

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

10 December 1985

The Philippines: President Marcos's Snap Election Strategy [redacted]

Summary

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President Marcos's announcement last month of a snap presidential election--two years before he is constitutionally required to face the voters--is a classic example of both his unpredictability and his political genius. By unilaterally changing the rules of the game, he has almost overnight succeeded in refocussing domestic politics and directing domestic and international attention away from the country's depressed economy and rapidly growing Communist insurgency. His manipulation of the issue in recent weeks, moreover, has displayed more than a hint of the old, politically astute Marcos. Even if he cancels the vote--a move we cannot completely rule out--he still will have accrued substantial gains by driving deep wedges into the factionalized opposition and mollifying some of his foreign critics. [redacted]

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If Marcos goes ahead with the election--as we believe he will--and has to choose between holding a fair election and winning, there is no doubt in our view that he will choose the latter. What Marcos will have to reconcile in the weeks ahead is pressure for clean elections from his domestic and foreign critics and pleas that he protect the interests of his close associates. How he goes about this will determine whether the snap election is a brilliant stroke--designed to put a lid on US pressure for political, economic, and military reform--or a gross miscalculation that, by requiring heavy-handed manipulation of election rules and results, could intensify opposition to his rule. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Islands Branch, Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 9 December 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, [redacted]

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What Tipped the Balance This Time?

The key element in Marcos's decision to call a snap election, an idea he had floated and dropped earlier, almost certainly was his changed calculation of the benefits of a poll and increasing confidence regarding the outcome (see box). Marcos probably calculated that an election victory would divide and confuse US policymakers, help regain some support in the US Congress, and give him at least a temporary reprieve from US pressures to make broad reforms. Furthermore, he probably believes that he has no chance of gaining Washington's "endorsement" for his continued tenure; he may have concluded that the prospect of a snap election would hopelessly divide his domestic political opponents, illustrating to Washington that there is no credible alternative to his leadership. [redacted]

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At the same time, Marcos's confidence that he can win without blatant election irregularities has been bolstered recently by a variety of public and private polls indicating that he could defeat the opposition. Marcos also appears to be enjoying a period of relatively good health, and he probably believes he is physically able to campaign now, while there is no guarantee that he will be healthy enough to campaign for reelection in 1987. [redacted] Furthermore, although his party currently controls well over 80 percent of the local elected offices nationwide, internal party assessments indicate that it will lose a substantial part of that majority to the opposition after elections for mayors and governors next May. Marcos may have calculated that electoral gains by the opposition in local elections, combined with advances in rural areas by the Communists over the next two years, would make him far more vulnerable to defeat in 1987. [redacted]

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Marcos, meanwhile, has moved farther down the road toward tightening his control over the country's election machinery since his last flirtation with a snap election. For example, last August he packed the election commission with loyalists, a contingency that will facilitate manipulation of the vote tally. In addition, Marcos removed operational control of the local police from the military and returned it to mayors--a move that he says is designed to aid the country's counterinsurgency effort and provide voting booth security during the election, but which is interpreted by many political observers as an attempt to facilitate intimidation of voters. [redacted]

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Finally, the current election code--railroaded through the Assembly by the ruling party this fall--contains provisions to undermine the monitoring abilities of poll watching groups and allow intimidation of voters by local government officials, who will be permitted to act as official poll monitors in their hometowns. In addition, the National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL)--the private poll monitoring group generally credited with safeguarding many of the opposition's victories in last year's National Assembly election--is currently poorly

### The Snap Election: Not a Snap Decision

The idea of a snap election was not a new one. Marcos first began considering an early election when rumors that he was critically ill set off an intense round of succession jockeying within his ruling party following kidney transplant surgery in November 1984. Marcos's principal political adviser, Jose Rono, tried to persuade him to synchronize and advance local and presidential elections--scheduled in mid-1986 and mid-1987 respectively--in the hopes of tightening party discipline and quieting maneuvering over the critical succession issue. Upon regaining his health in January, however, Marcos announced that the election schedule would remain unchanged. [redacted]

