

Behind the Laxalt mission to Manila

by Allen Douglas

On October 14-18, Sen. Paul Laxalt was sent to Manila to deliver what was characterized as a "blunt message" to President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines that he must immediately institute specified reforms. Implied in the message was that, otherwise, the Philippine President would face a withdrawal of support from Washington, and, more importantly, from President Reagan. The Laxalt mission was the culmination of an operation against the Philippines directed by the State Department, and which now involves most elements of the U.S. intelligence community. From Manila, it appears as if the United States has declared war on its ally.

The process leading up to the Laxalt mission began in May of this year, when William Casey, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, paid a four-day visit to Manila. The fact that it was Casey who undertook the mission was not accidental. A key swing factor in U.S. policy toward the Philippines was the Office of the Director of the CIA, the office occupied by Casey. His Manila trip was a result of his decision to take up the State Department demand for "reforms," including the holding of immediate, "new, fair elections," although national elections are not mandated by the Philippine Constitution until 1987. President Marcos "artfully dodged" Casey's demands, according to the disappointed comments of William Sullivan, the former U.S. ambassador to the Philippines, and to Iran, who acted as a principal figure in the overthrow of the Shah, and is now active in the Philippines destabilization.

The reforms center upon three themes: the holding of immediate elections, a reform of the military, cleaning out of alleged "old cronies" in high positions in the military, and the permanent removal of former chief of staff of the armed forces Fabian Ver from his post. Ver is now on trial for his alleged complicity in the murder of opposition leader Benigno Aquino.

Finally, the United States has been demanding that Marcos adhere 100% to the austerity conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund, which conditionalities are the single most destabilizing factor in the crisis.

President Marcos has made repeatedly clear, that while his government is dedicated to fighting the insurgency and solving the economic crisis, he is not willing to carry out "reforms" that will destroy the country. Marcos's refusal to remove himself from power forced a "reassessment" of the

"stability" of the Marcos government and the Philippines, at the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Security Council. The State Department line that Marcos must be removed to guarantee stability emerged as the consensus.

The 'reassessment' goes into motion

A newly appointed director for the CIA's East Asian division wrote the "reassessment." Its verdict was delivered by former CIA London station chief Cord Meyer in a "signal piece" in the *New York Post* in mid-July. Entitled "Big Trouble Looms in the Philippines," Meyer established two critical themes: first, that "the Reagan administration must face the real possibility that before its second term is over, a Marxist regime may have taken over in the Philippines and given the Soviets access to the strategic air and naval bases now occupied by the U.S."; and second, that although all pressure must be kept "on Marcos to make the necessary military, political and economic reforms while there is still time." The key to these reforms is his personal relationship with President Reagan, which must be severed. "Since Marcos discounts advice from most American officials on the ground that he enjoys 'a special relationship' with President Reagan, it is essential that Reagan be directly and personally involved in this effort," Meyer wrote.

Under the aegis of the Special Crisis Planning Group of the National Security Council, representatives of the Pentagon, the DIA, the CIA, and the State Department, gathered to plan the implementation of the measures indicated in the Cord Meyer piece.

Fortunately, Meyer and his cronies were not the only ones considering U.S. policy toward the Philippines. On Aug. 16, almost simultaneous with the NSC-sponsored meeting, the *EIR* lobbed a bombshell into the policy discussions, a 13-page feature, "Shultz Torpedoes American Defense in the Philippines." Echoed on the front pages of the Philippines' press within a week, *EIR* charged that the "on-the-ground operations for the overthrow of Marcos are being directed out of the U.S. embassy in Manila under Ambassador Stephen Bosworth."

According to U.S. intelligence sources, that *EIR* piece forced a reevaluation of the "stability of the Marcos government," in both the United States and the Philippines. It was

published just as a poll issued by the Philippine opposition itself showed that if elections were held today, Marcos would win convincingly, with 56% of the vote. Then, one of the most important critics of the Marcos regime, Cardinal Jaime Sin, officiated at a birthday mass for President Marcos, indicating his interest "dialogue" and "reconciliation."

The original intent of the press hysteria opened by the Meyer piece, was to so isolate President Marcos that he would be forced to step down for a "junta" or designated successor amenable to the destabilizers. The media barrage was to include a CBS "Sixty Minutes" interview with Marcos, an arrangement set up by CIA chief Casey with his old OSS buddy, CBS President William Paley.

