

THE PRESIDENCY OF MAGSAYSAY, 1953-1957

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PREFACE

This dissertation is an attempt to make a study of Filipino politics during the tenure of Ramon Magsaysay (1953-1957). The author feels that the Presidency of Magsaysay was the most crucial one in the history of independent Philippines. Most of the study that has appeared on his presidency lacked the proper perspective. They were only aimed at perpetuating the myth fostered round his personality. Only lately has there been some efforts to make a dispassionate study and evaluation of his performance in the light of the promises his presidency engendered. This has given the author the necessary inspiration and the guidelines.

Magsaysay came to power in the year 1953 largely through his pledges of a 'new deal' for the rural areas. Earlier while serving as Defence Secretary under the Elpidio Quirino Administration, he perceived the underlying needs of the peasantry and also their vote delivering potentialities. Politicians before him relied exclusively on provincial and municipal bosses to deliver the rural votes to them during general elections. It was Magsaysay who made the vital break from tradition. For the first time in a general elections, the major emphasis was on the rural areas. None of his predecessors could visualize the wisdom of making such a move nor did they take into account

the short-term benefits that would accrue. Political opportunism may have been one of the factors that may have induced Magsaysay to undertake so radical a venture, but all the same to him should go the credit of bringing the barrios into the mainstream of Filipino national life. It rightly or wrongly helped in restoring the people's faith in the government at Manila. He also helped to accelerate the pace of rising expectations which will one day assume revolutionary proportions among the underprivileged who formed the bulk of the rural populace. He thus made them forever an important factor in Filipino politics. Henceforth no Filipino politicians could survive without paying obeisance to them.

In the field of foreign policy, the Magsaysay Administration made some important decisions which had far-ranging ramifications. It must be remembered that it was during his tenure that Philippine-American relations reached the peak of intensity. But it was also during his time that opposition to the American presence in the country was manifested in many ways. Clamour for the revision of the 'Bell' Act was the strongest. So was the demand for the clarification of the American stand on the 'bases' issue. Though the foreign policy of his administration was built on an unswerving opposition to communism, he realized that a strong bilateral relationship with the U.S. was not

an automatic guarantee for the well-being of the country. He realized the imperative need for the Philippines to move closer to its neighbours. This realization found fruition in the concept of collective security.

Constraints of time and space has made the author rely heavily on material easily accessible and also on various Government documents. Therefore, this work is only a preliminary report of the author's findings. Emphasis is laid on the description and analysis of the major foreign policy decisions taken during his tenure and also on the impact his agrarian policies had on the Philippine domestic scene.

The author wishes to convey his gratitude to Dr Pushpesh K. Pant for his valuable guidance. He also wishes to thank Dr Vishal Singh for the encouragement and help given.



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Chapter . I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Ramon Magsaysay was born on the 31st of August, 1907, in the province of Zambales. Much has been written about his peasant background, but the fact remains that he was born in a middle class family, which could afford him a decent education by Filipino standards. His chosen profession was that of a mechanic. It was only after the war that he found his true vocation. His election to the House of Representatives was the first stepping stone. But his becoming Chairman of the House Committee on National Defence, placed him in the national limelight.

Magsaysay's Rise to Prominence

There was nothing striking in Ramon Magsaysay's early career that would have marked him out as a future colossus striding the Philippine political scene in a way very few Filipino politicians ever would. His rise to prominence was not an overnight phenomena though. Earlier on his exploits as an anti-Japanese guerrilla leader had become legendary, albeit with a little help from the U.S. publicity machine. His was a typical success story moulded in the typical Anglo-Saxon ethic. From petty mechanic to national hero, was the kind of stuff the average Filipino's dream was made of. No wonder then, that to most Filipinos he

epitomized their ideals and this was an important factor in their identification with him.

But his quantum leap to popularity came after his occupation of the Defence Secretary's post in the Quirino Administration. The timing was very important for the year 1950 and the Hukbalahap insurgency was at the peak of its intensity. The disillusionment among the masses in the fertile plains of central Luzon threatened to spill over to the surrounding islands and what was termed as an "agrarian problem" by the Administration and its American advisers soon started assuming the dimensions of a full scale communist revolt. The graft-ridden and inefficient Philippine Armed Constabulary (P.A.C.) lacked the leadership as well as the personnel to combat the guerrillas. And besides their overt protection of landlord interests earned them the hostility of the peasants. Something drastic had to be done to stem the rut. President Elpidio Quirino under pressure from his American advisers appointed Ramon Magsaysay to the post of Defence Secretary.¹ His staunch anti-communist beliefs and the reputation he had built up for his hard work and integrity had endeared him to the American advisers stationed in the country. And besides

1 William O. Douglas, North from Malaya (New York, 1953), p. 110.

Magsaysay was not considered to be very ambitious and his interest in the sectarian internal politics was supposed to be minimal.

No other Secretary of Defence before him had been given such blanket powers. An extraordinary situation called for extraordinary powers. His job was to eliminate² the Huks and he was eminently successful in that. Within a year he was hailed by the Manila and the American press as the "Huk Killer". In the span of two short years he eliminated the Huks as a factor to contend with in Filipino political life. By 1953 what was once a strong mass-based movement was reduced to roving bands, which occasionally indulged in banditry. Magsaysay achieved what the others before him could not, by combining ruthlessness, organizational efficiency and expert anti-guerrilla strategy supplied by the American tacticians attached to JUSMAG (Joint United States Military Advisory Group).³ In fact nationalists like Recto later alleged that almost all his close advisers comprised almost exclusively of Americans, chief

2 Huks (an abbreviation) were a guerrilla organization, concentrated mainly in Central Luzon, fighting against landlord oppression.

3 David Wurfel, "The Philippine Agrarian Crisis", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol. 49, no. 4, 1972-73, p. 584.

among them being known as C.I.A. agents like Col. Lansdale, who was to achieve even greater notoriety after Magsaysay's election to the Presidency. Aided by the powerful Manila mass-media, Magsaysay after his assumption of the Defence Secretary's post received a big publicity build-up.

Stories, some fictitious, like the one about "Manila Boy,"⁴ other's quite real, helped a lot in building up his image, especially in the distant areas. He endeared himself to the peasantry by his substantial achievements. His re-organizing the army and created for it a new image in the eyes of the peasant. He offered a viable alternative to the peasant by promising them radical reforms and thus imbuing in them a feeling of participation. His personal, on the field supervision of the counter-insurgency measures, was one of the reasons that helped him harvest most of the credit. The capture of almost the entire Huk politburo in Manila, including its supremo, Luis Taruc, was another feather in his cap.

President Quirino was alive to the fact that his Defence Secretary was becoming a potential rival. But his

4 Magsaysay, according to the story, succeeded in converting a hardened Huk guerrilla into a god-fearing, patriotic Filipino, by his personal charm.

moves to cut him down to size were belated and they ultimately boomeranged. The only saving grace in the Quirino administration was Magsaysay. Many saw him in a different light. The Philippines Free Press wrote: "...If Magsaysay is as popular as he is, it is because he has followed justice, not Quirino, or, to put it another way, followed Quirino only when Quirino followed justice... Magsaysay in the view of many, worked under the Quirino administration, was with it but not of it. He was a man apart. He was, briefly, a man." Quirino was never very popular with the electorate. His victory against Jose P. Laurel was not achieved under ideal circumstances as any casual observer could see. Now popular sentiment had reached its peak against him. It was at this juncture that he made his move to undercut Magsaysay. His first tentative move was to relieve the Defence Secretary of some of his responsibilities. This only helped in exacerbating the situation, as Magsaysay having long since foreseen this sort of reaction on the part of Quirino had established contact with the Nacionalistas and hence had his options open.

5 "Quirino and Magsaysay: The Problem", Philippine Free Press (Manila), 3 January 1953.

6 Renato Constantino, The Making of Filipino (Quezon City, 1969), p. 184.

The Nacionalistas had never reconciled themselves to the defeat they suffered in the hands of the Liberals in 1948. They never did consider it a fair verdict. Though the Nacionalistas had in their ranks two towering and ambitious personalities in Jose P. Laurel and Claro M. Recto, their choice of the candidate for President was undertaken with only one sole aim in mind to dislodge the Quirino and his liberals from power. The top party echelon rationalized that one factor for the defeat of their party was because of American distrust of Laurel and Recto, especially the latter. A candidate with the antecedents of Ramon Magsaysay would ensure at least American non-interference, if not outright support. As the drama unfolded they were not very wrong in their surmise. Jose P. Laurel would have been the automatic choice as the candidate for President. But party strategists decided to take a more expedient line. They decided to rush in on Quirino's only remaining asset -⁷ Ramon Magsaysay, the "Huk killer" and "America's Boy".

Magsaysay Chosen Nacionalista Candidate for President.

