

The AQUINO MANAGEMENT Of The PRESIDENCY



IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

Published by the
Presidential Management Staff
Office of the President
Manila, Philippines
June 1992

"Arm-chair critics and destabilizers have asked - can we survive despite all the problems that we suffer? My answer is definite yes! Yes, we will survive despite natural calamities, destabilization campaigns, insurgency, international crises and scathing criticism from those who should be talking less and working more. With full confidence in our people's resolve to sustain this freedom, we will survive. And we will grow".

President Corazon C. Aquino

Philippine League of Councilors

First National Congress

September 7, 1990

INTRODUCTION

THIS VOLUME OF The Aquino Management of the Presidency series seeks to document how President Corazon C. Aquino, the members of the Cabinet, and her closest advisers managed the crisis situations that confronted the Aquino government. Not all the crisis situations are covered. The focus is on the seven putsches and related events which threatened the existence of the government or the unity of the armed forces.

Chapter 1, entitled 'The Coup Attempts That Failed', covers crisis situations which started with the takeover of the Manila Hotel by the Marcos loyalists on July 6 to 7, barely four months after President Aquino assumed office, up to Black Saturday, April 18, 1987, when a band of rebel soldiers took over the Philippine Army headquarters. These were the jabs, as in boxing.

Chapter 2, entitled 'The Military Putsches That Almost Succeeded', covers the punches: the bloody August 28, 1987 and the near fatal December 1989 coup attempts. It also touches on the escape of renegade Col. Gregorio 'Gringo' Honasan in 1988.

Chapter 3, entitled 'The Gulf Crisis', covers the crisis situations during the Gulf War in late 1990 to February 1991 which the military rebels could have exploited to go in for the kill, were they not too weak to do so, having spent their strength and credibility in coup attempt after coup attempt.

The tragedy of a coup d'etat is that it is planned and executed by military officers who have pledged loyalty to the Constitution, the duly constituted government and the Commander-in-Chief. It was difficult enough that the Aquino government inherited a three-pronged insurgency led by the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army (CPP-NPA), the secessionist movement in Mindanao led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the insurgency in the Cordilleras led by the Cordillera People's Liberation Army (CPLA).

When we look back at the crises that confronted the Aquino government in the last six years, there is no doubt that the transition from dictatorship to democracy had been a difficult one. The return of democratic processes meant the loss of wealth, power, and privilege to those who, at every possible opportunity, opposed its restoration.

However painful the experience was, we can put it in perspective with what is happening in the newly restored democracies of the world. The key elements are the same: a new and inexperienced government; the deposed ruling elite attempting to regain power; and, a powerful military in an uneasy partnership with its former enemies. It may be presumptuous to say so, but we will say it nonetheless: we have done as well, if not better than many of the newly restored democracies.

It is tempting to be revisionist and to just gloss over some of the more unpleasant aspects of the events that happened. The truth is that yes, there was tension between the highest civilian and military officials of the land. And yes, it was not always well among the President and members of the Cabinet. The conflicts stemmed not only from clashes of

personality or struggle for power, but from fundamental disagreements on policy issues affecting national security and the economy.

It would be hackneyed to say that those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. But this volume was written not just to record historical facts nor to just entertain. This volume was written in the hope that future leaders of this country might pick up a lesson or two in crisis management.

Finally, we pay tribute and dedicate this work to the woman who was at the center of the storm for six years, Her Excellency Corazon C. Aquino, President of the Republic of the Philippines.

It is supreme irony that one of the failed coup attempts was codenamed "God Save the Queen". That is precisely what He did.

THE COUP ATTEMPTS THAT FAILED

AFTER THE EDSA revolution in 1986, the Aquino government began the work of consolidating power, democratizing, and reviving the economy. It was not an easy task. The Marcoses had left as legacies a prostrate economy, a large foreign debt, a serious insurgency problem, and a politicized military that would have much difficulty finding its proper place in a newly restored democracy.

The mission of surmounting these problems and leading 60 million Filipinos was suddenly thrust upon the widow of the late Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. She had no experience in government. So did many of her advisers and Cabinet members. Rene A.V. Saguisag, former Presidential Spokesman (later Senator), describes the situation best: "One day we were in the barricades, the next we were in power".

Within the President's close circle of advisers were lawyers who fought President Marcos. There were Saguisag, Executive Secretary Joker P. Arroyo, and Deputy Executive Secretary Fulgencio S. Factoran Jr. Their reputation and predisposition as human rights lawyers had put them in constant collision course with the Marcos administration, particularly the military. To the Reform Armed Forces Movement (RAM) and its godfathers, Arroyo et al were communists, period.

The events that unfolded soon after the EDSA Revolution seemed to justify the knee-jerk accusations.

Two days after assuming power on February 27, 1986, President Aquino ordered the release of 517 political detainees. Those released included Jose Ma. Sison, former Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), and Bernabe "Ka Dante" Buscayno, former Supremo of the CPP armed group, the New People's Army (NPA).

On February 28, 1986, President Aquino created the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG). She appointed former Senator Jovito Salonga as Chairman. The mission of the PCGG was to recover the ill-gotten wealth of the Marcos family and their cronies.

On March 18, 1986, the President created the Presidential Commission on Human Rights (PCHR). Former Senator Jose W. Diokno headed it. The PCHR was tasked to investigate complaints of forced or unexplained disappearances, torture, hamletting, and other violations of human rights.

On March 25, 1986, President Aquino promulgated the Freedom Constitution. In one bold stroke, she repealed the 1973 Constitution, assumed lawmaking powers, and abolished the Batasang Pambansa which had proclaimed Ferdinand Marcos as the winner in the 1986 presidential elections.

President Aquino appointed Aquilino Pimentel Jr., former Mayor of Cagayan de Oro City and erstwhile political detainee, as Minister of Local Governments. With the President's approval, he began a purge of governors, mayors, and other local officials perceived to be loyal to the ousted President. He appointed officers-in-charge (OICs) in their place, until regular elections could be held. His choices as to who to remove and who to appoint as OIC were not necessarily popular with some segments of the military.

On April 23, 1986, President Aquino issued Proclamation No. 9 calling for the convening of a 50-member Constitutional Commission to write a new Constitution. Political parties, civic organizations, cause-oriented groups, and various sectors sent in more than 800 nominations to the President's office. On June 2, 1986, President Aquino formally opened the sessions of the Constitutional Commission at the Batasang Pambansa building in Quezon City.

In the course of implementing these initial reforms, the Aquino administration made enemies. There were cronies whose assets were sequestered. All sorts of politicians closely identified with the Marcoses were booted out of power, including Cabinet members, members of the Batasang Pambansa, governors, and mayors. Within the military, there were groups which remained loyal to the Marcoses. At the same time, segments of the military led by the RAM had fundamental disagreements with the new government's reconciliation policy with regard to the insurgency problem. Executive Secretary Joker Arroyo explains why President Aquino pursued a policy of reconciliation instead of pushing for a hard-line approach: 'The problem with the military was a recurring one. It was actually a policy of conflict. The military insisted on crushing the communists militarily. So we raised the question, if you could not defeat them during Marcos' time, how can you defeat them now?'

But more important is the fact that the military never understood the difference between the Marcos military and the Aquino military. They thought that the Marcos military and the Aquino military are one and the same, that it is a continuation. That since the Marcos military was committed to destroy the communists militarily, ergo, the Aquino military must also destroy the communists militarily.

Remember that President Aquino released the leaders who were in prison, two days after she assumed office. She released them for one simple reason: she had sympathy for almost all incarcerated political prisoners. Because Ninoy was like them. Many think their release was at my suggestion. It came from her.

Any incoming President must extend the olive branch. When a new President assumes office, he is President of the entire Filipino people and he must try to reconcile them and not to fight or kill them. The military wanted a continuation of war. The President herself did not want it".

In a matter of months after President Aquino took over, the RAM started to lay the groundwork for overthrowing the newly-installed government. Philippine Constabulary (PC) Chief Renato de Villa recalls: "As early as May 1986 or barely three months after the Aquino administration had taken power, there were already indications that certain personalities in the armed forces were preparing for a coup. We knew about the silent recruitment that was going on".

The Manila Hotel Incident

The first major challenge to the legitimacy and the existence of the Aquino government came from the Marcos loyalists, although later sources would indicate the involvement of the RAM. On July 6, 1986, a Sunday, some 490 soldiers and 5,000 Marcos loyalists took over the Manila Hotel and swore in former Senator Arturo Tolentino, the running mate of Ferdinand Marcos in the snap elections, as "acting President".

At that time. President Aquino, along with most of her Cabinet and key military officials, was in Cagayan de Oro City. Joker Arroyo looks back: 'The entire government was in Cagayan de Oro'. Luckily, I went to the office even if it was a Sunday afternoon. Nobody was there.

A reporter called me up from Manila, Hotel, There are troops here ...' 'What kind of troops?' I asked. They are rebel troops, Marcos loyalists,' he answered, then asked me for my reactions. 'What is the strength?' I asked. 'About five thousand,' he replied. I told the reporter, 'Never mind asking me about my reaction. I want information on what is happening. Every time you call me, I will give you one thousand pesos. But I do not have the money now. I will pay you later.' He agreed.

Another reporter of another paper called, asking me the same thing. Before long, I had five reporters from print and radio giving me information. I knew exactly what was happening through them because the Marcos loyalists were buttering up to the media and wanted to use them for propaganda".

Arroyo made several more phone calls after that. He called Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile: he was playing golf. Then he called Commander Jesus Regala, Deputy Commander of the Presidential Security Group (PSG), ordering them to secure Malacanang.

Next, he called Vice Chief of Staff Salvador Mison. "He was a fellow Bicolano, but I did not know him then", Arroyo says. Mison asked him for orders and Arroyo told him what he told the PSG. Then Arroyo called Gen. Rodolfo Canieso, the Commanding General of the Philippine Army. Canieso also asked him for orders. "Eliminate any hostile force", was Arroyo's quick retort. Canieso said that he could use howitzers and wipe out the loyalists in three minutes. "Just give me the order. Sir", Canieso said. Arroyo did not.

Only then did Arroyo call the President in Cagayan de Oro and informed her of the situation, but told her that "everything was under control".

On the same day, late in the afternoon, Arroyo and bosom buddy Jejomar Binay (then Makati OIC Mayor) got in a car with Noni Pineda of the Malacanang Motor Pool and proceeded to Rizal Park. They did not see many troops, but they saw people buying ice cream and people lolling on the grass in Luneta.

Arroyo got in touch with Mison and they compared notes. Mison told him that they had already made contact with the rebel officers. "They will retire little by little", Mison assured.

The former Executive Secretary learned a lot of things from this first 'incident'. First is that the military expected to be given orders and not to be asked what should be done. Second, it was easy to purchase information. Arroyo claimed he spent P 9,000.00 for his reporter - spies.

Early in the evening, Arroyo got in touch with the President and told her that there was no reason for her to come to Manila right away. But later, the President called back and said that upon Gen. Ramos' advice, she was coming back that same evening. The President was not able to, however. The runway lights in Cagayan de Oro were not functioning.

Maria V. Montelibano, Executive Director of Radio Television Malacanang (RTVM), was among those who accompanied the President in Cagayan de Oro: "We had a serious communications problem because of lack of facilities in the area. The President wanted to come out on television to give a statement, but this was not possible. We held a press conference and the best we could do to transmit the President's message to the Metro Manila stations was in bits and pieces by radio. We had videotaped the President's message and we looked for a plane that would fly me out to Manila. But the runway lights were out and no pilot would risk it.

We learned the hard way/ but since then, we always made sure that communication linkages were available wherever the President were to go".

