Crisis and Speculation in the Marcos Regime (1980-1986)

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Abstract

When a regime is perceived to be in crisis, speculation about its end begins to circulate. In the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos, the early 1980s marked a period when signals of decline intensified, prompting key actors, from foreign intelligence officials to academics and opposition leaders, to project competing futures for the country. This paper analyzes these speculative discourses not as straightforward diagnoses but as strategic interventions shaped by political position, ideological commitment, and historical memory. The scenarios envisioned—ranging from communist takeover to transitional authoritarianism to democratic restoration—reveal how crisis reconfigures the boundaries of political possibility. These discourses offer insight into how authoritarian collapse becomes legible not only through institutional change, but through the ways people in the past imagined, and attempted to shape, what came next.

Keywords: *Ferdinand Marcos, Marcos regime, political forecasting, historiography*

In the early 1970s, a boy with purported supernatural abilities (healing powers, telekinetic abilities, and psychic premonitions) gained fame in the Philippines. He was shown on national television making overseas calls using toy telephones and reading from his palm the texts someone else was reading. He was popularly dubbed "Bionic Boy," a nickname inspired by the American TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Bionic Boy was virtually adopted by the Marcos couple; he had his own room in Malacañang, called the first couple "Mom" and "Dad," and took the name Ronald "Ronnie" Marcos (after Ronald Reagan). He lived for a long time under the favor of the first family until he fell from grace in 1985, when he shared a premonition about the imminent fall of Marcos. He predicted that the Philippines would have its first woman president, but it was not Imelda he saw in his palms—an omen that enraged the First Lady, who later denied ever knowing him in subsequent interviews (Hamilton-Paterson, 1998). Outside the gilded walls of Malacañang, intense speculation surrounded the regime's uncertain future.

This paper examines practices of political forecasting during the final years of the Marcos regime. It asks: how did different actors construct scenarios for the end of the regime, and what did these reveal about their interests, fears, and aspirations? The goal is not to assess the accuracy of these predictions or trace their influence on historical outcomes. Rather, it seeks to examine political forecasting as a practice: what were the narratives, what shaped them, and what kinds of futures they made thinkable during the Marcos regime's decline. It aims to analyze how crisis gave rise to a future-oriented discourse and what those forecasts reveal about the historical consciousness of the period.

For this discussion, I follow the definition of political forecasting as "a series of activities involved in projecting what is likely to happen and, thereby, engages as well in formulating options or alternative courses of future action on the basis of factual information that has been gathered beforehand" (Bauzon, 2009, p. 28). The interest in political forecasting in the 1970s stemmed from the premise that political forces in developing nations played a crucial role in shaping the global business environment. The 1973 Arab-Israeli War, for example, prompted Arab oil producers to impose an embargo on oil shipments to the United States and other Western countries, ultimately causing oil prices to skyrocket (Office of the Historian). In short, instability in developing countries was deemed bad for business. To protect overseas investments of multinational corporations, scholars developed systemic methods to analyze political risk (see Bunn & Mustafaoglu, 1978; Korbin, 1971, for example). Political forecasting was not limited to investment concerns; it also served as a valuable tool for Western governments (Bauzon, 2009). But scholars have been preoccupied

with the future for some time. In response to Cold War geopolitics, the RAND Corporation developed the concept of crisis stability, which used scenario-based research to help policymakers avert nuclear war (RAND Corporation). In 1971, Wendell Bell and James A. Mau (1971) published *The Sociology of the Future,* which represented an effort in the late 1960s to promote future studies as a legitimate field of inquiry in the social sciences. Bell and Mau drew questions about change in the English-speaking Caribbean, particularly on the dynamics of the countries' transition from colonies to independent nation-states.

The collapse of the Marcos regime has been widely examined in Philippine scholarship. Some scholars looked at the process of the dictatorship's sharp decline starting from the early 1980s (see De Dios et. al., 1988; Overholt, 1986), while others focused on the role of popular movements in its downfall (see Thompson, 1995; Youngblood, 1990). Other studies focused on describing and analyzing the sequence of events that led to Marcos's exile in Hawaii (Stuart-Santiago, 2013; Aruiza, 1991). These works, written with the benefit of hindsight, mapped the regime's decline by identifying key moments and turning points. This study, by contrast, explores the competing interpretations of crisis to show how power struggles were not only fought through action but also through divergent visions of the future. This study aims to contribute to the scholarship on post-authoritarian transitions by examining how this underexplored perspective provides a new lens for understanding the uncertainties, aspirations, and strategic maneuvering during the final years of the Marcos regime.

Speculating on the end of the Marcos regime was done both by American policymakers and academics, as well as their Filipino counterparts, a more diverse group that included journalists, leaders of traditional anti-Marcos opposition, business executives, and the Philippine Left.

This paper does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all efforts to predict the regime's downfall; instead, it attempts to examine a diverse range of perspectives from various ideological and political standpoints. Furthermore, the paper does not claim that the authors cited here represent the official views of their respective groups (e.g., Jose Maria Sison's assessment as representative of the Communist Party of the Philippines or the Central Intelligence Agency with the government of the United States of America). Rather, it highlights some of the most influential perspectives as a starting point for broader historiographical analysis. The focus was on materials published between the Aquino assassination and the EDSA People Power, with earlier publications serving as reference points to assess any shifts in the tenor of predictions.

In the discussion, I start with a brief overview of some of the defining moments that weakened Marcos's hold on power, proceeded by an outline of how key actors of the period envisioned the dictatorship's end. Three main groups are discussed in the study: the American intelligence community, academics, and the anti-Marcos opposition. Lines are difficult to draw when categorizing the actors of this period. Academics, for instance, can be broadly defined as those who were paid to conduct research or teach in higher educational institutions, yet many were also consulted by members of the American intelligence community for their expertise. At the same time, many engaged in discussions with the anti-Marcos opposition or were active participants in the movement. These categories, then, are used primarily for the sake of analysis rather than as rigid distinctions.

The Fall of Marcos

Ferdinand E. Marcos was forced into exile following the 1986 EDSA uprising—an episode that has been widely documented elsewhere and need not be recounted in detail here. But even before 1986, there were already signs that Marcos's grip on power had weakened, and these became increasingly apparent as the regime began to fracture under the weight of its own contradictions.

By the late 1970s, speculation about Marcos's deteriorating health had become widespread. Despite repeated denials, evidence of his physical decline became harder to ignore. He withdrew from public appearances and remained largely confined to Malacañang, a pattern that became more pronounced after his first kidney transplant in August 1983 (Aruiza, 1991). Around the same time, Marcos's political opponent, Senator Benigno S. Aquino Jr., who had been in self-imposed exile after almost eight years of incarceration by the regime, returned to the Philippines. Moments before he could set foot on Philippine soil, Aquino was fatally shot in the back of his head. The brazen killing triggered nationwide protests and emboldened the alternative press to voice out pointed criticism at the regime. But above all, it laid bare the stark truth: Marcos was no longer in control.