Magsaysay was acclaimed as the Nacionalista candidate for President on April 12, 1953. There were stories circulat-

7 Hernando J. Abaya, The Untold Philippine Story (Quezon City, 1957), p. 151.

ing about Magsaysay's informal agreement with the party elders, Laurel was supposed to have a say in the cabinet line-up and domestic policy while Recto was to advise Magsaysay on foreign policy matters.⁸

The unabashed support he received from the Americans was a significant factor in the campaign. The Liberals would no longer claim to be the sole benefactors of American interests, as they did in the 1948 campaign. Magsaysay's quitting as Defence Secretary left the Quirino Administration bereft of its last saving grace. Many of the party regulars would see that the party, under ^{the} helmsmanship of Quirino, was a sinking ship. Therefore, it was no wonder that immediately after the formal nomination of Quirino to run for a second term - there was a split in its ranks. Quirino should have seen the writing on the wall.

The election of 1953 like elections before and after did not give the voter a viable alternative. "There are no differences in ideology, in fundamental platforms, no burning national problems which have to be decided in public debate. The issue is clean government, efficient government, and a honest measure of public service for value received in the form of taxes which the people pay to sustain

8 Ibid., p. 151.

the government. The Nacionalistas have firmly set the campaign at that level and the Liberals have to follow it in self-defence".⁹ Nothing absolutely was said about effecting actual social change, considering the fact that the Philippine economy was basically the same landlord dominated economy carried over from colonial times.

With everybody wanting to jump on the Nacionalista band wagon, it was clear that Quirino and his Liberals had lost their initiative in the campaign. Their desperation was manifested in the way they pounced upon trivial issues. Quirino tried putting on the nationalist garb and opportunistically took a mildly anti-American posture as he had no hopes of an American reappraisal of his candidature. What finally forced him to adopt this posture were the two articles written by Joseph Alsop. Alsop, who was known to be close to the Eisenhower administration, wrote rather bluntly in his column that "Magsaysay is the American candidate in the Philippine elections."¹⁰

The U.S. definitely played for great stakes in the Philippines and besides, the year was 1953 - the cold war was being waged in relentless fury. The role of the Philip-

9 "what were the issues", Manila Daily Bulletin (Manila), 13 March 1953.

10 Manila Daily Bulletin, 25 September 1953.

pires in the strategy devised by the U.S., especially in the domino theory concocted at "foggy Bottom", was becoming clear. It was one of the strongest bastions of the U.S. in the Pacific. It was going to be the bulwark to prevent the spreading of the "red menace" in Asia. It had co-opted the active support of the Filipino political elite and the armed forces. The Joint Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) which in effect ran the Philippine army, was controlled by the U.S. advisers. Carmellio Villareal, a former speaker in Philippine House of Representatives has admitted this in a documented speech "JUSMAG controls the nature, quality, quantity and time of delivery of weapons and supplies to the A.F.P."¹¹

Quirino had failed miserably to provide stability, economic or otherwise, to such a crucial area. The search for a "strong man" had started. Magsaysay's crushing of the Huks and his amenability to advice from Americans were perhaps two of the important reasons for American propagation of Magsaysay's candidature. The U.S. big/business interests had viewed the incipient Huk revolt and the failure of the Quirino Administration to react positively, its unwillingness to remedy even the most glaring of social evils, was viewed with alarm.

11 Abaya, n. 7, p. 153.

Magsaysay's Campaign Style

After the final dye was cast, Carlos P. Romulo and his Democrats having thrown their weight behind the Magsaysay candidacy, the Nacionalista candidate plunged into the campaign with a vengeance. The presidential campaign of 1953 will be a milestone in Filipino politics for never before were such great distances covered by the candidates, nor was the campaigning carried on with such intensity. And as for the expenses incurred no other campaign before could rival it.¹² But what the campaign of 1953 will be remembered for is for effecting a radical change in the style of Filipino politicking. Before this, electoral victory was more or less guaranteed with the active co-optation of the big-city politicians and provincial governors. Governor Rafael Lucson, notorious for his strong arm methods, delivered 90 per cent of the votes to Quirino in the 1948 elections. He, of course, was given a free hand in running the province. The Philippines therefore is the country where "pork-barrelling" is assiduously practised. But the Huk rebellion showed that the barrios would be no longer neglected. The "illustrados" had to wake up to this reality. It was to the credit of Magsaysay that he was the first to realize the short-term advantages he would secure

12 Jorge B. Coquia, The Philippine Presidential Election of 1953 (Manila, 1955), pp. 261-63.

by carrying his case to the people. In retrospect, Quirino's miserable failure in the elections to a very great extent was due to his failure to gauge correctly the role the peasantry was destined to play in the 1953 elections.

Magsaysay's well financed publicity machine had built him up as a man who had his roots among the peasants. Besides his extensive forays into the barrios both as Defence Secretary and then as Nacionalista candidate for President, refurbished this image. He indulged in a lot of symbolic deeds, which also paid dividends. For example he made contributions from his campaign funds to individuals in need.¹³ This was a common practice in Philippine politics. With his avowed policy of "an iron fist for the die-hards and fellowships for the misled",¹⁴ vis-a-vis the Huks, he succeeded in achieving the impossible - that of suppressing the Huks and not alienating the peasantry. History has shown us that a counter-insurgency movement almost invariably results in a lot of destruction, ultimately alienating the peasant thoroughly. These

13 Ibid., pp. 215-54.

14 F. L. Starner, Magsaysay and the Philippine Peasantry (Berkeley, Calif., 1961), p. 54.

and other fortuitious factors helped him establish his bona fides with the highly impressionable masses. Ramon Magsaysay, great friend of the US, the exterminator of the anti-Christian Huks, initiator of land reforms, was the charismatic figure the patient Filipinos were waiting for.

The peasantry at last was given the recognition it was due, - it had become a major source of power, Magsaysay's candidature, ostensibly at least, signalled the entry of the under-privileged into the mainstream of Filipino politics.

Magsaysay Campaign: A New Political Experience for the Filipinos

The 1953 campaign for the Presidency differed significantly from all the earlier ones. The difference was not only one of degree. The distinguishing element was the great emphasis that was laid on the problem affecting the rural areas, although factually only one of the fifteen articles in the Nacionalista platform was specifically directed at agrarian reforms. But significance has to be attached to the fact that never before had a major political party carried its case directly to this vast segment of the hitherto neglected electorate. This small but significant step "aroused the peasantry to the potentialities of its power".¹⁵

15 Ibid., p. 55.

Magsaysay was instrumental in bringing about this shift in the locus of Philippine politics. "In both respects, the personal predilections of Ramon Magsaysay, candidate of the coalesced Nacionalista and Democratic parties played perhaps a very decisive role."¹⁶ He was not blind to the fact that his candidacy helped to focus attention on the necessity to expedite the pressing needs of the rural populace and that his appeal was directed at those people, for whom government till that time, was only of peripheral importance; many of them represented in Joseph¹⁷ Malsten Hayden's words - the "unrepresented minority."

The relative independence with which Magsaysay conducted his campaign was because his dependence on the party machinery was minimal. This was due to the participatory feelings he generated among the non-committed people. A good illustration are the two organizations - Magsaysay for President Movement (MPM), and its counterpart, the Women for Magsaysay for President Movement (WMPM). When the campaigning reached its peak, some 12,000 chapters had sprouted. They were useful in countering the

16 Ibid., p. 23.

17 J. M. Hayden, The Philippines: A Study in National Development (New York, 1947), pp. 376-400.

pulls and pressures from the party machine and were also of great help in carrying the campaign to the heartland.

The active support of the Democratic big-wigs like Romulo and Fernando Lopez and his easy access to the Democratic party's war chest gave him greater flexibility in his dealings with Laurel and Recto and also made his campaign machinery well-oiled. But this also raised the question of a possible future compromise on the question of land-reforms keeping in view the sad fact that the Democratic Party was almost entirely dominated by the so-called "sugar barons" of the western Visayas. As the U.S., in spite of its "above it all" posture, was all out for Magsaysay, encouraged the vested interests to adopt a conciliatory stand towards Magsaysay. Also the desire of the business community for a revision of the Bell Trade Act,¹⁸ consideration of which depended on the good humour of Washington, naturally played an important role.

The Outcome

The hectic campaign style of Magsaysay would not be matched by the ailing Quirino, who for the major part of the campaign was undergoing surgery in America. Besides

18 Under the 'parity' provision of the Bell Trade Act, the U.S. had the right to dispose, exploit, develop, and utilize "all agricultural, timber and mineral lands" together with the operation of public utilities.

Magsaysay had everything going for him. The radical image, overwhelming response from the cross-section of the Philippine polity, American support and to top it all, a well¹⁹ financed campaign machinery.

One can go even to the extent of saying that it was the blatant American support that Magsaysay elicited, which guaranteed the free atmosphere in which the poll was conducted. In an interview he said that the election was "a fight between the people and a handful of liberals - plotting to overrule the will of the people."²⁰ Not all agreed. Luis Taruc for one called him "the most dangerous of²¹ American puppets and the worst dog of Wall Street". The more sophisticated among the electorate could discern motives, which were definitely not altruistic, in the statements of some of the Nacionalista leaders. The impression they managed to convey was that they intended using Magsaysay only to get rid of the Liberals, the way Quirino tried to use him. Quirino had stated that he needed Magsaysay only to kill Huks.

