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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

19 July 1985

Perspectives on the Philippines' Political and Economic Drift [Redacted]

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Summary

Most intelligence analysts believe there is still time to halt the political and economic slide in the Philippines and to limit the growth of the Communist insurgency there. They agree that President Marcos has done much to create these problems during two decades of rule, but there is also consensus that his future role will be critical in determining whether or not the deterioration can be slowed or stopped. [Redacted]

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In this regard, our own analysts are divided over whether or not Marcos can be part of the solution. One view is that Marcos is the most effective vehicle for reform and a necessary element for a return to stability. Those who hold this view argue that Marcos has already taken some positive steps and would continue to do so under what are likely to be mounting internal and external pressures. The alternative view--and one that has been gaining strength as conditions in the Philippines deteriorate--is that continuation of Marcos's rule ensures the worst of all possible outcomes. Analysts holding this view argue that

This typescript memorandum was prepared by [Redacted]

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[Redacted] of the Islands Branch, Southeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 15 July was used in its preparation. Comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Southeast Asia Division, [Redacted]

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Marcos--out of political necessity--will block the reforms required to reinvigorate the political center and undercut the left. They say that the slide cannot be reversed until there is a change in government. [redacted]

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This paper examines both hypotheses and sets out some key areas where Marcos must take positive action if he is indeed to be "part of the solution." It is intended to furnish the reader with a framework for analyzing the efficacy of the Marcos government from the US perspective as the country approaches the presidential election in May 1987. [redacted]

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The Pivotal Role of President Marcos

In our judgment, there is still time to stem the growth of the insurgency, including its political front activities, and to prevent the CPP from gaining eventual control of the Philippine Government. The Communists have exploited near-perfect conditions during the last several years--a foreign debt crisis, declining living standards, human rights abuses, the political polarization caused by the Aquino assassination, Marcos's ill health, a preoccupation in the military with internal politics rather than counterinsurgency. Most domestic and foreign observers believe--and we agree--that economic, political, and military reform would significantly reduce the possibility that the coincidence of these conditions will be repeated. This would undercut the causes of growing Communist influence, begin to defuse the threat, and set the country on a reasonable path back to stability. [redacted]

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President Marcos is in the strongest position to begin the process of redirection. Despite his unpopularity and failing health, he has near-total control over domestic politics, and is free to make wide-ranging policy changes. Marcos controls a powerful political machine--based on personal and financial allegiances developed during 20 years in power, and his ruling KBL party continues to dominate the Batasan.¹ The opposition remains highly fragmented, lacks cogent alternative policies for addressing the country's serious political and economic ills, and on some issues is less receptive to reform than Marcos, particularly in the area of economic policy. The key question is thus whether Marcos has the energy and the will to become part of the solution. [redacted]

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¹The Batasan, or National Assembly, contains 183 elected seats--110 of which are held by the KBL. [redacted]

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The Case For Marcos as Part of the Solution

To those who hold the affirmative view, the events of the past several years have demonstrated that Marcos can be influenced to undertake policy reforms and refrain from politically inflammatory actions, although he must be convinced--often through extensive lobbying--that the alternatives to reform are unattractive. In 1983, for example, Marcos eliminated the controversial coconut levy which, though supported by his political allies, depressed the finances of already struggling coconut farmers. [redacted]

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The following year, under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund, the President deregulated interest rates, a bold initiative that removed one of the factors contributing to financial crisis in the banking sector and--by stimulating savings--removes one of the causes of the foreign debt runup of the early 1980s. In addition, tax and tariff reform measures designed to increase government revenues and improve the efficiency of domestic corporations have been put in place. But an even more dramatic example of Marcos undertaking reform at political cost is his unilateral dismantling, under IMF-World Bank auspices, of the country's tariff system during 1981-83. The move exposed the manufacturing empires of several of his political allies to international competition, forcing a number of their firms out of business. [redacted]

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This view also argues that Marcos has taken reassuring steps on several key political issues. Despite growing criticism of his government and the obvious political risks, for example, Marcos has not censored the domestic press, thereby continuing to allow an important safety valve for dissent. The Philippine press--currently considered among the freest in Asia--is now an important forum for debate. In addition, Marcos accredited the National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL)--a nonpartisan poll watching group staffed by private citizens--to monitor the 1984 National Assembly elections. NAMFREL's accreditation under US pressure was the most important factor in making the 1984 elections the "cleanest" in recent memory. Pressure brought to bear on Marcos has also produced a more vigorous follow-through by the administration in the Aquino assassination investigation by the Agrava Board and the subsequent trial in the Sandiganbayan.² [redacted]