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Marcos appeared to reverse course in mid-1985 when he threatened to schedule a snap presidential election for November in response to opposition impeachment efforts. According to US Embassy reporting, Marcos was persuaded to reconsider his decision during a tense five-hour party caucus, in which key advisers pointed out that the absence of a constitutional mechanism allowing an early vote would require Marcos to resign from office at least 70 days before running for reelection, because the constitution only allows for a special election if the President dies, is incapacitated, is impeached, or resigns.

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[redacted] Marcos subsequently tasked legal experts on his staff to devise a way to allow him to campaign for an early election while still holding office. Although confusion surrounding election details continues to cast doubt on whether he intends to go through with the proposed balloting, National Assembly passage of the special election bill on 2 December, Marcos's hard-hitting campaign appearances in recent weeks, and ongoing opposition maneuvering to select a presidential candidate now ensures that some form of early review--at a minimum a national referendum on his leadership--is inevitable. [redacted]

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positioned to monitor the election in rural areas. NAMFREL's chairman is organizing to monitor all 90,000 of the country's polling booths, but estimates that he will only be able to cover 60 percent by February. [redacted]

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### Gains Achieved, Risks To Be Weighed

Marcos's proposal of an early election has already gained him a great deal of political capital. The intense bickering in opposition camps over who will be its single candidate turned into decisions by Corazon Aquino and Salvador Laurel in late November to run separate campaigns against Marcos. Before the split, most opposition leaders--and many ruling party leaders--believed that a joint Aquino-Laurel ticket would be the opposition's best hope to defeat Marcos. Whether or not Aquino



and Laurel still end up on the same ticket, Marcos probably believes he has permanently weakened the opposition by smoking out Cory Aquino's candidacy and preference to run without Laurel. In any case, the opposition's political and financial resources--meager when compared to Marcos's political and financial juggernaut--will be further stretched if internal rivalries are not resolved. [redacted]

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Marcos probably also believes that his political maneuvering over the past month has restored some of Washington's respect for his leadership--at least enough to win him a tactical advantage over what he charges is a clique of enemies in Washington's bureaucracy working to undermine his standing with more senior US officials. Probably the most important factor in Marcos's decision to raise the prospect of an early election was the fear



that the recent series of high-level US visitors signalled an emerging consensus among US policymakers that Marcos is no longer capable of managing the country's critical problems, including the Communist insurgency and the deteriorating economy. If he believes he has shaken this perception among US policymakers, he almost certainly will feel no need for further concessions on election safeguards. [redacted]

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Marcos, however, almost certainly is still weighing some reservations about subjecting himself to an early review. In our judgment, these concerns are well-founded, given the ruling party's large losses in Manila in the National Assembly election last year and Marcos's unpopularity in the cities.\* Conflicting reporting makes it impossible to gauge Marcos's electoral strength nationwide at present. [redacted]

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There is also the possibility that Marcos may misjudge his ability to manage election events--as he apparently did in the period leading up to the National Assembly election.\*\* Marcos, in short, cannot be certain that Aquino's "fresh wind" campaign--promising an alternative to old-style politics as represented by Marcos and most of the traditional opposition--will not gain momentum in the weeks ahead, forcing rival opposition leaders to abandon their bids and fall in behind her. Marcos also cannot rule out a strong "moral" vote for Cory Aquino along with votes based on "anti-Marcos" sentiments that could force him to use extraordinary measures--even by Philippine standards--to ensure a favorable outcome. [redacted]

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Another issue that could cost Marcos ruling party discipline is the pivotal question of the vice presidency. The US Embassy says that Marcos is torn between selecting a credible vice president--to satisfy domestic and foreign critics who see a vice president as a way to resolve the critical succession issue--and

\*The ruling party took only 5 seats of 21 in Manila, where Imelda Marcos is the regional party chairman. [redacted]