Col. Voltaire Gazmin, the PSG Commander, recalls what took place after they received news of the Manila Hotel takeover: "We secured the President in the house of Dr. Lazo. The location was kept secret even from Gov. Emano. The only ones who knew were the PSG and the military units deployed to secure the entire subdivision. Later, after an assessment of the situation as reported from Manila, the President decided to fly back".

President Aquino flew back to Manila the following day, after finishing her original schedule of visiting military camps and receiving rebel returnees in Cagayan de Oro. She conferred with Cabinet members and senior military officials at her office in the Guest House. At 2:00 p.m., she held a press conference and issued a statement giving the loyalists 24 hours to give up.

Rene Saguisag recalls events that Sunday afternoon and the days that followed:"... July 7 ... Monday, I reported for work in the Guest House early. I advised my staff that despite all the rumors and commotions we should not panic and go on with business as usual. Before, during and after my stint in the Guest House, there are two fixed stars that I have gone by. One, you can waste a whole lifetime worrying things that may never happen. Two, don't let terrorists dictate the tempo of your life.

The President arrived in her office later that morning, having flown back from Cagayan de Oro. She noted that everything was normal save in that small pocket that is the Manila Hotel, where the 'rebels' were having a hard time persuading people to take them seriously. Traffic was normal in the Malacanang area and no barricades were even put up. Our staff reported for work.

The President said in jest that she would like to discipline Joker for insubordination. He had disobeyed her order the day before to call the Cabinet to an emergency meeting. We thought it was totally unnecessary as he was in constant touch with the military and the police. Indeed, the Cabinet was not to meet until the bizarre affair was over.

Key civilian and military officials (led by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile) were summoned to Malacanang that same morning. Ramos, Mison, Navy Chief Serapio Matillano, Air Force Chief Ramon Farolan, and PC-INP Chief Renato de Villa briefed the President on the

situation.

There was discussion on the setting of a deadline, one week, three days or 24 hours. I then suggested that, for starters, to give the putschists 24 hours to give up. My idea was to divide the leaders and the followers of the caper. I had the gut feeling that many of them would just want some excuse to go home. This was adopted and it was somehow interpreted as an 'ultimatum'. As it happened, everyone took advantage of the opportunity to leave.

As a lawyer, I had been used to negotiating in my cases as well as in rallies and in discreet secret meetings. One lesson I learned in Prof. Roger Fisher's seminar at Harvard Law was for one always to think of making 'yes-able' propositions to the other side in crisis management situations. Do not humiliate or embarrass your opposite number. Give him a gracious way out. Do not rub his nose into the ground".

The President went about her day with her usual calm and followed her previously set schedule. She addressed the Association of Major Religious Superiors and met with the press.

Defense Minister Enrile's Deputy, Rafael "Rocky" Ileta, was assigned by President Aquino to lead the negotiations with the group of Senator Tolentino which included former Batasan Speaker Nicanor Yniguez and loyalist military officers like General Jose Maria Zumel, Bgen. Jaime Echevarria, and Bgen. Antonio Palafox.

Ileta was Commanding General of the Philippine Army in 1972 and was removed for opposing the declaration of Martial Law. He was Ambassador to Thailand when Senator Benigno Aquino was assassinated on August 21, 1983. From then on, he developed linkages with business leader Jaime "Jimmy" Ongpin and his circle and silently worked for the downfall of the Marcos administration. At the height of the EDSA revolution, he was given the task of negotiating with then AFP Chief of Staff Fabian Ver.

Ileta recalls the negotiations with the loyalists who had taken over Manila Hotel: "I got in touch with the group of Senator Tolentino and I was able to convince them to go to the conference table. The negotiations were held in neutral ground -the Army and Navy Club.

The negotiations were done at two levels: first, with the political leaders and second, with the military group that was supporting them. Eventually, both gave in and agreed to pull out".

The President called a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday, July 9. At issue during that meeting was the government's policy on the participants in the caper. Presidential Spokesman Rene Saguisag reflects on the debate that took place, and the implications of the decisions made in that meeting: 'There were hawks and there were doves. The President was the wise owl. In hindsight (Minister of Local Governments), Nene Pimentel was correct about removing the incumbent local chief executives and replacing them with OICs. Had the duly elected Mayors of Metro Manila been retained, they would have been able to mobilize in support of the Marcos loyalists. There would have been a greater likelihood that the government would have fallen".

Implementing The Reconciliation Policy

By the time the Marcoses fled to Hawaii, the NPA had grown to a force of more than 20,000. The next serious threats came from the MNLF advocating secession in the south and

the CPLA in the north. Despite these threats from all sides, President Aquino was not inclined to continue the traditional hardline approach to countering insurgency. She believed that the long-term solutions were political, economic, and social; not military.

In August 1986, the government began implementing a policy of pursuing peace talks with the CPP-NPA, MNLF, and CPLA - with the aim of arriving at initial agreements to a ceasefire. The efforts towards a ceasefire, especially with the CPP-NPA, were not popular with the military establishment which had been bred mainly in the "find-fix-and-finish" school of thought insofar as fighting insurgency was concerned. The RAM accused the Aquino government of being "soft" on the communists and of being infiltrated by communists at the highest levels.

Rene Saguisag responds to some of the issues raised by RAM: "The claim of RAM that the government is soft on the CPP-NPA is an excuse for their inefficiency against the insurgency. The hardline approach during the Marcos years just made the insurgency bigger and bigger.

There was tension in relating with the military because we were pushing for civilian supremacy. On the other hand, the RAM subscribed to the school of thought advocating power sharing, on the theory that the government assumed power because of the military".

The Aquino government continued its policy of pursuing peace talks despite resistance from some segments of the military.

On September 5, 1986, President Aquino flew to Jolo, Sulu under tight security. There, she signed a ceasefire agreement with Nur Misuari, Chairman of the MNLF. The following week, on September 13, President Aquino flew to Bontoc, Mountain Province and signed a ceasefire agreement with Fr. Conrado Balweg, leader of the CPLA. In both cases, it helped that the draft Constitution being prepared at that time by the Constitutional Commission explicitly provided for a mechanism by which autonomous regions could be created. In the meantime, negotiations with the CPP-NPA continued, with a ceasefire agreement being eventually signed on November 27, 1986.

On her sixth month in office. President Aquino began a series of state visits starting with Indonesia and Singapore which she visited from August 24 to 27. It was as much to set the tone of her foreign policy as to underscore her government's confidence that it would not collapse even in her absence.

After Indonesia and Singapore, the President visited the United States, from September 15 to 23, where she gave a much applauded address to the US Congress. By the time her third trip that year had been scheduled - to Japan on November 10 to 13 - rumors of a coup that would attempt to topple the Aquino government were rife.

God Save The Queen

The coup rumors were accompanied by increasing public criticism of the Aquino government from its very own Defense Minister, Juan Ponce Enrile. Demonstrations by Marcos loyalists and a series of bombings compounded the situation.

On October 21, 1986, in an effort to resolve the growing rift. President Aquino met

with Minister Enrile. The meeting was held at the home of then University of the Philippines (UP) President Edgardo Angara, a friend of the President and the Defense Minister's fraternity brother. Vice President Salvador Laurel, Minister Jose Concepcion, Press Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., and Chief of Staff Gen. Fidel Ramos also attended the meeting. Among Enrile's demands: abolition of the Freedom Constitution, restoration of the Batasang Pambansa, the removal of some Cabinet members and other government officials, and a hardline policy on the insurgency. In a Cabinet meeting the following day, the President informed the Cabinet of what had taken place.

While the "God Save the Queen" plot was running its course. President Aquino appointed her first National Security Director, Dr. Emmanuel V. Soriano. He was former President of the UP and a member of the Convenor Group which had drafted and supported the President's candidacy in the snap elections.

Soriano was summoned to Malacanang. He remembers that when he met her, one of the first questions she had asked was: "Do you know Eddie Ramos?"

When Soriano replied that he knew Ramos but had not worked with him, the President explained that she needed to have another channel to the military and that Soriano should develop links with Ramos. Soriano says that her parting words were: "Tell Eddie that, come what may, we should be together".

"A couple of months later, Eddie Ramos, as Chief of Staff, became one of the seven members of the Cabinet Crisis Committee (that had been created). As Chairman of the Committee, I was able to work with and observe Eddie at close range - during relaxed discussion sessions and while under intense pressure - and I am convinced, as I was even then, that he is for the people and will respect Constitutional processes," states Soriano.

Joker Arroyo relates how the President decided to proceed with the state visit to Japan and how the "God Save the Queen" crisis was resolved: "We knew that the military top brass were meeting among themselves to resolve the "God Save the Queen" crisis; but they were not reporting to the President. It was only in the last meeting that Gen. Ramos gave a direct order to abort "God Save the Queen". Perhaps it was for tactical reasons that he gave the order only at that time. There were dialogues with the RAM. Well, maybe that is the military way of doing things, I don't know. But what went on, the President was not told. She was told only after the last meeting".

But the President did have quiet supporters within the military. Joker Arroyo tells of "... a Reserve Colonel in the Army, Carbonell. 'He's Bicolano' Mison explained ... He shared the same barracks as Gringo Honasan, another Bicolano. Honasan, who is good at symbolism and show, parked his armor face to face with Carbonell's armor. At Mison's urging, I asked Carbonell to see me at the office.

To make a long story short, Carbonell had confronted Honasan, saying: 'Hoy, paisano, the fight will start and end here'. Carbonell made sure that Honasan understood that he would get opposition if he tried to pull a coup.

I asked Carbonell what would happen if fighting started. He said, 'It won't start without us knowing. The moment they start loading their shells, we load. The moment they start their motors, we start ours'. . . After that meeting, I told the President, There are units

very loyal to us".

The President and her immediate staff, however, knew all about the plot. Press Secretary Teodoro 'Teddy Boy' Locsin, Saguisag, Gazmin, Factoran, and Arroyo met with the President. Together, they decided to let the military know that the Executive knew. It was agreed to be done through a 'leak' to a newspaper. The President chose the Inquirer. She said that the one to write the article should be the daughter or wife of a military officer.

Arroyo was assigned to talk to Inquirer editor Eugenia Apostol and journalists Letty Jimenez-Magsanoc and Belinda Olivares-Cunanan. In the name of "public service", the article exposing "God Save the Queen" appeared in the Inquirer on November 6, 1986.

Locsin, in the meantime, was asked by the President to include the plot in her speech before the World Dental Congress at the PICC, scheduled on the same day the article came out. The President said, "Make a speech telling the rebels to do their worst, that we are prepared and that I am going to Japan".

President Aquino left for Japan on the very next day, November 19, 1986. Before leaving, she called in key commanding officers to ensure their loyalty. Col. Gazmin put the PSG on red alert. The RTVM prepared and secured back-up broadcast facilities.

The visit to Japan resulted in a package of grants, loans, and other economic assistance. But President Aquino's triumphant return to Manila on November 13 was greeted with the news of labor leader Rolando Olalia's violent death. The Chairman of the left-leaning Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) and President of the Partido ng Bayan (PnB) was obviously tortured and killed along with his driver Leonor Alay-ay. An investigation of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), then under Director Antonio Carpio, would later link the RAM to the murders.

The Night The President Could Not Sleep

At 5:00 a.m., Sunday, November 23, 1986, Arroyo was roused by a phone call. The President was on the line. She said that she could not sleep the night before and that she wanted him to call for a Cabinet meeting "except Enrile" at 6:00 a.m. With sleep still in his eyes, Arroyo bargained for 6:30 a.m. He needed time to get in touch with the others.

Her Cabinet gathered, the President informed them that she had made up her mind to fire Enrile: "I want your support", she told them. She got it.

By mid-morning, Enrile was called to Malacanang and in a one-on-one meeting with the President, was asked to go. All he asked for was that his security continue to be assigned to him which the President granted.

During the Cabinet meeting, Ramos had told of troop movements that were detected on Saturday mid-morning. He had also said that an attempt to reconvene the Batasan was to be held by disgruntled KBL MPs and a faction of the military.

