

# “Showing Its Flag”: The United States, The Philippines, and the Vietnam War

Matthew Jagel  
Northern Illinois University

## Abstract

The Americanization of the Vietnam War began following the disintegration of the French colonial empire in Indochina at the Geneva Conference of 1954. The subsequent increased advisory and military role of America in aid of the new Republic of Vietnam was done primarily in a unilateral fashion. The United States soon deemed a multinational face to the conflict necessary to winning the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese population, and thirty-nine separate international governments were recruited to participate as allies. One of these countries was the Republic of the Philippines, whose main contribution was PHILCAG, or the Philippine Civic Action Group. Obtaining this support was difficult, as the divisions created by the war were not solely centered in United States politics and public opinion, and the position of the Philippines in the war would go on to divide that country as well. The following attempts to analyze the political implications for a Filipino presence in Vietnam from both American and Philippine perspectives as well as to look at some of those Filipinos working for the survival of the Republic of Vietnam.

---

The concept of the Vietnam War as an American endeavor was born out of the United States’ failure to sign the Geneva Accords on 20 July 1954, following France’s loss at Dien Bien Phu to the Ho Chi Minh-led Viet Minh. Subsequent U.S. actions and increased military presence, previously executed begrudgingly at the behest of France for the sake of its empire, now operated unilaterally. The United States government soon afterward deemed a multinational face to the Vietnam conflict necessary to winning the “hearts and minds” of the Vietnamese population. Thirty-nine separate international governments were recruited to participate as U.S. allies in the Vietnam War. With contributions ranging from financial aid to medical assistance

## “Showing Its Flag”

to combat units, these nations were the flags of an international war on communism, and they provided broad international support for the United States to increase its military presence systematically.

One of these countries was the Republic of the Philippines, whose main contribution was PHILCAG, or the Philippine Civic Action Group. American public relations officials saw utilizing the help of Asian nations in this Asian war as a necessity, particularly under the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson. Obtaining this support would prove to be difficult, as the divisions created by the war in Vietnam were not solely centered in U.S. politics and public opinion. The Philippines’ position in the war would go on to divide that country politically as well, and by the end of Filipino involvement, the nation found itself living under martial law.

Current historiography on the role of the Philippines in the Vietnam War is sparse. The focus of major Vietnam War surveys stems from the perspective of the United States, with little, if any, attention paid to the internal views of the Filipino politicians. No history focuses solely on the Philippines in Vietnam, instead framing Philippine involvement as part of a larger geopolitical scheme. There are, however, some that do include more than a terse recognition of Filipino involvement.<sup>1</sup>

Stanley Robert Larsen and James Lawton Collins Jr.’s *Allied Participation in Vietnam* was originally released shortly after the war. Under the commission of the United States Army, this work details how the Philippines, as well as other nations, were fighting the so-called “good fight” against communism in Vietnam. While there is some value in its succinct history of Philippine involvement, and some details are useful in the study of PHILCAG, Larsen and Collins present no internal Philippine perspective, and their analysis ends in 1967. Robert M. Blackburn’s *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags”: The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* is a damning critique of the U.S. “more flags” policy, which dictated that additional countries be recruited to aid in the Vietnam War effort. While his coverage of the Philippine ends in 1969, his overall analysis trumps any of his few competitors for depth and reliability. W. Scott Thompson’s *Unequal Partners: Philippine and Thai Relations with the United States 1965-75* focuses on the political aspect of these relations, although he includes little on the specifics of war and PHILCAG in particular.

---

<sup>1</sup> George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (4<sup>th</sup> ed), (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002); George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994); Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars: 1945–1990*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991); Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941–1975*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

This paper attempts to fill in the gaps in this existing historiography. Its goal is to analyze the political implications of a Filipino presence in Vietnam from both American and Philippine perspectives, as well as to look at some of those Filipinos who worked for the survival of the Republic of Vietnam. What follows is the curious, complicated history of PHILCAG in Vietnam.

The relationship between the United States and the Philippines began at the end of the nineteenth century, when the United States was prepared to follow the British model and accept Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" as the rationale for colonial empire. According to Michael Hunt, advances in technology made expansion seem easier, served security, and had the potential for domestic benefits.<sup>2</sup> With the conclusion of the Spanish-American War (1898-1902), U.S. imperialism began anew in the archipelago of the Philippines. The success in the nation-building of the Philippines by both the Spanish and the Americans is clear in the subsequent dependence of the native population on their oppressors. While colonial leadership changed after the Spanish-American War, little change was realized in the daily lives of the native Filipino population. According to historian Paul Kramer, "For Filipinos, the war meant trading—after an eight month interval of embattled political independence—one imperial antagonist for another."<sup>3</sup> According to Kramer, when the Philippine-American War broke out a short time later, the race war began in the United States.

During this period, Filipino migration to the United States began to increase. Putting an end to, or at a minimum dramatically reducing, the influx of Filipinos into America became maximum priority for many nativists. When exclusion proved impossible, they began to push for independence for the Philippines as a means of stemming the tide. Despite such sentiment, and Wilson's unenthusiastic support for the bill, the promise of eventual independence in the Jones Act of 1916 was, in the global scheme of the era, actually quite groundbreaking, and was the precursor to the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, which created a Commonwealth and granted independence to the Philippines in ten years' time. Despite this autonomy, the United States retained the rights for various military bases in the Philippines, notably Clark Air base, just north of Manila. These bases were the key to America's predominant position in the Pacific, which had been all but guaranteed following the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22, and they proved to play a pivotal role in the war in Vietnam.

---

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 50-1.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 44, 88.

## “Showing Its Flag”

Kramer’s explanation of the Philippine-American War draws connections to later American overseas incursions. The derogatory term “gook,” widely used during the Vietnam War, is based on “gu-gu,” a term commonly used in the Philippine-American War to describe Filipino revolutionary fighters. Guerilla fighters in the Philippines during that war were not seen to be fighting a civilized war, and therefore America did not afford them the rights of prisoners of war. Many Filipinos and Americans alike considered the Philippine-American war to be primarily a nation-building effort. Additionally, the war was declared prematurely over on a number of occasions by American leadership. All of these would prove to be hallmarks of the war in Vietnam.