19 Time Magazine, 23 November 1953.

20 Manila Sunday Times, 1 November 1955.

21 Manila Times, 9 November 1953.

Magsaysay triumphed with an overwhelming majority. Of the 4,226,719 votes cast, Magsaysay's share was a overwhelming 2,912,992 votes or 68.9 per cent of the total votes cast.²² He was victorious in all but four of the 52 provinces in the Philippines. Magsaysay had come to preside over the destiny of the Philippines.

Immediately after the landslide victory, political pundits both in the Philippines and the US termed the outcome as a victory of the people. True, due to the initiation of the barrios in a big way into the electoral process, the centre of political gravity in the 1953 elections clearly indicated a shift from the local and provincial level to the national level. It no doubt heralded the end of arbitrary government. The elections showed that the power and prestige of the national leaders dwarfed those of the local 'caciques.'

Magsaysay's entire campaign machinery was geared to activate the dormant power in those segments of Philippine society which till that time had remained latent. The 30 per cent increase in the votes, both registered and actual, was of great importance in the future of political development of the country. But this participation was

22 F. L. Starner, n. 14, p. 59.

not wholly engendered by the promises of agrarian reform, but because of the importance given to these forgotten areas in the campaign. The 1953 campaign established a precedent and future politicians could ignore it only at their own peril. Any intensive study of the 1953 election fails to recognize the existence of an agrarian issue at all except peripherally.²³

Suffice it to say that the 1953 elections did not make much of a dent in the Filipino political culture which has evolved between the small ruling oligarchy and the Philippine masses. The culture which still is and has been "intensely personal, particularistic and fluid"²⁴. However, with the belated recognition of the peasantry, by the ruling elite, as a major source of power, there was considerable hope that henceforth reform would no longer depend on the benign paternalism from an elitist government or as a result of prodding from abroad. It seemed that the 'tao's aspirations would be given vent through the regular political channel.

23 J. B. Coquia, n. 12, pp. 100-93.

24 Frank G. Darling, "Political Development in Thailand and the Philippines", South East Asia: An International Quarterly, vol. 1, nos. 1 & 2, 1972, p. 24.

The "new deal" platform on which Magsaysay came to power, made the downtrodden Filipinos see visions of a new day. The opening of the Malacanang Palace to the people on the day of his inauguration looked like a happy augury. And after all one of his very first statements was "the people will have their own way".²⁵

25 Time, 3 November 1953.

Chapter II

THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM

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The Agrarian System: Its Nature

Though the Philippines is a predominantly agricultural country, agriculture surprisingly contributes an income very disproportionate to its strength, to the total national income. Though in the years 1949-54, almost 68 per cent of the entire labour force was employed in agriculture as late as 1955. Statistics indicate that between the years 1949 and 1954, agriculture's annual contribution to the ex-¹chequer varied from 40 to 44 per cent. To a large extent this is due to the prevalence of 'subsistence' farming in most of the country. Coupled with this is the insidious practice of 'kasama' (share cropping). Then there is the omnipresent money-lender whose stranglehold only the luckiest 'tao' can escape. The accumulation of debt forces him to sell his 'palay' (rough rice) immediately after harvest time, when the price hits rock-bottom. Of course the most important cause is landlordism and especially absentee landlordism. The Agricultural Tenancy Commission Report has stated that in Central Luzon, 85 per cent of the land with area over twenty-five acres or above was owned by absentee landlords. The summary report of the 1948 Census of Agriculture (Philippine Bureau of

1 Agricultural Tenancy Commission Report (Manila, 1955), p. 42.

Census and Statistics) reported that 34.7 per cent of all farm operators were tenants, with share-tenants forming the overwhelming bulk. In two-thirds of the cases reported the absentee landlords share of the harvest was 50 per cent or more. For the Filipino peasant, labour was not at all dignified and it offered very little incentive, "It is a system that breeds indolence and lack of responsibility".² The peasantry had all the features of a "corrupt and corrupting feudalism that rule and profit best when they have demoralized him".³

Indifference at the Top

Those in the seats of power at Manila, from Quezon onwards never ceased issuing statements expressing concern at the plight of 'tao' (peasant). The 'illustarado' class in whose hands power was and who were themselves big landlords, could not be expected to show genuine interest in the problems facing the peasantry. They viewed any attempt of the peasantry to organize themselves as a threat to the very source of their power. The Philippine leadership refused to acknowledge that the right to enact reforms was

2 William Pomeroy, The Forest (New York, 1963), p. 139.

3 Ibid.



inherent in the people. Rather they seemed to be under the delusion that it was something to be conferred at their discretion. President Manuel Quezon for instance, was interested in alleviating the discontent among the peasants. His legislative programme reflected this concern.⁴ But as the privileged few had entrenched themselves in the seats of power, they easily succeeded in reducing his legislation into a farce.

The war in a way gave the peasants the opportunity to display their influence and flex their muscles. After the Japanese invasion, de facto authority in many rural areas passed into the hands of the resistance, which was mainly composed of the peasantry. The landlords had either become willing accomplices of the Japanese or had fled to the urban areas. With the return of the Americans and the installation of the 'Roxas' Administration, the landed gentry as expected made its bid to reassert its authority. The Manila administration used the law and order situation then prevailing as a pretext to deny the peasantry any representation in the government.⁵ Therefore the tenancy legislation, the Roxas Administration enacted was heavily

4 H. J. Abaya, Betrayal in the Philippines (New York, 1946), p. 211.

5 Taruc, Luis, Born of the People (New York, 1953), p. 214.

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weighted in favour of the big landlord. Whatever crumbs it offered to the peasant were only of a symbolic nature, as the government lacked the will and incentive to implement them, nor did it have the adequate machinery to do so.

The 'Huks' an abbreviation of 'Huklo ny Bayun Halan sa Hupos' or Peoples Army was the best organized peasant group operating. Their main base was in the rice-lands of central Luzon. Their fight against oppression gained momentum from the year 1948 onwards. The Philippine elite were forced to wake up from their slumber. The avowedly communistic leadership of the Huks, in the eyes of the American advisers and the Filipino elite, posed a great danger. It was evident that the government under Elpidio Quirino was incapable of dealing with the 'Huk' uprising. The U.S. advisory group in the country was well aware of the fact that brute force alone would not suppress the legitimate aspirations of the peasantry. Therefore while more than doubling the military and economic aid to the country, it virtually forced President Quirino to make at least promises of effecting substantial social and economic reforms. ⁶ The Americans may or may not have been very sincere in actually seeing land reforms implemented. But one should not forget that the Americans had a big stake in

6 J. L. Starmer, Magsaysay and the Philippine Peasantry (Berkeley, Calif., 1961), p. 6.

the existing system in that country. But some ritualistic concessions had to be made to an aggrieved peasantry. The Truman Administration's primary goal was to keep the Philippines a safe haven for the investment of the American dollar. Chaotic conditions, like the one the 'Huk' uprising had brought was not^{at} all conducive to American 'free enterprise'. A second consideration was to keep the country in the 'free world' fold. The Quirino-Foster agreement of November 1950, was the outcome of all these considerations.

The Quirino-Foster Agreements were based on the findings of the 'Bell' Mission. The 'Bell' Mission report had to be recommended for its candid and forthright dissection of the ills plaguing the Philippines and also for its bold recommendations. It stated that "...there is a great inertia on the part of the government to give really serious consideration to agriculture's many besetting handicaps and long standing maladjustments."⁷ The report envisaged radical land reforms to remedy the prevailing situation. Under the agreement the Philippines agreed in

7 Report to the President of the United States, Economic Survey Mission to the Philippines (Washington, 1950), p. 55.

principle to implement the social, economic and technical programmes the Bell report recommended. The U.S. Government on its part agreed to give technical and economic assistance to the Philippines to help it carry out its obligations under the agreement.

Under this programme, the United States Mutual Security Agency invited Robert S. Hardie, the well-known expert on land reforms. In his recommendations, submitted in form of a report in 1952, he called for the total rehauling of the existing agrarian structure. He wanted the removal of the tenancy system "insofar as practicable and replacing it with a "rural economy based on owner operated family-sized farms". In short his proposal called for utmost total transfer of ownership of lands to cultivators. He also recommended that a separate enforcement machinery be provided, an autonomous Court of Industrial Relations.

Almost concurrently another report was also released. It was called Rivera-McMillan report. Though it was mainly a study, its findings only stressed the imperative need to implement the Hardie recommendations. This report was prepared under the auspices of the Mutual

8 Robert S. Hardie, Special Technical and Economic Mission: Philippine Land Tenure Reform: Analysis and Recommendations (Manila, 1952), pp. 25-31.

Security Administration and the Philippine Council for U.S. Aid (PHILCUSA).