Moreover, the Philippine economy's integration with international capital markets and the Marcos regime's heavy reliance on foreign debt made it particularly vulnerable to external shocks such as oil price hikes and rising global interest rates. The regime's debt-driven economy suffered multiple crises, the most severe of which came after Aquino's assassination, triggering massive capital flight. The peso plunged, inflation soared, and businesses shut down as investors withdrew and debt payments drained government resources. Ordinary Filipinos bore the brunt of the crisis through skyrocketing prices, shrinking wages, and unemployment (De Dios et al., 1988).

Together, these developments signaled to the Filipino public and Marcos's American sponsors that he was no longer in control. If the 1973 Constitution, as amended, were to be followed, the Speaker of the *Batasang Pambansa* (National Assembly) shall serve as caretaker of government in the event of Marcos' death or permanent incapacity. The *Batasang Pambansa* shall convene and agree on rules for the selection of a new president. The Speaker, in consultation with the assembly, shall set the schedule for the special election, which must take place within a period prescribed by law (*An Act to Implement the Constitutional Provisions on Presidential Succession of 1982*). However, many feared that members of Marcos's inner circle would circumvent this process and maneuver to take power for themselves.

The American Intelligence Community

Chief among American foreign policy objectives in the Philippines was the "continued unhampered operations and effectiveness of U.S. military forces and facilities in the Philippines" (United States Department of State, 1980, para. 1). The United States' access to facilities in the Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Airfield was crucial in deterring overt military action by China and North Vietnam in the region. In a confidential memorandum dated 1980 titled "Goals and Objectives Statement and Implementation Plan for the Philippines," it was explicitly stated that American objectives in the Philippines could be achieved through maintaining a "useful relationship with President Marcos" (United States Department of State, 1980, para. 2). Other key areas of concern for the Americans are continued Philippine support for U.S. positions in international fora, improvements in the human rights situation, and the enhancement of investment opportunities in the expanding Philippine economy. Maintaining these interests was at risk when the regime showed signs of decline.

The U.S. government, however, did not hold a unified stance on the Marcos question. For some officials, the only alternative to Marcos was a communist takeover, a scenario they were determined to avoid. These officials viewed Marcos as both part of the problem and part of the solution, believing his administration had the capacity for reform. Among them were U.S. President Ronald Reagan, his Chief of Staff Donald Regan, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, CIA Director William Casey, and initially Secretary of State George Shultz, who later revised his position (see Shultz, 1993). On the other hand, there were those who believed that Marcos was incapable of reform. Most of them were professionals from the bureaucracy and included former Ambassador to the Philippines and later Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Michael Armacost, Bureau of Intelligence and Research Director Morton I. Abramowitz, and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman

Admiral William J. Crowe. For them, continued support for Marcos only deepened American entanglement in the twin challenges of military base retention and the communist insurgency. They argued that alternative political paths, ones not tied to Marcos, were not only possible but necessary (Bonner, 1987).

In the early 1980s, the American intelligence community played an increasingly central role in high-level decision-making about the Philippines, especially amid mounting efforts to retain strategic overseas bases. Multiple agencies—among them the CIA, National Security Agency (NSA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and military intelligence branches—engaged in intelligence work. Of these, the CIA was specifically tasked with conducting intelligence and counterintelligence operations beyond U.S. borders. By mid-1985, the U.S. intelligence community scrambled to devise a solution to the Philippine problem. The CIA doubled its staffing dedicated to the region, while the DIA formed a specialized group focused exclusively on the Philippines. Seasoned experts with regional experience were enlisted in the effort, including Carl W. Ford Jr. of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Marjorie Niehaus of the Congressional Research Service (Bonner, 1987).

Before the political and economic turmoil triggered by the Aquino assassination, the prospect of Marcos's "departure from the scene" surfaced in the context of negotiations for the military bases agreement. A memorandum dated December 27, 1982, described Marcos's exit either by death or ouster as "plausible but not likely to occur." Even then, concerns were already growing that a successor government might be more vulnerable to "Leftist pressure, potentially leading to "unacceptable demands" on the U.S. in future negotiations (Assistant National Intelligence Officer for East Asia, 1982, p. 1). Simply put, they feared that it would be more costly to retain access to Philippine bases under a post-Marcos government that would be less beholden to Washington and more attuned to nationalist or populist pressures.

By May 1983, the CIA had a detailed list of key figures in the post-Marcos succession politics. The list included First Lady Imelda Marcos, Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Fabian Ver, Deputy Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos, and Prime Minister Cesar Virata—individuals expected to either contend for the presidency or play critical roles during the period of transition should Marcos die, be incapacitated, or ousted from power. The central premise in this scenario-building exercise was that Marcos's concentration of power in himself and the resulting weakening of political institutions had left the transition to the post-Marcos era precarious. As such, any successor government would lack the monopoly of power that Marcos had and

could not therefore afford to disregard certain domestic constituencies like Marcos did. The government, thus, could be stirred toward a more nationalistic stance, a threat that jeopardized the use of U.S. military bases in the Philippines (Office of East Asian Analysis, 1983).

In their estimation, Imelda, if she could get the full support of Ver, would have a strong chance of succeeding her husband. She had the resources and the political clout to keep traditional politics working in her favor and could manipulate the election, should it happen. Despite the brewing undercurrent of resentment among state forces, the loyalty of a significant portion of the military and the constabulary was with Ver, which made him another important figure in the succession scenario (Office of East Asian Analysis, 1983, p. 3).

Virata was another key player. Because of his good reputation in the international financial community, he was seen as a sought-after ally by presidential contenders. If Virata got the support of the military, the report argued, his place in the interim government could be secured. Enrile, on the other hand, had at his disposal vast resources, especially with the support of the Marcos crony Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco. Ramos, who was perceived as lacking presidential ambition, was an attractive ally for any presidential aspirant because of his "untarnished image and the military and police he controls" (Office of East Asian Analysis, 1983, p. 2). But regardless of how reputable or powerful these actors were, none could seize power on their own; they could only do so through strategic alliances with one another (Office of East Asian Analysis, 1983).

The opposition's most viable candidate for mounting a successful presidential campaign, according to the document, was former Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., who, at the time the report was written, was still residing in the United States. The CPP was expected to take advantage of the succession process by fielding candidates through aboveground and infiltrated organizations. The report also noted that the NPA was not strong enough to launch a successful military takeover of the government within the next two to three years (Office of East Asian Analysis, 1983).

