Promoting Ferdinand Marcos

by Stephen R. Shalom

Introduction

One of the ironies of the neocolonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines is that leaders in Manila are as dependent on Washington for their power as they are on any of the sectors of the Philippine population. No ruler of the Philippines was more aware of this than Ferdinand Marcos during his more than two decades in power.

The chief means by which Marcos secured the backing of Washington was by serving U.S. political, economic, and military interests. Examples are legion: Marcos sent a military civic-action group to Vietnam—breaking his own campaign promise—to help lend an international cover to the U.S. war on that country. When the Reagan White House needed to disguise secret weapons transfers to Iran, Marcos's chief of staff provided some of the false documents. After declaring martial law in 1972, Marcos nullified a ruling by the Philippine Supreme Court that had threatened the rights of U.S. investors. And throughout his rule Marcos permitted the United States unhampered access to two huge military bases—Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base.

But serving U.S. interests was not always so easy for Marcos. His greed and corruption alienated local business interests as well as many foreign investors. His human rights abuses troubled liberal members of the U.S. Congress. And his repression fueled the Communist insurgency, while pushing the middle class and the church towards the left, causing officials in Washington to worry that Marcos might drag U.S. interests down with him. Accordingly, Marcos needed other means of building his support in the United States, and he pursued a variety of tactics intended to bolster his standing with U.S. politicians, to neutralize his Filipino critics in the United States, and to enhance his image among attentive members of the U.S. public.

To cement his relationship with the White House, regardless of who inhabited it, the Philippine dictator authorized (illegal) campaign contributions to both Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter in 1980, as well as to other influential members of Congress. To deal with his exiled Filipino opponents, Marcos had his agents operating in the United States—with the knowledge of U.S. officials, according to a Senate report—infilitrating and monitoring exile organizations. Former Marcos


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aide Primitivo Mijares defected in 1975 and testified before the U.S. Congress regarding the corrupt practices of his boss; in 1977, Mijares mysteriously disappeared. On 1 June 1981 Marcos had two outspoken Filipino-American labor activists murdered in their union hall in Seattle.

Many of Marcos's image-enhancing tactics were unsuccessful. In 1977 he offered $1.5 million to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University to establish a Ferdinand E. Marcos Chair of East Asian and Pacific Studies. Despite protest by students and faculty, Tufts jumped at the offer, even presenting a citation for humanitarianism to Imelda Marcos. But after several Asian specialists reportedly declined appointment to the chair, Marcos failed to pay up and the position was never filled.

In another public relations maneuver, Imelda Marcos's Cultural Center of the Philippines signed a contract with the Opera Company of Boston. Critics charged that the arrangement was helping to legitimize a repressive regime, and they organized picketing and mock performances outside the opera house. Although the contract was originally reported to be for five years, the Opera Company quietly allowed the contract to expire the next year.

In 1977 the Philippine government hired Doremus and Company, a U.S. public relations firm, to promote the Marcos regime in the United States. In 1982, public relations consultant John McHugh Stuart was retained to boost Marcos during a state visit to the United States.

Although the documents reproduced here make it clear that the position of the Marcos regime was that the Philippines had few problems, in fact many Filipinos and Westerners disagreed. As a result various kinds of propaganda campaigns were implemented at home and abroad, including the one pointed out in this article—the Philippine government sponsoring public appearances by a pro-Marcos U.S. academic. Cartoon from and courtesy of Voices (Hong Kong), vol. 8, no. 4 (Nov.-Dec. 1984).


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The bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, and the Bulletin sent a copy of the main document to its author, Raul Ch. Rabe, the then Philippine consul general in Honolulu, now an official with the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila, inviting his comment. Rabe could not confirm that the document was in fact the final version that he sent, but he did not dispute its authenticity. Both the document and Rabe’s recent letter are printed below.