From its contents and from the reaction it evoked, it was clear that the 'Hardie' report was too strong a dose for the Filipino elite to take lying down. The Americans on their part must have thought it worthwhile to float such radical proposals as the agrarian issue then was threatening to take a very explosive turn. The suspicion still persists that it was only a ruse to lull the peasantry into inactivity. Otherwise the sudden change of the U.S. position by the year 1954, the time when the Huks were crushed is inexplicable. In fact the U.S. mission in Manila, only a year and a half after the release of the Hardie report, almost completely repudiated the Hardie recommendations.

Only after the peasantry, under the vanguard of the Huks, shook the very edifices of the Manila government that the government found it expedient to consider the minimum list of demands. As early as 1948 Luis Taruc had requested the administration "let the government enforce the law on the partition of the crop, according to the fertility of the soil. Let the government make it

9 As contained in the "Report concerning Philippine Land Tenure Policy, published by U.S. Embassy Operations Missions Land Tenure Committee (Manila, 1954), p. 52.

possible for the peasants and farmers to obtain loans at a reasonable interest. Let it help establish marketing facilities. There must be freedom of association and assembly. And in the future let the government work to provide land for the landless."¹⁰

Magsaysay's Realistic Approach

Magsaysay and his American advisers saw the feasibility in committing themselves to a programme which included proposals for substantial agrarian reforms. Domestic political exigencies also impressed upon Magsaysay the need to cultivate the barrio voter. It only showed that the peasant could no longer be taken for granted. The elite had at last recognized them as a major source of power, Magsaysay's new deal programme was not very much different from programmes offered by earlier aspirants to Malacanang, but he was the first to realize that even a minor restructuring of the archaic hide bound tenure laws could not be effected without the underprivileged having some say at least in the government. The keen personal interest he took in the problems of the peasants, while he was in charge of the campaign against the Huks, and the relative success he enjoyed in

10 Teodoro M. Locsin, "Talk with Tarac", Philippine Free Press (Manila), 3 July 1948, pp. 22-23.

gaining the confidence of the peasants he came in contact with, must have influenced him and his advisers while in the process of formulating his election manifesto. Of course the rich political dividends he would accumulate by bypassing the traditional centres of political power, i.e. the urban areas, and carrying his campaign into the heartlands was the main consideration. In the process he offered the peasantry at least the semblance of political power.

Magsaysay was aware of the magnitude of his act. He stated in one of his innumerable 'barrio' visits that "by coming like this among the humble people of the country, I am revolutionizing political campaigning in the Philippines. My policy can be summed up in one word 'action'. It is my obsession to serve you."¹¹ It is no surprise then that Magsaysay evoked a magnificent response from the peasantry. He conjured up in them, visions of the 'bayanihan' (the original concept of village self-help). Deluged by a shower of slogans, the peasant must have forgotten that it was the same Magsaysay who followed the brutal policy of exterminating Hukos, who were after all peasants. But the resettlement programme which he initiated and the big publicity build-up he got with the help of the mass commu-

11 Time, 14 August 1953.

nication media helped in creating a sympathetic image of his in the eyes of the peasantry. Besides he gave the impression of having a deep insight into the psyche of the peasant. He repeatedly made statements that should great perception of the problems, e.g. "to achieve lasting peace, the people must have three square meals a day because it is an empty stomach that propels a revolution."¹²

Magsaysay's landslide victory was made possible by the overwhelming participation of the barrios in the electoral process. This of course did not give the peasantry the actual fruits of power. Magsaysay realized that he was obliged to the peasantry for his victory. There is evidence to show that he viewed the problem of agrarian reforms as the most urgent in his priority list. His efforts to install conscientious men in ministries concerned were not successful as he could not withstand the intense partisan pulls and pressures. These factors also influenced his decision-making abilities too, with the result that his first year in office was noted for its indecisiveness. He failed to utilize the prerogative which he had as President of the Philippines. This stunted his capacity to get his bold agrarian reforms programme passed in its entirety through the Legislature. He even

¹² H. J. Abaya, The Untold Philippines Story (Manila, 1957), p. 158.

failed to state his programme for agrarian uplift in explicit terms. A sense of urgency was missing. His first state of the Nation message, he gave this problem its due importance, contained only a handful of relevant proposals for agrarian reforms.¹³ In his first year he devoted more time in carrying on his personal crusade with the peasantry than in enacting legislation which would have given them long range benefits. He spent innumerable days with the peasants, sometimes in remote areas, using the prestige of his office to solve petty disputes and personally persuading some landlord or the other to grant some symbolic concession to an aggrieved peasant. He substituted his personal offices for regular court channels in to secure out of court settlements.¹⁴ At the most short-term benefits may have accrued to the peasantry.

He attained limited success in his bid to extend social, public health and educational services to the barrios. This was possible because he used the prestige of his

13 F. L. Starmer, n. 6, p. 132.

14 The "Concepcion" Contract signed between the Federation of Free Farmers and the Landlords.

office to back non-official service projects like the Liberty Wells programme. He assigned to the army the task of resettling peasants in those areas which were evacuated in the aftermath of the 'Huk' rebellion. His first year in office also saw the elimination of the Huks as a serious challenge. This was formalized after the surrender of Luis Taruc in the same year.

The President had sounded the Congress about the feasibility of having an uniform tenancy code. He also tried to impress upon them the immediate need to eliminate "too many laws on too many books."¹⁵ But Magsaysay did not ask the Congress for a substantial increase in the machinery of the Court of Industrial Relations nor did he demand for the creation of the essential autonomous 'Agrarian Court'.

Before it was too late, the President instituted a committee under the chairmanship of Senator Tavanlar. The Tavanlar Committee put forward some radical proposals, which included the setting up of a Court for Agrarian Relations, increasing taxation on big landholdings. It provided the basis for extensive redistribution of lands by the administration.

15 Republic of the Philippines, Official Gazette, vol. 50, 1954, pp. 82-83.

Meanwhile the judiciary and the agrarian welfare committees of the Philippine Congress were holding separate hearings on the bills introduced in the separate houses. As far as Congress was concerned it was running at cross purposes with the Administration. Magsaysay could have used the vast political advantage he enjoyed at that time to ram a strict tenancy bill through the House. It was unfortunate that he did not use his vast prerogatives to the hilt. The President it should be noted had the power under the constitution to certify legislation for immediate enactment.¹⁶ Instead he succumbed to the pressure of vested interests certifying hundreds of bills as important, though some of them were only concerned with the renaming of barrios and schools.

The sudden shift in American global priorities had its side effects on the Philippine domestic scene.¹⁷ With the Huks reduced into a negligible quantity, the Americans much to the satisfaction of the Filipino elite figured that economic and agrarian issues could for the time being take a back-seat to what they considered to be of more

16 Under Article VI, Sec. 21 (2). Constitution of the Philippines.

17 Frank H. Golay, Philippine-American Relationship (Manila, 1966), p. 158.

importance - the gearing up of the Philippine Armed forces to make it into a bastion against the 'red peril'. The putting of the 'Hardie' report into cold storage should have been an indicator to the Filipinos. The Manila Government showed a strange reluctance to publicly acknowledge the 'volte face' on the part of the American authorities in the Philippines. The measure to abolish the existing tenancy law, based on the recommendations of the 'Hardie Report' was drafted mainly through the effort of the Philippine Council for American Aid. This Council was given the assignment of formulating programmes under the Quirino-Foster Agreement. With the change in the official American position, the PHILCUSA had also to change its stand. This also explains why Magsaysay was a little reluctant to call a special session of the Philippine Congress to push his administration's programme through. When this session was finally called what emerged was a measure which did not have any proposal for the reformation of the 'pasama' system. And it only concerned itself partially with the question of tenancy reform. Therefore the Agricultural Tenancy Act passed in 1954 was not a revolutionary step in any sense of the term. Whatever limited scope for reforms it had was offset by the lack of a Court of Agrarian Relations, which was necessary to implement the tenancy measure. Robert McMillan aptly commented "without

adequate enforcement, a large proportion of tenants will continue to be at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords and predatory money lenders.¹⁸ In short the Agricultural Tenancy Act made little impact in the then existing situation because the tenancy and the usury laws could not be enforced effectively.

The Land Reform Bill of 1955

President Magsaysay had stated that "Our ultimate goal is to reshape the land-tenure system in our country in such a way as to build up a strong nation of small, independent and untented farm owners, free from want, protected from injustice, and eager to contribute their share to the welfare, and progress of the nation."¹⁹

In his state of the Nation message to the Philippine Congress, he took a step forward. "Another essential measure in land reform is the purchase or expropriation of large estates and their distribution to their occupants and to landless workers... I would urge Congress to consider anew ways and means to carry out the redistribution of large

18 Robert McMillan, Analysis of the Agricultural Tenancy Act of the Philippines, U.S. Operations Missions to the Philippines, Foreign Operations Administration, 1954.

