

The Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM): A Creation of Historical Experience

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People Power



"The events of that historic 1986 are only the beginning."

Background

The political system that sustained Marcos during and after Martial Law depended on a powerful and well-organized political party that religiously practiced a patron-client relationship, and which had the full support of the military hierarchy. This patron-client relationship provided the space and time to dismantle the faulty two-party system of the post-war Philippines, and paved the way for the creation of a single dominant political party under Marcos' leadership. Likewise, those years also saw the creation of a bureaucracy tailor-made to the needs of Marcos. Coupled with this was the development of an economic system anchored on "crony" capitalism which equally reinforced if not naturally blended with the Marcos-tailored political system. Thus, what evolved was a political and economic system that catered to the needs of Marcos and his chosen few.

The history and sentiment of the military during the reign of Marcos can be summarized by two general statements. First, the common soldiers, especially those in the field, hardly knew what they were fighting and dying for except from Marcos' rhetorics and the rhetorics of his generals. Obedience to the chain of command was greatly emphasized. The military dictum "theirs was to do or die and not to reason why" became the single most important commandment emphasized by the Commander-in-Chief and which gave Marcos a free hand to completely turn the military into a quasi-private army. Second, many of the senior officers (generals and colonels) and even junior officers (Lt. Colonels to 2Lts.) contributed greatly to the decay in the military organization. Either they

allowed themselves to be duped by the Commander-in-Chief so that their services can be extended, or they were simply corrupt and took advantage of the dysfunctional culture that had developed over time. Many junior officers followed the examples set by high military command; others who felt that there was no future in the field had themselves reassigned in air-conditioned headquarters. It is no wonder that after the February revolution many of the senior and even junior officers would be investigated for unexplained wealth and human rights violations.

The RAM: Its Beginnings

The beginnings of the Reform the AFP Movement (RAM) could be traced to the Philippine Military Academy where most of the RAM members graduated. For four years, the Academy impressed upon its students the values of discipline and honor: discipline is a virtue that strongly bonded the cadets, while the honor code that taught the cadets not to 'lie, cheat, steal, nor tolerate others' entailed moral and ethical uprightness and intellectual honesty. The violation of this code by any member calls for the ostracism by the Corps. Many of the graduates of the Academy, especially the idealistic and dedicated young officers felt that Marcos and many of his generals have violated the honor of the military and have lost the sense of discipline, resulting to the insidious and continuous isolation and decay of the military organization. This in turn, effected the total alienation of the military from the people.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle that the AFP has had to surmount in its 90 years of existence was a civilian leader who had decided to stay in power for as long as he could. This he did through legal manipulation and the use of the bureaucracy, especially the military.

The dilemma therefore of the military was whether or not to continue supporting a perverted status quo at all cost and resist moderate and violent forces seeking to dethrone the Marcos regime. It was a dilemma that had far-reaching consequences: it could mean the erosion of the military's institutional role and its transformation into a mere private army of the regime. It was a dilemma of becoming anti-people rather than pro-people, of protecting one man rather than protecting the state itself, thereby becoming a praetorian guard rather than the guardian of democracy.

It is a sad historical note that it took one and a half decades for the military to fully comprehend their dilemma. It was only when the military institution became directly threatened by an internal revolutionary force that seems to be beyond its scope and control that soldiers started questioning why. It was when the people whom they have sworn to protect and serve began to hate and despise them that they felt the strong contradiction in their role. It was when the people started to clamor for a change in government that they felt

something was gravely wrong with the then existing government. With these great contradictions as backdrop, the RAM was born.

The RAM: Its Ideals and Aspirations

The Reform the AFP Movement (RAM) stood for some basic value-changes that were badly needed by the AFP. It means Restore Ethics, Fairmindedness, Orderliness, Righteousness and Morale (REFORM) in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Movement. Its battlecry was WE BELONG. It meant that the AFP belonged to the people; that the AFP cannot survive without the care and support of the people. It was the cry of the young, patriotic and nationalistic soldiers to the people to open up their arms and receive a brother who has lost his identity because he was used as ammunition in a war of partisan politics.

In their manifesto, RAM stated that its "efforts shall be geared towards the attainment of the AFP's new thrust of uplifting the morale and welfare of every man and woman in uniform; enhancing the operational effectiveness of the military establishment; and restoring our people's faith in their armed forces, so that in the long run, we shall be able to contribute our share of building a just, peaceful and progressive society where all Filipinos live in harmony and with dignity".

Included in the Statement of Common Aspirations is a nine-point objective:

1. Maintain a strong and solid AFP that can uphold the sovereignty of the people and the state, support the constitution and protect the geographical integrity of the country and at the same time extirpate all divisive forces within and outside the organization;
2. Cleanse the AFP of undesirables;
3. Maintain a high standard of discipline;
4. Effectively enforce the merit system;
5. Reorient training and education in the AFP;
6. Promote the morale and welfare of every man and woman in uniform;
7. Restore camaraderie and *esprit de corps* in the AFP;
8. Rationalize the management of the AFP's limited resources; and,
9. Align the concept and practices of leadership with the basic constitutional concept and the tasks of the AFP.