Ramos had been invited to join the coup plotters. In fact, a Colonel and a Major had boldly come to him and complained about how President Aquino was allegedly mishandling practically everything - human rights issue, appointment of Cabinet members, peace

negotiations, etc., etc.

Ramos had refused to join them. Instead, he ordered all camps shut and flights prohibited. Middle-level officers, not only enlisted men, were ordered to man the entry gates and patrol borders, if need be.

The die was cast. Ramos issued an order to all commanders: "Disregard any orders from MND or Col. Honasan and MND staff.

Saguisag says: "On the basis of... the directive of Gen. Ramos, clearly it would have been untenable to keep Minister Enrile in office... It was a principled disagreement. There was some question as to the timing. But, the President, cool and relaxed, obviously had made up her mind that early Sunday morning. She listened patiently to all those present, weighed what they had to say, but was not swayed. She directed that we all resign and we did on the spot. That afternoon, the President relieved Manong Johnny of his post.

I have always admired her gut instincts and gut feel and maybe that was the right time to do it... But clearly, she did the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reason.

It was past 3:00 p.m. She stood up to leave the Guest House to walk to the Palace and address the nation on TV. All the Cabinet members stood up and clapped, and clapped, and clapped. For a moment I thought she showed some softness and hesitation. She made the statement with a touch of class and a dash of humor, following many hours of toughness and steel, determined to get and do what she wanted.

Like the rest who would like to be reappointed, I applauded, too. She was every inch President and Commander-in-Chief. Her morale needed no boosting. It had never been higher. And we had never been more proud of her. We were hailing the Chief".

Unknown to the public, 'the Chief wept when it dawned on her that she also had to fire her friends in the Cabinet, among them Aquilino Pimentel. In a televised interview she gave towards the end of her term. President Aquino looks back: "Let me tell you about when I was going to ask Nene Pimentel to resign, remember after the 'God Save The Queen' incident? Then there was a cry for removing some members of the Cabinet. And I called Nene Pimentel in. I think I was more sorry and sadder than he, you know, as I was telling him this. And I really had to get some tissues because the tears were coming out. And Nene was saying, 'No, it was alright, I understand that this is something that you have to do'".

Maria Montelibano remembers it as the beginning of the toughening of the President - her first real test to go beyond the personal.

The President named Deputy Defense Minister Rocky Ileto the successor of Minister Enrile. Deputy Minister Ileto says of his new assignment: "Minister Enrile left behind a large security force in the Ministry with 600 men and 10 armored cars. It was led by Gringo and was considered a powerful group. My first task as Defense Minister was to dismantle that group because of the danger it posed. I had to do it softly because I was treading on dangerous ground. If I acted harshly, they could easily get me. It took a long time before I was able to disperse them by assigning them to other areas. Gringo Honasan was the son of a good friend and classmate. They told me that if I had not been the one who dismantled the group, it

would have been more dangerous".

On November 27, 1986, four days after the removal of Minister Enrile, representatives of the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) signed a ceasefire agreement which took effect on December 10, 1986. The Aquino government stepped up its campaign for the ratification of the proposed Constitution. Registration of voters for the plebiscite and expected elections in 1987 began on December 7, 1986.

President Aquino began implementing a policy of attraction with regard to the insurgency. She launched the National Reconciliation and Development Program (NRDP) on December 24, 1986 with an initial budget of P300 million. The program included an intensive information campaign to attract NPA or MNLF rebels to surrender. A package of social and economic benefits were made available to the rebel returnees - consisting of grants, housing, livelihood, and other assistance.

In its December 28, 1986 issue, TIME magazine named President Aquino its "Woman of the Year". Meanwhile, there were forces which continued to plan, recruit, organize, and build alliances in order to remove President Aquino from power. She would not last one more year, they said.

The Mendiola Incident

In January 1987, the President mobilized the entire Cabinet to campaign for the ratification of the new Constitution. The new Constitution restored a presidential form of government, asserted the supremacy of civilian rule over the military, and emphasized social justice. It also contained controversial provisions on the US military bases, nuclear weapons, agrarian reform, and the removal of the Philippine Constabulary from the AFP. But the marching orders from the President to her allies in and out of government were clear: all must work for an overwhelming "Yes" vote. Ratification would pave the way for regular elections at the national and the local levels, and lay the foundations for political and economic stability in the long run.

In the afternoon of January 22, 1987, a Thursday, militant farmers led by Jaime 'Ka Jimmy' Tadeo marched to Malacanang to demand the immediate implementation of an agrarian reform program. Riot police blocked them at Mendiola bridge. Because the rally was bigger than usual, two companies of Marines were sent to reinforce the riot police. Provocation from the marchers led to a clash which left 12 shot dead on Mendiola. Later in the evening, the President, Joker Arroyo, Secretary Ileto, and Ching Escaler watched a videotape of the incident. The mood was somber. Ching Escaler cried. Secretary Ileto offered to resign, but the President did not accept it. Gen. Ramon Montano's offer to go on leave was accepted - he was Commander of the CAPCOM charged with Securing the Malacanang perimeter.

The following day, January 23, the ceasefire agreed upon by the government and the NDF collapsed. The President and her staff immediately implemented damage control measures in the wake of the tragic incident.

Ileto reflects on the lessons that were learned the hard way that day: "I learned about the incident at Mendiola almost as soon as it happened. The Ministry had been covering the rally. The incident started due to the actions of provocateurs coming from within the ranks of

the marchers.

We implemented certain changes in our crowd control methods after that. First of all, we minimized the use of force and firearms. Secondly, I began to advocate more strongly the separation of the police from the military.

Soldiers are trained to shoot and kill. Putting them to work in crowd control, directing traffic, and rehabilitating criminals - it's not in the ballgame. Soldiers are trained to destroy the enemy - the people are not the enemy".

The Aquino government was put on the defensive as media and various groups announced a plan to hold an indignation rally the following Monday, on the very spot where the marchers had been killed. There was no guarantee that this indignation rally would be peaceful. In fact, with tension high on both sides, the potential for more violence was very high.

Saguisag started to look for contacts on the side of the marchers to defuse the tinderbox. On Friday, January 23, he found Tadeo in, of all places, "Street Pulse", a TV talk show on Channel 9. They were both guests on the show which had devoted that night's episode to discussing the previous day's unfortunate event.

The weekend saw frantic talks between the side of the government and the side of the marchers. People who used to walk elbow-to-elbow together against Marcos were now divided into camps.

On Monday morning, the President met with Tadeo, Crispin Beltran of KMU, student leader Lean Alejandro and others to discuss the manner by which the indignation march was to be conducted. A timetable agreement was reached wherein the marchers would cross the Mendiola Bridge (now Chino Roces Bridge) and then turn left at Concepcion Aguila St., the street that separated San Beda College and the College of the Holy Spirit.

Saguisag relates: "After the meeting with the President in the morning, we quickly called in the Ministers and our friends who used to march against the deposed regime, to 'welcome' the marchers led by Sen. Tanada. Street protesters like Raffy Alunan, Maring Feria, Dick Powell, Lulu Teodoro, Bea Zobel, a gaggle of nuns, and so many, many others came. Mita Pardo Tavera and Joe Concepcion, among other ministers, marched with the protesters. Even with a scorecard, one would have difficulty determining who was on what side".

Arroyo, on the other hand, had his misgivings: "Without enthusiasm, I briefly joined the indignation march ... more to satisfy the old man Tanada who was there. I was the Executive Secretary. How could I demonstrate against the very government of the President?"

"What mattered was that we were all FiHpinos, solving a problem the Filipino way, which would drive a foreigner crazy. It was a happy reunion of sorts. Nostalgia was in the festive air ...but nail-biting anxiety-was never far away", Saguisag concludes.

In the end, the marchers were allowed to reach up to J.P. Laurel and turn left to Sta. Mesa. The petition of the protesters were turned over at the Malacanang gate. Then the tension vanished. Everybody went home relieved. Nobody picked up a stone. Nobody swung a piece of wood. Nobody pulled a trigger.

The GMA-7 Incident

Military rebels saw a window of opportunity in the wake of the tragic incident at Mendiola. Apparently, they expected the January 26 indignation rally to be another violent affair. In the first hours of January 27, military rebels aligned with the Marcos loyalists launched a coup attempt.

Their targets were the GMA-7 television station, Villamor Air Base, Sangley Point, and Fort Bonifacio. Rebel units successfully took over GMA-7 at about 1:30 a.m. Government forces under the command of Col. Loven Abadia defeated rebel units that tried to take the Villamor Air Base at 1:45 a.m. Rebel units took over Sangley Point for seven hours and then surrendered. Government forces preempted rebel action in Fort Bonifacio. A raid on a house inside the camp led to the arrest of 11 army soldiers, 5 marines, one patrolman, and 21 civilians, all of whom were heavily armed. Government forces intercepted rebel reinforcements coming from Nueva Ecija before they reached Metro Manila.

Col. Oscar Canlas, with around 100 men, arrived at 5:00 a.m. to reinforce the rebel force that had taken GMA-7. Later that day, he issued statements asking President Aquino to step down and asking for the return of Ferdinand Marcos. Government forces under the command of Gen. Fidel Ramos withheld an attack against the rebel forces in GMA-7 and pursued negotiations for their surrender. A peaceful surrender would minimize bloodshed and damage to property. The rebels finally surrendered at 9:00 a.m. on January 29.

President Aquino had called a Cabinet meeting in the morning of January 28 wherein General Ramos briefed the Cabinet on what had happened in GMA-7, Villamor Air Base, Sangley Point, and Fort Bonifacio. Among the decisions made by President Aquino in that meeting was the creation of a Cabinet Crisis Committee to be headed by Dr. Emmanuel Soriano. Dr. Soriano, who had been attending Cabinet meetings as early as November 1986, was also formally appointed as National Security Director that day.

The members of the Cabinet Crisis Committee included Ileta, Ramos, Health Secretary Alfredo 'Alran' Bengzon, Finance Secretary Vicente 'Ting' Jayme, and Trade and Industry Secretary Jose Concepcion. In the Committee's first meeting, a week after the GMA-7 incident, they defined its functions and responsibilities. They agreed that its role was to assist the President in anticipating crisis situations or flashpoints, and having identified them, to decide what actions were to be taken.

Among the possible flashpoints identified were: assassination of the President; the sudden appearance of Marcos or Ver; bombings; hijacking; kidnapping of Aquino children; enlargement of the Gulf crisis; proliferation of private armies; and many more.

Meanwhile, the plebiscite for the ratification of the Constitution pushed through on February 2, 1987 with an 87 percent voter turnout. The "Yes" votes prevailed with 78 percent, as against 23 percent voting "No". On February 11, President Aquino led the highest civilian and military officials of the government in taking the oath of allegiance to the new Constitution. Pursuant to the new Constitution, the elections for the Senate and the House of Representatives were held three months later on May 11, 1987.

After the unsuccessful coup attempt in January of that year, the next move of the rebels was an assassination attempt on President Aquino. She was scheduled to attend her

first Philippine Military Academy (PMA) graduation on March 22, 1987. On March 18, four days before graduation day, a bomb planted in the grandstand prematurely exploded, killing four and wounding 43 people. On March 22, under tight security, the President addressed her first PMA graduating class with AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Fidel Ramos at her side. As if to stress again her victory, the President wore yellow, the same color as the flowers on the dais.

Democratic Transition Keeps On Track

In the meantime, the election campaign for legislative positions throughout the country shifted into high gear. Like the plebiscite for the Constitution, there was a high voter turnout on May 11, 1987 with 87 percent of 26.6 million registered voters participating. Candidates, supported by what was then called "Cory Magic" swept an overwhelming majority on both houses of Congress. The opposition Grand Alliance for Democracy (GAD), composed mostly of former KBL members, complained that there was massive fraud.

