Aiding Development, Aiding Repression? Australian Aid and the Human Rights Violations in the Philippines under Marcos' Martial Law

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Abstract

During the Martial Law period (1972-1986), the Philippines was on the receiving end of aid provided by Australian aid among other international financial institutions aimed to alleviate poverty and foster development in the Third World. Existing scholarship on Australian and Philippine relations during this period largely revolve around the latter's strategic location for regional trade and the presence of United States (US) military bases. This study aims to look at the impact of Australian aid concerning the human rights situation in the Philippines during Martial Law. In the spirit of international cooperation and regional stability, Australia funded humanitarian projects such as integrated rural development projects in Zamboanga del Sur and Northern Samar. This study takes off from Walden Bello's work, "Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Philippines" that discusses disasters brought about by foreign aid. It first gives a general overview of the Australian-Philippine aid during the period and some of the projects that were funded as a result. It then focuses on how Australian aid impacted the militarization of the countryside and the repression of human rights in the Philippines, drawing on specific incidents such as the Sag-od Massacre of Northern Samar, and the trial of Australian priest Fr. Brian Gore.

Keywords: *Philippine-Australian relations, aid, development, Human rights violations, Martial Law*

Introduction

On February 10, 1974, Malacañang Palace hosted a dinner in honor of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, marking the first visit of an Australian Prime Minister to the Philippines (Marcos, 1979). Following United States (US) President Richard Nixon's statement for countries to be more "self-reliant" against the backdrop of the Cold War, Australia found itself strengthening its' alliance with the Philippines through the visit to build up their nation's security (Lim, 1987). For the occasion, then Philippine President Ferdinand E. Marcos delivered a speech "Cooperation with Australia" (Marcos, 1979). Several months earlier, the country was placed under Martial Law, wherein democratic rule was replaced by a dictatorship headed by Marcos himself. Through his speech, Marcos took the opportunity to justify his declaration of Martial Law to the Australian Prime Minister despite the Australian media's critical stance on Martial Law and the Prime Minister's resistance to endorse it (Lim, 1987). In his speech, Marcos declared that his use of the "law of the gun" was not only to

> dismantle a rebellion… but to extirpate the causes, the political, the social, and the economic causes of rebellion, the discontent of our people, the injustices, the inequity. (1979, p. 11)

Time would demonstrate that Martial Law was detrimental for the country, aggravating opposition to the state as the country's economy worsened and thousands suffered from the state's violation of human rights.

The dinner in Malacañang marked the forging of closer and improved bilateral relations between Australia and the Philippines, following the relatively lack of familiarity between the two countries. Later during his visit, Whitlam announced the establishment of the Philippine-Australian Development Assistance Program (PADAP), marking the beginnings of the pouring in of Australian aid into the Philippines in the context of Martial Law. In 1979, Australia funded another Integrated Area Development (IAD) project into the Philippines, namely the Northern Samar Integrated Rural Development Program (NSIRDP). Aside from these IAD projects, under Marcos, the Australian government also began aiding the Philippine military through the Defence Co-Operation Program. However, Marcos' falsehoods in his speech would foreshadow the relationship of the two countries during the rest of Marcos' rule, especially in the context of foreign aid and human rights (Lim, 1987).

As these IAD projects continued, criticism later intensified in both countries on the mismanagement of aid. They were viewed as ineffective

for not targeting the poorest residents of Zamboanga del Sur and Northern Samar. Attention was also drawn to rising human rights violations in the two provinces receiving Australian aid. This prompted criticism that Australian aid was not aiding development, but rather, aiding repression. (Sibraa, 1986).

The conflicting effects of aid in the Philippines raises questions of concern. In the spirit of international cooperation and regional stability, Australia provided developmental aid to the Philippines as the two countries forged closer ties with each other. This brings us to the primary research question of this study: what was the relationship between Australian aid and human rights abuses in the Philippines during Martial Law?

The study explores the connection between Australian aid and human rights abuses in the Philippines during Martial Law. It argues that although Australia's intentions for foreign aid were generally in favor for the country's development, it was later seen as a symbol for aiding repression as its' provision brought legitimacy to the Marcos government. Due to increased militarization and discontent with Marcos, the local people who opposed or were suspected of opposing him were terrorized and harassed instead of benefitting from Australian developmental assistance. The discussion will first focus on Marcos' declaration of Martial Law in relation to human rights abuses and the economy's plunder, Australian-Philippine relations, and the context of Australian aid during the period. It then looks at the rural development projects which Australia undertook, the criticism raised against them, and their implications to human rights violations, and the Australian Parliament's subsequent investigations.

This paper serves as an initial exploration of the issues related to Australian aid and human rights violations in the Philippines during the Marcos dictatorship. It highlights the concerns that prompted the Australian government to examine the consequences of its relationship with the Philippines. The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence's Parliamentary report, which was titled "Australia and the Philippines: The Situation in the Philippines and its Implications for Australia," drew attention to different human rights issues such as labor and "sex tours."[1] However, the paper's discussion will focus on civil-political rights, especially on issues such as militarization, killings, imprisonment, and state repression. Robyn Lim's monograph, *Australian relations with the Philippines during the Marcos Years: A study in the implications of the Nixon doctrine* (1987) is an important foundation to

[1] Organized "sex tours" was one of the problems during Martial Law. These "sex tours" refer to tourists visiting the Philippines primarily for prostitution purposes.

the study as a pioneering piece of scholarship to Philippine-Australian relations.

Marcos' Martial Law, the Cold War, and Human Rights

On December 10, 1948, the Philippines was one of the 48 countries which ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), displaying the country's commitment to protecting human rights following the violent destruction and harrowing loss of life during World War II (Elwood, 1990). Less than a quarter of a century later, human rights in the country were curtailed when Marcos placed the country under Martial Law on September 21, 1972. Marcos cited the rising communist rebellion from the New People's Army (NPA) and the Muslim secessionist movement in the south led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) as key reasons for declaring Martial Law (Proclaiming a State of Marial Law in the Philippines, 1972). Marcos, however, declared Martial Law to wield absolute power over the country (Mijares, 2017). Martial Law was a premeditated move wherein Marcos used several tactics to grab power, including winning the military's trust, gaining control of the Supreme Court, and securing US backing by convincing US of the threat of communist rebellion against the Cold War's backdrop (Robles & Robles, 2016).