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\*\*Marcos predicted last year that the opposition would take fewer than 20 of the 183 contested National Assembly seats--instead they won 61. Marcos underestimated NAMFREL's ability to prevent vote tampering immediately after the election and overestimated the ruling party's ability to turn out the vote in urban areas. [redacted]

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his own political instinct to choose a political nonentity to avoid designating a clear successor, who could become a political rival or spearhead a plot to assassinate him.\* If Marcos moves to satisfy his critics by choosing a credible running mate, he almost certainly knows that he runs the risk of alienating key stalwarts--including his wife--who have been hoping for years that he would give one of them the nod to succeed. [redacted]

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### Marcos's Options as Balloting Approaches

Marcos retains control of the country's political, military, and financial institutions--a circumstance that will allow him to manipulate key variables and continue pulling political levers in the weeks ahead. During the snap election threat in mid-1985, the Embassy reported that the ruling party was poised to vote in favor of an early ballot even though [redacted]

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[redacted] a majority of ruling party members personally were against the idea. Although Marcos decided to scrap the idea, the party's willingness to quickly push through the measure--which would have required using questionable parliamentary and constitutional procedures--underscores Marcos's tight grip on the ruling party. [redacted]

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Marcos's control over the \$1.7 billion national budget is another key election asset. According to US Embassy reporting, Marcos discussed tapping the budget to provide each KBL assemblyman--there are currently 110--with about \$450,000 for public works projects in his district. NAMFREL's chairman, Jose Concepcion believes that Marcos might easily spend as much as \$300 million to buy votes and finance projects to win political support. Marcos will also be able to supplement government expenditures for his reelection bid with large contributions from his wealthy political allies, including agricultural magnates Eduardo Cojuangco and Roberto Benedicto. In addition, through close presidential associates and government agencies, Marcos controls nearly all television and radio media and a majority of the country's newspapers and periodicals. [redacted]

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Marcos has other levers he can pull to ensure the election outcome. In the past, he has used the Supreme Court--which he has packed with loyalists--to legally justify controversial moves such as retaining his authoritarian powers after the election of a National Assembly last year. He has also used the election commission--six of its seven members are close associates--to

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\*Marcos's concern about an attempt on his life has not been confined to the issue of the Vice President. According to the Embassy, Marcos wore a bulletproof vest at a recent campaign appearance in the opposition stronghold of Cebu and has been very concerned that one of his political opponents might make an attempt on his life during the campaign. [redacted]

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Election Timetable

DATE	EVENT
3 December 1985	Marcos signs election bill...Corazon Aquino announces her candidacy.
11 December 1985	Ruling Party Nominating Convention... deadline for filing presidential and vice presidential bids...campaign begins.
21 December 1985	Marcos's announced date for naming his running mate...political parties must declare which candidates they support...first voter registration day.
28 December 1985	Final voter registration day.
5 February 1986	Official campaign period ends.
7 February 1986	Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections.
9 March 1986	Date by which constitution requires proclamation of a winner.

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manipulate vote tallies\* In addition, Marcos controls the military--through a tight loyalty network amassed over his 20 years in power--and has in past elections used the armed forces

\*There are currently two vacancies on the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and Marcos has promised to fill at least one with an opposition representative, but so far has made no appointments.

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[redacted]

to intimidate voters and cast fraudulent votes.\* His recent decision to reinstate General Ver as Armed Forces Chief of Staff--ostensibly to oversee a revamp of the military--will ensure that loyalists remain in command to deliver the military's contribution to Marcos's victory. [redacted]

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Marcos may also move--as he has in the past--to weaken the opposition's chances by setting up straw parties to run against the ruling party. For example, the Embassy reports that Marcos funded and supported the Roy wing of the Nacionalista Party during the presidential election in 1981 and the National Assembly election last year to divide votes among several opposition candidates. [redacted]