Ultimately, the author argued, the military would be the pivotal force in the dynamics of the succession process. The report had a generally positive view of the role that the military would play. According to the report, they would support legal succession mechanisms and would serve a "stabilizing role" by supporting either a candidate of their choice or the winner of a free and fair election. For the author, military intervention seemed unlikely, unless the internal security situation worsened due to the successor government's failure

to consolidate power or if insurgent violence escalated (Office of East Asian Analysis, 1983, p. 6).

An intelligence estimate with input from major U.S. intelligence agencies dated September 1983 reported that succession jockeying had begun in earnest after Aquino's assassination. As anticipated, the situation gave rise to clearer alliances, such as that between Imelda and Cojuangco. Marcos reduced the power of the Ministry of Defense (thus further alienating Enrile) to bolster his control over the AFP through Ver, a manifestation of the infighting that had been growing in the defense establishment (Director of Central Intelligence, 1983).

A change in the tenor of the estimates regarding the military's next moves was evident in the post-assassination period. Earlier forecasts emphasized the AFP's tendency to adhere to constitutional succession. In an October 13, 1983 document titled "The Philippine Military: Will They Remain in the Barracks?" the author cited deep distrust in the viability of constitutional succession among factions in the AFP, leading them to believe that a military coup was likely to happen. However, a coup was not considered alarming by the analysts; in fact, it was considered advantageous, given the Philippine military's enduring ties to the United States (Southeast Asia Division, 1983).

CIA analysts did not perceive an immediate threat from the Soviets, despite their efforts to exploit the political turmoil after the Aquino assassination by fueling anti-American sentiments (Third World Studies Division, 1984). The report, however, said that the Soviets were preparing for a post-Marcos scenario and were anticipating a government led by Imelda Marcos—a key political actor who appeared "susceptible to Soviet flattery" and had "strongly supported expanded economic and cultural relations" (p. 2). Imelda's more "radical ideas on foreign policy" and her tendency to stir a foreign policy closer to the Soviet Union was a real concern for the CIA. (p. 6).

Thus, the CIA attempted to project what it would be like if Imelda were to succeed her husband. Despite her growing unpopularity, they believed that Imelda was "determined" and had a "fair chance" at the presidency (Southeast Asia Division, 1985, p. 1).

The memorandum contended that in the likely situation that she becomes president, Imelda would have a weak mandate and would be beset by opposition from key interest groups in the Philippines, including the legislature. To establish her power base, she would rely heavily on the military (using Ver's influence) and the resources of her husband's inner circle, notably Danding Cojuangco and her brother, Benjamin Romualdez, the Ambassador to the U.S. Lacking a popular mandate, she was expected to govern with even greater authoritarian

tendencies than her husband, but with less calculation and restraint. She would be inclined to launch an onslaught of arrests on who she would label as subversives, further suppress free speech, and, in the face of widespread unrest, would not hesitate to declare martial law. Her positions on economic issues were described as "naive and poorly defined," and as such, would present bleak prospects for the United States' desired economic structural reforms (Southeast Asia Division, 1985, p. 4). Preoccupied with political survival, Imelda would become a destabilizing force, making her hypothetical presidency a threat to U.S. interests (Southeast Asia Division, 1985).

The Americans were naturally anxious about the possibility of the Philippines falling under communist hands. But from their perspective, the CPP appeared to forgo contingency planning and were instead focused on implementing their long-range plans, particularly organization-building and penetrating aboveground groups (Office of East Asian Analysis and Office of Global Issues, 1985). The CPP and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), however, were continually improving their capabilities while Marcos's power base was steadily declining. If this trend continued, the CIA projected that a communist takeover of Manila would be possible by 1990. Again, the grim forecast was a result of the Aquino assassination; it became an example of how unanticipated developments could rapidly reshape the political landscape (Southeast Asia Division, 1985).

Recognizing the inevitability of collapse, the American intelligence community explored options for U.S. intervention in the Philippine crisis. On May 23, 1985, National Intelligence Officer for East Asia Carl W. Ford Jr. issued a memorandum titled "U.S. Influence and the Philippine Succession." The memo was premised on the then-prevailing U.S. policy that Marcos was part of the problem, but he was also part of the solution. By the third quarter of 1985, an alternative view had been gaining ground among the agency's analysts: that the "continuation of Marcos's rule ensure[d] the worst of all possible outcomes" (Ford, 1985, p.1). This perspective, however, was not shared by key decision-makers in the White House at the time.

As a first option, Ford suggested encouraging Marcos to choose a "highly qualified" running mate—though that hinged on Marcos's judgment and timing (1985, p. 2). In the second option, U.S. officials would choose Marcos's running mate, but this risked sending Imelda the message that she was not the favored candidate and may provoke her to instigate a power grab. In the third option, the U.S. would "insist" that Marcos follow either of the first two (Ford, 1985, p. 3). The fourth and fifth options involved urging Marcos to announce his retirement and having him elect a KBL successor to run in his place. Though these

options did not guarantee a clean election, such options would boost public and congressional support in the U.S. Ford further warned that a genuinely democratic vote might bring in a government less aligned with U.S. interests (Ford, 1985, pp. 4-5). The sixth option was redacted prior to being declassified.

In January 1986, just a few weeks before the EDSA uprising, the CIA produced a memorandum titled "Beyond Marcos: Adverse Long-Range Trends for Philippine Democracy and U.S. Interests." By the time this document was made, the snap election had been announced, and the campaign period was in full swing. Unlike the other assessments, this memorandum adopted a long-term perspective and reflected on the historical roots of the failure to implant healthy and stable democratic institutions in the country. The author argued that all "Third World countries" must navigate political and economic challenges in order to arrive at societal arrangements best suited to their respective stages of development (National Intelligence Council, 1986, p. 3). In the case of the Philippines, however, this process came relatively late—delayed by the uniquely close ties that long bound the country to its former colonizer, the United States. Furthermore, the author argued that though the Philippines had had regular elections since 1946, along with other features of a functioning democracy, the underbelly of traditional patron-client relations plagued its democratic institutions (National Intelligence Council, 1986).

On the basis of the assumptions mentioned above, the author attempted to forecast the implications of the ongoing political turmoil for the country's democratic future. There were three projections for the future of Philippine democracy in the long-term. The *first* was a communist takeover which could materialize as a result of a military victory or a power struggle between anti-Marcos forces following the regime's downfall. The communists would take advantage of a turbulent shift, and the prolonged political stalemate was giving them time to organize and gain military strength. The *second* probable outcome was "a strengthened authoritarian system probably based on a coalition of the military and the civil bureaucracy" (National Intelligence Council, 1986, p. 4). This system would share some features with Marcos's authoritarian regime but would be more accommodating of left and even left-of-center groups. The author believed that this strengthened authoritarian arrangement was the most likely scenario, and it would provide the stability that is needed to serve American interests. And lastly, the *third* outcome—one which was deemed as the least likely to emerge out of the political turmoil of the 1980s—was an effective democracy, one that was not limited to political parties running for electoral seats but could articulate and integrate the demands of politically engaged groups. The prospects for an effective democracy

were bleak because, in the author's estimation, a tradition of broad-based democratically inclined parties did not exist at that moment, and there was no time to evolve such a system before the Marcos regime collapsed (National Intelligence Council, 1986). Therefore, resolving the crisis was seen as urgent: failure to do so could pave the way for a communist takeover.