Against the backdrop of Martial Law was the Cold War, which Marcos exploited to his advantage. In the conflict between Washington's capitalism and Moscow's communism, countries in the Third World were forced to choose between the two dominant systems (Bevins, 2021). The US viewed Third World countries unaligned with them as a threat and sought to bring them under its sphere of influence, even if it meant supporting extermination programs of authoritarian leaders that led to the curtailment of human rights and the loss of life (Bevins, 2021). Despite being one of the strongest proponents for the passage of the UDHR, the US was not as consistent in defending human rights especially when it came to winning the Cold War. Human rights was used whenever convenient in advancing its interests and immediately discarded when beneficial to them (Ishay, 2008). As Micheline R. Ishay writes "the United States soon dropped whichever elements of liberal human rights seemed incompatible with state power and the interests of private capital" (Ishay, 2008, p. 27).

Marcos wielded absolute power under Martial Law. In winning the military's trust, Marcos made sure they remained subservient to him as they carried out his agenda (Robles & Robles, 2016). Based on his official declaration, the military were supposed to go against those in open rebellion against him, which included the NPA and the MNLF (Proclaiming a State of Marial Law in the Philippines, 1972). But on the night Martial Law was declared, the military arrested all his critics,

ranging from statesmen, journalists, and student activists. State repression was used against anyone opposing Marcos, and those who opposed him were branded as threats to the state (Mijares, 2017). The military abused their power against those who criticized the government. Throughout the Martial Law period, the military increasingly used violence against those who opposed, were suspected of opposing, and were considered in the way of Marcos' and his cronies' interests.

According to the data from the Human Rights Victims' Claims Board (HRVCB), the Philippine state recognizes 11,103 victims of various human rights abuses such as killing, enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary detention, and physical injuries during Martial Law (*Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission* 2022). Amnesty International (AI), however, records that 70,000 were imprisoned, 34,000 tortured, and 3,240 killed (Bicker, 2022). Cases of violence were spread unevenly throughout the country. According to Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), a church-based NGO that monitored the human rights situation in the country, about 46.6% or the 9,079 documented cases of human rights violations took place in Mindanao (ABS-CBN Investigative & Research Group, 2018). TIME Magazine notes that places considered as NPA strongholds such as Samar, Negros, Bicol, and Cagayan-Isabela also record a high number of cases (Tifft, 1986). Human rights abuses were typically justified as the victims were allegedly part of the insurgency or simply against the government (Robles & Robles, 2016).

Foreign Aid and Marcos

Marcos abused the total control he wielded over the country. The government was placed to serve his and his cronies' interests. Marcos' cronies were granted key positions and control of industries, consolidating Marcos' hold over power. Nepotism was rampant as family members, friends, and associates close to Marcos controlled the economy. Marcos was also notorious for plundering the nation's economy, leaving the country in billions of dollars of debt when he was forced out of power (Manapat, 1991).

One source of Marcos' economic pillaging was the diversion or misappropriation of foreign aids and loans (Aquino, 1999). Belinda Aquino writes that investigations requested by Sen. Edward Kennedy found that $350 million USD out of the $460 million USD of US aid sent to the Philippines from 1982-1985 was unaccounted for. It was discovered that the money was sent to shell corporations associated with Marcos or his cronies (Aquino, 1999).

Despite corruption allegations, Marcos continued receiving support from international lenders. A key factor was the prevailing "Blank

State" ideology on aid and development at that time (Easterly, 2021). This ideology, as promoted by Gunnar Myrdal, saw the resolution of an impoverished society through technical remedies, disregarding the community's history and dynamics (Easterly, 2021). This contrasts with the idea of free development as advocated by Friedrich Hayek, who argued that "the only truly progressive policy" is one that supports "freedom for the individual" (Easterly, 2021, p. 19). William Easterly argues that the cause of poverty is "unchecked power of the state against poor people without rights" (2021, p. 6).

In the case of the Philippines, following his reelection as President in 1969, Marcos was caught in a "Debt Trap" (Bello, 1982). Marcos acquiesced to the policies imposed by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to borrow money from them, beginning with breaking his campaign promise to not devalue the Philippine Peso (Bello, 1982). Vivencio Jose claims that ultimately, it is the people who are burdened by the loans contracted by the government. (1983, p. 204-205) He adds that the World Bank's and IMF's imposition of austerity measures to countries heavily indebted to them to pay back their loans leads to the worsening of the economy (Jose, 1983).

In his work, Bello (1982) discuss some of the disasters brought about by foreign aid which left the supposed beneficiaries of foreign aid in a worse off position. The WB and IMF were initially supportive of a Marcos dictatorship, believing in the "myth of authoritarian efficiency" to implement key reforms in the Philippine economy (Bello, 1982, p. 43). Then-WB President Robert McNamara forwarded the strategy of rural development in response to pacifying insurgencies plaguing developing countries. Projects such as the Masagana 99 were disastrous, leaving thousands of farmers in debt (Bello, 1982).

The WB also participated in Marcos' "Integrated Area Development" (IAD). The rationale for this project was that investing in rural development would reduce poverty and diminish discontent towards the government, ultimately steering people away from insurgency. Bello remarks that this was a "thinly-disguised counterinsurgency scheme" designed to contain the NPA. Areas targeted by the IAD include Bicol, Mindoro, and Samar (Bello, 1982). Australia then found itself partly financing Zamboanga and Samar's IAD projects as it forged closer ties with the Philippine government under Marcos.

Australian Aid

The origin of Australian aid is usually associated with the Colombo Plan in 1950. Australia's main considerations for foreign policy then were political instability and communism, factors influencing the nation to join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in

the 1950s. The idea of aid's role relative to development emerged in the 1960s, a factor that witnessed the shift in the management of Australian aid ideologically (Corbett, 2019). More practitioners and theorists began advocating for focus on the poor's 'basic needs,' which the Whitlam government considered in establishing the Australian Development Assistance Agency (ADAA) (Connell, 1986).

In perfecting their policy for aid, the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program presented its Report to the Minister for Foreign Affairs Bill Hayden. The Report subsequently became known as the Jackson Report as the Review Committee was chaired by Sir Gordon Jackson (Jackson, 1984). MP Hayden wanted to review the following aspects concerning Australian aid: equity, Australian interests, effectiveness, multilateral/ bilateral aid, geographic distribution, terms of aid, Australian resources, and administration (Elridge et al., 1986).