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Marcos has also shown restraint in reacting to recent developments in the Philippine military. Contrary to what is

²The Agrava Board was a fact finding body commissioned by Marcos under pressure from the United States to counter allegations that his first investigative board--the Fernandez Commission--was not objective. [redacted]

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surely his personal inclination, Marcos has responded to outside pressure and allowed the prosecution of Armed Forces Chief of Staff Fabian Ver while privately leaving open the question of Ver's permanent reinstatement. At the same time, Marcos appointed the generally well-respected Fidel Ramos as acting Chief of Staff and has been publicly supportive of Ramos's initial efforts at reform. Marcos has not blocked Ramos's prosecution of lower level military personnel accused of criminal acts and human rights abuses. Most recently, moreover, Marcos has resisted the temptation to crush the newly-emerged reform movement among junior Philippine military officers. His recent meeting with leaders of the "We Belong" group to discuss their concerns will if anything give them a further sense of legitimacy. [redacted]

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Finally, Marcos's most important role in returning stability to the Philippines is properly setting the stage for an eventual successor government--a process beyond the scope of other politicians. One of the most dramatic examples of a determined Marcos turnaround is his 1983 support for an amendment establishing a succession mechanism. The result of intense lobbying by Washington as well as several domestic interest groups, the amendment provides the Philippines with a framework for an orderly and legal transfer of power in the event that Marcos dies or becomes incapacitated. [redacted]

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Whether controlled by the KBL or an opposition coalition, a future government will lack the political machine and the stock of "reciprocal obligations" Marcos has acquired over the last two decades--suggesting it will be weaker than the present regime. In the conventional wisdom, reform in the economic, political and military spheres will be painful and politically costly in such an environment. Initial steps by Marcos at this time to institute changes in traditional political and economic practices may be the only way of assuring change without violence over the longer term. [redacted]

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The Case for the Alternative View

The alternative analysis grants that there is sufficient time to reverse the Philippines' downward trend and does not deny Marcos's preeminence as a political actor. Nonetheless, it maintains that Marcos is unwilling to move forward with the military, political, and economic reforms required to avoid a slide into chaos. It also argues that he will be increasingly resistant during the next two critical years--the period leading up to the May 1987 presidential election. [redacted]

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Since the assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983, in the alternative view, Marcos has lost much of his aura of invincibility that evoked fear and respect in both his political adversaries and members of his ruling party. This has forced him to depend more than ever on the support of associates unreceptive to reform, such as agricultural magnate Eduardo Cojuangco and

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Fabian Ver. Marcos's serious health problems have further reduced his maneuvering room and are likely to continue preventing him from managing events with his former political skill. He will become increasingly resistant to pressure for even limited reform because most of these measures would require that he move against the interests of his most trusted and loyal supporters. Thus Marcos is likely to spend the remainder of his tenure fighting a series of rear-guard actions designed to prolong his political survival--at the expense of his country's long-term stability--and protect his family's post-Marcos political and financial fortunes. [redacted]

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Although Marcos has made policy changes over the past two years, most concessions have been wrung from him during periods of extended illness. Upon recovering his health, Marcos has routinely moved to ensure that reforms remain cosmetic, so as not to undercut his traditional power bases or give the appearance of bowing to pressure from his political opponents or the US Government. [redacted]

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During his health crisis in 1983, for example, Marcos was pressed by the opposition, his own ruling party, the Catholic Church, and businessmen to strengthen political institutions by clarifying the succession mechanism. Although a succession amendment was ratified by plebiscite the following January, Marcos subsequently moved to ensure that the language of the amendment remained vague, thus leaving the way open for his loyalists to manipulate the process.³ He also appointed a longtime associate and intimate of Imelda Marcos as Speaker of the National Assembly--who would act as interim president after Marcos's death or incapacitation--furthering the prospect that the succession mechanism will be subverted. [redacted]