As provided in the new Constitution, Congress was to convene on July 27, 1987 and President Aquino would lose her lawmaking powers. The Malacanang staff worked feverishly to finalize vital proposed legislation that the President could issue as Executive Orders. Among the major pieces of legislation issued by the President between July 1 and July 27, 1987 were: the Family Code of the Philippines (EO No. 226); and EO No. 229 providing the mechanism for the implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

On July 27, 1987, President Aquino opened the First Regular Session of the First Congress under the 1987 Constitution and delivered her first State of the Nation Address. Slowly but surely, and under the worst possible circumstances, the foundations of a democracy were being laid.

But the RAM had other things in mind. There was a spate of bombings in Metro Manila, and on August 2, 1987, the whole country was shocked by the news that Local Government Secretary Jaime Ferrer had been killed in an ambush. Higher oil prices in the world market and limited government resources for subsidy forced the government to impose an unpopular oil price increase which took effect in August. In protest, cause-oriented groups under the BAYAN umbrella launched a "Welga ng Bayan" which involved coordinated mass actions in major cities throughout the country. There were marches, barricades, bonfires; public transport was paralyzed.

By the book, it was the right time for a coup. At about 1:45 a.m. on August 28, 1987, military rebels led by Gringo Honasan launched an attack against Malacanang.

THE MILITARY PUTSCHES THAT ALMOST SUCCEEDED

THE WALLS SPOKE even before the August putsch struck. First of all, the government enemies were so steeped in arrogance that they would always announce the fall of the Aquino administration. Hotel lobby habitués gulped these predictions with their brewed coffee.

In the early morning of August 26, 1987, Arroyo got up because he was told Senator Tanada wanted to see him. Thinking that it was Bobby (the young Tanada, by then Senator, too), he was surprised to see the old man. Senator Lorenzo Tanada, in his sala. Without any fuss, Tanada told him that the RAM was going to strike on the 29th, the same day that the jeepney drivers scheduled their strike. He got it from reliable sources and he thought he would want the President to know about it. Then Tanada left quickly.

Actually, intelligence reports had been trickling in for days. The number of information were checked against each other.

The President, the Executive Secretary, and the PSG knew about the August 28 coup attempt days before it happened. Arroyo explains: "There had just been an oil price increase, the jeepney drivers were restless and wanted to strike.

Intelligence information came that there was a buildup of forces in Central Luzon ... You know, when you have this information, you have to get it from several sources so you can check. My sources told me that RAM would strike on August 29, to coincide with the announced date of the jeepney strike. I checked with Col. Gazmin and he said, 'My own intelligence reports say August 29'... Then (the jeepney drivers' group changed its plans and moved the planned jeepney strike to August 28. It was reported that RAM also moved back the planned coup to August 28 - sinabay. This was fatal to RAM because they were not yet prepared. I informed the President about this".

The RAM came to Manila, nevertheless, and went straight to Malacanang. The PSG was waiting for them.

The rebel units came from San Miguel, Bulacan; Soliven, Isabela; Cabanatuan City; Palayan City; and Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija. In many cases, the rebel officers withheld the true nature of their mission from most of their troops. Lt. Col. Melchor Acosta, for example, a classmate of Gringo and commander of the 14th Infantry Battalion told his troops that they were going to Manila to protect Malacanang from an impending attack.

The rebel forces closed in on Malacanang from all the possible approaches: Nagtahan Bridge, J.P. Laurel St., and Concepcion Aguila St., and Ayala Bridge.

Malacanang As Battleground

Arroyo says of the battle: "Every military man will tell you that Malacanang is not a good place to fight, for both the attacker and the defender. There are so many houses and civilians around and the streets are narrow. Looking back, the error of RAM is that they did not pursue the attack after taking initial casualties. Instead they turned around and went to Camp Aguinaldo. In the meantime, their reinforcements could not come. The reinforcements were not prepared because the attack had been moved a day earlier".

PSG Commander Voltaire Gazmin recounts the attack on Malacanang: "The PSG armor had been deployed. A PSG Scorpion tank was stationed inside of Gate 4. I ordered the tank officer to move outside the gate and park right on J.P. Laurel St.

I was right there at Gate 4 when the rebel soldiers tried to enter Malacanang. The rebel troops moved in on several trucks and shooting started. The car of the President's son, Noynoy, was intercepted by attacking rebel soldiers near St. Jude Church. Noynoy was injured, and three of his security men were killed. The other PSG troopers were killed during that clash.

During a lull in the shooting, I ran to the President's residence on Arlegui St. The close-in security were already deployed around the residence. I went up to the President's room on the second floor. She was very calm. I asked the President and everybody on the second floor to go down - the windows in the Arlegui residence were not bulletproof. The President agreed and we started bringing down her family to the first floor. I started a head count. When I finished, there was one missing. The President was still upstairs! I rushed back and Boy Gonzales, one of the close-in security, told me that the President was dressing up and fixing her hair. That's how calm she was.

The President did not want to leave Arlegui at that time so the PSG simply had to take extra precautions. It was only during the daytime that the President transferred to the Palace to meet with key officials. The attack on Malacanang being unsuccessful, the rebel soldiers went to Camp Aguinaldo. At that time I knew the battle was over for them, they had failed in their principal objective of seizing Malacanang. Had the rebels succeeded, I do not discount the possibility that the President would have been killed.

After that failed coup, Louie Beltran criticized me for not having troops deployed at Sta. Mesa. That would have been ideal. The problem was that PSG forces had been deployed to Bulacan, Pampanga, and Zambales in preparation for a visit by the President. Since I had fewer troops, I had no choice but to pull back my defense positions".

The attack on Malacanang was a failure. Jeering civilians in Sta. Mesa compounded the humiliation of the rebels. Before withdrawing to Camp Aguinaldo, the rebels went on a savage orgy to vent their frustration - they killed 11 and wounded 54 unarmed civilians.

But the RAM forces succeeded in capturing the Philippine Military Academy, Camp Olivas, Basa Air Base, Channel 7, and in the wee hours of the next day. Channel 4.

PC Chief de Villa relates his experience prior to and during the coup attempt: "I tried to stop it before it could happen. There was an intensive intelligence effort which included day-to-day monitoring. We determined the personalities involved, their organization, the

course of action they wanted to take, and their time frame. I talked to the people whom I believed were involved and tried to dissuade them from getting deeper into the mess that they were trying to create. We were aware of their movements from the very start.

General Ramos, Dr. Emmanuel Soriano, and Teddy Boy Locsin were with me in the PC Headquarters in Camp Crame. I had mobilized my men and we prepared for counteraction.

General Ramos wanted to go to his office at the AFP General Headquarters inside Camp Aguinaldo. I advised him against it.

Teddy Boy Locsin wanted an immediate counteraction against rebel forces that had taken over Channel 4 and wanted it razed to the ground. We told him that we would operate according to certain priorities.

Our first priority was to retake Camp Aguinaldo. It was intolerable that Camp Aguinaldo - the seat of military power - would remain in rebel hands. It is very symbolic. More than that, there were officers who were with us who were trapped in the headquarters building, which the rebels set on fire. They had poured gasoline in one of the offices in the first floor. Among those trapped were General Eduardo Ermita and General Ramon Montano".

As de Villa recounts, he formed a Task Force to retake Camp Aguinaldo. Colonel Rene Dado of the Philippine Army was to lead troops to enter Gate 3 of the camp, while Major Nicholas Pasinos, commander of the Special Action Force of the CAPCOM, was to enter Gate 2. They were ordered to head straight for the burning headquarters.

The Marines who had earlier reinforced the PSG in the defense of Malacanang were asked to go to Camp Aguinaldo to beef up the forces.

Retaking Aguinaldo

The counterattack was set at 9:00 a.m. But at 10:00 a.m., there was still no action. General Ermita, who probably was feeling the discomfort of being broiled to death, called up de Villa and half-complained: "Pare, bakit walang nangyayari?"

De Villa checked his commanders and found out that they were still preparing. Finally, at 11:00 a.m., the counterattack began. A 90 mm recoilless rifle was fired through the gates of the camp. The troops under Major Pasinos engaged the rebel forces in a firefight. General Cesar Nazareno was wounded in the initial exchange. But soon, the rebels near Gate 2 were waving their white flags.

However, Colonel Dado and his group had not entered their assigned gate. De Villa bawled out the officer. One account has it that Dado encountered resistance from a group led by Colonel Javier Carbonell of the Pasig Brigade. Both sides apparently were not clear as to each other's loyalties. By the time they found out that they were on the same side. Dado had been shot in the leg.

At 1:00 p.m., the marines from Malacanang arrived. They were ordered to take over the assignment of Dado and his men.

Soon after, the rebel troops under Ochosa surrendered. Honasan, meanwhile, fled

aboard a helicopter - leaving 12 officers and a disoriented band of soldiers to their means.

The next target was to retake Channel 4, which was being held by the rebel forces under Colonel Eduardo Matillano. Matillano was one of the RAM officers who secured the government station during the EDSA Revolution.

During the first hours of the rebel attack, the President ordered that the police be detached from the constabulary. She wanted a special force under General Alfredo Lim to safeguard broadcast facilities. The EDSA experience had taught everyone that the control of television was pivotal in the warfare.

Maria Montelibano of the RTVM actually had a fallback position in case the rebels were able to capture all the stations. An emergency broadcast system was ready to air any message from the President. But that had not been necessary.

De Villa recounts: "Fred Lim arrived at Camp Crame with 200 men, in all sorts of vehicles, attire, and weapons. It looked like a ragtag army". Lim and his men were issued armalites. Then they were combined with the PC Special Action Force under Major Avelino Razon.

Lim led the attack on Channel 4. The SAF went in first with its armored vehicles. Several SAF men were wounded. A policeman, Sgt. Octavio Esguerra, was killed. The rebels retreated to the nearby Camelot Hotel but, in the end, they too surrendered.

Soriano, along with Teddy Boy Locsin who served as the President's eyes and ears in the camp, was with Ramos and de Villa at the Camp Crame Operations Center: "I joined frequent caucuses conducted by General Ramos and de Villa as the situation evolved. My main concern was to assess if there was sincerity and determination in defeating the rebels.

The Operations Center was filled with subdued excitement and, I suppose, subdued fear of the unknown.

When a report came in that flags were being turned upside down in various military camps, it was decided to postpone recapturing Camp Aguinaldo until all such camps were identified. It paid off: about 140 camps and their commanders were identified for future investigation".

After the government troops had retaken Camp Aguinaldo and the television stations, the regional commands which were overrun by the rebels became easier to retake. In the aftermath of this unsuccessful coup attempt, all the regional commanders who proved ineffective were relieved of their commands.

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Despite the fall of various camps into military rebel hands, reinforcements from outside Metro Manila under the command of officers loyal to the duly constituted government remained on full alert.

Soriano reports: "Sometime during the day, I phoned the President to update her and to assure her that I thought General Ramos, the officers, and the forces under his command were loyal and doing their job as best as they could".

In the wake of the failed coup, PSG Commander Gazmin adopted additional security measures to ensure the President's safety: "One of the first things we did was to limit the President's visits to the regions to only one province at a time. This helped to ensure that PSG troops were not deployed too thinly. Preferably, she flew out of Manila and was back on the same day.

I also stopped accompanying the President on her state visits. I would go with the advance party to finalize security arrangements. But on the date of the President's visit itself, I always stayed behind in Malacanang. The only exceptions were the visits to Singapore and Indonesia".

De Villa also implemented changes in the security system after the August 1987 coup attempt: "First, we strengthened intelligence. Second, we improved the command structure by selecting more determined commanders. We reshuffled. Third, we improved our weapons. We got heavier stuff and got more armor.