The Jackson Report was received favorably but met criticism concerning "serious inconsistencies in its assessments of goals and priorities" (Elridge, 1986, 4). The opening statement may be subject to "conflicting interpretations," stating that:

> Aid is given primarily for humanitarian reasons to alleviate poverty through economic and social development. It is the response of the wealthy industrial countries to the needs of hundreds of millions of people who live harsh and materially meagre lives. Aid also complements strategic, economic and foreign policy interests, and by helping developing countries to grow, it provides economic opportunities for Australia (Jackson, 1984, p. 3).

While affirming that aid is given for humanitarian purposes, commercial, security, and diplomatic interests are also considered (Elridge et al., 1986). In his report which gives a general overview of Australian humanitarian aid, these conflicting considerations can be reconciled by focusing on development, which is measured by looking at economic growth (Elridge, 1986). However, such reasoning can be used to support repressive regimes, including the Philippines under Marcos (Langmore, 1986).

Aid to ASEAN countries is also mentioned in the Jackson Report. In evaluating strategic interests, the Jackson Report emphasizes that aid should be focused on neighboring regions, including Southeast Asia. This is reflected in the Report's Country Programming priority, placing the region at Category II (Jackson, 1984). In 1983-84, Southeast Asian countries received the most aid for Asian countries, with the Philippines and Thailand receiving an increasing share because of their

growing diplomatic significance (Forbes, 1986).

Among the more controversial issues considered in providing aid for the region include the withholding of political aid to the region especially in discussing human rights. One example is the stoppage of aid to Vietnam following its' invasion of Cambodia, which is inconsistent when considering how military aid to Indonesia was relatively unaffected despite the human rights violations reported during its' invasion of East Timor in 1975 (Forbes, 1986). Such inconsistency regarding human rights became a subject up for debate in Australian society when concerns were raised on the human rights situation in regions directly receiving Australian aid.

Australian-Philippine Relations

The Philippines is part of the "near north" relative to its geographic position to Australia (Forbes, 1986). Ironically, neither of these countries were quite familiar with each other prior to the cultivation of closer relations in the 1970s (Lim, 1987). During the postwar period, relations between the two suffered embarrassment resulting from the White Australia policy wherein Lorenzo Gamboa, a Filipino war veteran, was denied entry to Australia despite being married to an Australian citizen (Sullivan, 1993). Despite this, both countries were generally aligned with each other in terms of security interests given their relationship with the United States. Both countries had defense treaties with the United States: the Philippines with the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) and Australia with the Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty) (David-Balaba, 1993).

In 1969, US President Richard Nixon announced the Nixon Doctrine, defined as the "guidelines for future American policy towards Asia," causing a change in the status quo of international affairs (Richard Nixon Foundation, 2017). Nixon promised that the US "will keep all of its treaty commitments," but expected partner nations to be more self-reliant (Richard Nixon Foundation, 2017). Australia was forced to develop its multilateral ties with other countries, especially in the context of the Vietnam War (Lim, 1987).

Australia had many reasons to cultivate its ties to the Philippines, as articulated by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Department of National Defence. The Department of Foreign Affairs stressed to the Philippines' location and alliance with the United States. The Philippines' territorial integrity and national cohesion is to the advantage of Australia, given the former's sympathetic attitude to the latter and the West (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1985). Meanwhile, the Department of National Defence highlights the presence of US bases, aligning with Australia's security interests during that time.

Australia was also aware of the growing communist insurgency in the Philippines. Aiding the Philippines through development and defense would then be seen as an edge to Australia's global interest (Department of Defence, 1985).

The Philippines and Australia were also brought closer together when the Whitlam government assumed power in December 1972 (Lim, 1987). Whitlam was remembered as "the first true champion of Australian aid," presenting an opportunity for the Philippines to receive a larger share of Australian aid (Corbett, 2019, 33). From 1970-71, total Australian aid to the Philippines amounted to $356,000.00 AUD or 0.3% of total aid to Asia (Lim, 1987). But by 1984-85, the Philippines was the 5th country to receive the most Australian aid (Sibraa, 1986).

Philippine-Australian Development Assistance Program

Australian aid funded two Integrated Area Development projects in the Philippines: the Philippine-Australian Development Assistance Program (PADAP) in Zamboanga del Sur which comprises the present-day provinces of Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga Sibugay, and the Northern Samar Integrated Rural Development Program (NSIRDP) in Northern Samar. The PADAP, which was also known as the Zamboanga del Sur Development Project (ZDSDP) was "an extensive program of infrastructure, agriculture, and social development" (National Economic and Development Authority et al., 1989, ix). It also carried out trainings and other support which aimed to strengthen "the capacity and capability of the provincial and national agencies to sustain and expand project development initiatives" (National Economic and Development Authority et al., 1989, ix). The ultimate goal of the project was "to raise the living standards of the majority in the area, which is brought about with the development of infrastructure and agricultural programs" (Tolentino et al., 1983, p. 1).

The project was first conceptualized in 1972 from discussions between the Australian Ambassador and Philippine authorities (Aberdeen, 1983b). Zamboanga del Sur was identified as the target for Australian aid following two Australian Appraisal Missions in 1973 (Aberdeen, 1983b). Robyn Lim (1987, pp. 24-25) writes that the province was selected as it was in an area "badly neglected" in terms of development, facing problems such as infant mortality, inadequate medical services, and unequal income distribution. Its selection also reflected Australian naivety on the Philippines. Australia depended heavily on Executive Secretary Alejandro Melchor concerning the project, and there was a "marked absence of procedures on project appraisal and aid bureaucracy" (Lim, 1987).

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the project was signed on April 25, 1974, specifying that economic studies would be conducted concerning the construction of roads, irrigations, and other development projects along with the actual execution of these projects. The project was a joint venture between both governments. Australia provided the "professional and technical staff," along with various equipment and materials that would be used for the project, while the Philippines will be providing counterpart funding and staff, along with the offices and accommodation of the personnel (Philippine-Australian Development Assistance Program Inter-Agency Executive Committee, 1975). In total, Australia spent $50.4 million AUD, while the Philippines shelled out $43.1 million AUD (National Economic and Development Authority et al., 1989). The project was split into two phases: ZDSDP I (1974-1979) and ZDSDP II (1981-1985). According to the Administrative Development Center of the College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines, Australia was initially involved only in the first phase, but later extended support into the second phase, aiming for local institutionalization upon project completion. (The Administrative Development Center College of Public Administration University of the Philippines, 1982).