The American intelligence community's prognoses and recommendations reflected the prevailing U.S. policy—almost until the end—that though Marcos was part of the problem, he was the most well-positioned to take steps toward political stabilization. This is why, of the options presented to policymakers, it was clear that the agency was unwilling to explore possibilities outside of the Marcos clique and his military. Shultz, in a conversation with Abramowitz, expressed concern that the CIA—then led by William Casey—was "biased by a point of view." He warned that when someone is committed to a particular view, "that view colors his appraisal of the facts" (Shultz, 1993, p. 619). The moderate opposition or the possibility of a popular uprising never figured in seriously among the options for the political transition, perhaps reasonably so. In one memorandum written by Ford, he said that the opposition is "even more fragmented than the KBL" (1985). The White House, Don Regan (Reagan's chief of staff) in particular, had a low regard for Cory Aquino after hearing *New York Times* editor Abe Rosenthal's impressions of her following an interview in Manila.[1] Rosenthal painted her as a "dazed, vacant woman," an "empty-headed housewife [who] has no positions" (Shultz, 1993, p. 627; Karnow, 1989, p. 411). Yet more consequential than this view was Reagan's: despite how badly the situation in the Philippines was deteriorating, he wanted Marcos to change, not step down.

Those advocating the alternative view from the bureaucracy—most of them saw the situation in the Philippines firsthand—remained the minority up until the final hours of the Marcos regime. U.S. intelligence was reporting signs of a "pervasive siege mentality" inside Malacañang by September 1985 (Southeast Asia Division, 1985, p. 3). Paranoia and isolationism deepened as Marcos grappled with a failing body and mounting criticism against his administration. And yet, majority in the American intelligence community pursued the angle that Marcos was able and willing to undertake genuine reforms. Shultz was perhaps correct in his criticism of those in the intelligence community

1 Rosenthal accompanied New York Times correspondent Seth Mydans when he interviewed Aquino at her home. In the interview, she reportedly said that if she won the election, she intended to put Marcos on trial for her husband's assassination, advocate for the removal of U.S. military bases and instead pursue a "zone of neutrality" for the Philippines, and remain open to dialogue with the communists.

who held the dominant view. Case in point, one analyst wrote, "despite growing criticism toward his government . . . Marcos had not censored the domestic press," a sign they took to mean that Marcos was indeed instituting reforms (Southeast Asia Division, 1985. Harassment, massive libel suits against dissenting voices, forced resignations, and even arrests of men and women in the media were well-documented during this period (see Doyo, 2019). One can also argue that the idea that the mounting opposition to the regime could be appeased by cosmetic, or even genuine reforms coming from Marcos was deeply unsound. Despite persistent divisions within the anti-Marcos forces, whether over the future of U.S. bases in the Philippines or the challenge of establishing a *modus vivendi* with more radical elements, they had a unifying consensus: that Marcos had to go.

The Academic Community

In 1982, Filipino sociologist Walden Bello noted that the CIA had "recruited Philippine academic specialists to elaborate on possible alternatives to Marcos" (1984, p. 204). While he refrained from naming individuals, no scholar has publicly acknowledged involvement in this exercise, the speculative discourse in the academic community (regardless of whether they were CIA-sanctioned or not) was notably active during this period.

In November 1983, Australian scholar R.J. May and Filipino political scientist Francisco Nemenzo (1985) put together a conference in Canberra, Australia in response to the political upheaval resulting from the Aquino assassination. This conference had a precursor earlier in 1983, a meeting attended by academics from the Philippines and North America, Filipinist scholars from Australia, and the opposition leader Jose W. Diokno. The participants intended the meeting to be an exercise in "futurology," but the developments had unfolded quicker than they had originally anticipated (p. 1). As Nemenzo and May (1985, p.1) put it:

> Uncertainties about the president's health, combined with an economic crisis and an apparent strengthening of political opposition, created a situation in which those close to the regime became preoccupied with succession scenarios and those in opposition to it began to look hopefully to the prospects for a fundamental change in the political structure. [2]

One of the contributors to the volume, Canadian David Wurfel

2 *The Philippines After Marcos* was subsequently published in 1985 by Croom & Helm, a publishing company based in Sydney and London.

(1985), who was a professor of Political Science at the University of Windsor, made a prediction about the future of the regime. He believed that Imelda would most likely succeed her husband by forming an alliance with Ver. Wurfel saw that an Imelda-Ver successor government would be even more corrupt, repressive, and plagued with factionalism. Moreover, it would also be far less capable of maintaining a coherent economic policy than its predecessor. As their rule inflicted greater damage on the economy, he believed that the business community would align with the working class and intellectuals in demanding change.

The worsening crisis, Wurfel noted, would push the U.S. to take a more active role in Philippine affairs. He also foresaw that it could prompt a faction of the military led by Gen. Ramos—whom he described as more inclined "toward probity, democracy, and economic rationality"—to take action (1985, pp. 40-41). Wurfel believed that it would be in the United States' interest to support a coup, one that the public would likely tolerate as long as American involvement was not too apparent. Opposition figures would then be invited to participate in the restoration of constitutional democracy. He cautioned that a limited democratic opening, one that excluded the Left and kept the executive's hold over the legislature, would leave the successor regime grappling with the same problems as Marcos's rule.

Earlier in the decade, Nemenzo drew up scenarios for the future of the Marcos regime. In 1980, when widespread rumors circulated about Marcos's chronic illness, Nemenzo presented a paper sponsored by the Indian Council for Social Science Research titled "The Alternative to Marcos" where he analyzed the key forces that could play a decisive role in ending the regime. He identified three main actors: transnational corporations (primarily American and Japanese), the elite opposition, and the military.

Nemenzo argued that once transnational corporations recognized that the regime's corruption and mismanagement had become too costly, they would move against Marcos and install Aquino as his successor. He was skeptical, however, about the elite opposition's ability to challenge the regime, even if they managed to unify under a single program and direction. A coup by the entire military establishment seemed unlikely, but Nemenzo saw the possibility of a bloody confrontation if a faction attempted to seize power. Lastly, because Marcos commanded the lukewarm allegiance of conservative church elements, Nemenzo anticipated that the hierarchy might ultimately support a successor government that could contain or render the communists irrelevant. He argued that any one of these actors could only succeed if it had U.S. support. As for the Left, Nemenzo speculated

that a "social revolution" was unlikely in the near future (1980, p. 15).