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Many economic reforms have been short-circuited, according to the alternative hypothesis. Under strong pressure from independent businessmen and international financial institutions such as the World Bank, Marcos earlier this year claimed to have dismantled the monopolies that two of his closest associates--Eduardo Cojuangco and Roberto Benedicto--maintain in the country's largest agricultural industries, coconuts and sugar, respectively. Subsequent decrees issued by Marcos camouflage his associates' continued control over these industries, according to the US Embassy. [redacted]

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Although Marcos allowed legal proceedings to be instituted against Ver and 25 others implicated in the assassination of

³Philippine legal experts, for example, believe that the Constitution contains conflicting language on the succession that could be interpreted to give concurrent presidential powers to the Speaker and the Prime Minister. [redacted]

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Benigno Aquino, [redacted]
[redacted] he has influenced the process in favor of the
defendants [redacted] Since
Ver's removal, criticism of his leadership in the form of calls
for military reform by middle level and junior officers has
become increasingly vocal. Marcos, however, has refused to
permit Acting Chief of Staff Ramos to press ahead with senior
level personnel changes that would alleviate much of this
frustration and indeed has even expressed his intention to
reinstate Ver after he is cleared by the court. [redacted]

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Several other examples provide reasons to expect little of
Marcos in the future for advocates of the alternative view. He
has been made aware by several of his closest advisers of the
ruling party's poor prospects in local elections next year,
increasing domestic criticism of the agricultural monopolies, the
critical threat posed by the rapidly expanding Communist
insurgency, and widespread frustration within the officer corps
concerning the military's lack of professionalism and combat
effectiveness. But Marcos appears to believe that he can manage
with tactical diversions. Although such an approach has
succeeded in muting his opposition in the past, the current
situation requires substantial policy changes. [redacted]

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Finally, any government that legally succeeds Marcos will be
more willing to press ahead with political, military, and
economic change, if for no other reason than because it will lack
Marcos's monopoly on power and thus will be more likely to bend
to pressure for reform. The initial legitimacy and popular
support that such a government may enjoy also would provide it
greater leverage among competing interests as it attempts to
build its own political consensus. On balance, therefore, the
chances for political, economic, and military reform will be
better under a successor government than under Marcos, according
to the alternative hypothesis. [redacted]

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Signposts To Watch

While it may be premature to reach a final verdict on
whether or not Marcos can be part of the solution, at this point
the burden of proof must rest on those who argue that he can. In
this respect, we think that Marcos's performance over the coming
year in a number of key policy areas will conclusively settle the
question. If Marcos is to be "part of the solution," he will
have to take positive action on many, if not most, of the
following issues. [redacted]

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**Developing an Integrated Civil/Military Counterinsurgency
Strategy.** Major reforms are required in both the military and
civilian sectors in order to improve the counterinsurgency
effort. Most observers believe that improving the military's
human rights record--by imposing stronger discipline and more
severe penalties for abuses--is central to this effort. Military

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discipline, morale, and effectiveness would also benefit from moves to improve pay and benefits, give free rein to the military reform movement, and deploy additional forces from Manila to combat areas. It is crucial that the counterinsurgency effort be bolstered by progress in logistics, communications, and training. [redacted]

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In all likelihood, far-reaching reforms can only be achieved if Marcos replaces many senior officers--most of whom are Marcos loyalists--with more competent, honest, professionally trained officers. Not only would such officers be more likely to improve the performance of their commands, but their appointments would help break down current practices of promotions--typically based on family ties and personal loyalties--that have eroded morale among all levels of the Philippine armed forces. [redacted]

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The civil side is equally important to the military in halting the momentum and eradicating the conditions feeding the insurgency. Appropriate yardsticks in this area include progress at improving government services and upgrading infrastructure. The first step in this process could be to require "absentee" local officials to return to their municipalities, reestablish an effective system of local justice and, at a minimum, reduce the widespread local graft which now results in public funds--slated for public works such as road and school repairs--enriching public officials and other local power brokers. [redacted]

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Complying with the IMF Economic Recovery Program. The IMF program is designed to substantially improve the balance of payments, reduce reliance on foreign borrowing, improve the government's finances, trim inflation, and restore confidence in the Philippine economy. Compliance with the program requires meeting monetary targets, floating the exchange rate, lowering tariffs, widening the tax base, and cutting government expenditures. Floating the exchange rate is particularly crucial to stimulating exports by correcting the overvalued peso. Although Manila failed to meet monetary targets set by the IMF earlier this year, it has met the targets set for 31 May and has taken steps to lower tariffs and float the exchange rate. [redacted]