Courses of Action

A. Membership

The RAM was dramatically introduced to the public during the Alumni Homecoming at the Philippine Military Academy on March 21, 1986. Wearing shirts bearing the words "We Belong", RAM paraded in front of the grandstand and unfolded a banner with words 'Unity Through Reforms'.



Almost 500 alumni joined, including senior and retired officers. This singular act captured the imagination of the people and soon the RAM became the focus of attention in a society that was wanting of change. The demonstration-parade was unparalleled in the Philippine military's history and it signalled to the Filipino people that the institution would not allow itself anymore to be isolated from the people's fight for justice, freedom and democracy. With the prevailing explosive political situation after the death of ex-Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., the RAM became another validation of Marcos' loss of mandate from the Filipino people.

With its members initially coming from PMA classes 1971 to 1984, the organization quickly expanded to include retired alumni who publicly expressed their sentiments and many active officers who were quietly supportive. Greeted with favorable response, RAM then needed only a few active members to devote much of their time propagating the aspiration and ideals of the organization to expand more rapidly. An 11-man steering committee was created in the National Capital Region (NCR) for this purpose.

B. Regional Counterparts

Upon learning of the developments in the NCR, fellow officers, mostly PMA graduates, in the different regions banded together to initiate the formation of the movement in their respective regions. They proceeded to address local issues while keeping themselves constantly informed about the development in the NCR. It is interesting to note that one regional counterpart - RAM region 11 - was more organized than RAM-NCR. The strong organization and cohesiveness of RAM-11 could be mainly because insurgency and graft and corruption were worse in that area.

C. Functional Committees

As early as April 1985 several functional committees were created and their purposes, responsibilities/tasks, procedures, organization/composition defined. These were the economic committee, complaints and grievance committee, and the sunshine committee. In addition, other committees were created to meet the immediate needs of the movement, namely: the information committee, the education committee, and the finance committee.

Over and above these committees was a secretariat that coordinated the activities of RAM. It aided the Steering Committee in dissemination and communication.

A consultative advisory group was later created to help RAM in its pursuit of reforms in the AFP.

Later, a parallel organization called the Senior Cavaliers Reform AFP Movement (SCRAM) was formed by retired generals and colonels in the AFP. They helped the RAM in its campaign for clean and honest elections.

The functional committees served as venues where the inputs of the members are processed, and more importantly, translated into action. The economic committee was concerned with the salaries, benefits and other similar concerns of the members of the AFP. It was headed by a Colonel. The complaints and grievance committee was concerned with the irregularities and inequities not covered by other committees. It was headed by a Lt. Colonel. The Training Committee was concerned with the manpower development of the AFP. It was headed by a Lt. Colonel. The Resource Management Committee was concerned with the proper management and allocation of the scarce AFP resources. It was headed by a Major. The Special Projects/Audit Committee was to undertake special projects or entities of special interest to the AFP such as the Retirement and Separation Benefit System (RSBS), the Mutual Benefit Association, Inc., the AFP Saving and Loan Association, Inc. (AFPSLAI) and concerned itself with other entities where soldiers involuntarily invest their money. The committee would conduct surveys or performance evaluation to ascertain its viability and progress. It was headed by a Lieutenant. The Finance Committee was concerned with sources and uses of funds of the movement. It was headed by a Lt. Colonel. The Information Committee was a representative body of the movement in relation to external entities outside the chain of command. It was headed by a Navy Captain. The Education Committee was to undertake the continuing education of members about the movement. It was headed by a Lt. Colonel. The Sunshine Committee was assigned to conduct visitation of relatives of deceased AFP elements and wounded soldiers in hospitals and other related work. This committee was headed by the retired group of the AFP. Of the different committees that were created, those of information and education were the most active. These committees spearheaded the expansion of the movement

within RAM, within and outside the AFP. The Information Committee met with all sectors of society to include business, church, teachers, students, government executives, and the opposition. They kept a high profile with the press and were able to picture the deplorable state of the AFP. With this 'holy alliance' with the press the RAM became another sector in society that Marcos had to face.

D. Meetings

At general membership meetings, first-time attendees were lectured about RAM and the AFP. The aspirations and ideals of the RAM were discussed as well as the courses of action and general guidelines to be followed in the pursuit of reforms. The lecture likewise included a discussion on the decay and isolation of the AFP from the people and how to overcome it.

The informal and formal meetings of soldiers that occurred throughout the different regions immediately after the formal inauguration of RAM contributed greatly to the interplay of ideas. The meetings on specific issues affecting the AFP were openly held. Often the discussions centered on the growing insurgency problem that both government and the AFP had to seriously face.