Nemenzo gave (at least) two other future scenarios in late 1983. Both were written at a time when different groups were discussing the prospects of the moderate opposition in the upcoming 1984 elections. The first was in a lecture he delivered at a joint seminar of the Department of Political and Social Change, where Nemenzo, who was then a senior research fellow, speculated on the steps Marcos might take as his health deteriorated, the economy worsened, and both the Left and the moderate opposition gained momentum. First, Marcos could respond to these threats with the same force he used in 1972. However, this approach carried risks: while it might cripple the moderate opposition, the CPP could counter with tactical offensives in the countryside. With the world closely watching and with the growing discontent within the AFP, it was uncertain whether the military would support Marcos if the latter decided to impose a violent crackdown, particularly one targeted against the urban middle class. The second option that Marcos had, according to Nemenzo, was to forge a power-sharing agreement with the moderate opposition. This would involve the creation of a composite body that would facilitate a constitutional convention and the conduct of honest and free elections. Marcos's third option was beyond his control; he would be prevailed upon by a faction of the military holding strategic command positions to step down and oversee free elections.

The second forecast Nemenzo made in late 1983 was published as a chapter in the previously mentioned volume he co-edited with R.J. May. Nemenzo's assumption was that the opposition was incapable of toppling Marcos on its own, and that the CPP and its armed wing were still in no position to be a real threat to the Marcos government. He sketched three potential scenarios. First, if Marcos were to die, an all-military junta would take over as a caretaker government. Lacking expertise in governance, the military would enlist the help of technocrats to manage the economy. The second possibility was a "modified authoritarian rule," in which Marcos would permit limited power-sharing with the moderate opposition while maintaining a strong executive. This new coalition would then oversee an election, but Marcos would make sure that he, or his chosen successor, would emerge victorious. In the third scenario, the U.S. would persuade Marcos to resign upon recognizing that the CPP was capable of launching a coordinated offensive against the government and that the National Assembly had lost credibility. The military would decide not to step in but allow technocrats and "acceptable members of the traditional opposition" to pave the way for a restoration of constitutional democracy.

Bello (1985/1986) had a different view of the anti-Marcos opposition. He criticized the "fictitious image" held by the U.S. State Department that the "communists" and the "democratic forces" were irreconcilable. For Bello, there was a real possibility of attaining a "pluralist democratic order" that represented all the major anti-Marcos forces (1985/1986, p. 56). Nationalism would unite these groups despite their disparate perspectives on how to topple the dictatorship, and what the post-Marcos order should look like. However, continued U.S. support for Marcos's repressive regime would provoke retaliatory action from the armed Left, potentially sidelining other factions that were averse to violent methods. Bello therefore asserted that the main obstacle to this pluralist democratic order was not the Left, but the U.S. For him, a peaceful transition would only be possible if the U.S. respected the country's self-determination by not intervening in the political transition to the post-Marcos era.

Renato Constantino (1985), a Filipino nationalist historian, shared his prognosis in a speech originally delivered at a student-organized symposium at UP Cebu on September 19, 1984.[3] Despite heightened calls for change at the time, Constantino (like Cariño) had a pessimistic outlook for a post-Marcos future:

> In my opinion, the post-Marcos era will be characterised by the same policies and programs and they will be implemented by the same breed of technocrats but behind a facade of democracy. In this sense, the post-Marcos era will be essentially the same as the Marcos one, only with a new set of actors and with just enough cosmetic changes to barely accommodate present popular dissent and beguile a majority of the citizenry. (1985, p. 256)

For Constantino, the Americans were not genuinely interested in installing real democratic institutions. They were only interested in an electoral exercise so that tensions could be eased without jeopardizing foreign corporate interests. He shared similar views with Bello on the possibility of cooperation between the Left and the moderate opposition; Constantino anticipated that the two could find "common ground in confronting the anti-imperialist forces and show their real colours when they attain power" (1985, p. 265).

Filipino political scientist Alex R. Magno (1984a) also published articles with *Diliman Review,* an academic journal of the defunct

3 The journal article was based on a speech he delivered during the symposium "The Philippines After Marcos" sponsored by student organizations in University of the Philippines Cebu held on September 19, 1984.

University of the Philippines Dilimans' College of Arts and Sciences. Like Nemenzo, he believed that neither the Left nor the moderate opposition was capable of toppling the dictatorship. He lamented that the anti-Marcos opposition had abandoned the call for resignation in favor of the electoral route, a shift that ultimately deepened divisions within their ranks. Magno cautioned that a sharp economic decline would put Marcos in a defensive position, which would prompt a harsher crackdown on the opposition. In another article in *Diliman Review*, Magno (1984b) argued that it was within the strategic interest of the U.S. to support the political consolidation of the traditional opposition. Such a transition would preserve the military, keep technocrats in control of economic policy, and contain the influence of the Left.

Magno (1984c) was also responsible for organizing a university-wide series of colloquia, which sought to describe the political crisis that engulfed the country and "explore alternatives for meaningful social transformation" (p. 250). The then UP president, Edgardo J. Angara, supported his initiative, and a steering committee helped organize the colloquium series and shepherd the publication of its proceedings through the University of the Philippines Press.[4]

One notable analysis from the colloquium's proceedings came from political scientist Ledivina Cariño (1984), who outlined three possible scenarios. The first mirrored Nemenzo's forecast: the military would take over, maintain the regime's economic policies with technocratic support, and keep the economic elite, whose interests aligned with the U.S., close. The second involved a successor, either from Marcos's inner circle or the opposition, gaining U.S. and military backing, possibly through a coup. This successor could also be appointed Speaker of the National Assembly and therefore would be positioned to provide Marcos a dignified exit. Lastly, a "council of leaders" might be installed through military intervention or by the U.S. withdrawing support from Marcos. Cariño believed this group would be composed mainly of moderates and would avoid major disruptions to the social and economic order. It would adopt nationalist rhetoric, but its opposition to American influence would be largely symbolic.

Whether these scholars were driven by *realpolitik* or ideological commitments (i.e., Bello and Nemenzo were former members of the

4 The ad hoc committee overseeing the series included UP professors Randolf David, Raul Ingles, Winnie Monsod, Roger Posadas, Alex Magno, and Haydee B. Yorac. The sessions featured speakers from various disciplines, while members of the opposition, business leaders, journalists, and former government officials were invited to respond to the discussants.

CPP), there was broad consensus among them that Marcos needed to be removed from power. The real debate, however, lay in determining the most viable formula for ushering in a peaceful transition—one that avoided a violent crackdown by Marcos and for some (like Magno and Wurfel), one that excluded the participation of the Left. Another preoccupation of these works was an assessment of the prospects of attaining meaningful political, social, and economic transformation in a post-Marcos scenario.