[redacted]

Although Marcos probably believes a mixture of such tactics will ensure an election victory, several loopholes would allow him to call off the election if he fears he might lose. For example, he could orchestrate an appeal to the Supreme Court to produce a ruling that the early election is unconstitutional. Alternatively, he could dissolve the National Assembly--which has the final authority to tally votes and declare the presidential winner--decree a postponement of the election, or revoke his postdated resignation--which would void the vacancy and the need for the election. His last resort probably would be invoking his emergency powers to stop an election, a move he knows would cost him political capital. [redacted]

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### Other Factors in Marcos's Decisionmaking

Predicting what Marcos will do and when he will do it is always a hazardous venture. What we can say for certain is that US pressure on Marcos to hold a fair election, combined with domestic pressure that he make concessions on election safeguards, soon will collide with his own instinct for political survival and urgings from his ruling party, inner circle, and family. Marcos's maneuvering room is likely to be constrained as he struggles to resolve key issues such as how dirty the election can be, how far to go in accrediting NAMFREL, whether to fill the two remaining vacancies on the election commission, what role to assign to the Supreme Court, whether and when to retire Ver, and finally, what role the military should play. Acknowledging the certainty that Marcos will act to protect his grip on power, the actions of the following groups will influence Marcos's decisionmaking as the election approaches. [redacted]

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\*The military is frequently used to cast "flying votes"--a practice where the same group of voters visits different polling stations and casts votes at each one. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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**Critics in the US.** Marcos's response to US calls for a free and fair election will almost certainly depend on how cohesive he believes his US critics are. If he detects confusion or disagreement in the US Government, we believe his concessions on election safeguards will be minimal. A relatively unyielding-- and united--US stand on election issues is more likely to elicit broader concessions from Marcos. At the same time, Marcos is likely to attempt further maneuvers--such as retiring General Ver or his recent suggestion that the Military Bases Agreement be extended past its scheduled expiration date in 1991--to divide his US critics and fend off pressure for fair elections. [redacted]

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**His Domestic Political Opponents.** Marcos is almost certainly more confident of his ability to cope with the moderate opposition. If the opposition runs more than one candidate, Marcos probably will make just enough concessions to ensure that a majority of his opponents participate. We believe, however, that he would not give in on key opposition demands, such as accrediting NAMFREL as the sole citizen's watchdog group. A unified Aquino-Laurel ticket, on the other hand, would pose considerable problems for Marcos and might prompt him to resort to large-scale fraud to avoid defeat. Marcos, in that case, could even decide to use one of the existing election loopholes to call off the vote. [redacted]

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**The Inner Circle.** Marcos's election decisions are also likely to be substantially influenced by his wife, family, and close personal advisers such as Eduardo Cojuangco, Jose Rono, and General Ver. According to US Embassy reporting, Marcos's close associates counseled him against calling an early election because they believed the risk of defeat was too great. This group is likely to pressure Marcos to use all the levers in his possession--including the military--to pull off the election successfully. Marcos also recognizes that this group does not want him to name a legitimate successor as vice president, unless it is one of them. Marcos then will have to decide whether to choose a credible alternative--as is hoped for by the US and the opposition--or satisfy his loyalists, who fear that their post-Marcos prospects will be jeopardized if he names a successor. [redacted]

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**The Parliament of the Streets.** Marcos almost certainly believes that he needs high voter turnout to convince his critics in the US that he has renewed his popular mandate. He also probably believes that a relatively calm balloting day is necessary to give the appearance to foreign and domestic critics that police and security forces were not used to coerce or intimidate voters. To that extent, Marcos is likely to be susceptible to some public pressure that he guarantee a minimal police presence at voting booths and that voters are not prevented in any way from voting according to their beliefs. Marcos's political concessions to this group, however, are likely to be minimal and mainly for public relations purposes. For example, he will probably make a strong public admonition that