19 Republic of the Philippines, Official Gazette, vol. 50, 1954, p. 82.

estates." ²⁰ From the statement is evident that he wanted Congress to take the initiative. It should be noted that the Philippine Constitution was not a serious obstacle in the way of the President if he wanted authority to ex-propriate. / ^{Under} the Commonwealth Act 539, the President's authority was only limited by the provisions of the constitution itself. All the same Magsaysay for reasons of his own wanted Congressional approval for his policies. He called for a special session in the summer of 1955, to get his Land Tenure Bill passed.

As expected, House Bill No. 2557, as it was called, ran into rough weather. This was to be expected as the landed interests had powerful representatives in the House as well as influential supporters outside. The sugar lobby and lobbyists for other rich agriculturists like the National Rice Producers Association of Central Luzon were extraordinarily active. These vested interests carried on their campaign in public meetings, in the Press, and even in the galleries of the Congress. ²¹

As compared to this, the peasantry had very few spokesmen inside the House or outside. In fact a vast

20 State of the Nation Message to Congress, Republic of the Philippines, Official Gazette, 25 January 1955.

21 Starner, n. 6, p. 161.

majority of the peasantry was unaware of the deliberations going on in Manila. As a result the peasants had virtually no say in the radical or substantial reforms were not expected to be given to them on a platter.

The measure which Magsaysay sought to introduce in the House, called for the establishment of a Land Tenure Authority under the control of the President, which would have the power to acquire land both by negotiations and outright expropriation. An agreement on a measure so radical was impossible and as a majority of members from both the parties opposed it on one ground or the other, there were many amendments to the bill, without any attempt to reconcile the conflicting ideas behind them. It only resulted in the measure being watered down beyond recognition. In its final form, the expropriating power embodied in the bill, was made very limited.

The Land Reform Act of 1955, was passed in the special session of the House on September 9, 1955. Till the last moment its passage was uncertain. It was earlier thrown out on the basis of a minor technicality, was brought back with minor alteration. A recalcitrant House was forced to accept the same bill which it unceremoniously tried to throw out. This was made possible by the threat of the President going
22
and seeking a fresh mandate from the people.

The land reform act empowered the President to acquire privately owned agricultural lands both by negotiated purchase and by expropriation, for subsequent selling²³ to peasants and others willing to tend their lands. Surprisingly no restrictions were placed on the size of the area. The only condition was that it should be the workers who should petition for the acquisition of the land concerned. But expropriation would only be resorted to when the land-holdings were more than 300 hectares if owned by a single individual and 600 hectares if the owner was a corporation. The existence of justified agrarian unrest also warranted expropriation, regardless of the above mentioned exceptions. Most important of all, the Act provided for the setting up of a Land Tenure Administration, directly under the control of the President, to delve into the nature of the country's agrarian problem and prepare²⁴ long-range plans for remedying them.

The Act embodied little of the radical measures²⁵ the 'Hardie' report recommended, but all the same, at least on paper, it was a big step forward for the peasantry in its struggle for a square deal. The very fact that the

23 Robert Aura Smith, Philippine Freedom, 1946-1958 (New York, 1958), p. 173.

24 Agoncillo, Teodoro A. & Guerrero Milagros C., History of the Filipino People (Quezon City, 1970), p. 542.

25 Starner, n. 6, p. 140.

Act endorses expropriation of lands regardless of size - where agrarian unrest existed, ^{showed} ~~showed~~ that the government, at least formally, would not remain indifferent to the plight of the 'tao'.

In the process of actual implementation, it brought only marginal dividends to the peasantry. The 100,000,000 ~~was~~ collected from "bond" issue sanctioned by the 'Republic Act 1000' to cover the cash requirements of the Act, was really only a pittance. And ~~the~~ government acquisition in expropriation would be undertaken only if it could furnish the full market value of land. Furthermore the few tenants who benefited from it all, served only their current holding of land, not the promised family size farms they were given twenty-five years to pay for their organizations; but this included "purchase price plus six per cent interest, per annum for twenty-five years."²⁶ As land was over-valued, not many peasants could really derive much benefit from this measure.

To Magsaysay should go the credit for implementing the first legislative measure aimed at alleviating the misery of the peasants. The Land Reform Act did not bring about a major realignment of forces. The peasantry has still not succeeded in playing its vaunted role in Philip-

26 Republic Act, 1400, Sec. 23, para 3.

pine politics. But after Magsaysay the Philippine elite was more and more willing to utilize the peasant voter to maintain its grip on power. Milestones like the Land Reform Act may have been only an exercise in political ritualism. An act to dupe the people into believing that something is being done. A ruse to rationalize and legitimize conditions which otherwise would be totally unacceptable.²⁷ Even today no significant fundamental change has occurred in the social and economic relationship between the elite and the non-elite. Even in the period between 1963 and 1964, land reforms benefited only a negligible minority of the peasants and till this period only a total of 10 per cent of the total rice land is covered by that programme.²⁸

The reforms would have been implemented more successfully if the peasantry were in a more organized state. It failed to provide the necessary countervailing power and hence failed to pose as an alternative to the ruling elite. This is one of reasons for its failure to make a dent into the existing political and socio-economic structures.

27 Astin Subrke, "Political Rituals in Developing Nations: The Philippine Case as a Case Study", Journal of South East Asian Studies (Singapore), vol. 11, no. 2, 1972, p. 127.

28 C. D. Corpuz, The Philippines (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), p. 105.

Chapter III

PHILIPPINE FOREIGN POLICY DURING THE TENURE OF
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Before Magsaysay became President, Philippine foreign policy, as one of the Filipino writers put it, was only another word for the conduct of Philippine-American relations. Once in a while it showed awareness of the world round it by issuing periodical statements expressing concern at the goings-on which were of immediate interest to her. Verbal support for the Indonesian freedom struggle is an example. In fact the venerable Carlos P. Romulo, located the country, in the late forties, for his convenience and for what he thought was for the general good of all Filipinos, in the South Pacific.¹ At the Baguio Conference held in 1950, in which the Philippines was the host country, keen observers of the Philippine scene, could sense a new awareness in the Philippine leadership. In this conference, held when Elpidio Quirino was president, the Philippine Government actually refrained from inviting South Korea and Nationalist China. Attendance-wise the conference was a success as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines represented South-East Asia and India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Australia came from outside this area. Discussion mainly pertained to

1 Insight (Hong Kong), July 1972.

matters economical and cultural. The Baguio conference closed with the passing of many resolutions, which generally praised the concept of regionalism. Nothing more tangible came out of the conference.

The Inhibiting Factors

Independent Philippines had all the ostensible trappings of a free nation. But the independence granted had built-in strings which were designed to perpetuate U.S. economic and political dominance of the country. The American Congress on the 29th of June, 1944, authorized the President "to keep or to get and hold such bases" and also incident rights he might consider necessary for the protection of the Philippines and the U.S. In another joint resolution, approved on the 28th of July, 1955, the Philippine Congress gave the Philippine President blanket powers for approval of the establishment of American bases in the archipelago. Within a short span of less than two years, seemingly the final dye was cast. On March 14, 1947, a military agreement was signed whereby the U.S. for 99 years got "the right to retain the use" of a number of bases and to use such others as listed if it thought that "military necessity" warranted such action.² A clause was also inserted

² Agreement between the Republic and the United States of America Concerning Military Bases, Department of Foreign Affairs Treaty Series, vol. 1, December 1948, pp. 144-60.

whereby the U.S. would ask for extension of the bases. The Philippine armed forces also came to be strongly linked ^{the} with the American military machine with/introduction of the Joint United States Advisory Group (JUSAG).

Economic independence was also partial to an extent. The "Bell" Act linked the dollar with the peso. The fixed rate of exchange, and the facilities for the unrestricted transfer of funds for American citizens, could only be stopped or reviewed on the approval of the American chief executive. By the year 1965, the second year Magsaysay was in power, U.S. share of Philippine business estimates ³ was 63 per cent.

'Padre Faure' (where the Department of Foreign Affairs is housed) was very active when Magsaysay was at the helm of affairs. He took a number of initiatives in the foreign policy field. The bilateral agreement with the U.S., the formation of SEATO, the settlement with Japan, etc. are some of his achievements. His stature no doubt, helped place Philippine-American relations on a more equal footing. It was during his tenure that the Filipinos would stand up to the U.S. in bilateral negotiations and also could force the U.S. to revise agreements. Magsaysay came to power at a

3 Russell H. Fifield, The Diplomacy of Southeast Asia, 1945-1958 (New York, 1958), p. 65.

very crucial juncture of world politics and also Filipino politics. The mounting peasant unrest in the agrarian sector clearly underlined the imperative need for radical reforms. The Truman Administration therefore, laid great emphasis on the urgency of effecting these much heralded land reforms. Great pressure was brought to play on the Quirino Administration. Magsaysay based his campaign on the agrarian issue. But unfortunately with the dawning of the cold war and the coming of the Republican Administration, the attitude of the U.S. underwent a perceptible change.⁴ The exigencies of the cold war brought about an inversion in the priorities of both the governments. Social reforms for the time being had to take a back-seat in the Philippines, notwithstanding the fact that Magsaysay came to power on a platform which promised substantial agrarian reforms. The unorganized state of the peasantry, allowed the policy-makers for many more years to give the greatest priority to what they thought was for the well-being of the country.