The document indicates that the consulate sponsored a trip to Hawaii for A. James Gregor, a professor of political science at the University of California at Berkeley. Gregor’s early writing dealt with fascism and race. He wrote articles critical of school desegregation and served as an officer of the International Association for the Advancement of Ethnology and Eugenics, an organization committed to “restoring freedom of inquiry” to areas such as race and race relations that had been compromised by “extraneous political and philosophical predispositions.” More recently, Gregor has concentrated his scholarly attention on Asian affairs. He has conducted research for the International Security Council, joins in Council manifestos, and sits on the editorial board of the Council’s journal, Global Affairs. The Council is part of the empire of Sun Myung Moon, an empire considered dangerous even by many conservatives. Moon’s Unification Church is, for example, possibly the only religious organization in the world to own an arms factory.

Among Gregor’s work has been some specific writing on the Philippines and in support of the U.S. bases there. In 1984 Gregor wrote a thin volume for the right-wing Ethics and Public Policy Center entitled Crisis in the Philippines: A Threat to U.S. Interests. Much of his thesis was heaven-sent for Marcos; for example, he asserted that “it is most implausible that the Marcos government, or anyone responsible to that government, was directly involved” in the assassination of Benigno Aquino (p. 58). But most welcome from the point of view of the Marcos regime was Gregor’s argument that the United States should withhold support from Marcos’s noncommunist opposition since the latter were hostile to U.S. interests. It was this message that the Philippine Consulate in Honolulu hoped to promote by sponsoring Gregor’s trip to Hawaii.

Former consul general Rabe now explains his proposed propaganda campaign as motivated by fear that the communists would come to power. But why, then, try to arrange a propaganda program aimed at helping Marcos vis-à-vis the noncommunist opposition? Right-wing dictators, of course, have always sought to justify their continued rule by warning that they represented the only alternative to communism. As these documents show, Rabe tried to assist Marcos in making this case, and Gregor helped provide the academic rationalization.

Document 1:
Letter from Consul General Raul Ch. Rabe to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Manila

Consulate General of the Philippines
Honolulu, Hawaii
1 April 1985
No. HO-66/85
Subject: Consult Information Campaign

The Honorable
The Minister for Foreign Affairs
Manila

SIR:

I have the honor to report that the Consulate was able to conduct an information campaign in Honolulu from 22 to 26 March 1985 which, from all indications, was highly successful in presenting to the Hawaiian public the other side to what opposition groups and the American liberal press are saying about the Philippine situation.

A key factor in the Consulate’s information drive was the participation of Professor A. James Gregor, professor of political science at the University of California (Berkeley) and principal researcher for the university’s Institute of International Studies. The Consulate was able to arrange a free Philippine Air Lines ticket for Professor Gregor from San Francisco to Honolulu and back. The only expense we had to meet was Prof. Gregor’s hotel expenses which we were able to cover from our normal budget.

17. See, for example, Global Affairs, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 213–21.
21. Actually, anti-Americanism was growing among many in the moderate opposition precisely because of the U.S. embrace of Marcos. Thus, among the anti-Marcos figures who signed a statement in 1984
In the short period that he was in Honolulu, Prof. Gregor: 
a) spoke on 22 March 1985 before the Pacific and Asian 
Affairs Council at the Kahala Hilton Hotel (the audience 
was composed of top business executives, state and city of­
icials, academics, and other prominent Honolulu resi­
dents);  
b) appeared same day, on Honolulu’s Public Service 
Television (Channel 11) program “Dialog” together with 
Consul General R. Rabe and oppositionists, Fr. John 
Doherty25 and Heherson “Sonny” Alvarez26 of NAM and 
the MFP (a video tape of the program is enclosed);  
c) was featured in an article entitled “It’s a mistake for U.S. 
to back anti-Marcos forces, professor says,” which ap­
ppeared in the 24 March 1985 issue of the Sunday Star-Bul­
etin & Advertiser (side by side with an article featuring 
Heherson Alvarez). Copies of the articles are also enclosed; 
and  
d) was interviewed on radio station KGU on 25 March 
1985.27