Initial Filipino involvement with the State of Vietnam began in 1953, when a group of Philippine doctors and nurses arrived in the country. Their mission was to supply medical aid to various hamlets and villages throughout the republic as part of the privately funded project Operation Brotherhood. Edward Lansdale, a former member of the Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War, arrived in Vietnam a short time later, in June 1954. Then working for the CIA, his specialty was “psychological warfare,” and he counted on Philippine auxiliaries as part of a series of early covert operations targeted against the communist North Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

The first contingent consisted of seven doctors and nurses, and a clinic was established at the main refugee reception center in Saigon. Other volunteers followed, until 105 Filipino doctors and nurses were at work in Vietnam. With other countries contributing, Operation Brotherhood treated over 400,000 patients in its first year alone. It was designed to lend the new South Vietnamese government an air of legitimacy as Asians worked together with other Asians under the eye of the United States. Lansdale publicly expressed support for the group’s goal of wanting to “ease the suffering of their fellow Asians,” yet in a government memorandum, his words were markedly different, where he called Operation Brotherhood “another private Filipino public-service organization,” over which there was “a measure of CIA control.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Robert Larsen and James Lawton Collins, Jr. *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University Press of the Pacific, 2005), 52; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 236-7. According to Lansdale, initial Filipino involvement in Vietnam began to ease the transition of refugees fleeing the North following the division of the country at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel following the 1954 Geneva Conference. Lansdale encouraged the exodus to South Vietnam and even teamed up with a Filipino production company to raise \$1.5 million USD to produce a film that depicted “a love story taking place during the evacuation.” See Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale’s Cold War* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 61. Many of these refugees suffered from severe health problems, and a vast shortage of doctors and dentists was evident as the flow of the populace increased. Oscar Arellano, vice-president for Asia of the International Jaycees (Junior Chambers of Commerce), with Lansdale’s aid, worked with Vietnamese Jaycees to craft formal invitations for aid from the international community. This was the beginning of Operation Brotherhood. See also Edward Geary Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American’s Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 169; Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson’s “More Flags”: The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1994), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Lansdale, *Wars*, 169-170; Nashel, *Lansdale’s Cold War*, 61.

Although this aid was welcomed in some circles, Vietnamese leadership was hesitant to accept aid from foreign Asian countries. The new Republic of Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem stated that the Vietnamese did not need the help of “a bunch of orators and nightclub musicians,” a reference to Filipino dance bands that were popular throughout Asia at the time. Needing to reconcile these cultural and regional differences to forge a clear path for a Filipino contribution, Edward Lansdale was instrumental, at one time even using pretty Filipino nurses as part of the negotiations to get Operation Brotherhood personnel to the impoverished city of Camau alongside Vietnamese military.<sup>6</sup>

At a meeting of the Operations Coordinating Board’s Special Working Group on Vietnam on 7 November 1955, the significance of a Filipino contribution to Vietnam was discussed. It was noted at a meeting of the Operations Coordinating Board’s Special Working Group on Vietnam that “Operation Brotherhood, supported by the Philippines, gave an added psychological support in convincing the people that they were being considered not only by their own government but by foreign governments.”<sup>7</sup> At this point, Filipino contributions were deemed a minor success by the United States in the overall effort to thwart the advance of communism on the Indochinese peninsula.

The second project, the Freedom Company of the Philippines, was administered directly under the CIA. Started in 1955, this group was composed of Filipino World War II veterans who performed various operations throughout Indochina, including guerilla warfare activities, the training of Diem’s presidential guard battalion, and even aided in the composition of the South Vietnamese constitution. While the self-proclaimed purpose of the Freedom Company was to further “the cause of freedom,” the main goal was to perform tasks that could not be connected to either the United States or South Vietnam. American support was later withdrawn and it was renamed the Eastern Construction Company, continuing operations until the late 1960s. The CIA also discussed using the Philippines as a military training ground for Vietnamese students.<sup>8</sup> Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay was receptive to this concept, and while U.S. officials implemented the initial stages of planning, it never materialized.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Lansdale, *Wars*, 214, 234-235.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at a Meeting of the Operations Coordinating Board’s Special Working Group on Vietnam, Department of State, Washington, 7 November 1955, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1985), 574.

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum Prepared in the Department of Defense, 22 August 1956, *FRUS 1955–1957*, 1:735.

<sup>9</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 68; Stephen Rosskam Shalom, *The United States and the Philippines: A Study of Neocolonialism* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1981), 93; W. Scott Thompson, *Unequal Partners: Philippine and Thai Relations with the United States 1965–75* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1975), 77; Lansdale, *Wars*, 213.

## *“Showing Its Flag”*

Operations such as these were the forebears of the “more flags” policy. Despite the aid of the United States, these early efforts by the Philippines to support the infantile country of South Vietnam could hardly be deemed a success. According to Gloria Emerson, who reported from Vietnam for the *New York Times*, “The Philippines did not become an important anti-Communist force in Vietnam; the Vietnamese did not at all trust other Asians manipulated by the Americans.”<sup>10</sup>

In a conversation with President Dwight Eisenhower on 9 May 1957, South Vietnamese President Diem remarked that he felt a grave threat from the North, and that while SEATO may have been a political deterrent to the North, only Thailand and the Philippines were potentially ready to come to the Republic of Vietnam’s aid.<sup>11</sup> Diem stated that most of the Philippines 60,000 troops were needed at home anyway, as a means of protections against potential communist threats there. At this early stage, American policy Makers had little faith in further contributions from the Republic of the Philippines. It would be seven years before discussion on additional Filipino aid to South Vietnam began.

In the interim, the two nations retained generally friendly relations as they worked together through the SEATO treaty, although there was a slight controversy following the U.S. House of Representatives’ failure to pass the Philippines War Damage Bill, which caused President Diosdado Macapagal to postpone a May 1962 trip to Washington. When he finally did visit in 1964, he toasted the two nations’ shared “ties and ideas and ideals—democracy, freedom, love for peace, and the rule of law” at a White House dinner.<sup>12</sup>

Initially started in 1964 by Lyndon Johnson’s administration, the “more flags” policy attempted to bring, as historian Robert Blackburn has noted, a “visible symbol of free world support for [Johnson’s] Vietnam policies.” It was intended to buttress the access to Filipino air bases which the United States already possessed. Strategically, the Philippines played a large role in American geopolitical considerations. The significance of these bases to Washington’s containment policy was well noted. On 9 June 1964, the Board of National Estimates sent a memo to the Director of Central Intelligence, John McCone, which emphasized their importance.

---

<sup>10</sup> Gloria Emerson, *Winners and Losers: Battles, Retreats, Gains, Losses and Ruins from a Long War* (New York: Random House, 1976), 294.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, Washington, 9 May 1957, *FRUS 1955–1957*, 1:798.