Casey at the bat

The *EIR* exposé of the U.S. embassy's coordination of the opposition and the evident disarray in the opposition itself, gave Marcos crucial breathing room to tighten his administration and the military. The siege from Washington abated, but did not end.

Though not himself of the Eastern Establishment and its "Bankers' CIA," William Casey is "the man of consensus." According to sources, his attitude toward the Philippines was shaped by a deal cut with the "Bankers' CIA" who themselves are the proponents of the New Yalta deal with the Soviet Union, under which Asia, including the Philippines, is to fall under Soviet hegemony. In return for "favors" from the New Yalta crowd and the Israeli Mossad (whom Casey reportedly highly respects), Casey agreed to Marcos's removal.

The only dissenter in the August NSC Crisis Group meeting was Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. Weinberger argued that the threat to withdraw U.S. bases, one of the bludgeons the bankers' boys were demanding be used against Marcos, was an idle one. All strategic thinkers know, he argued, that the location of the bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay, combined with the highly skilled Filipino work force, make the bases irreplaceable.

Weinberger's arguments went unheeded. In September, Secretary of State George Shultz visited Australia, allegedly to line up agreements for U.S. base rights there. To think the United States would get base rights from the left-wing dominated Labour Party now ruling Australia, and which is now endorsing Soviet-backed Nuclear Free Zones in the area, is a joke. The other touted option of the Woodlands Naval Base in Singapore, offered by Singapore's President Lee Kwan Yew to President Reagan in Washington in early October, is equally inadequate, both by reason of location as well as the commercial terms under which Lee offered it.

Casey and Co. proceeded with an hysterical media charge against Marcos, beginning late September, and continuing through Sen. Paul Laxalt's trip. The central theme of the propaganda was what Meyer had noted in mid-July: break the personal relationship between the two Presidents, Reagan and Marcos. Articles were placed in the *Washington Times*,

which Reagan reads, to convey a picture of uncontrolled violence in the Philippines, to convince Reagan he personally had to pressure the Philippines president.

U.S. Ambassador Stephen Bosworth had wanted to deliver an ultimatum from Reagan to Marcos himself, but Laxalt, a close friend of the President, was designated, although Bosworth managed to insert himself into the meeting. According to sources familiar with the President's thinking, the letter had the following elements: 1) it was directly from the White House; 2) it was an attempt to deflate congressional destabilizers like Rep. Steven Solarz; and 3) the letter represented an attempt by the President to quell the momentum built up by the Bankers' CIA.

But, in the meeting, Marcos put before Laxalt the reality of the situation in the Philippines, as he also did in an interview with ABC's "Nightline" on Oct. 18. According to the *New York Times* Oct. 19, Marcos had "rejected" Reagan's "demands." Marcos denied this, as did Laxalt. "The thrust of the [*Times*'] story is inaccurate," said Laxalt. "All of the reports of Marcos as a doddering old man were wholly contradicted by my observation of him" during their four-hour meeting.

The *Times*, disregarding Laxalt, came back on Oct. 20 with an editorial calling for a coup. Complaining that the Reagan letter fell on "deaf ears," the *Times* threatened that if Marcos refuses to listen, "many demoralized officers in Manila may have keener ears."

The reports and "evaluations" the CIA, DIA, and NSC are preparing on the Philippines are coming from the New People's Army itself. According to Washington sources, U.S. intelligence operatives, under Agency for International Development (AID) or Peace Corps cover, are going into the Philippine islands, not through Manila, but through areas dominated by the NPA. The "intelligence evaluations" are interviews with NPA members and leaders. One of the operatives recently on such a mission was Princeton University professor and Khomeini apologist, Richard Falk.

There are also indications that, under cover of the AID, money is being poured into local political operations as a direct counter to President Marcos's party, the KBL, and local organizations created through Mrs. Marcos's Ministry of Human Settlements. This coheres with the designs of the State Department. As Cord Meyer explained in a recent interview, he wants elections in 1986, elections the State Department is trying to rig.

As the Canadian-based Philippine oppositionist and leader of the terrorist-supporting August 21st Movement, Ted Alcuitas, put it, in a recent discussion, "The U.S. must stop supporting Marcos. As long as it does, there will be no peaceful change. I was in the U.S. for two weeks. . . . In three to five years there will be a revolution on our hands. Very few people in the U.S. understand the situation. The head of the Philippines Desk—[John] Maisto—he understands, and his views are the same as mine."