In his speech at the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council, Prof. 
Gregor outlined the importance of the U.S. bases in the Philip­
pines, particularly the Subic Naval Base, to U.S. strategic and 
national security interests. As the opposition groups in the Philip­
pines have become outspokenly anti-American and are almost 
unanimous in being “anti-U.S. bases,” he said it would be a mis­
take for the United States to support them. He pointed out that 
should the opposition groups gain control in the Philippines, they 
will not, as many American analysts believe, “lapse back into 
broadly democratic and pro-American postures.” The gist of 
Prof. Gregor’s remarks are contained in the attached Sunday 
Star-Bulletin and Advertiser news clipping.28

condemning the U.S. bases, many have by now dropped their opposi­
tion to the U.S. facilities: among them Corazon Aquino, Raul 
Manglapus, and Ramon Mitra.

22. The footnotes accompanying this document were added by Stephen 
R. Shalom. —Ed.

23. John F. Doherty, an American Jesuit priest, who had taught and 
served as Vice President at Ateneo de Manila University. A critic of 
the Marcos government, Doherty was denied re-entry to the Philippines for 
“highly confidential reasons” that the Philippine Immigration Com­
mis­

sioner was “not at liberty to divulge.” (Quoted in Belinda 
A. Aquino, ed., Cronies and Enemies: The Current Philippine Scene [Philippine 
Studies Occasional Paper no. 5, Philippine Studies Program, Center for 
Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, August 
1982], p. 3.) Doherty is the author of, among other works, “Who Con­
trols the Philippine Economy: Some Need Not Try as Hard as Others,” 
in Aquino, Cronies and Enemies; and The Philippine Urban Poor 
(Philippine Studies Occasional Paper no. 8, Philippine Studies Program, 
Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 
1985).

24. A leader of the anti-Marcos exile organization Movement for a Free 
Philippines; Alvarez later served in Aquino’s cabinet as land reform min­
ister and then was elected to a seat in the Senate.

25. Gregor was interviewed by conservative talk show host Bill 
Maniaci.

26. Not printed here. For Gregor’s argument, see his Crisis in the Philip­
pines: A Threat to U.S. Interests (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public 
Policy Center, 1984).

During the TV debate, Fr. Doherty and Mr. Alvarez dwelt on the usual themes of the opposition such as corruption in government, mismanaged economy, human rights abuses and the growth of the NPA.27 They also called for a cessation of U.S. assistance to the Philippines. Prof. Gregor and Consul General Rabe were, on the other hand, able to bring out the following points, among others:

a) The Philippines has political and economic institutions 
which are strong and stable, enabling the country to 
weather the current crisis;  
b) We are setting our financial house in order, our exports 
are rebounding, and the President is in control and has fully 
recovered from what ailed him last December 1984; 

c) The opposition, in trying to gain power, should not 
demand the ouster of the President because this is contrary 
to the democratic process of electing our leaders;  
d) The opposition has become basically anti-American 
which is shown by their almost unanimous demand for the 
abrogation of the treaty covering the U.S. bases in the Philip­
pines;  
e) We are implementing a mix of socio-economic programs 
as well as military secure and hold operations against the 
NPA. The Pentagon projections that the NPA will reach the 
capability to hold government forces to a “standstill” in five 
years time was clarified as being based on the assumption 
that nothing is done by the government side between now 
and five years hence;  
f) Allegations of human rights abuses are being investi­
gated but many of them are undocumented or purely hearsay;29

27. New People’s Army, the military arm of the Communist Party of 
the Philippines.

28. On the contrary, the abuses were well-documented. See, among 
other sources, Amnesty International USA, Disappearances: A 
nesty International Mission to the Republic of the Philippines, 11–28 
November 1981 (London: 1982); International Commission of Jurists, 
The Philippines: Human Rights After Martial Law (Geneva: 1984); 
Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, “Salvaging” Democracy: 
Observations and Recommendations

The Philippine Government has suffered from a negative image in the United States principally because critical reports by the "liberal" press, and constant propaganda of oppositionists, have not been countered effectively.