<sup>12</sup> “Statement by the President on the Postponement of a Visit by the President of the Philippines,” 15 May 1962, The American Presidency Project, accessed June 17, 2013, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=8656&st=philippines&st1=>; the bill was eventually passed in August 1962; “Toasts of the President and President Macapagal,” 5 October 1964,

US military strength in the Far East is based on the chain of islands from the Philippines to Japan.... As long as the US can effectively operate from these bases, it will probably still be able to deter... overt military aggression.... In the Philippines, there would be some impetus to the tendency of ultranationalists... to press for reduced cooperation with the US.... We do not think this would affect Philippine government policy, at least as long as the present administration is in power in Manila.<sup>13</sup>

In the early stages of negotiations for an increased Filipino presence in Vietnam, United States Secretary of State Dean Rusk leaned on his allies in the Philippine government, notably Macapagal. A proponent of sending combat forces in support of medical and engineering units, Macapagal represented the ideal Asian “more flags” ally. What complicated matters was the need for Philippine congressional approval. The major sticking point for passage of the bill was the amount of American support, financial or otherwise, that would complement a Filipino contribution.

On 8 July 1964, the Philippine House and Senate agreed on the wording of the authorization of a one million peso appropriations bill, which would support the first contingent in Vietnam under the “more flags” auspice. The following day, Philippine Ambassador James Ledesma, in a meeting with Johnson, notified the president that the Philippine government had decided to enlarge its assistance program for South Vietnam. The president responded that he was glad that the Philippines would be “showing its flag.” While dissent within the Philippine Congress at this point was minimal, one of the leading opponents of the appropriations bill was Senate Majority Leader Ferdinand Marcos. His opposition was grounded on his claim that Macapagal used Vietnam policy to indulge his totalitarian tendencies. The more plausible scenario was Marcos’ anger at Macapagal for supposedly backing out of a commitment to not seek reelection.<sup>14</sup>

A few months earlier, a State Department memo to the American Embassy in Manila stated that “in order to enhance the possibility of maximum Philippine contributions... be prepared to add supplemental inducements.”<sup>15</sup> This would prove to be necessary, as the one million pesos allocated for this Philippine contingent

---

<sup>13</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 1; Memorandum From the Board of National Estimates to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone), 9 June 1964, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1992), 1:486.

<sup>14</sup> Philippine Congress, Senate. 5th Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., *Congressional Record* III, no. 8 (8 July 1964), 195; Memorandum of a Conversation, Washington, 9 July 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, 26:649-50; Claude A. Buss, *The United States and the Philippines: Background for Policy* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), 43.

<sup>15</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 71.

*"Showing Its Flag"*

(PHILCON I) was insufficient to support the medical and psychological war teams. This price tag was of little concern to the United States, as its main goal in negotiations with the Philippines was simply to secure its contribution.

Initial Philippine support consisted of a contingent of sixteen doctors, nurses, technicians, and civic action officers from the Philippine Armed Forces, who arrived in Vietnam on 16 August 1964. Official documentation from the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) recounted that PHILCON:

assisted in the advisory effort directed toward psychological warfare and civil affairs in III Corps. They were initially assigned in pairs... in the provinces of Binh Duong, Gia Dinh, and Long An. Of the four remaining officers, one acted as OIC, while one each worked with the Psywar Battalion.<sup>16</sup>

Being assigned to Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Psywar companies and platoons and actually traveling and working with teams of these units, the Filipinos and their South Vietnamese counterparts helped to ensure that the psychological warfare portion of the pacification plan was being carried out in this region. In the short time the Filipinos operated in the field in 1964, they were able to make a notable contribution to the psywar effort, which prompted South Vietnam to request an additional contingent of sixteen officers who were then scheduled to arrive in Vietnam in mid-January 1965.<sup>17</sup>

U. S. officials were pleased with the immediate impact that PHILCON had. An internal State Department memo noted, "We enthusiastically agree that there should be more Asians helping Asians. We're impressed with the performance of Fils already there, and would warmly welcome more." The success of this initial contribution encouraged additional requests for aid, with U.S. officials increasing the pressure on Macapagal. Additional State Department memos emphasized that "the Philippines... will be pressed for additional contributions along the lines of the program for approximately 1800 men already submitted to President Macapagal." Hopes at this point were for an additional military contribution, an idea which Macapagal supported. He was quick to offer additional help, as Secretary Rusk noted in a memo to President Johnson:

---

<sup>16</sup> United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Command History 1964 (unpublished), in MACV, SGS MACJ03, Military History Branch, Annual Command Histories, RG 472, Box 1, National Archives II, College Park, MD, 157, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.; Annex A, Tran Van Do, 23 March 1965, FWMAO Admin Office, General Records, RG 472, Box 8, NA II.

On September 22, [Macapagal said he] expected to discuss the Viet-Nam situation with you, that he thought it was approaching “desperation,” and that he thought part of the trouble might be that the American advisers and military units, being “Westerners and white men,” seemed to the Vietnamese little different from the French and are consequently unable to “convey a sense of common purpose to them.” He suggested that the 16,000 American soldiers in Viet-Nam be replaced by an equal number of Filipinos and Thais. He recognized that “massive logistic support and ultimate control must remain in American hands.”<sup>18</sup>

While this proposal never got out of initial planning stages, it nevertheless provided an example of Macapagal’s strong commitment to the efforts in South Vietnam.

Macapagal visited Washington on October 5-6 for the first official discussions between the two countries on a heightened Filipino involvement in Vietnam. This included talk of the possibility of a 2,000 troop deployment, which both Macapagal and Johnson agreed should be pursued. Macapagal said that the Philippines was ready to send support in teams of public health, medical, engineering, and military special forces, and that he would be willing to send “as many as useful.” President Johnson replied, “We think we can be helpful.”<sup>19</sup>

While both heads of state were in agreement, Philippine congressional approval was still needed for this new aid package, entitled the Philippine Civic Action Group. The Johnson administration was concerned about how the Philippine Congress would respond. The largest hurdle would be the financing of PHILCAG. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Earle G. Wheeler sent a memo to the embassy in Manila detailing Washington’s position. “Recommend you let Macapagal raise question of funding.... We prefer donor countries support costs of contributions to greatest extent possible. Nevertheless, if necessary in order to secure meaningful and substantial third country aid to Viet Nam, we are prepared to pay entire bill.”<sup>20</sup>

The dispute between U.S. and Philippine officials over the amount contributed to PHILCAG by the United States remained the sole sticking point. The Philippines not only demanded that the entire operation be funded by the United States, but also wanted additional concessions. The specifics of Filipino demands were:

---

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson, Washington, 5 October 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, 26:659-60; Paper Prepared for the Executive Committee, Washington, 2 December 1964, *ibid.*, 1:972; Memorandum From Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, Washington, 3 October 1964, *ibid.*, 26:656-57.