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Further reforms are needed in the financial sector, where the IMF suggests merging and consolidating weak private banks, limiting lending by government-owned financial institutions and relinquishing some of their functions to the private sector--moves that would strengthen the financial sector and restore public confidence in the banking system. The financial sector has been undercapitalized and recently plagued by failing private banks and deteriorating loan portfolios in the large government-controlled institutions. An increase in nonperforming loans, large deposit withdrawals, and high interest rates have so weakened private banks that in 1984 the Central Bank had to provide emergency loans to 10 percent of the banks. At the same time, government-controlled financial institutions--especially the Philippine National Bank and Development Bank of the

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Philippines--have expanded their lending dramatically to accommodate the government's acquisition of financially distressed firms, many of which were owned by Marcos's political allies. As a result, almost two-thirds of the Development Bank's assets are nonperforming and the IMF estimates that this year the three largest government financial institutions will show a combined loss equal to about 2 percent of GNP. [redacted]

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Agricultural Reform. The battle to undercut the insurgency by improving long-term economic prospects requires revitalizing the agricultural sector, which provides a livelihood for more than two-thirds of the population. Manila's pricing and exchange rate policies have long favored urban consumers over farmers; as a result, farmers real income fell 50 percent between 1977 and 1981 and have not improved since. Reversing this trend requires decontrolling agricultural input prices and the prices paid to farmers for their crops. Exchange rate management is especially important, since an artificially strong peso undermines exporters, and agriculture is a leading foreign exchange earner. [redacted]

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The dismantling of the coconut and sugar monopolies is also crucial to improving long-term prospects. US Embassy reports suggest that the coconut monopoly--comprising marketing, milling, exporting, and banking institutions controlled by Marcos's long-time political ally Eduardo Cojuangco--is partly responsible for nearly halving coconut farmers' income between 1979 and 1983. USAID studies conclude, moreover, that basic marketing and pricing reforms could boost coconut farmers' incomes by about one-third. In the sugar industry, Marcos associate Roberto Benedicto has exploited his control of the sugar marketing authority to extend his personal sugar empire into milling, farm equipment, transportation, and banking. Philippine economists estimate that, since 1977, Benedicto's manipulations of the sugar industry cut revenues paid to local sugar producers by 2 billion dollars. [redacted]

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We believe that a comprehensive approach to agricultural policy reform would improve agricultural output and rural incomes, allowing the rural economy to grow by over 4 percent annually.⁴ Rice and corn production, for example, will receive a boost from steps Manila has taken recently to deregulate prices of selected agricultural products. The IMF and World Bank are pressing for further policy reforms which ensure that marketing agencies are audited, monopoly interests within a sector are reduced, and price competition is increased. If Manila postpones these policy reforms, we estimate that the rural economy will

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grow by only 1.5 percent annually--less than the growth of the rural population. [REDACTED]

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NAMFREL as Sole Election Watchdog. Accrediting NAMFREL would substantially limit election fraud and lend credibility to the upcoming local and presidential elections. As such, it would help to secure the next government by validating its popular mandate. Another option open to Marcos, however, would be either to replace NAMFREL with a more sympathetic group or to authorize such a group to "balance" NAMFREL's activities. Because of NAMFREL's good reputation, we believe either of these moves would leave Marcos vulnerable to widespread criticism both at home and abroad. [REDACTED]

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A key element may be NAMFREL's own political conduct in the months ahead. NAMFREL is the bipartisan outgrowth of the post Aquino assassination political fervor and has been guided by the "core group" of moderates led by former University of the Philippines President Emanuel Soriano. The same group is responsible for considerable opposition political activity, however -- especially Corey Aquino's Convenor Group. Thus its claim to nonpartisanship is not assured, particularly in the eyes of Marcos. NAMFREL could leave Marcos little choice but to sanction a rival if its opposition profile remains high. [REDACTED]