The ZDSDP was divided into three components: infrastructure, agriculture, and social services, and divided into four areas: Sibuguey, Baganian, Salug, and Pagadian (Aberdeen, 1983b). Consistent with the integrated rural development ideology, the focus of ZDSDP I was initially on the construction of roads, believing that this will "accelerate rural progress and lead to balanced development" (Ole, 1983, 172). Furthermore, a 1973 study in South America also justified the prioritization of roads in development projects, as they were seen as the "single most important element in the pioneering, consolidation, and growth of all projects" (Ole, 1983, 172). As the road construction progressed, the project began focusing on other components such as constructing potable water supply systems, the Sibuguey Valley Irrigation System, agricultural assistance programs related to multiple cropping, commercial tree crops, agroforestry and hillside farming systems, and livestock, poultry, and freshwater fisheries (Aberdeen, 1983b). Social development programs were also launched later into the advancement of ZDSDP II, following two sociological surveys commissioned by the project (Leenhouts, 1983).

The ZDSDP faced criticism during its implementation concerning the ineffectiveness of Australian aid. An earlier assessment indicated that the projects primarily benefitted the affluent members of the province, rather than the most disadvantaged sectors of the community (Aberdeen, 1983a). One example reported by Community Aid Abroad (CAA) was that the cows allocated through the Livestock Development

Project appeared to be granted based on local patronage and those with "more stable" farms (Richards, 1981, p. 47). The project managers recognized this and identified the need to focus ZDSDP II benefits on the most marginalized group, specifically small tenant upland farmers in the province (Aberdeen, 1983a).

A more glaring problem in the province was the peace and order situation, revolving around militarization, religious fanatics, and land grabbing cases. Safety was lacking in the area as elements of the MNLF found mostly in the coastal areas of Sibuguey and the Southeastern Baganian Peninsula, and the New People's Army (NPA) operating mostly in Salug clashed with the military (Tolentino et al., 1983). Areas where military operations were being conducted also recorded civilian abuses inflicted by the former (Startup & Laird, 1985). Other violent groups also operated in the area, such as "Rock Christ," whose acts of terror forced the Subanons to evacuate the area, and the Ilaga in Sibuguey who targeted Muslims (Tolentino et al., 1983).

Various religious and human rights groups documented the massive extent of terror and violence in the province. Twenty-one cases of military and government abuse were documented in Sibuguey by the Justice and Peace Commission of the San Jose Parish in Siay. Most of these cases were perpetrated by policemen, members of the Philippine Army, or armed men (Tolentino et al., 1983). A fact-finding mission was sponsored by the Philippine Conference for Human Rights (PCHR) in May 1985 due to the increasing reports of "deaths, arrests, massacres, evacuations, burnings, and lootings" by the military in Cotabato and Zamboanga del Sur (Startup & Laird, 1985, p. 1). The mission focused on the Sigacad Burning in Bayog, Sibuguey, the evacuations in Baganian Peninsula, and the increasing terror in Midsalip, Salug. During its tour, members of the mission were detained as they were returning to Pagadian City and were subsequently released with the intervention of Pagadian Bishop Antonio Tobias (Startup & Laird, 1985).

Another group that documented the violence in the area was TFDP. They were among the groups that co-sponsored the PCHR mission in May 1985 (Startup & Laird, 1985). In their submission of the "Situation in the Philippines" to the Australian Parliament, TFDP highlights the case of Midsalip, Zamboanga del Sur which they likened to a "howling wilderness." Various atrocities such as slaughter, arson, salvaging, unlawful arrests, torture, and shelling plagued the town. From October 1984 to March 1985, 36 civilians were massacred in seven separate incidents, including farmers, whole families, and children (Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, 1986).

Australian aid and the rising cases of terror in Zamboanga del

Sur was linked to the construction of roads, as they argued that the roads facilitated violence against the local people of Zamboanga del Sur because it improved the travel time of counterinsurgency forces (Ole, 1983). This criticism was prominently voiced out in an evaluation report of the ZDSDP. One example of this is in Margosatubig in the Baganian Peninsula. The constructed roads were beneficial for giving the town's residents easier access to the local hospital but also enabled faster military response to the insurgency threat in nearby Igat Island (Lim, 1987).

The proponents of ZDSDP strongly objected to the linking of its roads to violence in the province. The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs responded that "aid projects designed to improve living standards of the poor will most likely be in places with high levels of social tension and insurgency." (Lim, 1987, p. 22). Meanwhile, B. Trevor Ole, the project's agricultural economist, wrote that

> While the history of military involvement in the Province has been laced with incidents of oppression, they are present primarily as a peace keeping force. Problems arise when soldiers are located for extended periods in remote areas. They are often without funds and have no duties. The village must support their presence. With the arrival of a road the problem evaporates. Military requirements are satisfied by routine visits. Thus roads may ease rather than exacerbate any local problem with the military (1983, p. 173).

Ole's defense is clearly out of touch with reality. His description of the military presence as a "peace keeping force" contradicts the fact that there were dozens of documented cases of massacres, burnings, unlawful arrests, and other cases of harassment and violence by the military themselves. His callous defense deliberately ignores this and blindly sides with the military.

Despite the intentional neglect of military abuses by many of the supporters of ZDSDP, a survey commissioned by the PADAP acknowledged the peace and order situation. Conducted by the Institute of Philippine Culture of the Ateneo de Manila University, it served as a follow-up to a 1976 study that established the baseline information regarding the impact of PADAP on the province. Data collection was limited in Salug because of conflicts in the area. In Josefina town, only 5 of the 12 barangays were surveyed because massacres and militarization led the residents of other barangays to evacuate to the town center or nearby areas. One of the questions addressed community issues, with peace and order ranking as the second-highest concern regarding the most unpleasant thing occurring in the area. The survey recorded

above-average responses from the towns of Midsalip, Josefina, San Miguel, Dimataling, and Molave. Notably, it highlights that these towns were significantly impacted by the road improvements associated with the project, with the exception of Josefina (Tolentino et al., 1983).