<sup>19</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, Washington, 5 October 1964, *FRUS 1964–1968*, 26:661-2.

<sup>20</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 76-77.

*“Showing Its Flag”*

1. Complete equipment and logistic support of PHILCAG while in South Vietnam
2. Overseas allowances
3. Costs for a replacement unit in the Philippines
4. Two swiftcraft (river patrol boats) in addition to two already promised
5. Accelerated funding for three already funded engineer construction battalions
6. M-14 rifles and M-60 machine guns for a Filipino battalion combat team to be stationed in the Philippines<sup>21</sup>

U.S. officials felt that the demanded per diem for overseas Filipino troops was excessive, but Philippine negotiators refused to budge. This refusal raised American frustrations, and no compromise was made. This development put an end to any realistic proposal of Filipino combat forces being sent to Vietnam, negotiations for which officially came to an end on 19 February 1965. At that time, Rusk had the embassy in Manila notify the Philippine government that an engineering task force would be acceptable to the United States, and that over \$9 million per year would be provided as funding. With these matters agreed to, the only thing keeping their deployment from proceeding was the Philippine Congress. As of 1 June 1965, there were only 73 Filipinos in Vietnam, with Macapagal waiting for congressional approval of the 2,000-man task force. Congress was split on the prospect of becoming enmeshed in a war that had no end in sight.<sup>22</sup>

1965 was a congressional and presidential election year for the Philippines, which made the prospect of obtaining congressional approval problematic. The United States continued its support of Macapagal in the upcoming elections, where he faced an underdog challenger in Ferdinand Marcos, who had previously been unfriendly to the prospect of PHILCAG. Macapagal was not optimistic, saying, “The reality is that the bill faces an uncertain future.” There was nothing for Washington to do but wait.<sup>23</sup>

The November elections produced a startling upset, with Marcos prevailing. Despite this perceived setback, officials in Washington continued to pursue the PHILCAG task force. Lyndon Johnson sent five diplomatic missions in an attempt to change Marcos’ mind on PHILCAG, led by such notables as Vice President Hubert

---

<sup>21</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-81; Memorandum From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) and James C. Thompson Jr., of the National Security Counsel Staff to President Johnson, Washington, 1 June 1965, *FRUS 1964–1968*, 26:675.

<sup>23</sup> Ambassador of the Philippines to Department of State, 5 July 1965 in *The Presidential Papers of Ferdinand Marcos*, file no. 279, National Library, Manila, Philippines, 1.

Humphrey, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Senator Mike Mansfield, Ambassador W. Averell Harriman, and Edward Lansdale. The theme of Humphrey's report on his trip was expressed in a speech given by Marcos shortly after: "Those who fight for liberty fight for us." There seemed to be some hope for reconciliation.<sup>24</sup>

During a phone conversation with Defense Secretary Robert McNamara on 17 January 1966, Johnson inquired as to whether there had been progress on obtaining a Filipino presence on the ground in Vietnam. McNamara noted that the presidential change in Philippines had hampered negotiations. He described the progress being made on bringing the Koreans into the fold, but noted that "we must have some Philippine contribution as well."<sup>25</sup> While Marcos remained adamant about not sending a combat unit, he did rescind his prior position against sending medical and engineering teams to Vietnam. The key to his position reversal was the economic incentives offered by the United States.

Many nations up to this point, including the Philippines, preferred to provide civic action and medical assistance as opposed to active military participation, although this kind of proposed assistance was still often met with considerable opposition within national legislative bodies. "Some of this opposition was caused by the unstable political situation in RVN from March through June.... [U.S. officials] worked behind the scenes with defense ministries and heads of states... to secure favorable legislative reactions to the assistance program. In almost all cases, the US paid for the equipment, transportation, and in-country support of the personnel of the FW [Free World] assistance groups." The prospect of the United States providing such quantities of aid was able to sway some nations in their decision-making. The Johnson White House expressed much optimism when discussing allied forces in the Pacific. They "are more sympathetic to the peace offensive than we might have expected," noted Bundy.<sup>26</sup> The foundation for a true coalition was beginning to take shape.

Marcos kept the previous Macapagal agreement in tact, with slight adjustments. The major change was that the U. S. would no longer be expected to pay the full costs of forming new units within the Philippines to replace those sent to Vietnam. Marcos felt that if he allowed the United States to pay those costs, his troops would be regarded as mercenaries or "cannon fodder" for the Americans. During a meeting between Johnson and congressional leaders, a discussion of

---

<sup>24</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 83; Summary Notes of the 55<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Counsel, Washington, 5 January 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 4:19.

<sup>25</sup> Telephone Conversation between President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara, Washington, 17 January 1966, *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>26</sup> Command History 1966, 82; Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, Washington, 3 January 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 4:5.

*“Showing Its Flag”*

Marcos followed. “In Manila, found Marcos a real leader. Put his entire political life on the line. Dastardly are the news stories coming from the U.S.—Philippines are human mercenaries.’ Marcos made strong statement—courageous statement—in which he came down firmly on side of U.S.”<sup>27</sup>

The internal dispute within the Philippine Congress, however, nearly brought all proceedings to a halt. By 1966, passions were further inflamed by pressure from Marcos for a passage of the PHILCAG bill. On March 1 of that year, Senator Francisco Rodrigo delivered a speech to the floor of the Senate in support of the proposal. He noted Marcos’ “stand on an issue which vitally concerns the security of our country,” and recounted the forming of the Philippine Declaration of Principles, in which the defense of the state is a “prime duty of the government.” According to Rodrigo’s and others’ defenses of the bill, a main reason for intervention in Vietnam was the perceived internal threat to the Philippines of the communist Huk rebels. Rodrigo maintained his position that self-defense was central to the Vietnam question, and reiterated the potential for a communist menace in Vietnam. The fear of “Red China” and the thought that communism could take root in the Philippines was also prominent in forming the pro-PHILCAG policy. Some wanted not only a PHILCAG commitment, but a military one as well. Senators questioned what the response would be if the tables were turned. “How would we feel if, at a time when the Philippines is the target of armed aggression, we ask the United States for soldiers, and she sends us Peace Corps volunteers?”<sup>28</sup>

At that point, Thailand had not yet committed troops to Vietnam, which became a major area of contention for those protesting against PHILCAG. Senator José Wright Diokno observed that if Thailand, a country much closer to the communist threat from North Vietnam or China, had not yet sent troops, then why should the Philippines feel obligated? Senator Rodrigo quickly countered that Thailand needed “her troops precisely because she is now practically within attack.... Consequently, she needs her troops within her borders.” Another supporter of PHILCAG, Senator Raul Manglapus, stated on March 24, “Before anyone in this august Body [sic] was ever pro-Vietnam, I was.”<sup>29</sup>

There were other opponents. Senator Alejandro D. Almendras recounted “an incident during the war [World War II] in which an American major called the

---

<sup>27</sup> Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 85; Notes of a Meeting, Washington, 24 February 1966, *FRUS 1964–1968*, 4:257.