We went on a massive information and indoctrination campaign among our officers and troops, the whole theme of which was to support the Constitution and to protect the duly constituted government.

At the same time, we had to investigate and prosecute those who were captured or surrendered. We had a lot of them".

Convulsions After August

The August 1987 coup ended with a total of 53 dead, 200 wounded. Up to that point, it was the most powerful challenge against the 18-month old Aquino government.

Looking at the events in the months that followed, it seemed that the country was being torn apart.

The CPP-NPA complemented the efforts of RAM in running the country to the ground by going on a bridge-blasting binge in Bicol, destroying millions of pesos worth of infrastructure. First to go was Baraca Bridge on September 7. This was followed by Tara Bridge in Camarines Sur on September 8; Comapukapo Bridge in Pilar, Sorsogon on September 16; and, Del Gallego Bridge in Camarines Sur on September 20. President Aquino flew to Bicol to see the damage herself.

On September 9, President Aquino asked the whole Cabinet to resign. On September 16 and 17, the President accepted the resignations of Vice-President Laurel as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Finance Secretary Ongpin, Executive Secretary Arroyo, and Press Secretary Locsin. Two and a half months later, Jaime Ongpin would commit suicide.

Two days after the Cabinet revamp, on September 19, former UP Student Council President and BAYAN stalwart Lean Alejandro was shot dead. On October 28, NPA hitmen killed three US servicemen outside of Clark Air Base. On the same day, NPA hitmen killed Eduardo Mediavillo, a decorated police officer

Soriano remembers the period that followed the failed coup as especially difficult for the President and the Cabinet: "In the weeks after the August 28, 1987 coup attempt, the Cabinet Crisis Committee which I headed conducted a series of workshops to determine where the government was caught unprepared and what network should be set up to prevent a successful coup attempt by military rebels and their supporters. When the Committee was ready with an updated contingency plan and implementing network, an emergency meeting of the key people involved in the Cabinet, the military and intelligence agencies was called in October 1987.

Assignments were discussed, given, and accepted: the Department of Agriculture, under Secretary Sonny Dominguez, the Department of Health, under Secretary Alfredo Bengzon, and the Department of Trade and Industry, under Secretary Joe Concepcion were given monitoring responsibilities to supplement that of the Department of Defense and the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA); the Department of Tourism and the Press Secretary's Office were to assist in public information and psychological warfare; certain key individuals were assigned to handle demonstrations and mobilize people power; liaison was established with both houses of Congress; and the site of the Operations Center, in case of emergency, was determined but kept secret.

In the three weeks after the key resignations were accepted, those of us who remained in the Cabinet, whenever we gathered in small-group meetings, expressed great concern about working as a team: there was a new Executive Secretary; there were new Cabinet members; and even those who remained felt that we had not been working effectively enough as a team.

Thus, some of us, who were perceived to be close enough to the President, were asked to suggest to her that a Cabinet workshop was badly needed,

The President agreed. A whole day workshop was scheduled on October 10. It was held in the lobby of the Guest House. Cabinet Secretary Jose 'Ping' de Jesus and I were asked to be facilitators of the workshop.

The main objective of the workshop was really team-building. But the workshop was designed to attain the objective without delivering the message that the Cabinet had therefore failed to work as a team.

Therefore, the focus of discussion was on how to work together should another emergency arise. Policy issues discussed included when to declare a state of emergency, how to relate with media, how to safeguard public utilities, how to liaise with legislators, how to deal with certain key opposition leaders, how to handle strikes and demonstrations, the setting up of a Central Command and corresponding Regional Commands, psychological warfare operations, field monitoring, mobilizing people power, mobilizing local government leaders and minding close liaison with key and friendly governments.

Cabinet-related matters included such questions as the role of Cabinet members as advisers to the President and implementors of the policy, the problem of Cabinet "superstars", the relationships among Cabinet members, how to help Cabinet members in trouble, what Cabinet members expect from the President and the other way around, how to relate with the President and vice-versa and how to play the 'game'.

It was the first Cabinet workshop since the Aquino government assumed leadership; just about everyone agreed it should be the last".

On a quieter note. President Aquino strengthened alliances with Congress and the Judiciary. The very foundations of constitutional government had been shaken. It was no time to be hesitant to ask for help.

In the middle of September 1987, the President invited all the Senators to a meeting in Malacanang. She told them of contingency measures adapted to prevent a successful coup attempt. The legislators agreed to move around their respective constituencies, conduct dialogues, and mobilize the people's support.

On October 8, the President met with some justices of the Supreme Court at the house of her sister, Terry Lopa, in Pasay City. Former Chief Justice Claudio Teehankee, Marcelo Fernan, and Roberto Concepcion were there. She asked their opinion about emergency rule. If the fragile stability of the government deteriorated, the President felt a stronger hand would become necessary.

Soriano, who was present at the meeting with the justices, relates: "I was pleasantly

surprised to witness how spontaneous and open the justices were in speaking their minds. It seemed like hearing them say 'Go for it, Mrs. President! We will support your move should it be questioned before the Supreme Court'".

Amidst the difficulty, there appeared rays of hope. President Aquino delivered a well-received major policy speech to the business community on October 20, 1987 at the Manila Hotel. The military captured a high-ranking NPA leader, Juanito Rivera (Kumander Juaning), on November 15. Congress enacted laws increasing the salaries of military and civilian personnel of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Department of National Defense (Republic Act No. 6637), and increasing the minimum daily wage (Republic Act No. 6640). These were signed into law by President Aquino on November 26 and December 10, respectively. The campaign for local elections which were to be held on January 18, 1988 was also under way.

The best news for the Aquino government was the capture of Gringo Honasan on December 9.

Neighboring countries sent a strong signal of confidence and support for the Aquino government when the 3rd ASEAN Summit Meeting in Manila pushed through as scheduled, from December 14 to "15, 1987. Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita of Japan came for a visit and attended the ASEAN Summit as an observer.

The capture of Honasan and the successful ASEAN Summit was not a bad way to end the year. Twenty-two months after EDSA, the Aquino government had weathered through several attempts to overthrow it and crisis situations that could have made such attempts successful.

Lull Before A Storm

It would take more than two years before the RAM could muster enough strength to launch a major strike against the Aquino government. The government had suffered major setbacks in 1988 and 1989, prior to the near fatal December 1989 coup attempt.

Honasan escaped from detention on board a Philippine Navy ship on April 2, 1988. Captured high-ranking CPP-NPA leaders Romulo Kintanar and Gloria Jopson escaped on November 12, 1988. The Executive branch encountered difficulties in relating with Congress. In 1989, increasing oil prices in the world market resulted in higher prices of basic commodities. Inflation steadily climbed from 3.8 percent in 1987 to 8.8 percent in 1988 to 10.6 percent in 1989. Workers, jeepney drivers, students, and even government employees took to the streets to demand wage increases, fare increases, and price rollbacks. Opinion surveys showed a drop in the President's popularity rating and increased dissatisfaction with the government.

But there were also positive developments in the same period. Local elections were successfully held on January 18, 1988 and on March 29, 1989. The peace efforts in Mindanao and the Cordilleras were intensified, culminating in the drafting of the Organic Acts for Autonomous Regions which were to be subjected to plebiscites.

Despite the increasing prices, the economy looked good in 1988 when some 1.1 million jobs were created. It was still not so bad when this number fell to 700,000 new jobs in 1989.

The President had laid down her priorities and had asked the Cabinet to support them. First was employment generation. Second was to improve peace and order. Third was to have a more honest and efficient bureaucracy.

The Great Escape

Three months after the August 1987 putsch, the military had captured Gringo Honasan and had kept him detained on board a Philippine Navy ship, BRP Andres Bonifacio, docked in Manila Bay.

At dawn of April 2, 1988, on Black Saturday, Gringo Honasan escaped with 14 Navy men who had been assigned to guard him.

The President was in La Union for the Holy Week break with her family. Upon being told of the escape, she immediately flew back to Manila and summoned Executive Secretary Catalino Macaraig, Soriano, Ramos, and de Villa.

"I knew it wouldn't last", she told Soriano and Macaraig as soon as she saw them. She was smiling, but it was the smile of a very disappointed person.

Soriano reflects: 'The supreme irony was that a couple of days earlier ... a senior officer had assured Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos that the guards of Honasan had been doubled precisely to prevent his escape.

I had this sick feeling inside thinking that the Aquino government and our democratic institutions were seriously in danger because the military was thoroughly infiltrated by supporters of the military rebels. After the Manila Hotel incident in July 1986... and after the failed August 27, 1987 coup attempt, there was much talk that the military was incapable of disciplining its own ranks.

I began to believe this line of thinking, but was at a loss on what to do".

The President was given a brief update, after which she gave instructions on what had to be done.

Sword And Shield

In 1988, AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Fidel V. Ramos reached 60, the mandatory retirement age. On January 21, 1988, President Aquino appointed him as Secretary of National Defense and named Gen. Renato de Villa as the new AFP Chief of Staff. These were men, the President believed, who had proven themselves and could be trusted to remain loyal to the Constitution and to the Commander-in-Chief.

The new Chief of Staff stepped up the counterinsurgency drive. The military scored against the CPP-NPA on March 29, 1988 with the arrest of three of their top leaders: Rafael Baylosis, CPP Secretary General; Romulo Kintanar, CPP-NPA Central Committee Chairman; and, Benjamin de Vera, Central Committee member. Two other CPP-NPA members were captured: Gloria Jopson Asuncion and Marco Palo.

Seven months later, on November 7, 1988, President Aquino announced the capture of Ignacio Capegan, the no. 3 man in the CPP. On July 27, 1989, the military captured Saturnine

Ocampo, Chairman of the National United Front Commission of the National Democratic Front (NDF), and his wife, Carolina Malay Ocampo, Vice Chairman of the NDF.

Computer files and documents seized during the raids revealed a movement in increasing disarray.

Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos pushed for the passage of a bill creating the Philippine National Police (PNP). Under the bill, the Philippine Constabulary (PC) would be abolished and its officers and men given the option of joining either the Armed Forces or the new PNP. The new PNP was to be under the Department of Interior and Local Government. The PNP was to be oriented primarily to public safety and, after a transition period of two years, it was to have primary responsibility for counterinsurgency. The primary role of the Armed Forces was for external defense, although it was to continue to play a major role in counterinsurgency during the transition period. On May 4, 1988, President Aquino certified the bill to Congress to help ensure its early passage.

Gringo Honasan was not recaptured, but the government made steady gains against the military rebels. On May 11, 1988, a six-man general court martial convicted 35 military personnel, including seven officers, and sentenced them to 12 years imprisonment at hard labor.

The military captured two ranking officers involved in the August 1987 putsch. Col. Eduardo Matillano, who had earlier escaped, was recaptured on September 27, 1988 and Lt. Col. Francisco Baula was nabbed the following month, on October 3. Two weeks later, Baula was shot dead by prison guards while trying to escape.

The hard work and sacrifices were paying off. The military was slowly but surely exorcising its own ranks, at the same time breaking up the leadership of the communist insurgency.

Hard Times

Due mainly to the falling prices of oil in the world market. President Aquino was able to roll back prices of gasoline three times in 1988. It was too good to last.

The handling of the foreign debt problem inherited from the Marcos administration was a source of bitter debate. Academics, some legislators, and cause-oriented groups, including National Economic and Development Secretary Solita Monsod, pushed for a policy of selective repudiation. But the President's other advisers favored a more conservative approach, meaning cooperation with the IMF-World Bank.

On May 23, 1989, the IMF agreed to grant the country US\$1.7 billion in new loans over the next three years. A debt rescheduling agreement involving US\$2.2 billion had also been reached with the Philippines' creditors.

But there was a price to be paid for these resources which the Philippines needed badly. The trade-off was that the government would have to implement an austerity program.