There have been various explanations as to why this has been the case. The barrage of negative reports has been overwhelming. Our foreign service establishments and the Office of Media Affairs, on the other hand, have been hampered by a lack of logistics. Our personnel abroad are also working from an innate disadvantage—as employees of the Philippine Government, their statements are naturally taken as self-serving and lacking in credibility. In turn, because of this realization, many of our personnel have not been too eager to appear in mass media, particularly in debates with the opposition.

Recent developments in the Philippines however have resulted in an opportunity for us to wage a counter-propaganda campaign in the United States. Because of the anti-U.S. bases position taken by the major opposition groups in the Philippines, as well as the growing strength of the NPA movement, conservative elements in the United States are beginning to be more willing to speak out and be heard on Philippine issues. Because they are conservative in their political outlook, they view the Philippine Government from a broader perspective, i.e., its stand against communism, its generally pro-West stance, and the compatibility of its interests with U.S. strategic interests in Asia. Among these conservative elements are a number of American academicians, including, in particular Prof. Gregor, who are beginning to write and speak on the Philippine situation from an angle that is generally favorable to the Philippine Government. Thus, the opportunity to use them for our benefit has arisen.

To take advantage of this opportunity, the Consulate invited Prof. Gregor to come to Hawaii for a counter-propaganda program. As was shown by our experience, an American speaking out in favor of the Philippine Government rates high credibility not only because he is viewed as a free agent but because he is also able to put things in the American perspective. Most of all, if he is a conservative American (as in the case of Prof. Gregor), his ability to identify U.S. interests with Philippine Government interests makes him a particularly effective spokesman for us even if we may not agree with him on every point. The result of our efforts was quite favorable, eliciting statements from the Filipino community that, at last, the other side of the coin has been heard.

It is for the foregoing reasons that the Consulate recommends to the Ministry to favorably take up with the Office of Media Affairs a program of utilizing American conservative elements, particularly academicians, in a counter-propaganda campaign to be waged in the United States. In this connection, I am also enclosing a copy of the concept paper prepared by Mr. A. Balmaceda, Information Officer in this Consulate, outlining just such a program. This concept paper has already been sent to Assembly is unable to act promptly, these powers, in practice, frequently have been used by the President to legislate widely, particularly in the economic sphere." Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1985, pp. 860–61.

31. Original says "If."

32. Although not printed here, copies of this three-page document and...
Minister G. Cendana of the Office of Media Affairs. As can be seen in the proposal, this program can be carried out with a minimum of expenditures. It should also be implemented as soon as possible for obvious reasons.

In addition to Prof. Gregor, other conservative academicians (mentioned by Prof. Gregor) who could be tapped to help in the program are:

a) Mr. Peter Duignan
   Director of International Studies
   Hoover Institute

b) Mr. Ramon Myers
   Georgetown Center of International Strategic Studies
   Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

c) Mr. Richard Allen
   Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.

d) Mr. Carl Jackson
   University of California, Berkeley

As additional inputs to the concept paper on our media program, the Consulate would like to add the following recommendations in the implementation of the program by our foreign service establishments in the United States:

a) Aside from maximizing the "exposure" of the American "consultant" who joins our program, arrangements should be made for face-to-face discussions, preferably on television, with representatives of the opposition. Our past reluctance to debate with the opposition has unduly given the impression to many people that the Philippine Government position is untenable or difficult to justify;

b) While Philippine embassy and/or consulate officials should join in these face-to-face discussions, the scenario adopted in Honolulu may be considered for "maximum effect," i.e., by prior agreement, Prof. Gregor was given every opportunity to argue and defend our positions with the Consul General playing a less aggressive role. In this way, the credibility of our arguments was enhanced.

c) The concept paper mentions the possibility of a "stipend" being paid to "consultants" in addition to their travel and lodging expenses. This appears to be a must considering that our program will take them away from home and their usual work. However, I am certain this can be negotiated to a "modest" level. This aspect should also be kept highly confidential. In Honolulu, Prof. Gregor was asked on two occasions as to who was paying for his trip in an obvious attempt to downgrade his credibility.

