press, 1992), 271.

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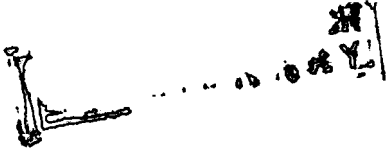

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