At other times, the discussion zeroed in on the AFP itself - its leadership, state of professionalism and discipline. The soldiers talked about their commanders' lack of concern over the difficulties the former encounter in the field, the kind of training and values practiced and the present *esprit de corps* and morale in the organization. The discussions would often-times become parochial in nature. Many felt that if reforms were initiated in the AFP other government agencies would follow. And true to their expectations, many government agencies also put up their own 'reform movements'. Some of these agencies are the Bureau of Customs and the Bureau of

Internal Revenue where the practice of graft and corruption was rampant.

What was interesting during those meetings was that the voice of the junior officers, mostly lieutenants and captains, were heard. They were given the opportunity to state the particular problems they encounter in the field. These were no-holds-barred discussions and many commanders simply could not negate the allegations of their junior officers. Many commanders could not answer the problems of their own soldiers for many of these problems were caused by the commanders' irresponsibility.

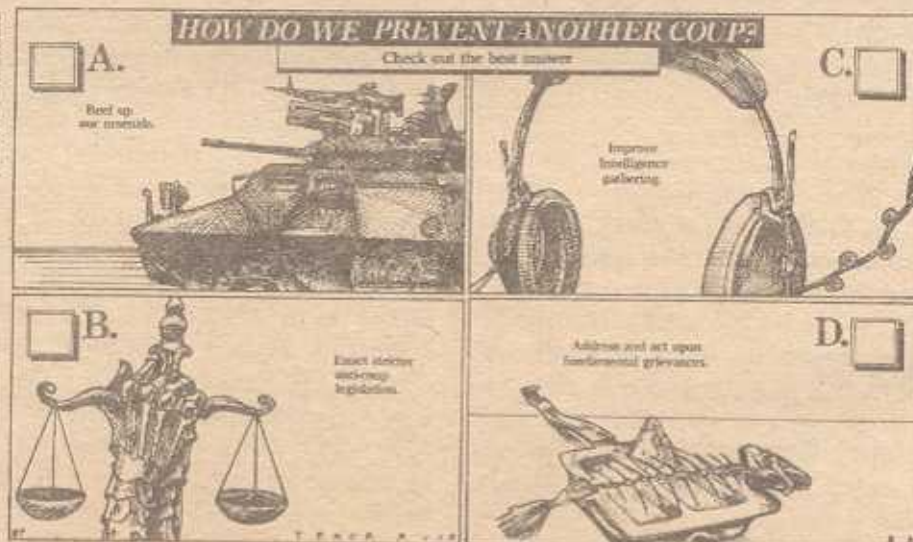
In their preliminary statement of aspirations the RAM stated that, "We have searched for leaders from among our seniors but then most, if not all, are too high to be non-partisan; too comfortable to be interested; or too wealthy to care. Or perhaps, it is their way of admitting that they no longer have the moral right to lead us to reform."

E. General Guidelines

Members followed certain general guidelines in the pursuit of reforms, namely: 1) it must be peaceful; 2) it must be legal, 3) it must be unifying, not divisive; 4) it must deal on principles, not personalities; 5) it must deal on issues, not individuals; 6) it must be in consonance with Marcos' Filipino Ideology; 7) it must follow the chain of command; 8) it must not question presidential prerogatives; 9) it must strive for self-reliance; 10) it must be public, open, and overt; and 11) it must be forward looking. These guidelines were religiously followed by the members up to the last days before the February revolution. Many felt that these guidelines made the movement safe from harassment from the powers-that-be.

But members questioned the use of Marcos' book *Filipino Ideology* (FI) as a source of inspiration and guide for the movement. Most of the members believed the book had no place in the movement other than being a ploy so that

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Marcos would not touch RAM. Nevertheless, many argued that Marcos only put together the different ideologies that were espoused by Filipino forefathers especially Andres Bonifacio and Jose Rizal. In any case, they believed Marcos cannot claim full credit for what he has written.

What caught the attention of the members was the process of internalization written in the FI. "Internalization" of the democratic revolution, according to Marcos, starts as the base of the nation - with the common people - inspiring and compelling those in the upper ranks to do likewise, so that a symbiotic relationship may be established among the various levels of society, making the task of nation-building truly a national concern. When asked by media why of all ideologies available RAM adopted that of Marcos, the standard answer was "we are after the song, not the singer."

F. Approach to Reforms

The behavioral approach of RAM in the pursuit of reforms inspired and compelled their peers and those in the upper ranks. This approach was horizontal and vertical with reforms starting with the person himself. This process was called by RAM members as 'internalization'. It was through this approach that RAM 'won the hearts and minds' of many soldiers and commanders. Although many were afraid to surface and actively participate, most of them believed in the ideals and aspirations that RAM was fighting for. Apart from a Commodore who castigated RAM for displaying dirty linen in public, other senior commanders announced to the press that they were likewise for reforms in the AFP and that reforms would be initiated as soon as possible. But events showed in the end that the senior commanders including the Commander-in-Chief were just paying lip service to the RAM's ideals.