<sup>28</sup> Philippine Congress, Senate, Privileged speech delivered by Senator Rodrigo, “Help the Philippines by helping Southe [sic] Vietnam,” 6<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* I, no. 24 (1 March 1966), 680–694; Philippine Congress, Senate, Privileged Speech of Senator Manglapus, 6<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* I, no. 38 (24 March 1966), 1006.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 698, 1005. The Royal Thai Army Regiment did eventually come to South Vietnam in September 1967.

Filipino soldiers ‘monkeys.’” Almendras, who was an officer in the Filipino Army at the time, beat up the American who made this slur and was court-martialed. Although he was later acquitted, his venom for the United States had not waned. “I hate not only the Americans for taking us for granted but also any alien for that matter who is enjoying our hospitality because this is the only country that God has given us and I love her very much.”<sup>30</sup> Another of the most outspoken opponents was Senator Juan R. Liwag, who wrote extensively in protest of the Vietnam War and candidly expressed his outrage at Philippine involvement. He questioned, “Why should we allow ourselves to get involved in a war of a highly controversial and questionable character?”<sup>31</sup>

After months of similar debate, the PHILCAG bill finally passed the Philippine Congress on June 3 1966, although it was subject to Congressional review on a yearly basis. The Republic of Vietnam agreed to the Philippines’ offer on August 15, and soon afterward, “a five-man US MTT [military transition team] was sent to the Philippines to provide the CAG an orientation on VC weapons, tactics, and techniques.”<sup>32</sup> Advance elements of the 2,000-man Philippine Civic Action Group began to arrive in Tay Ninh province in South Vietnam on August 17. On September 14, 1966, the first official members of PHILCAG began arriving, with Brigadier General Gaudencio V. Tobias acting as commander. Massive demonstrations against PHILCAG were planned for September 12, the day Marcos was scheduled to leave on a trip to Washington meant to coincide with the PHILCAG deployment, with counterdemonstrations planned as well.<sup>33</sup>

As the contingent settled in Vietnam, the Manila Conference was held on October 24-25, with President Johnson in attendance. The seven participating countries pledged to “continue our military and all other efforts, as firmly and as long as may be necessary, in close consultation among ourselves until the aggression is ended.”<sup>34</sup> While this was intended to be a demonstration of solidarity among Southeast Asian neighbors in support of United States action in Vietnam, tensions between nations arose during the conference.

---

<sup>30</sup> Philippine Congress, Senate, 6<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* I, no. 25 (2 March 1966), 727-8.

<sup>31</sup> Juan R. Liwag, “The American War in Vietnam,” March, 1966, copy in Northern Illinois University Library.

<sup>32</sup> United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Command History 1966, 577; MACV, SGS MACJ03, Military History Branch, Annual Command Histories, Record Group 472, NAI.

<sup>33</sup> Note from Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Vietnam to Embassy of the Philippines, 15 August 1966, FWMAO, Admin Office, RG 472, NA II; Command History 1966, 842, 290; Ambassador of the Philippines to Department of State, 8 September 1966 in *The Presidential Papers of Ferdinand Marcos*, File no. 2694, National Library, Manila, Philippines, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Command History 1966, 663.

*"Showing Its Flag"*



PHILCAG arrives in Tay Ninh, South Vietnam, 15 October 1966. Courtesy National Archives, photo no. SC-36897.

Shortly after its conclusion, a story was leaked regarding “top secret” tape recordings made during the conference. On 2 November, the *Manila Daily Mirror* published alleged dialogue from those secret sessions from various heads of state. The *Mirror’s* story alleged that President Johnson cursed, pounded the table, and behaved like “the angriest hawk of all.” The U.S. Embassy noted in response that it “normally does not comment on works of fiction,” but many other newspapers carried quotations almost verbatim to those of the *Manila Daily Mirror*, lending some credibility to the report.<sup>35</sup>

Amando Doronila of the *Manila Daily Mirror* wrote of a closed door session during the conference where a heated argument broke out between Presidents Johnson and Marcos over the latter’s insistence of the insertion of the words “constitutional processes” in a paragraph of the final communiqué from the summit. (Marcos apparently won the battle, with the publicized version of the communiqué

---

<sup>35</sup> Asian Conference, 8 November 1966 in NSF Country File Asian and the Pacific Philippines, Box #278, Philippines Vol. III, Cables [2 of 2], 7/66-7/67, Document #68a, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, 1.

reading: “Action taken in pursuance of policies herein stated shall be in accordance with our respective constitutional processes.”)<sup>36</sup> The following conversation, according to Doronila, began with Johnson’s counter to Marcos.

- Johnson: You are doing this because you are afraid of your Senate.  
Marcos: Mr. President, we are all afraid of our Senate. After all, you have your own Fulbright, Morse and Mansfield [Johnson’s critics in the United States Congress].  
Johnson: Damn it. Forget them. Don’t remind me of my Senators.  
Marcos: In the United States, you don’t have only one government—you have two governments.  
Johnson: What do you mean?  
Marcos: You have the State Department and the White House.  
Johnson: You are damn right. If the State Department had its way, the U. S. will be at war with every country in the world.<sup>37</sup>

For the United States, the result of the conference was a realization that Marcos refused to play the role of “America’s boy” for Johnson, although official reports of the summit painted a rosy picture of leaders working together for a common good.

While the majority of PHILCAG’s time was spent rebuilding roads or performing medical and dental operations on the local peasant population, they were involved in occasional defensive battles. In November, PHILCAG became acutely aware of the realities of war in Vietnam. “Operation ATTLEBORO, fought in the snarled thickets of War Zone C [near Tay Ninh], became [up to that point]... the largest operation of the war,” lasting over a month. Fighting was fierce, with the first documented enemy tear gas attack of the war occurring.<sup>38</sup> The PHILCAG contingent was not spared, with four wounded in action on November 4. While fighting in battles such as this was not standard protocol for PHILCAG, it would see action off and on throughout its years in Vietnam.