Government spending would have to be curbed in order to reduce the budget deficit. Support prices for palay would have to be reduced. Prices of petroleum products could no longer be subsidized. Demands of government workers for wage increases would not be fully

met. The bottom line was that, in the short term, prices of basic commodities would increase. This was bitter medicine. But the Aquino administration took it, in view of a pay off in terms of a stronger economy in the future.

Midway into 1989, the economic situation became more difficult. The price of crude oil in the world market began to rise. The Oil Price Stabilization Fund, used to subsidize the prices of petroleum products, had become nearly depleted. The National Power Corporation would have to increase power rates. Prices of basic commodities increased and interest rates escalated.

In May, the President and her Cabinet met to identify events that could culminate into a serious political and national security situation. They identified the events to watch as: mass actions from the labor sector, the traditional student protests against tuition fee hikes, transport strikes, and increased activities of the State's enemies in light of the other events. Wild cards were: the return of Marcos, possible escalation of RP-Malaysia conflict over disputed waters, effect of passage of the PNP Bill, and other destabilization efforts of the left and the right forces.

In the administration's mind, the difficult decisions it had to reach were necessary for long term and sustainable growth, increased employment, lower inflation, and an improved economy. They knew things would get bad before they got better. The more difficult task was managing the security and political implications of the short-run costs.

The Gathering Tempest

As expected, the brewing political and social unrest began to percolate. Alleged overpricing of lands sold to the government under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program blew up in a major scandal that badly damaged the administration's credibility. At the risk of further labor unrest, the President endorsed a bill increasing the minimum wage to Congress with an appeal that it should be the last. Even the government workers joined in the fray by demanding for the promised wage increases.

In light of the increasing economic hardships being felt by the people, the situation was ripe for a crisis. A public opinion survey conducted by the Ateneo de Manila and Social Weather Station showed an 18-point drop in the President's popularity. There was also a 50-point drop in the margin of satisfaction over the same period.

On November 24, 1989, Marcos crony Eduardo 'Danding' Cojuangco, Jr. suddenly arrived in the Philippines, ending three years and nine months of exile in the US. On November 29, 1989, President Aquino ordered Solicitor General Francisco Chavez to personally prosecute the criminal cases against Cojuangco.

On November 30, 1989, the Energy Regulatory Board announced price increases for gasoline, kerosene, diesel, and liquefied petroleum gas.

Just after midnight of that same day, rebel military units took over Fort Bonifacio, Villamor Air Base, Sangley Point, and Channels 2 and 4.

The December 1989 Putsch

In the evening of November 29, 1989, a team of Scout Rangers sabotaged military communications facilities in Tagaytay, in preparation for a coup d'etat. After destroying the facilities, the team proceeded to Fort Bonifacio. It turned out that the commanding officer of the rebel unit had made a mistake. He had acted one day too early.

By morning of November 30, the AFP GHQ was aware that there was an impending coup and Metro Manila was placed on alert. In Malacanang, a concerned Col. Gazmin put the PSG on alert. By 10:00 p.m., PSG troops were at battle stations.

At about the same time. Chief of Staff Renato de Villa called a news conference. He reported what had taken place in Tagaytay the day before and confirmed that a coup plot led by Gringo Honasan had been uncovered.

Executive Secretary Catalino Macaraig started getting phone calls at his home in Makati: "Before the December 1989 coup attempt took place, we were getting rumors of an impending coup every week. Even my son-in-law in Butuan was telling me that there would be a coup in December. As it turned out, Jojo Binay was the first one to inform me of the outbreak of the December 1989 coup. He called me up at home at about 10:00 p.m. I started receiving and making calls for the next hour.

I called up the President in Arlegui. 'You better come over,' she said".

In the first hours of December 1, rebel forces took over Fort Bonifacio, Villamor Air Base, Sangley Point, Channel 2, and Channel 4.

Macaraig had told Presidential Legal Counsel Adolf Azcuna, Presidential Management Staff Head Elfren Cruz, and Director Joaquin 'Jake' Lagonera to come to his house where they were picked up by a PSG vehicle with security escort led by Capt. Liwanag. The PSG had already planted mines around Malacanang.

Maria Montelibano and her staff started setting up for a television broadcast. It was critical that the President should go on the air immediately. Otherwise, the government would be vulnerable to psy-war tactics of the rebel side.

The hook-ups with the major television and radio networks were on, waiting to tape the President, when Maria thought that a little make-up on the President was needed. "Ano? Coup d'etat na coup d'etat, mag-me-make-up pa tayo?" the President reacted. "Never mind. You take now", she ordered, then calmly taped her message in the Guest House with the Cabinet at her back.

At 3:45 a.m., the President was heard all over the country assuring the people that the government was in control. The painstaking work of Maria and her staff had paid off- as early as two years before, they had been building up alliances in the broadcast media in view of such eventuality as a coup attempt. Maria tells of their preparation: "We studied and mapped the communication links of the entire Philippines: municipal, provincial, national and international, all the way up to the satellite links. Then we studied how all the friendly forces could network. If you look at the map, NEC covers northern Luzon all the way down to Visayas. The RMN covers Metro Manila all the way down to Visayas. The RMN covers Metro Manila all the way down to Mindanao. The radio network of the Catholic Church has a wide

reach and is better funded than the government radio network. It is the Catholic and government-owned stations that reach the most remote areas, like Kalinga-Apayao or Tawi-Tawi.

Remember the Manila Hotel incident in July 1986? We were trapped for some time in Cagayan de Oro, and we could not get the President on the air. We said, 'Never again'.

The Presidential Broadcast Staff were kept busy. It was important that the President was heard on the air from time to time. Speaker Ramon Mitra had come to Malacanang and, upon direct instruction of the President, went on the air. The staff recalled with awe and amusement how the President even directed how Mitra was to be taped: "Aba, importante na nakukuha siya with me".

Mitra expressed support and reported to the people that, according to some congressmen, everything was normal in their areas. Mitra also aired an appeal to the other congressmen all over the country to rally 'round the government: "We cannot afford to squander this second chance that history has given us to make democracy work in our country ... stay with your constituents, organize your resources and collaborate with the loyal military. Bear in mind that we are sixty million against only a handful. Our people still support the President".

The rebels had captured Channel 2 and Channel 4 so that they could broadcast a message to the nation from Gringo Honasan. They were never able to - the station managers already knew what to do in case of a coup attempt. They had disabled their stations' transmitters.

Of Tora Toras And Moro-Moro

At 6:45 a.m., three Tora Tora planes (T-28s) from rebel-held Sagley Point bombed and strafed the Malacanang complex. Armored Infantry Vehicles (AIFV) of the PSG, equipped with 25mm anti-aircraft guns, fired back.

For Col. Gazmin, the aerial attack on Malacanang was the worst point of the December 1989 putsch: "A rocket from a T-28 hit one of a convoy of vehicles parked near the golf club at Malacanang Park... this convoy of vehicles would have been used to evacuate the President. Among the contingency was that if the PSG Had not been able to hold the Palace, the President would have been brought across the Pasig river to Malacanang Park. From here she could be evacuated by land or by air. A second rocket landed ... shattering the car of Justice Secretary Sedfrey Ordenez. A third rocket landed on golf course. A T-28 tried to go after one of the PSG tanks but missed ... (it) was the worst point of the December 1989 coup. I felt that the President's life was in the most serious danger. The effect of the aerial attack on the morale of my troops was devastating".

During that time. President Aquino and Executive Secretary Macaraig were in constant contact with Secretary Ramos and Gen. de Villa who were busy in Camp Crame. Communications

The Philippine Air Force Base in Basa, Pampanga was ordered to send F-5 jetfighters against the Tora Toras. Ileto reflects on the bombing of Malacanang: "We saw our Philippine

Air Force F-5s come in and chase the Tora Tora away. Executive Secretary Macaraig wondered why the jet fighters were not firing at the smaller planes. I explained that if the jet fighters fired at the Tora Toras which were flying a lower altitude, there would be civilian casualties on the ground."

After the bombing, the President went on television to deliver her second statement for the day: "... We make this appeal to the misguided rebel forces. Lay down your arms and it will be better for you. You have no prospects of reinforcements. In a short while, it will be daybreak and the start of major offensive operations against you.

You have brought dishonor to the Armed Forces and destroyed the image of stability and progress our people have taken such pains to build. Your timely surrender to the government is the least you can do in restitution for the damage you have inflicted on our country...

To the officers ... I have this to say: you will regret the day you conceived this evil plan to destroy our country and our freedom. When will you learn that I cannot be moved by threats or violence? When will you learn the futility of challenging the duly constituted government of our country? When will you learn the futility of fighting our people?

I have ordered the Secretary of Defense and the Chief of Staff to smash this mutiny with all the force at hand".

That same morning, Tora Toras and Sikorsky helicopter gunships on the rebel side struck Channel 4, Camp Crame, and Camp Aguinaldo. Four bombs fell on Gen. de Villa's quarters in Camp Aguinaldo at 9:45 a.m., just half an hour after his family had been evacuated.

But the rebels did not have complete control of the air. In the morning and in the afternoon. Air Force F-5 jetfighters and Sikorsky helicopter gunships on the government's side pounded rebel positions at the Logistics Command in Sangley Point, Camp Aguinaldo, and White Plains subdivision at the back.

An integral part of the psy-war against the rebels was broadcasting the statements of support coming in from the international community. Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus, who was in the Guest House with other Cabinet members, actively solicited statements of support. Among the first countries to strongly express their support for the Aquino government were Spain and France.

At around 10:00 a.m.. Ambassador Nicolas Platt of the United States called up Macaraig at his office in the Guest House and informed him that the US supported the Aquino government and was willing to extend assistance. Ambassador Platt wanted to know what assistance they could provide. Macaraig then phoned "the President who was at her Arlegui residence at that time.

President Aquino instructed Macaraig to get in touch with Ramos and de Villa. After being informed of Ambassador Platt's query, Ramos told Macaraig that they needed persuasion flights to scare away the Tora Toras.

When told of Ramos' request. Ambassador Platt asked Macaraig if the President could

confirm it. Calling from her house in Arlegui, the President did. The President expressed thanks and informed Ambassador Platt that Secretary Ramos would get in touch with him.

At about 1:00 p.m., the rebel planes at Sangley were destroyed by Philippine Air Force F-5 jets from Basa Air Base. Persuasion flights by US F-4 Phantom jets from Clark Air Base began at 2:00 p.m. and ended before nightfall.

In the afternoon, the PSG, assisted by police units, moved against rebel units that were assembling near Malacanang. Col. Gazmin recalls: "We gained the upper hand and morale improved after PSG armor took out the rebel positions in Sta. Mesa, blockading one of the major approaches to Malacanang. I was very relieved when I learned that rebel-held Sangley Point had been neutralized by Air Force F-5 jets".

But there had been no doubt in Macaraig's mind that a land attack against Malacanang would be defeated by the PSG. It was the aerial attack which worried Col. Gazmin for a while.

Government forces took Sangley Point out of rebel hands. But at the cost of the life of Major Danny Atienza, after whom the military post is now named.

Senator Rene Saguisag, who was among those who joined President Aquino in Malacanang, sums it up: "The Tora Toras seemed more Moro Moro in the air for a while. But nothing could take away the glory of the Filipino soldier (Major Atienza) who knocked out the Sangley-based air power of the rebels, and died in the process that afternoon".

Desperate Moves

With Sangley Point lost to them, the rebels quietly took positions near the camps, unchallenged, and unmolested. In the morning of December 2, rebel forces moved out of Fort Bonifacio and took over 22 high-rise buildings in the Makati business district.

That same morning, government forces retook Channel 4 while rebel troops regrouped around Camp Aguinaldo. Government forces subjected them to constant air strikes. Meanwhile, two battalions under Gen. Marcelo Blando, who was supporting the rebels, had arrived from Nueva Ecija and stationed themselves at the nearby Greenhills Commercial Complex. The two battalions, however, refused to attack Camp Aguinaldo.