Australians were also not immune to the violence in the region. Military protection was essential for Australian personnel to operate safely, as both the personnel and their families were evacuated to Cebu twice due to the worsening conflict (Lim, 1987). On February 16, 1981, a shoot-out in Kumalarang town between suspected Muslim rebels and two Australian engineers led to the death of an engineer and the serious injury of another (*Australian engineers kidnapped*, 1981). Stricter security measures were imposed, as some of the staff opted to return home while Australian mobility was limited to the east of Siay town instead of the entire province (The Administrative Development Center, 1982).

The ZDSDP's end in December 1985 led to the transfer of the project's assets, functions, and responsibilities to the Philippines (National Economic and Development Authority et al., 1989). As early as 1981, the IPC noted that the project led to "enormous changes in the countryside of Zamboanga del Sur as evidenced by the roads" (Tolentino et al., 1983, p. 287). Other positive changes include infant mortality reduction, school enrollment increase by 27%, and the increase of rural health personnel serving the province. The study also indicates that while access to government services has improved due to road development, it does not match the services provided. Although living conditions have enhanced, significant economic transformation is still lacking (Tolentino et al., 1983, p. 288). Meanwhile, a post-evaluation report by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) from April-May 1988 indicated that infrastructure projects had a greater development impact than agriculture and social development projects. 400 kilometers of roads and bridges were built, 656 potable water supply systems installed to serve 17,000 rural households, and the Sibuguey Valley Irrigation System provided water to 2,000 hectares, increasing rice production from 3,000 metric tons a year to 13,000 metric tons. However, post-project sustainability was recognized as needing improvement. Many ZDSDP projects could not be sustained through "normal government funding channels" (National Economic and Development Authority et al., 1989, p. xiii). The pulling-out of Australian input and personnel led to the decline of many programs (National Economic and Development Authority et al., 1989).

Despite these positive outputs, it is difficult to appreciate these developments when the region's residents are plagued with threats to their security and life. Many reports diminish the significance or

outrightly ignore the impact of peace and order to development. As the CAA report argues, "a stable environment is one in which development takes place" (Richards, 1981, p. 2).

Northern Samar Integrated Rural Development Project

After PADAP's commencement, the Philippine government requested Australian assistance to fund a rural development project in Samar. In 1978, negotiations culminated in Australia allocating $25 million AUD for the Northern Samar Integrated Rural Development Project (NSIRDP) for an initial period of five years. The project's contract was awarded to the firm Crooks, Michell, Peacock, and Stewart Pty Ltd (CMPS) (Lim, 1987). The NSIRDP was part of the Samar Integrated Rural Development Project (SIRDP) established in 1976 under Presidential Decree 1048. Similar to PADAP, most of its budget was allocated for infrastructure (Concerned Citizens for Human Rights (Samar), 1982), including road upgrades, improvements to San Jose port, a public wharf in Laoang, water supply work, and rural electrification (Woolfe, 1986, p. 4). While some roads were built, the NSIRDP primarily focused on enhancing the existing road network (Woolfe, 1986). Under the Marcos regime, the NSIRDP was left unfinished as Australian workers were evacuated from Samar in 1985 due to security concerns (Sibraa, 1986).

NSIRDP's inception coincided with increased militarization in the area, as Samar Island was a known NPA hotspot (Tifft, 1986). In 1979, it was reported that the NPA had approximately 500 armed members and a support base of 200,000 farmers, with Marcos deploying an additional 2,400 troops to the existing 4,000 in response (Wideman & Chapman, 1979). The conflict between the NPA and the military led to significant violence, resulting in evacuations, torture, and killings (*Samar: A Province in Conflict*, 1982). Reports indicated 5,000 people evacuated in Eastern Samar (Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines, 1979), 36,600 displaced in Northern Samar, and 1,600 fleeing from Samar province (International Commission on the Militarization of Samar, 1979). The torture and execution of farmer Zoilo Francisco in Northern Samar stirred controversy after his beheaded remains were displayed as an "example" for supposedly being an NPA member *(Samar: A Province in Conflict*, 1982).

Concerned human rights groups began calling for increased attention to the situation in Samar. Among the groups that responded was the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), an Australian-based Roman Catholic Church agency. The CCJP took an interest in monitoring the NSIRDP after attending the Fifth United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Manila. CCJP was prompted to write to then Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrew

Peacock about the possibility of monitoring the project (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1982b). Peacock responded positively to their request and connected them with the Australian Development Assistance Bureau (ADAB) (Woolfe, 1986).

The CCJP expressed concerns about project management, evaluation criteria, promotion aligned with human needs, and the lack of local consultation. They were alarmed by ADAB's indifference to militarization, while ADAB was skeptical towards CCJP's Philippine sources (Woolfe, 1986). During their briefing with ADAB in May 1981, CCJP planned to address issues like impact on target groups, infrastructure, credit, militarization, and health in their second briefing with ADAB (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1981a). Concerning militarization, CCJP (1981a) asked:

> 1. Has ADAB reassessed the rate of military build-up in the area?
>
> 2. What is the effect of the peace and order situation [terror and militarization] in this regard [socio-economic situation, economic activity]?
>
> 3. Does ADAB consider that the extent of military operations in the region justifies a re-appraisal of the project?

ADAB downplayed the seriousness of militarization, deeming the term "inappropriate." They claimed that the local government was under civilian control (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (1981b, p. 176), despite civilian officials being unable to oppose the military (Mila D. Aguilar, 2015). They minimized concerns about military abuses, referring to them as "random infringements" and "sporadic acts of terrorism" (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1981c, p. 185). This perspective overlooks the systematic abuses recorded by HRVCB from 1979-82 (Cabardo et al., 2021). Additionally, ADAB and Foreign Affairs questioned the credibility of CCJP sources, labeling them as "faulty and unreliable" (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1981c, p. 185).

The Second Briefing between ADAB and CCJP occurred on August 26, 1981, less than a month before the Sag-od Massacre in Las Navas, Northern Samar. The massacre witnessed the killing of 45 men, women, and children or approximately three-fourths of the barrio of Sag-od (Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, 1981). Survivors recount that they were woken up by armed men early in the morning, with the men separated from the women and the children. The latter group was then forced to cross the river and hike when they heard gunshots from the village. Later, the women and children were gunned, with some

survivors escaping death by running into the forest or by playing dead (Komite San Katawhan sa Hustisya ug Kamurayan, 1981).