The works surveyed reflect varied positions on the desirability of American intervention, though some did not make a definitive stance and merely recognized that the U.S., along with the military it supported, was *the* main power broker. Nonetheless, one may reasonably conclude that the audience of these scholars was perhaps not the Filipino public, but American decision-makers. Wurfel, for instance, argued that an American-backed coup that would accommodate the moderate opposition may be a viable formula for getting rid of Marcos. Bello, who at the time was affiliated with the CPP, contended that American intervention was a bane to the prospects of forging a unified anti-dictatorship movement.

Furthermore, in contrast to the American intelligence community's more skeptical assessments, the academics surveyed here saw the moderate opposition as a viable (or for the majority, the most palatable) force in the post-Marcos transition. However, although they were largely viewed as possible instruments for stability and the restoration of constitutional democracy in a future dispensation, many scholars doubted their capacity (and willingness) to effect fundamental transformations in the political and economic structures that were buttressed by the regime. The academics were clearly pessimistic about the prospects of any real change coming out of the political turmoil in the 1980s, as they were wary of the influence of foreign corporate interests in determining the future of Philippine democracy.

The Opposition

The anti-Marcos opposition, and the groups that comprised it, were far from monolithic. There are no definitive classifications for its major factions, and scholarly descriptions vary depending on the author's perspective. However, for the purpose of analysis, I will outline a general grouping to understand how these different forces envisioned the fall of the regime and the post-Marcos future. The traditional opposition sought to remove Marcos using existing legal frameworks.[5] The United Nationalist Democratic Organization (UNIDO), a coalition

5 Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines called them the "legal opposition." The Filipino academic Walden Bello, on the other hand, called them the "elite opposition."

composed of the Laurel faction of the old *Nacionalista Party* (led by the former Senator Salvador Laurel), remnants of the Liberal Party, the newly-formed *Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan* (PDP-Laban, represented by former Senator Aquilino Pimentel Jr.), and *Bansang Nagkakaisa sa Diwa at Layunin* (BANDILA, led by Agapito Aquino, the younger brother of Ninoy Aquino) challenged Marcos electorally in 1984 and 1986 (Wurfel, 1985). Some business leaders, church-affiliated groups, members of reformist movements within the military, and individuals from the alternative press can also be considered part of the anti-Marcos opposition.

Aquino himself drew up scenarios before he was killed. Before returning to the Philippines, Spencer A. Sherman (1984) of *Mother Jones* (an independent, non-profit newsroom based in San Francisco) had a nine-hour interview with Aquino in his sister's home in San Francisco. In the interview, Aquino drew up three future scenarios that could unfold in the Philippines. The first scenario envisioned Imelda assuming the presidency. Aquino projected that Marcos had already set the stage for his wife to take over, and the ruling coalition would have strong incentives to rally behind her leadership. Corruption, repression, and political polarization would deepen under her rule. The military would then make her a scapegoat for the country's ills, creating an opening for them to step in and seize control. Two paths could follow. One possibility is that the U.S. withdraws its support from the military; this would lead to a communist takeover. The second path involves the U.S. continuing its support of the military, which could escalate into an actual confrontation between the U.S.-backed military and the communists.[6]

Aquino's second scenario was straightforward: the communists would storm the Palace and forcibly remove Marcos from power. In the interview, however, Ninoy warned the "moderates" of the pitfalls of striking a deal or cooperating with the Left. He told Spencer:

> The moment you go along with armed struggle, you develop a new cadre of leaders: the killers. And the killers of today can't be the leaders of tomorrow. No way. You see, when you emerge from armed revolution, it's the muscleman, the guy who has killed ten thousand people, who emerges as the leader . . . Now the dilemma of the moderates is, the moment you take that path, kid, you're an amateur compared to the Communists. They've been at it for 30 years. You will end up bedding with them, and then in the end—like Nicaragua,

6 The original story from which this conversation was sourced for was published in June 1983 in *Mother Jones.* It was entitled "The Palace Plot," co-auuthored with Jack Cheevers.

they take over. (1984, p. 19)

The last scenario was the most ideal for Aquino. Though he knew it was unlikely, he believed in it strongly enough that his return home was premised on it: the possibility of negotiating a "rational peaceful transition with Marcos." (Sherman, 1984, p. 20) Aquino hoped that Marcos understood the growing threats to his administration and that he was "patriotic enough to return democracy to his people." According to Aquino, Marcos would be willing to engage with the opposition, but only if the U.S. used its leverage to restore basic freedoms to the Filipino people (p. 20).

Another major player in the anti-Marcos opposition was the Philippine Left, which included groups aligned with the CPP and the NPA, and its broad coalition, the National Democratic Front (NDF). The Left also included politicians like former Senators Jose W. Diokno and Lorenzo Tañada who were staunch critics of U.S. intervention in Philippine affairs. However, their willingness to work within existing legal frameworks also set them apart from the CPP, which sought to overthrow the state through armed struggle. Despite their deep ideological differences, some key figures within these groups made earnest, though often unsuccessful, attempts to build a united, broad-based alliance aimed at bringing down the dictatorship.

Teodoro M. Locsin, who owned *The Philippine Free Press,* a weekly English magazine known for its sharp criticism of politics and which was closed by martial law,[7] wrote about the possible paths that were available to the moderate opposition. Locsin outlined three options: waging an armed revolution, boycotting the 1984 midterm elections, or participating in the electoral process (Locsin, 1984). The first was beyond its capacity, while the last two, he argued, would not be enough to topple the dictatorship. He believed that the opposition's main task was to unite, despite their ideological (and other) differences. In his view, the program for a successor government should be a secondary concern. Instead, he emphasized the need to fight the ruling regime "under intelligent and unified direction (Locsin, 1984, p. 7)" Locsin acknowledged that "however nauseating the prospect of another American liberation may be to the vociferous but equally impotent

7 When Aquino was killed, a tide of anger and grief swept through the country. The government refused to provide reliable information about the assassination, so the public pushed back against censorship and boycotted government- and crony-controlled media. Meanwhile, the so-called "mosquito press" gained ground. Ang Pahayagang Malaya and Mr. & Ms. saw their readership grow, and smaller tabloids covering the assassination began to emerge. Many would later call this moment the "pseudo-liberalization of the press."

nationalist fringe of the opposition," it was the withdrawal of support by the Americans from the Marcos administration that would lead the way to a democratic restoration (p. 7). Locsin was doubtful whether a return to democracy was aligned with American interests but argued that the U.S. had a "moral interest" in supporting it (1984, p. 7).