'Full court press' against Marcos

The following selections document the propaganda campaign to portray the "inevitable" overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos. The theme—that "Marcos is the best ally the guerrillas have"—is aimed to produce the "consensus" that the United States must push Marcos out in order to avoid a complete takeover of the Philippines by the Soviet-backed New People's Army.

Mid-July: "Big Trouble Looms in the Philippines," Cord Meyer, *New York Post*. After noting that "State Department and Pentagon officers almost despair of being able to convince Marcos of the size and immediacy of the threat posed by the Marxist guerrillas of the New People's Army," Meyer calls for breaking the personal ties between Reagan and Marcos: "Since Marcos discounts advice from most American officials on the ground that he enjoys a 'special relationship' with President Reagan, it is essential that Reagan be directly and personally involved in this effort [emphasis added]."

Late July: "CIA Prognosis: Gloom in the Philippines," London *Economist*: "The Communists say they will start urban guerrilla warfare in Manila next year and bring the army to a stalemate by 1987. . . . But, however wearisome the country may be, it won't go away. Now pro-American Filipinos believe the United States can and should help to replace Mr. Marcos with a better man."

Aug. 1: "The Hidden Hand: A Military Reform Movement Takes Hold," Rodney Tasker, *Far Eastern Economic Review*. Tasker pushes the "clean young reformers" in the military, noting that "The U.S. Embassy, among other interested foreign observers, is known to regard it as a highly significant development." Claiming that the coup plotters are themselves worried about a coup, *FEER* says that the reformists "would try to match any potential coup force's strength, to which end they have reportedly even begun to try to set up a network of paramilitary units as well as one of loyalist military regulars." *FEER* quotes the "reformers" approvingly: "We are the only ones standing between the republic and the insurgents," one reformist officer said in an interview, adding: "If we fall, it's easy pickings."

Aug. 16: *EIR* opens counterattack with cover story, "Shultz

Torpedos American Defense in the Philippines." "The on-the-ground operations for the overthrow of President Marcos are being directed out of the U.S. Embassy in Manila under Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, who was trained by Henry Kissinger's National Security Council. The timing for the final move against Marcos is projected in 8 to 9 months, or will be timed with Marcos's promised reinstatement of Chief of Staff of the Philippine Armed Forces Fabian Ver, upon his expected acquittal on charges of complicity in the assassination of Benigno Aquino."

Aug. 17: "The Philippines Could Be Lost To the Communists," *The News & Courier/The Evening Post*, Charleston, S.C. "Senior administration officials say the communists can be beaten, but they do not try to hide the threat. They are frustrated with the regime of President Ferdinand Marcos, whose 20-year reign has become increasingly repressive and who resists reforms Washington urges on him."

Aug. 25: *Philippines Sunday Express*, Teodoro F. Valencia: "The *Executive Intelligence Review*, a Washington, D.C., weekly, says that the U.S. State Department had been trying to destabilize the Philippine government even before the August 21, 1983 assassination of ex-Senator Benigno Aquino." Throughout the second half of August and September, the Philippines press continues the coverage.

Sept. 9: "Is the U.S. Out to Overthrow Marcos?" *Business Day*, Marites Danguilan Vitug.

Sept. 20: "Bosworth Denies U.S. Has Coup Plans," *Business Day*, quoting Ambassador Bosworth as saying: "I assert categorically that there is no such plan. . . . with factual inaccuracies."

Oct. 17: *Christian Science Monitor* quotes Lee H. Hamilton, ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence: "It's time for some tough thinking about the Philippines. . . . The communist insurgency is the most serious threat to U.S. interests in the Pacific. Marcos is that insurgency's greatest asset. Communist guerrillas now operate freely in one-third of the country."

Oct. 20: "What Can Make Marcos Listen?" *New York Times* editorial: "Corruption, incompetence, and brutality were playing into the hands of a communist insurgency." The *Times* threatens that if Marcos does not listen, "The many demoralized officers in Manila may have keener ears."

Oct. 7, 14, and 23: Articles appeared in the *Washington Times* presenting a picture of destabilization and uncontrolled violence in the Philippines, with headlines such as "U.S. Would Consider a Philippine Pullout"; "Murder and Mayhem Make the Philippines Wild West of the East"; "Filipino Journalists Risk Deadly Reprisals"; "Civil Strife Spreads in Philippines."