By the end of 1966, there were a total of 441,190 troops on the ground in Vietnam, of which the FWMAF (Free World Military Armed Forces) made up 52,622. The Philippines had 2,063 men in country at this time. There was some desire on the side of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam to ask for an increased commitment, but it was a touchy political situation. In April 1967, Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the Philippines Narcisco Ramos received an official communication from Prime Minister Nguyễn Cao Kỳ of the Republic of Vietnam.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Command History, 1966, 386, 851.

“Showing Its Flag”

While Ky expressed hope that the Philippines would increase its commitment, Ramos stated that this would prove difficult, as congressional disapproval of the current Philippine contribution to Vietnam could prevent the passage of the pending bill to pay the expenses of the civic action program.<sup>39</sup>

The United States found similar difficulty in gaining additional commitments from the Philippines. In a memo from Ambassador William P. Bundy to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Bundy stated that “the Embassy feels it is definitely premature to seek additional military contributions, and that any further non-military assistance should arise from clear GVN [Government of Vietnam] initiative,” which could reduce the perception of overt American pressure.<sup>40</sup> The close vote and narrow approval of PHILCAG in the Philippine Senate in June made American officials wary to press the issue any further.

President Johnson had a different view. Clark Clifford, a Democratic presidential advisor dating back to the days of Harry Truman, had been at Johnson’s side on his visit to Manila in October 1966. In 1967, looking to shore up public support for an additional troop increase, Johnson sent Clifford and Maxwell Taylor on a presidential mission to meet with Asian and Pacific allies, the hope being that by gaining additional troop increases from allied nations, the American public would stomach yet another troop increase themselves.<sup>41</sup> They were to push for another Manila-type summit and to secure new commitments from regional nations on a trip scheduled to depart on July 22, 1967.

Upon learning of Clifford and Taylor’s intentions, Marcos said that he “saw no need” for a visit so shortly after the Manila summit, and promptly cancelled his meeting. After visiting the countries of South Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea (none of which were prepared to offer additional wartime commitments), the Presidential mission did “visit” the Philippines, with engine trouble forcing an unscheduled landing at Clark Air Force Base. According to Clifford, “Marcos pretended we were not in his country.” Taylor and Clifford returned with drastically different interpretations of the Asia/Pacific trip. Taylor accepted the excuses of the allies at face value. Clifford, on the other hand, “returned both puzzled and troubled” at the failure to secure additional commitments. For Clifford, a long time Vietnam War hawk, the trip began his erosion of support for the war.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 857; Memorandum of Conversation, 17 April 1967 in *The Presidential Papers of Ferdinand Marcos*, File no. 5507, National Library, Manila, Philippines, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Far East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State Rusk, Washington, 15 November 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968*, 4:846.

<sup>41</sup> Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991), 448.

<sup>42</sup> Clifford and Holbrooke, *Counsel*, 448, 451-2. After months of negotiation with the United States, Thailand did eventually send additional troops to South Vietnam in July, 1968, for which the United States paid a substantial amount. See Blackburn, *Mercenaries*, 113-114.

Despite such setbacks, Washington was content with the news coming from Tay Ninh. The President's Special Counsel, Harry McPherson, visited the PHILCAG contingent in June, and reported back to the President:

I visited Philcag, and was stunned by the soldierly bearing of the Filipino soldiers.... Their commander, General Tobias, is a spit-and-polish tiger. I asked him if many of his men had fought the Huks. He said, "Yes, but compared to the VC, the Huks were amateurs."<sup>43</sup>

On a short visit the next month to his PHILCAG contingent in the field, Marcos seemed pleased with the progress the team had made. He continued his vocal support for the role of the Philippines in Vietnam and stated from the Saigon airport, "The aggression in Vietnam must be stopped right here if the security of Asia, and indeed ultimately of the world, is to be safeguarded."<sup>44</sup> While he did not want to appear too close to the United States, Marcos still supported the Filipino effort. Under relentless political pressure at home, Marcos made a number of speeches in support for his policies where he echoed American talking points. "Vietnam is the focus of attention now.... It may happen to Thailand or the Philippines, or anywhere, wherever there is misery, disease, ignorance.... For you to renounce your position of leadership in Asia is to allow the Red Chinese to gobble up all of Asia."<sup>45</sup> Marcos was also concerned with communist subversion at home in the Philippines, and his offer for a new Operation Brotherhood in Vietnam came with a price tag of infrastructure and roads to be built by the U.S. This would "increase mobility in the Huk Territory."<sup>46</sup> Despite his rhetoric, Marcos' hands remained politically tied with respect to the introduction of combat troops in Vietnam. When it appeared that the Philippine Congress might not reauthorize the spending bill in support of PHILCAG, Marcos began to feel the demands to reduce the number of men serving in Vietnam, which had remained slightly above 2,000 throughout 1966 and 1967. As pressure in the Philippines mounted for an end to the contingent, the reliability of the Philippines as an ally for the United States came into question.

On January 8, 1968, MACV commander General William Westmoreland summoned Tobias to a meeting. Recently declassified documentation recounts the

---

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum from the President's Special Counsel (McPherson) to President Johnson, Washington, 13 June 1967, *FRUS*, 5:497.

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Ugarte, "Marcos Spends 2 Hours with RP Troops in Tay Ninh," *The Philippines Herald*, 17 July 1967, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Marcos, as quoted by Lyndon Johnson in an address made before the National Legislative Conference at San Antonio, TX, on September 29, 1967, State Department, *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. LVII, No. 1478, Publication 8304, 23 October 1967.

<sup>46</sup> *FRUS* 26:791, 93-4.

*“Showing Its Flag”*

discovery by the United States that Tobias had developed a relationship with the Northern Liberation Front, and Westmoreland confronted him. During this meeting, Tobias recounted the history of PHILCAG’s contacts with NLF leadership, which dated back seventeen months to PHILCAG’s arrival in Vietnam. He had received orders from Marcos to establish contact with the NLF and thereby gain contacts with Hanoi leadership. The orders came to him on August 15, 1966, the same day that South Vietnam officially accepted the Philippines’ offer of PHILCAG. Marcos sought to begin peace negotiations without the consent or knowledge of the United States or the Republic of Vietnam. The plan was kept secret, with only Marcos, Tobias, and a few select Filipino cabinet members and military officials knowing the details. An unnamed Philippine captain and two enlisted men were selected as “action officers” to do the leg-work of meeting with NLF operatives, but even they had limited information as to the objectives or scope of the operation.<sup>47</sup>

The first contacts were made in February 1967. The details of these initial contacts are not entirely clear, but on April 25, 1967, Tobias received a response letter from Luu Kiet, Vice Chairman for the Front Liberation Committee of Tay Ninh Province. Kiet’s response to the General read:

Your letter has been received. You are being used by the Americans. You are bombing and destroying our houses and schools. It is the Americans who are the aggressors and whom our forces are fighting valiantly.... The Americans are losing and will continue to lose.... We want no part of you. Our advice to you is to go home to the Philippines and have no part of the grand aggressive design of the imperialist Americans.<sup>48</sup>

Tobias sent a letter in response, which was approved by Marcos. This was intercepted by the Government of Vietnam on November 7, 1967, along with the text of a July 16 speech by Marcos to PHILCAG troops. In the letter, Tobias urged Kiet to reconsider. Quoting Marcos’ speech, Tobias wrote that his mission was “not to kill, it is to give life and support; to bring happiness, not sorrow; to build and not destroy.”<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> American Embassy, Saigon to Department of State, 11 January, 1968 in NSF Country File Vietnam, Box #91 [2 of 2], Vietnam 5D(2), 1967–1969, Allies: Troop Commitments; Other Aid (Alphabetically: Australia – Philippines) [2 of 2], Document #73-c, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 6.

<sup>49</sup> American Embassy, Saigon to Department of State, 9 November 1967 in NSF Country File Vietnam, Box #91 [2 of 2], Vietnam 5D(2), 1967–1969, Allies: Troop Commitments; Other Aid (Alphabetically: Australia – Philippines) [2 of 2], Document #73-l, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, 1, 2.

Overall, there were six meetings between the unnamed Philippine captain and NLF political cadre. Three of these meetings occurred in Tay Ninh province and three across the border in Cambodia. Reaching the Cambodian site, in particular, was a challenge for the Filipino men. Taken by escorts down Route 13 from the city of Tay Ninh, the captain then took a jungle trail across the Cambodian border to a well-camouflaged camp. Tobias described the NLF's operations as "both secretive and well organized," but noted that they were "courteous and proper at all times."<sup>50</sup>



Brigadier General Gaudencio V. Tobias and Major General Fred C. Weyand during a tour of the 25th infantry, 9 July 1966. Courtesy National Archives, photo no. 111-SC-632025.

Tobias expressed his concern over the embarrassment that would follow him and his government should this information be released. He emphasized that he was not trying to bargain with the NLF, just "attempting to develop an arrangement that would result in the VC leaving the PHILCAG forces alone."<sup>51</sup> Marcos even attempted

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 11 January 1968, Document #73-c, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 4, 5.

*"Showing Its Flag"*

in late 1966 to make contact with Hanoi in hopes of serving as an intermediary to peace negotiations. Earlier on the same day of the Tobias/Westmoreland meeting, General Frederick Carlton Weyand, Commander of Second Field Force, sent a memo to Westmoreland detailing new intelligence reports, one of which described a PHILCAG vehicle with covered markings delivering medicines and food to an NLF contact. Both South Vietnam and U.S. leadership were quite disturbed at these "additional indications that PHILCAG is persisting in unilateral efforts to establish a relationship with the VC."<sup>52</sup>

One of the most disturbing aspects of the Filipino contacts with the Northern Liberation Front from the perspective of the United States was the PHILCAG leadership's insistence that the Philippines was performing independently from the coalition Lyndon Johnson had put together. From Marcos and Tobias' perspective, they were in Vietnam "merely to help all Vietnamese people in peaceful pursuits without respect to their 'beliefs and persuasions,' and... therefore, the NFLVN might consider tham [sic] as being a kind of neutral position outside the fighting war."<sup>53</sup> There was a belief in the Philippines that, because of their peaceful, non-combatant pursuits, they were not resented by the NLF, and were thus in a favorable position to act as intermediaries to bring about a peace settlement.

Discussions with GVN President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu revealed a series of distressed conversations, with Thiệu stating "emphatically [sic]" how unwise a move this was on the part of Marcos. There was great suspicion in the minds of South Vietnamese leadership of a future with PHILCAG, but not wanting to upset Marcos or the coalition, the United States' official position was to stay out of the affair, allowing Marcos to handle media reports, should they come out in the press.<sup>54</sup>

This "Illinois" situation, as it was referred to within the State Department, revealed Marcos' continued movement away from Washington and his attempts to establish himself as a world player. His attempts to negotiate his own peace showed his rogue, dominant personality and his unwillingness to accept a submissive role in America's war. With pressure in the Philippines to bring PHILCAG home from the war, and with this new rift in relations with both the American and South Vietnamese governments, the writing was on the wall for Marcos to end Filipino involvement.

As these developments moved forward, the war raged on for the men and women of PHILCAG. The staggering amount of work accomplished by PHILCAG

---

<sup>52</sup> 11 November 1967, Document #73-j, 1; *Ibid.*, 8 January 1968, Document #73-d, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 November 1967, Document #73-g, 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 January 1968, Document #73-a, 1; *Ibid.*, 10 January 1968, Document #73-b, 2; *Ibid.*, 30 April 1968, Document #69, 2.

included the construction of 59 kilometers of roads, building two modern, two-lane concrete bridges over the Tay Ninh River, and digging 200 wells. In addition, PHILCAG was heavily involved in food and clothing distribution, as well as various psywar operations, including the training of defectors in welding and equipment operations. Operations for the construction of “resettlement” hamlets were also a major function of PHILCAG, the largest of which occurred in Phuoc Dien, three kilometers from Tay Ninh.<sup>55</sup>

On July 30, 1968, the American embassy in Manila was informed that President Marcos had reduced the number of men in PHILCAG from 1,735 to 1,500. This was an attempt at political compromise by Marcos, who was fending off calls from Congress to reduce PHILCAG’s numbers by 1,000. While he had been supportive of the Philippines’ contingent in Vietnam, congressional support continued to flounder. While local editorials, such as those in the *Philippines Herald*, maintained their hawkish edge, local opposition to the war continued to gain strength. In 1968, a Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines was organized.<sup>56</sup> Crowds swarmed Clark Air Base on September 30 to, in the words of Ambassador to the Philippines G. Mennen Williams, “punish the U.S.”<sup>57</sup> Their demands consisted of a withdrawal of PHILCAG from Vietnam and a “modification or termination”<sup>58</sup> of the U. S.–Filipino bases agreement. There was little United States fear, however, of a complete withdrawal of PHILCAG at this time. Such a move would sacrifice Marcos’ claim for a place at the table for peace negotiations, as well as his “chance to share in the post-war division of American military equipment.”<sup>59</sup> Facing internal political pressure to distance himself from the United States and the Vietnam War, as well as the prospect of a new potential trade block, Marcos reconsidered his position on relations with communist nations.