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Appointing Nonpartisan Members to the COMELEC Board. Marcos has five vacancies to fill on the Commission on Elections, which oversees implementation of the election code and provides the official post-election tallies. In the past, Marcos has used the commission to manipulate election results. Sufficient movement on this issue would be the appointment of two additional opposition representatives. This would ensure that the opposition has a voice on each of the COMELEC's three panels. Marcos recently appointed a longtime supporter as the commission's chairman. Three appointments made last year consist of one Marcos loyalist, one independent, and one representative from the opposition. Resolution of this issue will matter less if NAMFREL is accredited. [REDACTED]

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Calling Early Presidential Elections or Postponing Local Elections. An early presidential election would subject Marcos to popular review. Moreover, a clean presidential election would strengthen political institutions and improve popular morale. It would, however, leave moderate opposition parties far less time to build grassroots organizations and raise funds. Postponing local elections would deny moderates an early chance at establishing their political credentials. [REDACTED]

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Relinquishing the Authoritarian Powers Granted Marcos Under Amendment Six. These powers, pushed through a national plebiscite in 1981, allow Marcos to retain many of the powers he enjoyed during the martial law period. They include the ability to suspend the writ of habeas corpus for all crimes against national security, issue any order deemed necessary to meet a

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crisis, including powers of preventive detention, shut down the media, transfer cases from civilian courts to military tribunals established during martial law, and control industrial labor relations. Abolishing Amendment Six would remove one of the prime sources of criticism leveled against the Marcos government. It would also signal a dramatic concession to political moderates and thus a defeat for the Communists in their propaganda war with the government. [redacted]

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Marcos's Perspective

How fast and how far Marcos will be willing to move ahead on these matters during the next several years is a matter of often heated debate among analysts. As in the past, we believe Marcos will concede less to his foreign and domestic critics on reform than they ask. The critical issue will be whether the concessions he does make will be sufficient to address the problems of the insurgency and overall stability. To better understand how Marcos will approach reform, we have examined what we believe are the ingredients of his thinking on the matter. [redacted]

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Marcos's political needs will require at least the appearance of progress on counterinsurgency issues, since the insurgency is now publicly recognized as a problem nationwide. Marcos will resist changes at the senior military level because he believes he needs a loyal military to aid the ruling party's chances in both the 1986 and 1987 elections. He will continue to be sensitive, moreover, to perceived pressure from abroad on matters concerning military leadership. This includes what he views as foreign intervention on the question of the reinstatement of General Ver and the removal of other senior military officers. Marcos clearly fears that capitulation would be a signal of weakness to his political adversaries. [redacted]

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On the other hand, there are undoubtedly competent, well motivated officers at the senior level who would pose no threat to Marcos as successors to Ver and Ramos. For example, the commanding generals of all four Regional Unified Commands on Mindanao are described as "neutral" on the Ver-Ramos issue by General Ramas, the commander of the Army. Although the appointment of a neutral to Chief of Staff would not completely satisfy either the reformists or the Ver loyalists within the armed forces, it would serve to mute the loudest criticism from both camps. Marcos, moreover, would still maintain final decisionmaking power, since such an appointee would lack an independent power base. [redacted]

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As for the reform movement itself, although addressing the concerns of the officers involved in the movement would pay dividends to Marcos--both in terms of improving the effectiveness of the armed forces and quelling a potential threat to his rule--it would shake-up the traditional system of loyalties upon which he has based his power. This would presumably undercut Marcos's

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ability to use the military to his advantage in upcoming elections. [redacted]

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On the economic front, Marcos's preoccupation with domestic politics suggests the government will move slowly to implement the IMF recovery program. Budget cuts in favored programs and ministries and the abolition of tax exemptions that benefit his allies will impose direct political costs. Strengthening government banks by imposing lending limits may also be resisted because of the threat such limits would pose to influential political associates seeking financial bailouts. In addition, floating the exchange rate--one remedy suggested to address the overvalued peso--will probably be resisted because it will rekindle inflation. [redacted]

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Moving ahead with the agricultural reform agenda of the World Bank and IMF would undermine the existing structure of Marcos's political support, and it is thus no coincidence that agricultural reform is the longstanding contest of wills between Marcos and his creditors that it is. In the 1984 local elections, for example, Benedicto is generally credited with delivering five out of the seven seats from Negros Occidental to the KBL. As next year's local elections approach, Marcos will become increasingly resistant to moves that might disaffect powerful allies like Cojuangco and Benedicto, whose wealth and influence will be critical factors in securing KBL victories. [redacted]