Feedback on developments in this project would be highly appreciated.

Very truly yours,
[unsigned]
RAUL CH. RABE
Consul General

Document 2:
Letter from Raul Ch. Rabe to Bill Doub
of the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars

Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila
Office of American Affairs
10 July 1990

Dear Mr. Doub,

Thank you for your letter of 12 June 1990 and the opportunity to comment on a document concerning an information campaign of the Philippine Consulate General in Honolulu in March 1985 concerning the Philippine situation then.

The information campaign did take place and I had caused a report to be prepared on it. The copy which you have sent to me of the report is unsigned and I am therefore unable to confirm if this was the version that finally was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Manila under my signature.

in responding to the challenge of military rebellion: "Since the attempted coup [of August 1987], she has removed two cabinet members; proposed and subsequently signed the military pay raise; proposed an increase in the defense budget; visited military camps in the provinces; ruled out peace negotiations with the communists; supported military-backed citizen self-defense groups; and requested expedited deliveries of military equipment from the U.S." (Statement before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2 Dec. 1987.) Jackson is currently serving as special assistant to the president for national security affairs in the White House.

An individual present at Gregor's Hawaii talks reports that Gregor publicly acknowledged that his trip had been paid for.

Bill Doub, managing editor, Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars.

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The consulate had undertaken the information campaign as part of our regular functions. At that time Filipinos had begun to despair about the future of the country, the perception being that the communists were about to take over. Mr. Marcos was still in power but rumors were already circulating about a possible "snap" election. I invited Professor A. James Gregor of U.C., Berkeley, to come to Honolulu for a series of speaking engagements. In the course of his visit, we discussed how important it would be for the American public to see both sides of the picture on the Philippines. He suggested that the Office of Media Affairs of the Philippine government invite conservative U.S. academicians to speak out their views on the Philippine situation which, Mr. Gregor said, would be broader in perspective and would be generally favorable. He mentioned the names of U.S. academicians whom he described as conservatives.

I sent a report and a recommendation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, I never received a feedback on it. I assumed that the report went the way of many of our communications—seen by desk officers and filed away. I did not follow it up, realizing that Manila would listen more to the Philippine Embassy in Washington, D.C. than to a mere Consulate on matters involving information policy in the U.S. I do not recall Mr. Gregor participating in other speaking engagements upon the invitation of either the Philippine Embassy in Washington, D.C. or the other Philippine Consulates in the U.S. I also assumed that the conservative academicians named by Prof. Gregor were never approached. The Marcos administration did undertake an active information campaign in the U.S. centered on a Philippine information team in New York and I recall it also hired a PR firm in Washington, D.C. However, as I was in Honolulu then, I cannot really comment on these two matters.

Official communications are not meant for publications. If you should decide to publish the document in your possession, unsigned as it is, then I would appreciate it if you could also publish this letter.

Very truly yours,

[signed]
Raul Ch. Rabe

39. See the introduction above.

FACTS AND OPINION ABOUT BCAS NEEDED!

Attention all readers of BCAS and past members and supporters of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars:

Paddy Tsurumi and Joe Moore are doing a study of the history of BCAS, CCAS, and the Japanese journal AMPO, and they need facts and opinions from all sources as soon as possible.*

Please write:

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University of Victoria
Post Office Box 1700
Victoria, British Columbia
V8W 2Y2 Canada

*Any materials that are lent to us will be handled with loving care and will be returned as quickly as possible to their owners in the condition in which we received them.