Just after midnight, in the first hours of December 3, rebel forces which had regrouped around Camp Aguinaldo launched another attack. The battle lasted until 6:30 a.m. with the rebels unsuccessful.

While the battle for Camp Aguinaldo was going on. President Aquino convened the Cabinet at noon in Malacanang. Secretary Ramos was absent as he was still in Camp Aguinaldo coordinating the efforts against the rebels. During the meeting, National Security Adviser Ileto reported that the coup appeared to have collapsed, with the majority of the rebels having already surrendered. President Aquino assigned then Cabinet Secretary Jose de Jesus to give all the Cabinet members regular updates on the actions taken by the President and other developments. Social Welfare Secretary Mita Pardo de Tavera reported that they had activated 19 evacuation centers for residents fleeing from the vicinity of the military camps

where fighting was still raging. Health Secretary Bengzon reported that all government hospitals had been instructed to treat all casualties. He had also directed the distribution of blood, intravenous fluids, anesthesia, and antibiotics needed to treat bullet and shrapnel wounds. After some discussion, it was agreed to suspend classes indefinitely. It was also decided that government offices and banks would resume operations the next day, December 4, a Monday, except in some areas where security was still a problem.

But by that Monday, rebel forces were still in control of portions of the Makati business district and Mactan Air Base in Cebu. President Aquino met with senators, congressmen, and Cabinet members. Macaraig recalls the meeting: 'The President called the meeting to marshal support for certain measures that the administration wanted to take. Senate President Jovito Salonga informed the President that the Senate was forming a special committee to investigate the December 1989 coup. One of the members would be Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, as majority floor leader. The President objected. She did not really raise her voice, but I knew that she was angry".

On December 5, President Aquino declared that she was ruling out the imposition of Martial Law. However, she imposed price ceilings on nine basic commodities to prevent unscrupulous traders from taking advantage of the panic buying.

In the meantime, negotiations with rebels still holed out in the high-rise buildings in Makati were pursued. PMA Superintendent Arturo Enrile took the lead for the government side.

At the Cabinet meeting on December 6, President Aquino announced that she was going to create an independent commission to investigate the most recent coup attempt. Hilario Davide, Chairman of the Commission on Elections, would be asked to head it.

Secretary Ramos, who had by that time been able to attend the meeting, briefed the President and the Cabinet on the latest developments. He announced that stranded tourists and foreign nationals in Makati would be able to leave before the day was over. Government negotiators led by then Tourism Undersecretary Rafael Alunan III, Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay, and Gen. Alexander Aguirre had worked out a ceasefire agreement to start at 3:00 p.m. that day. Ramos also reported that the surrender of the remaining rebel units and their transfer to Fort Bonifacio was being worked out. A detailed report on the circumstances regarding US assistance to the government during the coup attempt was also given.

After the report of Ramos, President Aquino called on Ping de Jesus to present a list of measures that needed to be implemented immediately by the government. The list included: securing Makati and Mactan Air Base, conducting loyalty checks, securing captured rebel officers and men, assistance to military casualties, and safeguarding against all possible NPA or MNLF attacks that would try to take advantage of the situation - care of the Department of National Defense; physical clean-up of Metro Manila - care of the Metro Manila Commission and the Metro Manila mayors; taking measures against possible outbreak of looting - care of the PC-INP and local governments; and, provision of assistance to dislocated civilians - care of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

The Department of Agriculture and the Metro Manila Commission were to ensure adequate supply of food in Metro Manila and to coordinate the free flow of goods and fuel. The Department of Trade and Industry was to take measures to stabilize prices of food. The

National Power Corporation was to coordinate with MERALCO in ensuring adequate power supply. The Department of Transportation and Communication and the Metro Manila Commission were to take immediate steps to improve transport and traffic conditions. The Department of Finance and the Central Bank were to take measures to prevent bank runs and flight of capital.

Mopping Up

On December 7, 1989, rebel troops which had retreated to Makati finally "returned to barracks" in Fort Bonifacio. President Aquino issued Administrative Order No. 146 creating a Presidential Commission to conduct a fact-finding investigation of the failed coup.

Business establishments in Makati resumed normal operations on December 8. By December 9, Mactan had been cleared of rebel forces and blockades north and south of Metro Manila had been removed.

On December 11, the NAIA and the domestic airport resumed normal operations. The Cabinet Assistance System, with minor revisions, endorsed to the President a draft bill by Congressman Raul Roco granting her emergency powers. The President certified the bill to Congress, which acted expeditiously. President Aquino signed the bill into law. Republic Act 6862, on December 20, 1989.

On December 28, 1989, the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) filed rebellion charges against Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, former Energy Minister Geronimo Velasco, Gringo Honasan, Makati Councilor Roberto Brillante, and Silahis Hotel President Rebecca Panlilio and his wife Erlinda.

On December 31, 1989, the President again revamped her Cabinet.

The December 1989 putsch was a near fatal blow, not only to the government of Corazon C. Aquino but to the fragile democracy and modest economic gains so painstakingly nurtured by her and the Filipino people. The country had to begin convincing the international community again, especially the business and financial sectors, that it could sustain democratic processes without threat of disruption.

Succeeding events as a result of this putsch, particularly the economic crunch felt largely by ordinary citizens, would be placed at President Aquino's doorstep. The Aquino government had weathered through crises made by human

THE GULF CRISIS

THE DECEMBER 1989 putsch left 99 dead and 570 wounded/ including civilians. The Armed Forces lost P469 million worth of facilities, equipment, and other property. Foreign investments and tourist arrivals declined due to doubts of the country's political stability.

In 1990 and 1991, a series of events reminiscent of the 10 plagues of Egypt as told in Exodus, confronted the Aquino government one after another: a killer earth-1 quake, a war in the Persian Gulf, the 20th century's largest volcanic eruption; and, typhoons and droughts brought about by the global weather phenomenon called "El Nifio".

In this chapter, we focus mainly on the Persian Gulf War (August 1990 to February 1991) and how President Aquino made difficult decisions in light of its implications on the country, as well as the manner by which she steered the country through crises in the final two and a half years of her term.

Picking Up The Pieces

The recent putsch and the perceived erosion of the President's prestige and political clout thereafter, alarmed many of her advisers and supporters. They were concerned that conditions were building up favorable to a return to power through elections by political forces identified with the Marcoses. They informed the President of their apprehensions.

A series of informal discussions generated consensus that there was a need to reconsolidate the forces behind the President. Recognizing the critical importance of such a move, she encouraged the group to pursue the discussions.

On May 27, 1990, a Sunday, the rainy season manifested an early start by a drizzle that lasted the whole morning and steadily got worse in the afternoon. It should have been a lazy Sunday, but it was a workday for eight Cabinet members and two governors who met that morning in the Board Room of the National Irrigation Authority (NIA) office along EDSA, Quezon City.

Present in this meeting were Presidential Coordinating Assistant Vicente Jayrne, Presidential Coordinating Assistant Jose de Jesus, Health Secretary Alfredo Bengzon, Finance Secretary Jesus Estanislao, Public Works and Highways Secretary Fiorello Estuar, Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Fulgencio Factoran, Transportation and Communications Secretary Oscar Orbos, Cabinet Secretary Aniceto Sobrepena, Immigration Commissioner Andrea Domingo, Bulacan Governor Roberto Pagdanganan, and Negros Occidental Governor Daniel Lacson. Three papers covering organizing support for the President, economic measures, and feedback from political leaders were read. After lengthy discussion over cups of coffee, the group came up with a series of recommendations to the President.

The recommendations were summed up in a paper titled "Project Katipunan" which was submitted to the President the next day. May 28. In essence, the paper stated: "... the

government needed to build alliances and networks with key sectors outside of government or the traditional political structures, in order to more fully ensure the survival of democratic institutions and processes".

The President's announcement that she would not run in 1992 had weakened her political position, especially in Congress. It was thought that this may adversely affect the implementation of the administration's program. Congress and the local chief executives had to be convinced that the President would be a relevant factor in 1992, if the administration were to work effectively with them for the remainder of the term. The paper proposed to do this in several ways: "First... create a doubt as to the President's political plans for 1992; Second ... strengthen the system of rewarding and punishing political leaders, on the basis of their support to the President's program; Third ... preserve and enhance the value of the President's endorsement of candidates for public office in 1992... achieved if... successful in restoring political stability and confidence in the economy; (Fourth)... mobilize the silent majority who are supportive of the President, especially from the middle class ... existing linkages with non-government organizations (NGOs)... strengthened further".

Among other things, the paper set the stage for the launching of the KABISIG Movement on June 12, 1990, when the President made her Independence Day Address. In her speech, the President denounced the ways of "trapos" or traditional politicians. Some political leaders took offense at the President's speech and assailed the "unelected and unelectable" Cabinet members who they thought were behind her statements.

Despite these irritants between the Executive and the Legislative, the President continued to forge a common minimum legislative agenda with the leaders of Congress. On July 11, 1990, President Aquino and the Cabinet approved a draft common minimum legislative agenda. The following day, President Aquino met with Speaker Ramon Mitra and key leaders of the House of Representatives.

It was already the typhoon season and, in the afternoon of July 16, 1990, the skies over Malacanang were overcast. President Aquino was meeting with the Senate leadership to craft a common minimum legislative agenda. Most of the bills in the President's agenda were meant for small farmers and countryside entrepreneurs. A week before, the President had met with the Lower House leadership on the same matters.

The Senators proposed their own bills. Senator Jovito Salonga asked for the inclusion of the bills that he authored, namely: a bill penalizing the crime of plunder and a bill penalizing the crime of coup d'etat.

In the middle of the discussion, at 4:29 p.m., the tremor struck. Nine cities and 30 municipalities in 15 Luzon provinces were devastated.

Seven days later, on July 23, President Aquino delivered her fourth State of the Nation Address. Added to the common minimum legislative agenda was the request for the appropriation of P10 billion for aid, relief, and rehabilitation of the people and areas affected by the July 16 earthquake.

She did not know it then, but as she spoke, an event that would profoundly affect her country and countrymen was unfolding. Men and arms were preparing for battle in a desert halfway around the world.

"When It Rains, It Pours"

On August 2, 1990, Iraqi military forces overwhelmed tiny but oil-rich Kuwait, plunging the whole world into a new economic and political crisis.

The invasion had very serious economic and security implications for the Philippines. The country imports 20 percent of its oil requirements from Iraq and Kuwait and, as a result of the invasion, world oil prices had shot up from US\$15 per barrel to US\$21 per barrel. A new round of oil price increase was sure to be taken advantage of by extremist groups.

Aside from the financial worry that the invasion triggered off, the government was concerned about the safety of Filipino overseas contract workers in Kuwait and Iraq. If a full-scale war broke out, the government would have to repatriate these workers and help them look for new jobs. It was also recognized that the dollars that these contract workers remitted had been keeping the Philippine economy afloat. The loss of these remittances would affect the country's fiscal stability.

The concerned Cabinet members met to assess the situation and made their recommendations to the President. Among the recommendations was a plan of action for economic managers which covered: a temporary suspension of the policy to deregulate oil prices, a shift of the tax system for petroleum products from ad valorem to specific, and the implementation of large-scale repatriation to the Philippines of overseas contract workers only as a last resort. Considering the resource constraints, it was thought best to simply move the workers out of the battle zones and for them to take refuge in neighboring countries where they could be reemployed.

In a Cabinet meeting on August 8, the major items in the President's agenda were: the diplomatic implications of the crisis, the protection of affected overseas workers, and the problem of ensuring a stable supply of oil, hopefully at affordable prices. Manglapus stated that the Philippines could turn to Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and Thailand as alternative sources of additional oil supply.