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Marcos will also have to weigh the costs of facing harsh criticism if he does not accredit NAMFREL as an election watchdog against the risks that vigorous election monitoring will seriously undercut his party's success at the polls. At the same time, he knows that a strong showing by his party in the local elections is critical for his chances in presidential elections; local officials often play an important role in national elections because of their influence over the local police and military forces, ability to hand out political favors, and role as conduits of funds to party supporters. [redacted]

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As with the NAMFREL issue, Marcos will confront the dilemma of choosing between domestic and international pressure for a balanced COMELEC or a commission stacked in the ruling party's favor. According to a government spokesman, NAMFREL has submitted a list of potential candidates for COMELEC to Marcos--some of whom are believed to be mutually acceptable. [redacted]

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If Marcos believes he can manage the elections in his favor, he may call early elections to capitalize on his improved health and the continuing disarray within opposition ranks. He faces a considerable risk, however, because he will be less able to control events than in previous elections. In fact, recent reporting suggests that Marcos currently favors the idea of deferring local elections until 1987--concurrent with the presidential poll. [redacted]

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On the face of it, Marcos would appear to have little to lose by the loss of his Amendment Six powers as long as the KBL dominates the National Assembly. But in actuality, we believe the President would be most reluctant to surrender what he considers an insurance policy in maintaining authority. He has used its various powers--including the power to legislate by decree--against the opposition as well as in cases where his own party looked set to move against him. Moreover, his ability to invoke emergency powers gives Marcos an edge for the eventuality that the domestic political situation moves beyond his control.

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Typescript: Perspectives On The Philippines'
Political and Economic Drift [Redacted]

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- 1--CH/OEA/SEAD
- 1--DC/OEA/SEAD
- 1--PDB (7F30)
- 1--C/NIC (7E62)
- 1--NIO/EA (7E62)
- 5--CPAS/IMC/CB (7G07)
- 1--C/PES/DDI (7F24)
- 1--DDI (7E44)
- 1--DCI (7D60)
- 1--DDCI (7D6011)
- 1--C/DDO/IAD (3D00)
- 1--C/DDO/EA (5D00)
- 1--D/OEAA (4F18)
- 1--Executive Director (7E12)
- 1--CPAS/ILS (7G215)
- 1--OEA/NEA (4G43)
- 1--OEA/CH (4G32)
- 1-- [Redacted] NIC/Analytical Group (7E47)
- 1-- [Redacted] C/DO/PPS (3D01)
- 1--OEA/Research Director (4G48)
- 1-- [Redacted] ANIO/Economic (7E48)
- 1--Senior Review Panel (5G00)

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Outside:

State:

- 1--Honorable Paul Wolfowitz
- 1--John Monjo
- 1--John Maisto
- 1--Thomas Hubbard
- 1--Lt. Gen John T. Chain, Jr., USAF
- 1--Rod Huff
- 1--Robert Dean

INR:

- 1--Weaver Gim
- 1--Alan Kitchens
- 1--Bob Carroll
- 1--Corazon Foley
- 1--Morton Abramowitz
- 1--William J. Newcomb
- 1--William D. Howells
- 1--Robert DuBose

Treasury:

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

[Redacted]

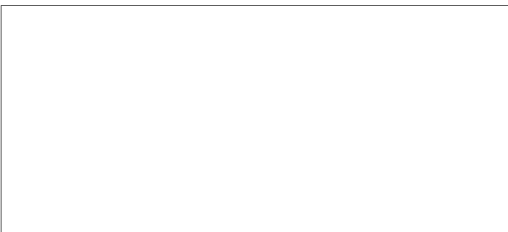
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NSC:

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

DOD:

1--James Kelly
1--Richard Armitage
1--James Martin
1--James Smith
1--Don Eirich
1--Brigadier General Philip Drew
1--Brigadier General Larry Dillingham
1--John Finney



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1--Don Gregg

Commerce:

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

Federal Reserve Board:

1--Robert Emery

Army:

1--Lt. Gen. William Odom

Navy:

1--R. Adm. John L. Butts

Navy Annex:

1--Brig. Gen. L. W. Smith, USMC

IPAC:

1--Tim Wright



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