On November 24, during his weekly radio-TV chat, Marcos answered questions regarding the future of Philippine/communist relations. When queried if he expected to establish diplomatic relations with socialist countries, he replied, “Personally, my answer will be yes,” and that it was “about time” to establish trade and diplomatic relations with smaller socialist governments.<sup>60</sup> On November 27, Marcos convened his Foreign Policy Council to consider this. Secretary of Foreign

---

<sup>55</sup> Richard P. Wilson, “PHILCAG Helps Rebuild,” *Free World*, 17:4 (n.d.), 40, 42.

<sup>56</sup> American Embassy, Manila to Department of State, 12 September, 1968 in NSF Country File Vietnam. Box #91 [2 of 2], Vietnam 5D(2), 1967–1969, Allies: Troop Commitments; Other Aid (Alphabetically: Australia – Philippines) [2 of 2], Document #66, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, 1; Shalom, *The United States and the Philippines*, 164.

<sup>57</sup> *FRUS 1964–1968*, 26:820.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 822.

<sup>60</sup> American Embassy, Manila to Secretary of State, 25 November 1968, Subject Numeric Files 1967–1969, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, NA II.

## *"Showing Its Flag"*

Affairs Ramos, among others, cautioned against a sharp turn from long-standing anti-communist policy, which likely influenced Marcos' decision to replace him as his new term began. Others, such as Senator Tanada, advocated full trade and diplomatic relations with communist nations. The result was a compromised solution, whereby trade with the "Eastern Bloc" countries would continue on a limited basis and cover only "distressed export products such as abaca, copra, coconut oil and tobacco."<sup>61</sup> A new direction was clear. It was known as New Developmental Diplomacy.

On January 2, 1969, Carlos Romulo assumed office as the new Foreign Secretary and, according to historian and diplomat Claude A. Buss, "declared that the Filipinos were no longer children seeking guidance from a parent, but mature adults independently pursuing their own security and well-being."<sup>62</sup> The U.S.–Filipino relationship was to be reexamined. Romulo stated that the United States "served us, but not too well.... They promoted our interests to a limited extent, but not enough to justify the almost unlimited advantages that accrued to others at the cost of our own self-reliance and initiative."<sup>63</sup> Senator Diokno stated that the American diplomatic pressure that got PHILCAG into Vietnam (among other grievances) was proof that America did not support Philippine aspirations. Salvador P. Lopez, the Philippine Ambassador to the United States, warned that a power vacuum would be left in the wake of an American withdrawal from Vietnam, and that, although the Philippines had been a loyal ally since World War II, it would consider closer future relations with both the Soviet Union and China.<sup>64</sup>

When he visited Washington in April 1969 for the funeral of former President Eisenhower, Marcos met with President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger. Marcos stated that he felt the Philippines would be a more effective force if it withdrew PHILCAG and concentrated on helping the South Vietnamese develop an "effective constabulary force."<sup>65</sup> He offered to conduct training programs in the Philippines, which Kissinger took under consideration.

Facing continued political opposition at home, in conjunction with a new foreign policy with respect to communist nations, commitment to the cause of South Vietnam began to wane for President Marcos. By November 1969, Marcos had ordered PHILCAG's removal from Vietnam, leaving only the original PHILCON medical units as a Filipino representative of the "more flags" program. With this

---

<sup>61</sup> American Embassy, Manila to Secretary of State, 29 November 1968, Subject Numeric Files 1967–1969, RG 59, NA II.

<sup>62</sup> Buss, *The United States and the Philippines*, 51-2.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-5.

<sup>65</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation, Washington, 2 April 1969, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 20:395.

dramatic change to Filipino policy, and with the new Nixon administration in the United States utilizing a policy of “Vietnamization,” the concern with the “more flags” program was greatly diminished. The Philippines began a Vietnamization program of its own, with withdrawals of men rapidly increasing from year to year. By late 1972, a mere 71 officers and enlisted men remained in Vietnam as Marcos declared martial law, ostensibly to protect the Philippines from the same communist threat faced in Vietnam.<sup>66</sup>

The Philippines’ loss of their youth to the ravages of the war in Vietnam was relatively small when compared to the other Free World nations. Nine men were killed in action, and four died from “other causes” from the period of 1964-1973.<sup>67</sup> The final remnants of a Philippine presence in Vietnam finally came home in March, 1973. Shortly after the collapse of the South Vietnamese government, Marcos stated that South Vietnam could have fared better if it had relied on its own will and strength rather than that of another.<sup>68</sup> While directly a reference to the United States, this statement managed to refute all of his previous statements that served as a rallying cry for Filipino intervention in aid of South Vietnam.

The years of support for the government of South Vietnam, the years of supporting the “free world,” the years of communist opposition—all this was forgotten when diplomatic relations were established with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976. In early January 1978, new economic, scientific, and technical agreements were made between the two former enemies. Marcos described the event as a “historic record of the growing friendship and cooperation between the two countries and proof of the sincere intentions of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam for the maintenance of peace, friendship and freedom in Southeast Asia.”<sup>69</sup> For the Philippines, the war was over.

The attempt by the United States government to add an Asian face to an obviously American endeavor was, ultimately, a failure. Not only had South Vietnam fallen, but relationships with allied nations were strained. While the U.S. did recruit representation from various Asian nations, this representation ultimately did not change the course of the war. For the Filipinos, PHILCAG would not be celebrated in years to come. Entrance into the Vietnam conflict was hotly contested, and departure came quickly. What will linger in memory, despite the accomplishments that were achieved on the ground, was the fact that the Philippines

---

<sup>66</sup> American Embassy, Manila to Department of State, 21 April, 1970 in *The Presidential Papers of Ferdinand Marcos*, File no. 5125, National Library, Manila, Philippines, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Rodolfo C. Valenzuela, Administrative Officer, to ACofS, J1, “Report of Philippines Casualties,” 24 June 1972, FWMAO Admin Office, RG 472, NA II.

<sup>68</sup> “President Analyzes Vietnam,” *The Times Journal*, 3 May 1975, 1.

<sup>69</sup> “RP, Vietnam Sign Economic Pacts,” *School News Review*, 45:8, 15 January 1978, 1.

*"Showing Its Flag"*

played a subservient role to America in a losing effort. The fear of communism that had permeated Filipino government remained, but communist neighbors were received with open economic arms. Just as the fiasco that was Vietnam came into perspective for the two nations, the Philippines fell into years of military rule under Marcos' martial law.

Department of History  
Northern Illinois University  
Zulauf Hall 715  
DeKalb, IL 60115-2854  
[z112969@students.niu.edu](mailto:z112969@students.niu.edu)