Investigations by the Komite San Katawhan Para sa Hustisya ug Kamurayaw (KKHK) and the CCJP both identify the perpetrators as members of the "Lost Command," or Special Forces of the Integrated Civilian Home Defense Forces (SF-ICHDF) (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, ca. 1981). The reports showed that the SF-ICHDF doubled as security guards of the nearby logging concession San Jose Timber Corporation (Komite San Katawhan sa Hustisya ug Kamurayan, 1981). Ricardo Manapat's *Some Are Smarter than Others* identifies ownership of the concession by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile (Manapat, 1991). Enrile was later criticized for linking Australian aid with counterinsurgency activity (Lim, 1987). In a statement to the South China Morning Post, he remarked that "Australian development aid is helping the government stamp out insurgency in rural areas of the Philippines" (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, 1986, p. 562).

The massacre recorded the largest number of individuals killed in one incident in Samar Island and was deeply concerning for Australia. Australian journalist Graham Williams wrote that then-Ambassador Richard Woolcott publicly deplored the massacre as it happened in an area with Australian involvement (Williams, 1981). His article also aired the views of Dr. Dennis Shoesmith, a researcher for the Asia Bureau. Shoesmith condemned the irony of Australian aid leading to greater militarization when its original purpose was to "help the poor" and "not those who exploit and persecute them" (Williams, 1981, p. 7).

As news of the massacre began entering the Australian public consciousness in December 1981, the Sydney Morning Herald's editorial section published letters that debated Australian aid's involvement in the massacre. On December 14, Dr. Shoesmith's letter was published, echoing his idea of linking the massacre with Australian aid (Peacock, 1981). Three days later, another letter was published by C.J. Stapleton entitled, "The Filipinos need our aid." Stapleton, who was previously employed under CMPS, defended Australian aid to the province, claiming that the massacre had little to do with aid given to the region (Stapleton, 1981). On December 21, the Herald published the letter "Massacre account lacks balance," authored by E.E. Peacock, Chairman and Managing Director of CMPS. Concerning the massacre, he writes that "there is no evidence at all that the perpetrators were under local military control and indeed there is strong suggestion connecting it with thugs privately recruited for private commercial reasons" (1981, p. 6). The statement ignores the KKHK's report which connects the thugs to the government through Enrile, who had control over

Philippine defense. There were also those who came to the defense of Dr. Shoesmith, such as the letter of Wendy Poussard on December 18, that states "aid project lends ammunition to local fears of exploitation" (Poussard, 1981, p. 6). Another letter by Sandra Fritz's letter takes a strong stance against enabling repressive regimes (Fritz, 1981).

CCJP partnered with Philippine organizations in producing research related to the NSIRDP (Woolfe, 1986). They first partnered with the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) in the Philippines, who connected them with the group, Concerned Citizens for Human Rights (CCHR) – Samar (Woolfe, 1986). The research prepared by CCHR was published by CCJP in August 1982 (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1982a). It describes the socio-economic conditions in Samar and assesses the NSIRDP's impact on the province. According to CCHR, the NSIRDP was projected to benefit the more affluent members of society, while the roads and other infrastructure constructed would lead to the eviction and destruction of the homes of many while serving to aid the military. CCHR-Samar voiced their concern over the Philippine socio-economic situation and the role Australian aid plays in it (Concerned Citizens for Human Rights (Samar), 1982).

The Report garnered controversy for the CCJP. Doubts were raised on the Report's veracity, such as the allegation of destroying coral reefs for building the roads (Woolfe, 1986). It was also criticized for taking a "limited view" (Lim, 1987, p. 41). Conflicting takes on the Report became a source of friction for both the ADAB and CCHR. CCJP wanted a more cooperative stance with ADAB on the NSIRDP, posing a problem because of CCHR's more aggressive stance (Woolfe, 1986). CCHR was unable to continue further research into the project, and interpreted CCJP's actions in seeking a wide range of views on the Report as "lack of trust" with their institution (Woolfe, 1986, p. 22).

The most notable attack that the Report received was from Sydney Morning Herald's Foreign Affairs editor Peter Hastings. Hastings wrote the article, "Aid Stakes on the Road to Samar," where he responds to criticisms of Australian aid in the Philippines (Hastings, 1982b). The article is filled with attacks against NSIRDP's critics, making false assertions such as that no CCJP member visited Samar, and questioned the abuses that were widespread and widely documented in the Island (Hastings, 1982b). CCJP National Secretary Chris Sidoti promptly called out Hastings for his falsehoods in a letter to the editor (Sidot, 1982).

Repression on the Clergy

Because of mounting criticism against the NSIRDP, Ambassador Richard Woolcott and Peter Hastings released damaging statements resulting in the clergy's persecution in Samar (Catholic Commission

for Justice and Peace, ca. 1982). In a speech to the Manila Rotary Club on April 29, 1982, Woolcott slammed the CCJP and the Samar clergy for their criticism that the NSIRDP exploits the poor (Lee, 1982, p. 38). Previously, members of the Samar clergy also criticized the SIRDP. In a statement released in August 1980, the clergy expressed their doubts about Australian presence in the Philippines as an "isolated act of humanitarianism," and denounced the link between Australian presence and the continued militarization of Northern Samar (Samar Priests and Religious for Human Rights, 1980, p. 1).

Woolcott's speech was followed by a report by Hastings entitled, "Christ's guerillas plot violent revolution." The report labels members of the Samar clergy as NPA members who were "extreme radicals" and "uncompromising Marxists" (Hastings, 1982a, p. 1)." He identifies its cause with the introduction of Liberation Theology, which he wrongly defines in the article. But perhaps the most serious allegation that he wrote was the quote of Bishop Angel Hobayen of Catarman, saying, "Of 27 priests in the diocese he said he thought he had 'lost' eight" (Hastings, 1982a, p. 1). Enrile took advantage of the quote, ordering a military investigation of Samar's clergy on July 9, 1982, which he acknowledged was a result of reading Hastings' article (Woolfe, 1986). Hastings was forced to clarify his statement, which he did not mean that the priests joined the NPA but were rather "lost to dialogue" (Woolfe, 1986, p. 17).