Foreign Policy Initiatives

Many observers of the Philippine scene had reasons to hope that the new administration would be more assertive

4 Frank H. Golay, Philippine-American Relationship (Manila, 1966), pp. 158-59.

in the foreign policy field than its predecessors. After all, Claro Recto, whose nationalist credentials were never in doubt, was then reputed to be his foreign policy adviser, and the appointment of Leon Ma Guerrero was another good indicator. The nationalist influence during the early days of the Magsaysay Administration was perceptible as is evident from some of the Administration's moves. The bid to establish closer relationship with its immediate neighbours is an example.

All the same it was during the same period that the "close and special relationship" with the U.S. reached its peak.⁵ An already deep involvement was made even more intense. Even before Magsaysay's coming, the Philippines was the only South-East Asian country in which the U.S. had operating military establishments, which were specifically meant to assist in the military activities to be undertaken in that area. Before his presidency, Philippine foreign policy indulged in 'minor heroics' like giving verbal support to the Indonesian freedom struggle. But Philippine foreign policy in spite of all its proclamation, considered Asia peripheral to her interests. Magsaysay had earlier shown indications of a new awareness. But still he had inhibitions. The reaction to Guerrero's 'Asia for the Asians'

5 Sung Yong Kim, US-Philippines Relations, 1946-56
(Washington, 1968), p. 46.

speech proved this.⁶ The Philippine representative in the U.N. even went to the extent of calling it a 'leaving⁷ of Japanese propaganda'. It must be remembered that Americans in those days viewed neutralism of any shade, with disfavour. Dulles called it immoral. More than that it smacked of Nehru's concept, as he had repeatedly played on the words of 'Asia for Asians' in many of his speeches. But as the concept found favour with the 'nationalist intelligentsia' Magsaysay tacitly accepted it, although with some reservations. He brought out a policy statement⁸ which completely dropped the offending slogan. The statement also underscored "the threat of communism", while also retaining an assertion to fight imperialism in any form. As an afterthought it also assured the sceptical that it was in no way incompatible to the traditional policy of friendship with the U.S. He went to great lengths to point out that these two policies were in fact complimentary.

6 Ramon Magsaysay's Statement clarifying his Administration's Foreign Policy vis-a-vis Asia. Department of Foreign Affairs Review, vol. II, March 1955, pp. 3-4.

7 Renato Constantino, The Making of a Filipino (Quezon City, 1969), p. 198.

8 Hernando J. Abaya, The Untold Philippine Story (Quezon City, 1957), pp. 162-63.

Many controversial foreign policy decisions were taken during Magsaysay's tenure. Magsaysay's personality and his personal predilections played an important role in their formulation. Invariably the nationalists clashed with him. Their most vehement charge was that Philippine foreign policy was unduly influenced by the American interests in the country. Their disenchantment increased when the President took some decisions which would have far-reaching future ramifications. For instance, Magsaysay's insistence in having even stronger relations with the Chiang Kai-shek regime in Taiwan, not leaving any avenue open for future rapprochement with the People's Republic, infuriated most Filipino nationalist statesmen. The Ohno-Garcia reparation deal, the granting of more bases to America; the question of expanded parity rights for Americans under the Laurel-Langley Agreement and the precipitate recognition of the Diem puppet regime served only in accentuating this growing disenchantment.

The United States for its part played its hands rather crudely. ⁹ For example, the then Secretary of the Navy, Robert Anderson, said on November 30, 1953, before Magsaysay was sworn in as the President, that he would be

9 Ibid., p. 167.

receptive to the idea of granting to the U.S. permanent use of the bases in the Philippines. U.S. interference was even more evident, when pressure began to build up in the Philippines for the immediate revision of the Bell Trade Act. The country's delegation under the able leadership of Jose P. Laurel were in a strong position to wrest important concessions from the U.S. But then President Magsaysay in an interview given to the magazine U.S. World and New Report (Far Eastern edition) which is a well-known organ of the Republican business interests, made a very unfortunate statement. And that too when the delicate negotiations were in progress. He was quoted as saying that Americans have parity rights "not only" in public utilities.¹⁰ This statement naturally encouraged the American business interests in the country to seek and obtain legal confirmation of the President's view in the now famous "Brownell" decision. Thus, the Laurel mission's hands were prematurely tied. Therefore it was no surprise that in the eyes of many Filipinos the Laurel Langley Agreement was a sell-out. The 'parity' amendments of 1947, after all governed only public utilities and natural resources. The new agreement meant a further strengthening of

10 U.S. News and World Report, 23 April 1954.

the foreign business stranglehold, as it gave freedom for the dollar to be invested in all sectors of the Philippine economy.

One result is that today U.S. business in the islands enjoys an 18 per cent average rate of profit, every invested dollar bringing in \$4.67 in return and, fully 17 per cent of the Manila government's revenue from all sources comes from taxes levied on U.S. big business interests.¹¹ The Laurel-Langley Agreement should ~~be~~^{be} ~~the~~^{be} the major responsibility for this sorry state of affairs. Recto correctly said that "This is indeed the first instance in history where an independent nation has granted to citizens of another, rights equal to those enjoyed by its own."

The Belated Awakening to Reality

It was after the Bandung Conference that the Philippine Government realized the imperative need for closer relations with other Asian countries and South-East Asian countries in particular. The discordant note it struck in the proceedings, especially while praising the "basic good faith of the U.S."¹² and its vitriolic stand against

11 Ramparts (Chicago), vol. 11, no. 6, December 1972.

12 Opening Statement of Carlos P. Romulo, Press Release, Asian African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955.

communism, showed to an extent how out of touch it was with the realities of Asia. After the Bandung Conference, Magsaysay came out with his concept of "positive nationalism." He would see no incompatibility between this slogan and his country's extensive political and economic ties with the U.S.

Magsaysay found it hard to counter the mounting U.S. pressure on his administration to recognize the Diem regime of South Vietnam. To clothe this regime with a facade of legitimacy, the Americans were pressurizing all its trusted allies in South East Asia to extend recognition. The Philippine Government was the first to succumb to American pressure. The Diem regime was recognized on 8 April 1954. This act could not be easily justified, as Ngo Din Diem was still not a popularly elected leader. The 'Philippine-firsters' or Nationalists as present historians now prefer to call them, termed it as an interference into the domestic affairs of South Vietnam. After this the nationalists' disillusionment with Magsaysay was complete. They had a suspicion that Magsaysay invariably could not differentiate between American and Filipino national interests. It became evident that the nationalists say in the formulation of foreign policy would be virtually nil, notwithstanding the informal arrangement they had made with Magsaysay before his becoming President. ¹³ The

nationalists especially Recto had visions of a new Philippine foreign policy which would shift gears and embark on a new road, similar to the Nehruite conception of a "third force". But Magsaysay preferred to see the world through American tinted glasses, which in those days saw everything in sharply etched hues of black and white.

It was now clear that Magsaysay would not be able to give Philippines foreign policy a radical new lead. His firm backing of the American position on all issues in the 'cold war'; His frequent outbursts against the countries opposed to America, left him with little room for future manoeuvre. For example he introduced a motion in the Philippine Congress expressing support to the U.S. policy of firmness towards the communist bloc. The resolution which contained the words "we stand squarely behind the U.S." was unnecessarily given wide publicity. Senator Clare M. Recto's quibbling motion which only tried to water down the extremism in the President's motion was defeated overwhelmingly. Magsaysay used all his influence to get it defeated by 22 votes to 1 vote.¹⁴

His failure to take a radical stance on the 'bases' issue and his apparent apathy to a pro-Asian policy were

14 Republic of the Philippines, Official Gazette, vol. 51, February 1955, p. lxxxvii.

the prime topics on which the nationalist stream of thought clashed with Magsaysay's ideology, which many found difficult to differentiate from 'puppetry'. Magsaysay, was under the naive assumption that the U.S. bases in the islands were for the protection of the Philippine national interests. Filipino public opinion had heated up on the 'bases' issue especially after some unfortunate statement made by top American Administration officials about U.S. ownership of the bases. President Eisenhower saw the feasibility of making concessions to Philippine national opinion. After protracted negotiations, the U.S. agreed to "turn over" U.S. owned title paper and title claims to the Philippines. This small gesture, as an American magazine pointed out, "changed little but accomplished much."¹⁵ The U.S. even after this agreement could use any of these bases for any purpose it deemed necessary as stipulated in the 1947 treaty. Of course they would use it only as guests not as hosts. This agreement was hailed by the Manila and the Western press as a great personal achievement of President Magsaysay.

The Brownell decision which sought to give legal sanction to the validity of the U.S. extra-territorial laws, was another example which impressed upon the national-

15 Time, 16 July 1956.

ists the need for asserting Philippine independence.