Locsin (1984) also posited that supporting a democratic transition would not be detrimental to American interests. First, he noted that a prolonged Marcos rule would be beneficial for the communists. The longer the U.S. supported a dictatorship that Filipinos found insufferable, many would, in no time, assume more anti-American positions. Still, he believed that the U.S. was unlikely to push Marcos to resign and allow a democratic government to take over. American interests had been served under the dictatorship, and Marcos had ensured that the fulfillment of these interests rested solely on him. Finally, Locsin prescribed an option that the U.S. could take to avoid chaos:

> Here is a gamble the US can take: press for a transition government that would lead to the restoration of democracy — *when he goes, not now*. His immediate resignation should be asked for by the U.S. . . . Marcos may say yes or he may say no. The gamble is worth taking. Meanwhile, the U.S. should make clear that his would-be successors that they may face U.S. economic reprisals should they attempt to abort the restoration of democracy in this unhappy land. (1984, p. 29, emphasis mine)

While the former *Free Press* publisher-editor was a realist and looked at the future on the basis on what he thought was possible, Jose W. Diokno was the opposite. He believed in the potential power of the opposition, despite their weaknesses. He was a senator from 1963 until he was arrested upon the declaration of martial law on September 23, 1972. In March 1983, he founded *Kilusan sa Kapangyarihan at Karapatan ng Bayan* (Movement for People's Sovereignty and Democracy) or KAAKBAY. Later that year, in November 1983, he joined the May and Nemenzo conference, the only opposition leader in an academic forum.

In that conference, Diokno (1985) identified two likely scenarios for the regime's downfall. In the *first* scenario, he predicted that a political vacuum would emerge which would allow maneuvering by key actors within Marcos's inner circle. Imelda, with the support of Ver, would circumvent the constitutional succession process, jockey for the leadership of the Executive Committee, impose martial law, and postpone the election. Alternatively, if elections were deemed beneficial to her, Imelda would position herself as a presidential candidate.

Diokno foresaw that Marcos's sudden departure from the scene because of his health crisis would yield a more volatile future for the country and would make the prospects for free and fair elections remote. The *other* scenario involved Marcos resigning due to pressure from the opposition. If they were to succeed in this objective, a transitional government with the support of the public should, in four months, call for free and honest elections, restore democratic institutions, grant a "general and unconditional amnesty" to political detainees and those facing persecution on political grounds, launch a thorough investigation of the Aquino assassination, address the grievances of Philippine minorities, and negotiate better terms for foreign loans (1985, p. 4). In both scenarios, Diokno believed that the military, trained to respect civilian rule but weakened by internal factionalism, would play only a secondary role. A military takeover, he argued, would be unlikely without U.S. support. A known critic of U.S. intervention in Filipino affairs, Diokno insisted that the Philippines must "forge the future in its own way" (1985, p. 5).

Jose Maria Sison (2013), who was the founder of the CPP, had a different take.[8] He argued that the dictatorship was beneficial to the "Philippine revolution" because it created the necessary conditions for it (2013a, p. 160). More than a year before the Aquino assassination, he saw that the "objective conditions for waging armed revolution in the Philippines will become even more excellent within the decade" (2013a, p. 155). When Aquino was assassinated in August 1983, Sison saw it as a pivotal moment that the anti-dictatorship forces needed to seize. He saw a movement emerging out of the assassination as an important force within the broad democratic mass movement that would challenge the Marcos dictatorship and the U.S. through sustained and escalating actions.

On March 22, 1982, in a statement titled "Prospects of the Revolution in the Philippines," Sison reported the growing strength of the party and its armed wing. Sison anticipated that the strategic defensive stage would reach maturity by the decade's end, and thus considered the possibility that the strategic offensive stage could advance toward a general offensive, which would ultimately culminate

8 He continued to influence the party after his arrest on November 11, 1977 through statements and letters smuggled from his prison cell. In *Detention and Defiance Against Dictatorship: Selected Writings*, 1977 to 1986, Sison recalled that by 1979, he had gained access to "more informative materials" (2013, p.1). These sources became the basis for his writings on the "doomed direction of the autocratic regime" and the "long losing course of the reactionary armed forces" (2013, p.1)

in the revolution.[9] Furthermore, Sison argued that the legal opposition would "amount to nothing either to Marcos or the U.S. if they are unable to relate themselves properly to the armed revolutionaries by cooperating with and extending logistical support to them, organizing their own armed groups and developing influence within the reactionary armed forces" (2013a, p. 156). He posited the necessity of a united "antifascist" front of diverse persuasions with the singular goal of overthrowing the dictatorship. Together, Sison said, they could topple the dictatorship within the decade.[10] Once Marcos was out, they could form a "democratic coalition government" that would share power depending on "basic interests of the people and the relative strengths of the participating parties and groups" (2013a, p. 157).

What would spell the end of the regime, Sison argued, was the strengthening of both the legal opposition and the armed revolutionary movement. Here, "the legal organization of workers, peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie, especially the students and teachers" would lead the way toward a "comprehensive legal democratic movement" (2013a, p. 157). Their growing mobilization, he suggested, would provoke harsher repression from the regime, which would compel them to join the armed revolutionary movement. At a certain point, the U.S. might start pulling back its support for Marcos, whether by stalling loan approvals or cutting them down altogether. Similarly, in a message to the *Kongreso ng Mamamayang Pilipino* (KOMPIL), a broad coalition of anti-Marcos forces formed in 1984, Sison (2013b) estimated that the U.S. would withdraw its support for Marcos once the armed movement had reached the stage of a strategic stalemate, a significant portion of the legal opposition had gone underground, and the discontent among the AFP had become more pronounced.

Shortly after Marcos expressed his intention to hold a snap election in November 1985, Sison (2013d) was interviewed by *Philippine News and Feature,* a Manila-based news outlet. In the interview, he argued that holding a snap election was a maneuver by the U.S. to install another pro-U.S. government, as it was cultivating candidates on both

9 Maoist ideology in the Philippines is rooted in the strategy of protracted people's war—building a mass base, waging guerrilla warfare in the countryside, and eventually encircling cities to seize power. This unfolds in three stages: the strategic defensive, where guerrillas establish footholds while avoiding decisive battles; the strategic stalemate, where they win key tactical victories but cannot take the center, while the state fails to crush the insurgency; and the strategic offensive, where the balance shifts toward the revolution.

10 Elements of the NDF played a role in organizing mass actions, such as the *welgang bayan*, which took place in various parts of the country.

sides, namely the KBL and the opposition. Asked about post-election scenarios, Sison was blunt; the opposition stood no chance against Marcos's machinery—unless the U.S. reined him in, fearing backlash from a public unwilling to endure another six years under his rule. He was certain that Marcos would rig the election, which would further deepen the political crisis. As he had previously argued, the worsening situation would only serve to advance the revolutionary armed movement's objectives.