Enrile's investigation resulted in the raid of the Pope Paul VI Social Action Center (SAC) in Catbalogan on September 1, 1982 (Youngblood, 1993). Officials alleged that several subversive documents, propaganda materials, printing paraphernalia, and a gun were discovered within the Center, leading to the arrest of Sister Helena Gutierrez and two lay workers: Juanito Delanida and Antonio Asistio (Hacbang, 1982). Arrested later were Fr. Edgardo Kangleon and four others (Hacbang, 1982). Fr. Kangleon later "confessed" to being a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines (Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, 1983, p. 4). Kangleon was the SAC's Director, and his "confession" raised doubts because he testified that he was tortured while detained (Cabardo et al., 2021). Enrile used Kangleon's testimony to spread black propaganda against the Catholic Church (Woolfe, 1986). Kangleon later died under suspicious circumstances after a car crash in January 1984 (Youngblood, 1993).

Another case of clergy repression that concerned Australia was the imprisonment of Australian priest Fr. Brian Gore. Gore, along with eight others, was charged with the murder of Kabankalan Mayor Pablo Sola. Gore, a Columban priest, was assigned to Negros Island in 1970 (McCoy, 1984). He first served in Kabankalan proper but was later

allowed to start a parish in 1977 at Oringao, a barrio southeast of Kabankalan. Gore was radicalized by the injustices and inequity he witnessed in Negros, leading him to conflict with Provincial Military Commander Militon Goyena and Mayor Sola (Stannard, 1984).

On March 10, 1982, Pablo Sola and his four aides were ambushed and killed in Barrio Bayhaw, with the NPA claiming responsibility. The NPA celebrated his murder due to his reputation as a landgrabber and charges of killing 11 civilians (McCoy, 1984). However, in February 1983, the same task force that apprehended the NPA rebels for Sola's murder charged Fr. Gore, Fr. Niall O'Brien of Ireland, Fr. Vicente Dangan of Antique, and six Catholic lay workers with his murder (Branigin, 1984). The accused were referred to as the Negros Nine. The Negros Nine faced a trial with weak evidence that drew significant media attention and protests, further embarrassing the Marcos regime. For the regime to save face, the trial concluded in June 1984, resulting in the acquittal of Fr. Dangan and the lay workers but with the expulsion of Gore and O'Brien (McCoy, 1984). In Australia, Fr. Gore became an advocate for Philippine issues and later testified during the Australian Parliamentary investigation regarding the Philippine situation.

Fr. Gore's trial also sparked discussion on Australian aid. The "Ang Bayanihan," the Association of Filipinos in Australia's newsletter, published an editorial which mentioned that Marcos was currently requesting the Australian government for an additional aid of $100 million AUD as his government had mounted a $25 billion USD debt. The editorial remarked that reports from the Philippines mention that Fr. Gore's case was seen as an important leverage in securing Australian aid (Association of Filipinos in Australia, 1984). In Australia, there were also discussions on whether aid be suspended to pressure the Philippine government for a fair and speedy trial. Nevertheless, Minister Hayden took pride that the case did not use "aid or trade as a lever" (Stannard, 1984). This is consistent with Australian policy as they believed the amount they provided was insignificant to warrant such a demand (Sibraa, 1986).

Defence Co-operation Programs

Australia's DCP with the Philippines began in 1972, coinciding with the fostering of closer ties between the two nations. The DCP with the Philippines involved officer training in "technical and management-related areas" (Sibraa, 1986, p. 155). The Philippines purchased military equipment from Australia, such as a DART electronic target system range and NOMAD aircraft, with the latter country providing training to best utilize the equipment. A total of 632 AFP personnel were also sent to Australia for training or study tours. The budget for the DCP was described as "modest" in comparison to the

PADAP, NSIRDP, and Australian military aid to other countries (Sibraa, 1986, p. 156). The Philippines received an average of $1.5 million AUD in aid yearly from 1979-1986, compared to Indonesia's $9.642 million AUD and Malaysia's $5.613 million AUD (Sibraa, 1986).

In the Hansard report, the Australian government justified the DCP with the Philippines. They strongly denied the use of Australian-purchased equipment for bombings of insurgency-concentrated areas, but they could not totally deny the connection of Australian aid with military repression. Although they received reports that officers trained in Australia participated in human rights abuses, the report asserted that the training received did not contribute to human rights violations in the country, claiming that the Committee had no "resources to pursue the question of whether Australian-trained Filipino servicemen committed human rights violations in the Philippines" (Sibraa, 1986, p. 161). It also neglects to address Enrile's contentious remark linking Australian aid to efforts at suppressing insurgency in the Philippines.

Australian Investigation into the Philippine Situation

Criticisms on Australian aid administration, Fr. Gore's trial, and various reported cases of human rights abuses brought the Australian government to shift from a defensive stance to a more critical approach in dealing with the Philippines. The Australian government felt the need to take up various human rights cases with the Philippine government following Senator Benigno Aquino Jr.'s assassination in 1983. These included the abduction of Fr. Rudy Romano, alleged violations of labor laws involving children, and the Escalante massacre. When Minister Hayden criticized the deteriorating situation in the Philippines and called for reform, Marcos responded promptly by withdrawing permission for the Royal Australian Air Force to use Clark Air Base. In 1985, the Australian government decided to conduct an inquiry on the Philippines to formulate official policy on how they should deal with the country (Sibraa, 1986).

On September 19, 1985, the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence began conducting the inquiry on the Philippine situation. It was chaired by Mr. Gordon Bilney, MP, and received 112 submissions, held 23 meetings, and interviewed 78 witnesses. Submissions by CCJP, CAA, Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) and the Australian Freedom From Hunger Campaign (AFFHC) were among those that called for the stoppage of military aid to the country as it facilitated oppression and lent credibility to a Marcos dictatorship. Five months into the proceedings, the Philippine situation shifted dramatically as Marcos was peacefully ousted by the People Power Revolution and Corazon Aquino installed into power. The inquiry was pleased with

this timely development but noted that some of the arguments and conclusions by the submission may be outdated (Sibraa, 1986).