Magsaysay and the Collective Defence Treaty

Magsaysay besides playing host to the nations participating in the Manila talks was also one of the most avid proponent behind the subsequent framing of the 'Pacific Charter' Prince Sihanouk has publicly stated that Magsaysay tried to pressurize him into joining¹⁶ SEATO. Regional security was ostensibly the motive, but even a layman could perceive America's self-interest in keeping the organization up and going.

The eight nations who were signatories of the 'Pacific Charter' stated that "they upheld the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and that they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote self-government and to secure independence of all countries whose people 'desire' it and are able to undertake its responsibilities."¹⁷ SEATO gave its signatories the psychological satisfaction of having the protective mantle' of U.S. power. Actually Philippine membership of SEATO gave it only the facade of American military support. John F. Dulles no doubt said that an attack

16 Russell H. Fifield, n. 3, p. 96.

17 The Pacific Charter, The Signing of the South-east Asia Collective Defence Treaty and the Pacific Charter, Proceedings, p. 88.

on the Philippines is an attack on the U.S.* But still the Philippines did not have the letter guaranteeing military assistance verbal assurances notwithstanding. For that matter such assurances were also given during the signing of the earlier security treaty and the Mutual Assistance Treaty.¹⁸

The Eisenhower-Garcia communique of 1958 stated that an armed attack on the Philippines is an attack on the U.S. and will be instantly repelled. But when the U.S. made its official position clear, there was no such automatic reaction guaranteed. James M. Wilson, Jr., then deputy chief of mission in the U.S. Embassy at Manila, clarified the American position when he said: "We do not believe that the statements made by American Presidents and Secretaries of State, in any way expand the treaty commitments. They simply recognize the fact that so long as the U.S. forces are partially in the Philippines, an attack on the Philippines would jeopardize their safety and we would act to protect them. Our commitment to the security of the Philippines remains exactly as stated in the treaties themselves."¹⁹ In all probability,

18 Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of Philippines and the United States of America, Department of Foreign Affairs Treaty Series (Washington), vol. II, January 1953, p. 14.

19 Leon Ma Guerrero, "The Penascola Syndrome", Pacific Community (Tokyo), vol. 3, no. 3, April 1972, p. 468.

the Filipinos were taken in by the rhetoric of the U.S. policy-makers. Nowhere in SEATO, is there a provision for the defence of Formosa, South Korea and Japan. Yet U.S. foreign policy-makers claimed that it throws "the free world's protective mantle over Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam".²⁰ There was also the threat of 'collective retaliation' in the case of attack on any member state also proved empty.

The Philippine leadership, wittingly or unwittingly, by joining SEATO, was giving the U.S. a helping hand in its effort to hold the then existing cold-war frontier. This was evident from these words in the treaty "to prevent or to counter by appropriate means, any attempt... to subvert freedom or to destroy sovereignty or territorial integrity." SEATO did not even vaguely fit into Bagehot's truism that most forms of collective action are dependent upon an "agreement upon fundamentals" on the part of its principles. Magsaysay was seemingly secure in the notion that somehow "eight nations are better than one."²¹ He failed to recognize that it was nothing but a contrap-

20 Neal Stanford, "The Meaning of SEATO", Foreign Policy Bulletin (Washington), vol. 34, 1954-55.

21 Ronald C. Nairn, "SEATO: A Critique", Pacific Affairs (Vancouver), vol. XLI, no. 1, p. 18.

tion to prevent the final liquidation of imperialism from Asia. He failed to comprehend that SEATO was an agreement "for the defence of the indefensible by the reluctant against the indifferent."²²

Relations with Neighbours

A country's foreign policy, it is sometimes assumed, is always a response to, or the consequence of the reality in which the country finds itself. This is no doubt an over-simplification, but such considerations sometimes play a part in the formulation of a country's foreign policy. In the Philippines, there was a conscious attempt on the part of the leadership, immediately after independence, to ignore reality. So secure did they feel under the illusive mantle of American power that the need for having better relations with its close neighbours was neglected.

Magsaysay, presumably under the influence of the Nationalists, in the beginning of his tenure, made a belated attempt to bring Philippine foreign policy to a more even keel, although the wide ranging system of political, economic and military agreements with the U.S., made this task difficult. In his State of the Nation address on January 25, 1954, he said that "as a good neighbour to the

22 Leon M. Guerrero, n. 19, p. 474.

countries of S. E. Asia, we shall participate in all regional activities that will promote closer economic and cultural relations amongst us." ²³ This recognition of the reality round it was also evident from another policy statement he made in the Philippine Congress, although it was clothed in the then prevalent cold war jargon.

Magsaysay followed up his pronouncements by setting out to tackle some of the outstanding issues which stood in the way of better relations with the Asian neighbours. With Soekarno's Indonesia there could not be a great similarity of interests. But there were minor irritants like illegal immigration and smuggling. After talks, it was agreed that the Philippines would establish a consulate at Manado, Sulawesi, which was the centre of these activities. The Indonesians promised to extend all cooperation. Another issue which created some misunderstanding between the two governments was the West Irian problem. The Philippine government extended its verbal support to the struggle of the Indonesians, but it had some inhibitions possibly because the Netherlands was a signatory of the Atlantic Charter. Anyway the Philippines did not

23 Address On the State of the Nation by Ramon Magsaysay, January 25, 1954, Official Gazette, Republic of the Philippines, vol. 50, January 1954, p. 86.

create much goodwill in Indonesia, when they abstained from voting in the U.N. General Assembly in the West Irian issue, hoping that the Dutch and the Indonesians would pursue their endeavours to solve the controversy." ²⁴ As a close neighbour and because of Magsaysay's earlier policy statements, the Indonesians had entertained the hope that the Philippines would play a more positive role.

The Philippine attitude towards other Asian states was rather ambivalent during this period. Cambodia and Laos were recognized only on January 8, 1955. It would have remained indifferent to Indo-China even longer but for Dienbienphu. The Philippine leadership interpreted the defeat of the French and the victory of the Viet-Minh as yet another instance of the spread of the yellow peril.

Relations with Japan and Formosa were given more importance. MacArthur had said in 1949 - "Now the Pacific has become an Anglo-Saxon lake and our line of defence runs through the chain of islands fringing the coast of Asia." ²⁵ The cold war strategicians at the State Department had charted out a role for the Philippines to play in the interest of what was then known as "American insular imperialism."

24 Russell H. Fifield, n. 3, p. 94.

25 Edward Friedman & Mark Selden, eds., America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations (New York, 1969), p. 170.

Magsaysay in many of his policy statements and interviews stressed on the prominent role Japan and Formosa had to play in any defence arrangement against communism.

It was also during Magsaysay's brief tenure that Philippine-Japan relations were put on sounder footing. Relations between the two countries though normal were far from happy. The deep wounds of war had still not healed. The war reparation issue was still unsettled and above it all the favoured nation treatment Japan was getting from the U.S. after the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, was not very much appreciated by the Filipinos. The reparation issue was catching a lot of fire in domestic Filipino politics. Magsaysay had to do something. In the talks that followed, the Philippine delegation being led by the Vice-President, Carlos P. Garcia and the Japanese side led by their chief of mission in Manila, Katsumi Ohno, an agreement was reached on May 9, 1955 which came to be called the Ohno-Garcia Agreement. To this day, this agreement has generated a lot of controversy. Under terms of the agreement, Japan agreed to give to the Philippines within a maximum of twenty years a total of \$550 million in reparations. \$500 million in capital goods, \$30 million in services and \$20 million in the form of price reductions. In a separate agreement the Japanese government made available \$250 million in long-term credit for capital goods to

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be brought from Japan. One effect of this agreement, which observer can note today is that the Philippine market, once the preserve of American business, is today facing exploitation from Japan also.

Magsaysay's Contribution

During his presidency, one cannot but fail to get the impression that Philippine foreign policy was subordinated to a 'simplistic' faith in the U.S. and special relations. It worked to an extent during Magsaysay's period, because of the cold war and its island isolation. But many Filipinos thought that the relationship was a little too close for the future good of the Philippines. His extremism was definitely uncalled for. "Between our way of life and communism there can be no peace, no paralyzing co-existence, no grey neutralism. There can be only conflict, total and without reconciliation."²⁷ No wonder then that Mactoco called Magsaysayism the Filipino counterpart of 'McCarthyism'. He even went to the extent of saying that US-Philippine relations under Magsaysay, was so

26 K. V. Kesavan, Japan's Relations with Southeast Asia (Bombay, 1972), p. 91.

27 Time, 25 March 1957.

close, that he sarcastically compared the closeness to the relationship of Edward Bergen with Charlie McCarthy.²⁸

Bergen was a very famous puppeteer in those days and Charlie was of course his puppet. Necto can be accused of indulging in verbal overkill, but when Magsaysay governed the Philippine foreign trade, the natural resources and even public utilities were either partly governed by the Act of the U.S. Congress, the Bell Trade Act or the Laurel Langley Agreement. The peso also came to be inextricably linked with the dollar.