According to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), there were some 60,000 Filipino contract workers in Kuwait and 3,000 in Iraq. Labor Secretary Ruben Torres had immediately flown to the Middle East to assess their situation firsthand and to lay the ground work for their evacuation and other contingency plans.

But there was more bad news. Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) President Manuel Estrella reported that the price of crude oil had climbed to US\$25.60 per barrel and that there would be no choice for the government but to increase oil prices.

There was an awkward silence in the room. This was like winding a tight string further. To some Cabinet members, the bad news that was to be expected after an oil price increase would be that of strikes. After that, the communists or the military putschists would swoop down.

In view of the political and economic implications, the President instructed the Cabinet to begin immediate consultations with Congress. She also directed the drafting of an Executive Order imposing energy conservation measures and the study of the possibility of having only four schooldays a week.

The Cabinet Cluster E, which was in charge of national security matters, spent several sleepless days to come out with a new set of political and security scenarios with corresponding government responses.

On top of all these, the Cabinet still had to attend to the rehabilitation of the earthquake affected areas and the results of the latest debt negotiations.

The country had pressing financial needs made more urgent by the recent calamity and the Gulf War. The President had asked Finance Secretary Estanislao to get the best terms possible from the country's creditors. She was informed that the core group of the country's donors and creditors, composed of the governments of Japan and the United States, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), supported the Philippine government's request for additional assistance. The President's policy of not repudiating debts had proven to be propitious. Now that the country needed emergency loans, the creditors were more amenable to granting them.

Estanislao reported that the commercial bank creditors decided to accelerate the release, without conditionality, of the second tranche of new money for the Philippines. He expressed concern, however, over a move in the Senate pressing for waiver or suspension of all foreign debt payments for the next two years. He thought it would be counterproductive in the light of the support being given by the country's creditors. President Aquino assured Estanislao that she was taking the matter up with some senators.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of Filipino workers from Iraq and Kuwait proceeded without incident. The Iraqi Foreign Minister in Baghdad had assured Manglapus, who had gone there to personally meet with him, that Filipinos wishing to leave Kuwait would be allowed to do so.

At about the same time, complaints also started to pour in regarding the perceived breakdown in the delivery of basic services in Metro Manila. There was a shortage of public transport and traffic tied up commuters for hours. Garbage piled up in many places. Crime, too, was in the upswing. The war, although miles away, somehow heightened the feeling of helplessness.

But the President did not buckle. Executive Secretary Drilon was directed to call a multisectoral meeting on September 14, 1990. She wanted the senators, congressmen, businessmen, media, labor, and the NGOs to be there. She was banking on People Power solutions.

The multisectoral meeting started with an assessment of the situation in the Middle East and how this was affecting energy supply and prices. Contingency plans for the affected overseas contract workers were outlined. Gas rationing was considered. They were updated on the peace and order situation as well as on government efforts to rehabilitate earthquake-affected areas.

The government took quite a few hits as the participants complained about its inability to deliver basic services, its inadequate communications program, and the scarcity of foreign exchange for the business sector, among other things.

Two days after the multisectoral forum. President Aquino launched a nationwide

energy conservation program. On September 19, she signed Republic Act 6956 shifting the taxation system for petroleum products from ad valorem to specific.

On September 21, exactly a week after the multisectoral forum, a new round of price increases for premium and regular gasoline, kerosene, diesel, and LPG was announced.

The Cabinet braced for a storm.

As expected, strikes and demonstrations erupted after the price increase. The KMU, BAYAN, PISTON, and affiliated groups organized a Welgang Bayan. But the government had been prepared.

Dialogues by government officials with transport and labor groups helped to reduce the number of people marching in the streets. The AFP fielded buses and the DECS suspended classes at all levels. The government's information drive on the repercussions of the Middle East crisis helped generate public acceptance of the inevitability of the price increases. It also clarified the government's actions - that they were not arbitrary moves. The Welgang Bayan, this time, failed to get widespread support.

But the administration knew this Welgang Bayan would not be the last. It would just be a matter of weeks before protest actions demanding wage increases and unrest due to price increases of basic commodities would follow. Ileta suggested that the government absorb the next round of oil price increase in order to softpedal the discontent.

But it was out of the question. Estanislao had prepared a tight budgetary program for 1991. Subsidizing oil prices simply did not fit into the harsh realities of the country's finances.

There was more to come. Although manufacturers and traders had been holding back prices as much as possible, they gave notice through Trade Secretary Concepcion that they could no longer do so for long. Aside from the oil price increase as a result of the Iraq-Kuwait conflict, the peso-dollar exchange rate had been steadily falling.

The government's hands were tied. In a delicate balancing act, on October 4, 1990, it imposed price ceilings on rice, milk, sugar, chicken, pork, cooking oil, and flour.

The old debate on the effectiveness of price control had been revived. Price control could lead to scarcity over the medium- and long-term as low prices would not encourage manufacturers and producers. On the other hand, government had to address the growing clamor from the lower and middle class to alleviate their plight. The demand of the labor sector for wage increases compounded matters further.

Threats From The Right

As the President and the Cabinet were grappling with the economic crunch and the political difficulties that came with it, rebel soldiers in hibernation for the past 10 months thought that it was time to strike again. This time, their strategy, based on the 'enclave concept', was to stage pockets of rebellion in different parts of the country so that the government's forces would be stretched thinly when it attempted to contain them; thus, leaving the seat of power in Manila vulnerable to attack.

Based on their own assessment that there was a wider base of rebel supporters in Mindanao, the rebel soldiers agreed that the launching point of this operation would be in Agusan.

On October 4, at the same time that price ceilings were imposed, renegade Col. Alexander Noble led a convoy of rebel soldiers and tribal followers from Agusan to Cagayan de Oro. They occupied Camp Evangelista in Cagayan de Oro without firing a shot. But Noble, in later interviews, said: "I was alone".

No other rebel units came to join. No civilian supporters sent prayers. Noble was a victim of miscalculation, like the others. In two days, he quietly surrendered to civilian leaders led by Senator Aquilino Pimentel. Noble was a disappointed man.

Threats From The Left

Twenty days later, the KMU launched another Welgang Bayan. To minimize its effect, the government again suspended classes and mobilized AFP vehicles to transport stranded commuters. The Alex Boncayao Brigade of the NPA, however, assisted the KMU by burning buses of transport companies which had fielded their units in defiance of the declared strike. It is to the credit of these bus companies that, in the interest of the public and in answer to the appeal of the President for solidarity, they had to suffer losses at a most difficult time. The strikers burned a total of 16 vehicles. Police arrested 50 strikers.

On the same day as the Welgang Bayan, President Aquino signed Republic Act 6968 making rebellion and coup d'etat punishable with life imprisonment. Authored by Senate President Jovito Salonga, this had been part of the common minimum legislative agenda of the Executive and Congress. It was hoped that the new law would help deter coup attempts in the future.

Meeting The Challenges

As the Oil Price Stabilization Fund (OPSF) was nearly depleted, the government was left with no choice but to impose a second round of price increases. The Energy Regulatory Board (ERB) announced it on December 5, 1990 - premium gasoline increased from P8.87 per liter to P15.95; regular gasoline, from P8.50 per liter to P15.00; and diesel, from P6.24 per liter to P9.35. The following day, new rates were again announced - premium gasoline became P20.70 per liter, regular became P19.56 and diesel, P7.75. There was a massive public outcry at these drastic increases.

The government backtracked and on December 10, premium gas was pegged at P15.95, regular gas at P15.00, and diesel at P7.75.

On December 15, President Aquino appointed Transportation and Communications Secretary Oscar Orbos as the new Executive Secretary. That same day, a 210-member medical contingent, all volunteers, left for Saudi Arabia.

The troika of the Presidential Coordinating System, set up after the December 1989 putsch, was abolished. President Aquino then appointed Jose de Jesus as the new Public Works and Highways Secretary. Tourism Secretary Peter Garrucho was named the new Trade and Industry Secretary, while Tourism Undersecretary Rafael Alunan was promoted to

Secretary. Transportation and Communications Undersecretary Herminio Coloma became the new head of the Presidential Management Staff. The revamp had not been as sweeping as that after the December 1989 putsch, but it helped quiet down the 'mob clamoring for blood outside the gates of Malacanang'.

The United Nations Security Council gave a January 15, 1991 deadline to Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. If there was no withdrawal by then, it was assumed that shooting would start between the Allied Forces and Iraq. As the deadline approached, the Aquino government stepped up its efforts to prepare for the economic and political effects of an actual outbreak of war. It helped immensely that the new Executive Secretary was outgoing, telegenic, and effective in relating with the media and the public.

Orbos launched the very popular free telephone calls to the Middle East. Telephone booths, courtesy of the Philippine Long Distance and Telephone Company (PLDT), were set up inside Malacanang grounds by the Presidential Action Center. Thousands came to Malacanang to benefit from the service which enabled families and friends of the overseas contract workers to communicate with them at the height of the war. Criticisms were raised against this program, but there was no doubt that it contributed to easing apprehensions of the general public as to the severity of the situation. It was a grand move of the Aquino administration.

In a two-day multisectoral workshop at the Asian Institute of Management, senior government officials and leaders from business, labor, academe, and the NGOs finalized plans to ensure that the country would survive the actual outbreak of war in the Persian Gulf. On January 5, 1991, President Aquino ordered the creation of six Presidential Task Forces that would implement the recommendations formulated in the multisectoral workshop. The following day, Labor Secretary Ruben Torres left for the Middle East to personally coordinate the implementation of the contingency plans for the overseas contract workers still there.

President Aquino also convened the National Security Council on January 11. This was only the third time that the President had convened the Council since February 1986. The difficulty arose from the strained relations between President Aquino and Vice President Salvador Laurel and Senate Minority Floor Leader Juan Ponce Enrile. Over the past two crisis-ridden years, the Cabinet Cluster E had been the de facto National Security Council. Iletto explains: "It took me some time to convince (the President) to convene the National Security Council... (the reluctance to do so was perhaps) because of the presence of the opposition in the membership.

The advantage of having members of the opposition is that you do not take for granted the disadvantages of certain actions. You see both sides and theoretically, you would have a better understanding of the problem. If there is no member of the opposition in the Council, decision-making will be smoother and faster. But there is no guarantee that the decision will be better".

In the meeting, President Aquino and the representatives of Congress committed to set aside differences and to work together to ensure the implementation of the national contingency plan.

On February 28, Allied Forces rolled into Kuwait. It was swift and sweet -much more fascinating than Phantoms and Tora Toras. Many Filipino homes stayed glued to the CNN

news. Each missile or smart bomb that punctured the enemy fortress was cataclysmic to the weary Filipino. This meant no more lost jobs, no more worries about lost dollar earnings. This meant no more fear of gas price increase.

Indeed, oil prices in the world market gradually softened. On April 19,1991, the government announced the first of a series of price reductions for oil products.





'MY SOLDIER.' *On preceding page,* President Aquino gives a snappy salute to new graduates of the Philippine Military Academy on February 17, 1991.

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF poses with newly-inducted Brigadier Generals of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in Malacañang on Dec. 16, 1991. In photo (first row, from left); PA Commanding General Arturo Enrile; Flag Officer-in-Command Mariano Dumancas; Defense Secretary Renato de Villa; Chief of Staff Gen. Lisandro Abadia; PAF Commanding General Loven Abadia and Presidential Assistant on Military Affairs Admiral Carlito Cunanan. (Second row, from left): Brig. Gens. Rodolfo Dimmano, Federico de Loya, Donato Quintos, Jr., Daniel Delgado, Francisco Atayde, Alfredo Pajarillo, Miguel Hinlo, Samson Mahimer, Guillermo Ruiz, Rodolfo Estrellado, Arnulfo Acedera, Jr., and Jose C. Lapus.