The report affirmed the importance of the Philippines as a neighbor, an ASEAN member, an ally with the US, and its "established bilateral relationship" (Sibraa, 1986, p. 1). It called to attention the Marcos regime's failures and welcomed the Aquino government's commitment "to democracy and moderate reform" (Sibraa, 1986, p. xviii). It also addressed a wide range of topics on the Philippines, including areas of policy, aid, and human rights. Overall, the Report affirmed their approach to the Philippine situation. On aid, they confirmed the Philippines as one of its high priority countries, acknowledged the main lines of criticism directed upon it, and asserted the effectiveness of integrated rural development projects in delivering aid. Regarding human rights, difficulty was expressed in dealing with the situation due to its delicate concerns but considers that it "acted correctly in maintaining defense links" despite seemingly lending credibility to the Marcos regime (Sibraa, 1986, p. 168). Lastly, the Committee concludes that the Government "acted appropriately" in pursuing a policy that "sought to encourage reform and distance Australia from Marcos without appearing to interfere in Philippine affairs," along with maintaining bilateral, aid, and defense links (Sibraa, 1986, p. 121).

Conclusion

In reviewing the relationship between Australian aid and human rights abuses in the Philippines during Martial Law, Australian intentions were anchored on strategic interests, reflecting how funds were disbursed to other countries. These mutual economic, military, and geopolitical interests all find a common denominator with the Cold War. With the uncertainty brought about by the Nixon Doctrine, Australia found itself strengthening its ties with the Philippines given its "special relations" with the US. The Philippines' relative proximity to Australia and alignment with the United States' capitalist system displayed the shared economic interests of both countries. The military and geopolitical interests were much intricate, as the Philippines hosted US military bases, while fighting off a communist insurgency.

Given these stakes, Australia then found it difficult to voice out its concerns over human rights in the Philippines when relations between the two countries began to warm up. Australia was also initially doubtful concerning the human rights situation in the country, as expressed by those defending the benefits of aid. Australia only began taking a stronger stance against human rights violations when the number and severity of these abuses became impossible to ignore and began to impact Australian citizens. Australia's stance towards human rights reflected Micheline Ishay's observation of human rights

becoming "a subterfuge for advancing the realpolitik interests of East and West" (Ishay, 2008, p. 226). As echoed in a submission to Parliament, Australian citizen Elizabeth McMahon protested that Australia should not support a government that violates the UDHR (McMahon, 1985).

Beginning the Parliamentary investigations about the "Philippine situation" was a welcome development, demonstrating Australia's commitment to human rights and democratic ideals. It helped the Australian government gain a better grasp and understanding of a country they previously hardly knew about only two decades earlier. This also emboldened leaders such as MP Hayden to take a stronger stance against the abuses in the country. In the middle of the hearings, the investigations saw a change in tone with the Marcos regime's dismantling. One would then wonder how the report would have turned out had Marcos not been ousted from power.

Australian aid to the Philippines during Marcos' Martial Law pales in comparison to American and Japanese aid. During the period, the United States poured in $3.5 billion USD (Trisko Darden, 2020), while Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounted to $4.963 billion USD (Trinidad, 2021). American aid, particularly from the WB and IMF, faced criticism for its perceived collusion with the Marcos regime. Various groups demanded the dismantling of the "US-Marcos regime," viewed as mutually benefitting from the Philippine situation. Such criticism has led Robyn Lim to note that Australian aid to the Philippines can be seen as "symbolic" (Lim, 1987, p. 15). Despite its "meager" value, aid from a "First World" neighbor conveys an unintentional yet powerful message of support for Marcos and his abuses (Lim, 1987, p. 51). Lim explains that this resulted from initial Australian naivety with the Philippine situation, and not with the intention to exploit the country's weaknesses (Lim, 1987). This can be argued with Australia's belated investigation into the Philippine situation under Marcos.

Despite condemning the Marcos regime, Australia defended its relationship with the Philippines during Martial Law, citing their desire to "pursue its long-term strategic interests" and to uphold their commitments to regional security (Department of Defence, 1985, p. 197). Parliament justified its provision of aid as it highlighted its achievements to the region. The Hansard Report defended the rural development programs by addressing criticism on the programs' execution, deeming them "effective." The Report acknowledged the criticism of aid in the form of road-building projects may have facilitated human rights abuses in the area but found such argument "unpersuasive" (Sibraa, 1986, p. 131).

Through the Report, the Australian government strongly denied facilitating repression in the Philippines through its aid programs. While it is challenging to identify a direct link to the Australian government, it is evident that certain Australians contributed to the repression of the Marcos regime. At the outset of the Report, Parliament ironically acknowledged the human rights abuses that occurred under Marcos, even highlighting high-profile cases that drew attention. Despite the Australian government's claims that Australian aid did not contribute to repression, the evident numbers and trends of abuse are hard to overlook; they cannot simply be brushed off as coincidences. Reflecting on the CAA's findings, it is ironic that such aid programs received praise while the very individuals meant to benefit faced threats of violence. This raises a critical question: Can aid and its associated projects truly be effective and reach their full potential when the lives of those intended to benefit are endangered and their security is not assured?

Almost 40 years have passed since the People Power Revolution and the end of the Cold War. Vincent Bevins (2021, pp. 240-243) writes that the effects of the Cold War are still manifested today such as "through unresolved trauma, the destruction of many possibilities of world development, the deformed world socialist movement," and the lingering remains of "fanatical anti-communism." Under the regimes of President Rodrigo R. Duterte and Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., dissenters are often labeled as supporters of communism and affiliated with the NPA. During Duterte's tenure, simply being labeled as a "drug addict" has served as justification for human rights abuses, a tactic reminiscent of Ferdinand Marcos' Martial Law. The Marcoses' return to power in the 2022 elections, bolstered by significant voter support, underscores the ongoing lack of accountability in the Philippines. The Berlin Wall may have fallen, but the shadows of Martial Law and the Cold War continue to linger.

Government-sanctioned reports on the ZDSDP and NSIRDP often overlook issues related to human rights violations and peace and order. The focus tends to lean heavily on the "technical" aspects of development, mirroring the "Blank Page" ideology. But it is also essential to recognize that the human element must be integrated into development projects like these, rather than relying solely on technical assessments. While developmental aid has yielded positive outcomes, we must ask ourselves how we can reconcile these benefits with the loss of life. One thing is clear: projects of this nature should never be used to support authoritarian leaders and their regimes. Such actions dishonor the memory of the victims who were meant to benefit from these initiatives, perpetuating further injustice against them.

Bionote

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