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security forces exercise maximum tolerance toward political  
activists who decide to demonstrate near voting places on  
election day. [redacted]

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**The Communists and the New People's Army.** Marcos almost certainly does not view the CPP as a direct threat to his early election plan. Similarly, Marcos probably would not directly alter his election plans on the basis of pressure from the New People's Army. Increased military activity by the NPA during the election, however, would force the military to respond--a development that almost certainly would cost Marcos the appearance of a clean and peaceful election. [redacted]

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Typescript: President Marcos's Snap Election Strategy [Redacted]

EA M 85-10217

Original--OEA/SEA/IB

1--OEA/SEA/ITM

1--D/OEA (4F18)

1--Ch/OEA/SEAD

1--DC/OEA/SEAD

1--PDB Staff (7F30)

1--Senior Review Panel (5G00)

1--C/NIC (7E44)

1--NIO/EA (7E62)

5--CPAS/IMC/CB (7G07)

1--C/PES/DDI (7F24)

1--DDI (7E47)

1--C/DDO/IAD (3D00)

1--C/DDO/EA (5D00)

1--CPAS/ILS (7G50)

1--OEA/NEA (4G43)

1--OEA/CH (4G20)

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1-- [Redacted] NIC/Analytical Group (7E47)

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1-- [Redacted] C/DDO [Redacted] (3D01)

✓ 1--OEA/Research Director (4G48)

1-- [Redacted] ANIO/Economic (7E48)

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1--OCR/ISG (1H19)

1--OCR/EA/A (1H18)

1--C/DDO/EA [Redacted] (5D10)

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Outside:

State:

1--The Honorable Paul Wolfowitz

1--John Monjo

1--John Maisto

1--John Finney

1--Robert Dean

State/INR:

1--John Taylor

1--Allen Kitchens

1--Dick Hermann

1--Marjorie Niehaus

1--Corazon Foley

1--Morton Abramowitz

1--William J. Newcomb

1--William D. Howells

1--Robert DuBose

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[Redacted]

Treasury:

1--Douglas P. Mulholland  
1--Bill McFadden  
1--Bill Quinn

NSC:

1--Gaston Sigur  
1--Richard Childress  
1--David Laux  
1--Alan Thomas

DoD:

1--James Kelly  
1--The Honorable Richard Armitage  
1--Colonel James Martin, USA  
1--Lt. Colonel James Smith, USAF  
1--Don Eirich  
1--Brigadier General Philip Drew, USAF  
1--Brigadier General Larry Dillingham, USAF  
1--Lt. Colonel Robert Cooley, USAF  
1--James Cossey

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Office of the Vice President:

1--Donald Gregg

Commerce:

1--Robert Severance  
1--Byron Jackson  
1--William Brown

Federal Reserve Board:

1--Robert Emery

Army:

1--Lt. General Sidney T. Weinstein

Navy:

1--Commodore William Studeman

Marine Corp:

1--Brigadier General Frank J. Breth

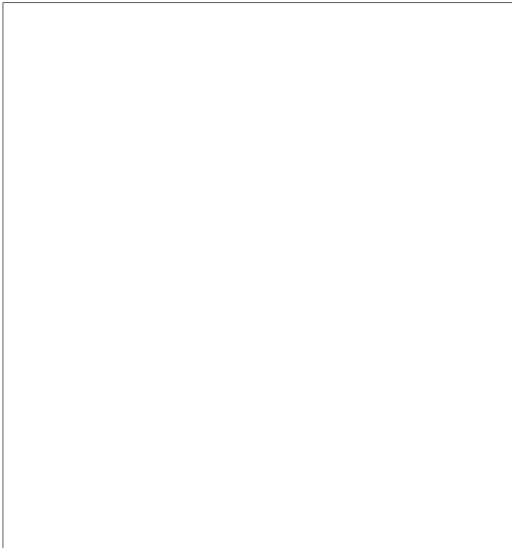
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IPAC:

1--Tim Wright

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