Key figures in the U.S. government, most notably Reagan, invoked the specter of communism to justify continued support for the Marcos regime. This was consistent with Cold War imperatives and longstanding concerns over the strategic importance of U.S. bases in the Philippines. This framing, however, was at odds with the realities on the ground. Though the NDF showed promise in mass mobilization (Nemenzo, 2024, p. 209), the CPP was not in a position to immediately mount a successful military victory against the AFP, as Sison himself conceded.

But the communist threat was not only played up by the regime's supporters; even members of the opposition drew on these fears to strengthen their case. The basic premise of Aquino's rhetoric was that either the moderate opposition assumed leadership or the country risked falling into communist hands. Locsin echoed a similar view, that a democratic restoration led by the moderate opposition was not only America's moral obligation, but is aligned with their strategic interests. Diokno was also talking to the Americans, but his plea was for them to not intervene. Whether grounded in optimism or a measure of political naivete, he expressed genuine faith in the opposition's ability to forge a peaceful, democratic transition beyond the Marcos regime, independent of U.S. involvement.

For opposition leaders, the realities on the ground carried little weight in shaping their projections about the Marcos regime's future. Their forecasts served less as diagnoses than as strategic communications, aimed at American policymakers, fellow actors in the anti-dictatorship movement, and the engaged and mobilizable sectors of the Filipino public. These public pronouncements also functioned as advocacy tools in contentious debates over the viability of collaboration between leftist forces and the traditional opposition, and over the merits of U.S. intervention as a mechanism for ousting Marcos.

Conclusion

In 1972, Marcos declared Martial Law, claiming that only he could restore peace, order, and stability to a nation he portrayed as teetering on the brink of a communist takeover and a Muslim secessionist

movement. He justified his concentration of power by insisting that a strong hand in government was necessary to curb crime and lawlessness, an authority that, he argued, only he could wield effectively. Yet it was this very concentration of power in one man that made his regime as fragile as his own body. When he deteriorated, so did the state machine he built around himself. The decline of this authoritarian apparatus thus prompted actors to scramble to narrate what might happen next. These speculative discourses were shaped by their institutional roles, strategic priorities, and ideological commitments. As the foregoing discussion suggests, political forecasting during this uncertain period, whether they were for public audiences or conducted within the context of covert operations, functioned less as a strategy for foresight than as a mode of persuasion. They were not merely idle intellectual exercises nor were they simply about contingency planning. The political forecasts served as tools of influence aimed at shaping elite consensus and steering public sentiment toward desired outcomes.

CPP founder Jose Ma. Sison, for example, devoted his writings to convincing the moderate opposition that joining the "antifascist front" was to their best interests. Some moderate opposition leaders, on the other hand, went so far as to seek U.S. support for their objectives, even if it meant overstating their capabilities. Yet virtually no one in the American intelligence community recommended active support for the moderate bloc, because a dominant faction within the White House was firmly committed to keeping Marcos in power.

To further illustrate this point, some anti-Marcos opposition figures appeared optimistic about the possibility of genuine change after Marcos. Aquino and Diokno believed that Marcos could be pressured or persuaded to step down peacefully and transfer power to a transitional body that would restore constitutional democracy. Although they may have doubted the feasibility of their own propositions—Aquino, after all, was a known realist—they had to make it sound possible through their writings, persuading others (especially American audiences) and positioning themselves as potential leaders of a post-Marcos transition. It is unlikely that Aquino genuinely saw a communist takeover as imminent when he was writing in 1983, because even Sison, who had every incentive to exaggerate the strength of the party and its armed wing, conceded that a potential stalemate would materialize until the end of the decade. One could argue that Aquino needed to amplify the threat to frame the moderate opposition as the more palatable alternative.

These speculative narratives, therefore, functioned as tools for framing alliances and identifying adversaries. Embedded within them were ideological investments, assertions about who deserved

to gain power and which futures were tolerable. Such discourse also justified action or inaction. For example, the American intelligence community's dismissal of the moderate opposition, attributed to its failure to consolidate its own ranks, served to justify continued support for Marcos, who was portrayed as both capable and willing to institute reforms.

Another point I would like to make is that narratives of speculation are themselves historical artifacts which were shaped by contexts and contingencies in that crisis-laden period. By studying these future-oriented texts, we understand how crisis was historicized in the moment: how actors interpret unfolding events through the lens of historical analogies, patterns, or moral frameworks to make sense of their present.

For instance, many of these authors were skeptical that genuine democracy or meaningful systemic change could emerge immediately after Marcos. They saw that the neocolonial relationship with the U.S. and patronage politics remained deeply entrenched in Philippine political culture. With no tradition of broad-based parties capable of articulating the people's needs and interests, the post-Marcos arrangements would function less as a vehicle for real change and more as a pressure valve. It would allow limited concessions, not to transform the system, but simply to release tension and keep moderate forces from radicalizing, all while preventing a communist takeover. Similarly, scholars like Constantino and Cariño believed that any post-Marcos administration would act as mere caretakers of an economic system shaped by American influence.

Looking at these forecasts also provides insights into how certain actors were expected to behave. While there were fears that the military had been deeply politicized after more than a decade of martial rule, it was still largely seen as an institution that would intervene only when necessary (or at least, only when they can reasonably justify it). The Filipino public, on the other hand, was seen as a more passive force, one that could be radicalized, driven to violence by anxiety or economic hardship, and subdued through military force. The moderate opposition was seen as an unwieldy group, lacking strategy, driven by narrow interests, and ultimately incapable of mounting a formidable challenge to the dictatorship. The Left, who were often seen as opportunists, was ready to exploit the confusion and turbulence of the post-Marcos transition.

As historical artifacts, these forecasts illuminate the atmosphere of the period as it revealed the layered anxieties that cut across the ideological spectrum. The Americans, consumed by Cold War

imperatives, feared either a communist takeover or the rise of a more nationalist-leaning government, one that would be more accountable to its people than to the United States. Installing democratic institutions was hardly the priority of the Americans, because they were preoccupied with achieving stability to guard their strategic interests more than anything else. The Left, on the other hand, worried that they might fail to capitalize on a critical juncture: Marcos had created the material conditions for a revolution, but their gains could be lost depending on how events unfolded. Meanwhile, the moderate opposition feared a violent rupture—whether from the communists or the military—and the possibility of becoming politically irrelevant under the new dispensation.

Speculating about the future did not emerge in the Philippines only in the 1980s. Dr. Jose Rizal famously wrote *Filipinas dentro de Cien Años* (Philippines: A Century Hence) as articles in *La Solidaridad* through 1889 to 1890. His work offered not just forecasts but insights into the political temporality of his age, layered with rhetorical precision and ideological clarity. Seen through this lens, and as explored in the foregoing discussion, the act of forecasting emerges not just as a historical artifact, but as a historiographic field: layered, contested, and rich in possibility.

Bionote

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