Magsaysay may not have given Philippine foreign policy a new direction, but all the same he imbibed a new dynamism into the conduct of foreign policy. It was, under him, no longer a glorified term for Philippine-US relations. He envisaged a very important role for the Philippines in the crusade against communism. The missionary zeal in which he tried to sell the idea of collective security to his neighbours is an example of his perseverance. This sometimes led him to absurd limits, like his commitment to the defence of Taiwan. But all the same it led to a consolidation of the ties which SEATO had brought into being with its immediate neighbours in the region.

28 Renato Constantino, n. 7, p. 212.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSION

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Magsaysay's Legacy

Ramon Magsaysay became the President of the Philippines at a crucial juncture of its history. The years preceding the war had brought up the explosive agrarian problem to the surface. The exigencies of the cold war and the strategic position the Philippines occupied coupled with the prevalence of absurd doctrines like the 'domino' theory, combined to make his presidency an extraordinarily important one. This fact is borne out by the number of important decisions Magsaysay made during his short tenure and the far-reaching effects they had.

Magsaysay's bid for the presidency came at a time when 'nationalist' stirrings were becoming audible, especially in ^{its} manifestations of anti-Americanism. Popular disillusionment over the government's handling of the 'Huk' problem was evident. The Quirino Administration had reached a new high in corruption, even by Filipino standards. As compared to this Magsaysay's image of do-gooder and his successful handling of the military campaign, against the Huks helped him project a picture of himself as an alternative to Quirino. But what made him look like a sure winner was his capacity to inspire confidence in the peasants.

His single-minded devotion to what he considered to be his duty and his unquestionable personal integrity coupled with his ability to provide popular leadership made him a viable alternative to Quirino.

The Peasantry's Gain

The bulk of the Philippine electorate, although politically naive was impressed by the stress Magsaysay laid on the 'agrarian' issue in the campaign of 1953. This in no way indicated the existence of an organized or coherent segment of the underprivileged. In the year 1953 the peasant organizations were even more splintered than usual - the result of Magsaysay's ruthless suppression of the Huks. None of the peasant organizations had even a minor part to play in bringing about Magsaysay's nomination. It was managed by the same band of power-brokers, who had run the show before. Therefore Magsaysay's thumping victory did not even bring a semblance of political power to them. It remained where it had always remained - in traditional hands. Magsaysay's entry into Malacanan failed to bring any representation to the peasantry. The only consolation was that the peasantry functioned as a political force at least at the primary voting level.

But all the same at least as far as the peasant was concerned, the coming of Magsaysay signalled a growing

awareness on the part of those in Congress, that the peasant was a force to reckon with in electoral politics. The refusal on the part of those in Congress to come out openly against the 'Land reform Bill' and also their failure to vote against it is indicative of this. The constraining factor was the effect such an act would have had on the voting behaviour of the electorate. Viewed from this perspective, the passing of the 'Land reform Act' of 1955, did not in any way indicate the dawning of a new awareness among the Philippine political elite but rather it reflected their willingness to adopt a flexible stand to maintain the status quo. One should not forget that after the passing of the bill, these same interests spared no effort to foil its implementation. Magsaysay may have been sincere but all the same he presided over a political machinery which used stop-gap measures to manipulate political forces in order to cling to power. The peasantry having been deprived of tangible benefits was lulled into complacency by certain symbolic concessions. Magsaysay only ensured legal affirmation of the need for land reforms by getting his Land reforms Bill passed. These noble sentiments were echoed earlier by Quezon, Roxas and Quirino. Crusades from party platforms, against a corrupt government and oppressive landlord used to start at the outset of every new campaign to elect to new

President.

Magsaysay's style of governing had certain shortcomings. Chief among them was his stress on 'personal action'. The rows of the underprivileged who stood outside the gates of Malacanan for a personal audience, and whom he was ever ready to oblige, only strengthened his predilection for personal government. Instead of trying to achieve concrete gains and then institutionalizing them, he seemed to be more interested in ritualistic acts like continuous touring, meeting particular groups, establishing advisory committees operating directly under his office. He succeeded in playing the role of the 'patriarchal compadre' to perfection. He effectively mastered the techniques of maintaining direct links between Malacanang and the people. Granting of personal audience, establishing Presidential complaint offices and extensive stump speaking were some of the means he used. Magsaysay set a precedent which President's after him had to follow.

The ideals of socio-economic justice and egalitarianism which Magsaysay's programme encompassed would not fit in with the then existing realities of the situation. Besides the elite in the Philippines, as in any other country, cannot be accused of having altruistic traits, so as to be willing enough to bring about substantial land reforms, which would in the long run undermine its position

of privilege.

Magsaysay was criticized in many quarters, for what was considered as undue stress on bringing about a change only in the agrarian sector of the economy. His critics had for long charged that the Philippine economy was essentially an "agricultural, export import, alien dominated" one. To this school of thought, Magsaysay's sole emphasis on agrarian uplift was tantamount to condemning the country to be perpetually a market for finished foreign goods. They clearly sought to emphasize the aims of American neo-colonialism. They sought to point out a fact that the Philippines being an underdeveloped, agriculture dominated country would soon cease to have an independent identity of its own, ultimately ending up as an adjunct of industrialized America. In a none too subtle way they were accusing Magsaysay of playing second fiddle to the American business interests in the country, which had reasons to keep the country agricultural. Their suspicions were more or less confirmed with the passing of the 'Land Tenure Bill'. Section II of the Bill consisted of the words: "It is the declared policy of the state to establish and maintain a peaceful, prosperous and democratic agricultural economy." This clause went against their concept of "nationalist

industrialization" which was all for capitalist enterprise in the land but wanted Filipino domination of the economy.

Magsaysay to them was a very convenient target, to them he symbolized the willingness of the Filipino to the subservient, a people in Renato Constantino's words 'habituated to abdicating control over basic areas of their national life, unaccustomed to come to grips with reality, prone to escape into fantasies.'

One Dimensional Approach to Foreign Policy

There is no doubt that Magsaysay's approach to foreign policy was rather simplistic. All the same he was aware of some of ^{the} glaring shortcomings of Philippine foreign policy in those days. But he like other Filipino statesmen in power before him thought that the salvation of Philippines, lay in its 'special relations' with the United States of America. He thought it expedient to commit his country four square behind the U.S., little realizing the dangers implicit in a policy which denied the country options in times of emergency. His stand on some of the issues America stood for was even more rigid than the original American stand itself. It may be very easy to apportion blame for present day calamities on the follies of past presidents. Therefore in the strong reappraisal of his contribution to the history of the Philippines, there is a tendency to gloss certain of his substantive achievements.

It was during his tenure that the 'Bell' Agreement was scrapped. In its place came the Laurel-Langley Pact. Some of the worst characteristics of the Bell Act were no doubt there, but there were also major refinements. The tendency among some of the contemporary historians to turn a blind eye to these achievements will only help in misleading future Filipino students of history. It is now conceded, that but for his influence and prestige, American climb down on the "bases sovereignty" issue would not have been possible, as was the revision of the Bell Act for whatever it was worth. He was also the first to realize that his country's destiny was inextricably linked with that of Asia, though it would have served his country better if he had had the foresight of not discriminating between Communist and non-Communist countries. In retrospect, the Philippines perhaps would not have been left out in the cold, at least as far as relations with China were concerned.

There has always been a charge that Magsaysay committed his country to Washington far beyond the legitimate requirements of its treaty obligations, in excess of his constitutional authority. They substantiated their allegations by citing the example of America's MAFO allies, who never went to the extent the Philippines did under Magsaysay's, whose national policies of commitment to the

defense of Formosa and active involvement in the domestic affairs of South Vietnam was uncalled for. The Laurel-Langley Act which the President considered to be one of his greatest achievements, freed the peso from the dollar, at least in theory. But all the same it gave the Americans more 'parity' rights and hence greater opportunities for investment. This negated the very concept of parity. The membership of the Philippines in SEATO was the culmination of Magsaysay's endeavours. He thought it would automatically give the country additional security.

Magsaysay's coming raised great hopes among the people initially. He was a man who did not come from the 'illustrado' class, who had some roots with the masses. As his victory was to a large extent due to his own personal popularity, he seemingly had no debts to pay to the political machine. Here was a man who would let the blessings of independence filter down to the masses and free them from the yoke of poverty.

He knew the pulse of the people. In his brief tenure he brought about more changes than his predecessors could effect in a decade. He did bring a change, howsoever, insignificant it may seem to be, in Filipino politics. He may not have tried to get rid of the entrenched plutocracy or liberate the Filipino from the trauma of Americanization.

But all the same he made the peasant feel that there was somebody up there in 'Malacanang' who liked him. Today the 'barrio' revolution started by him has flowered into private and official movements to reinstill the spirit of community self-help in rural areas, though these were limited in their scope. The agrarian reforms instituted under his presidency may have benefited only a small percentage of the peasantry, but it convinced them that the government was at last becoming responsive to them.

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