The Legitimate Gripes of the Common Soldier

The common soldiers - those in the field - do not receive the support they expect from the AFP. The people will find it hard to believe that in spite of the big chunk that the AFP gets from the national budget compared with the other agencies of government, soldiers in the field use softdrink bottles for canteens, maong pants and t-shirt for uniforms, slippers or rubber shoes for combat boots, and civilian school packs for combat packs. If human rights is a universal concept applicable also to soldiers, then the rights of these soldiers in the field are being violated by their own commanders. It is then of no wonder that many officers, including battalion commanders, die not in combat but by their own men's bullets.

The legitimate gripes as reported by a Navy Captain include economic/ livelihood issues, professional/career issues, irregularities/inequities and organization issues.

A. Economic/Livelihood Issues

The more immediate concern of the AFP is the sad economic plight of its personnel. The prevailing pay scale of the soldiers cannot provide for them and their family a minimum amount of decency. A rhetorical question would be: how could a soldier protect his people when in the first place he cannot even insure the survival of his own family?

There is a general belief among the civilian populace that military personnel are more than adequately compensated. Nothing is farther from the truth. The salary even of officers has not kept up with inflation, not even with the daily minimum wage. In 1936, when the minimum wage for an 8-hour day was P4.00, the basic salary of an Ensign (2Lt.) on 24-hour duty day basis, was P6.00. Today, the minimum wage is already P50.00 on an 8-hour daily basis but an Ensign gets only a basic salary of P36.00 for the 24-hour duty per day. Even if all allowances are added to the basic wage of an Ensign, it is only P45.00/day.

In spite of promotions and salary increases, a Lieutenant Commander (Major) may be worse off than today's Ensign. Definitely his economic condition has not improved. For the Lt. Commander today actually earns only less than half of what he earned in 1972 when this same person was just an Ensign. Consumer price today is six times higher than it was in 1972, whereas the salary of today's Lt. Commander is only 2.69 times that of an Ensign in 1972.

In the meantime, the same erstwhile Ensign who was a bachelor in 1972 has, through the years, acquired the responsibilities of a growing family with an average of four children, all of whom are now of school age. If he will devote all his pay as Lt. Commander to buying meat for his family, each member of the family will only eat 100 grams of meat for each meal and nothing else. But with the house rent, clothing, electricity, transportation, water, sanitation, and education to pay for, actual meat consumption may be as low as 5 grams per meal for each member of the family -- if they get to eat meat at all.

The enlisted personnel and the PN civilian employees are even worse off. The 10 per cent across-the-board salary increase fails to meet their level of needs which has doubled due to inflation. This same salary increase cannot even buy them a kilo of meat.

In view of the above, the salary of military personnel must be upgraded so that the lowest ranking enlisted man (Apprentice Seaman) may receive a basic salary equivalent to that of the minimum wage, that is, P1,500 a month. To at least bring the level of the pay scale of an Ensign to its equivalent to the minimum wage as it was in 1956, a basic pay of P2,250.00 should be granted. And the salary of the other ranks should be adjusted accordingly.

If the military organization cannot ensure the welfare

and morale of the soldiers who have a family to feed, cloth and shelter, graft and corruption will remain part of the military establishment. Many believe that keeping pay scales low was purposely done by Marcos so that he could ensure the loyalty of his men by easily corrupting them. It would be very hard to corrupt a soldier who feels that his needs are properly taken care of by the society.

B. Professional Career Issues

These issues center on the merit system. The patron-client practice, where personal loyalty to a commander is paramount to any promotion, assignment and other benefits, destroys the soldier's morale and will to fight. Bootlicking and personal loyalty develop in the chain of command down to the lowest level. A major service commander (two star general) will have to be loyal to his Chief of Staff (four star general). A division or a brigade commander (one star general) will have to be loyal to his major service commander. A battalion commander (Lt. Colonel) will have to be loyal to his division or brigade commander. This style of personal loyalty from the highest to the lowest chain of command destroyed the *esprit de corps* in the organization. The soldiers in the field, especially non-commissioned officers (the sergeants down to the lowest private), were offended to see their counterparts in the Headquarters getting promoted ahead of them. Officers who overstayed in the field felt the same way.

C. Irregularities / Inequities

The irregularities that commonly affect the soldier are those pertaining to personnel pay and allowances, the procurement system, and unexplained wealth of officers in the AFP. All these are part of the corruption that has permeated the military organization since the time of Marcos, the direct result of which is the degeneration of the armed forces.

It is saddening to note that the most destructive graft and corruption cases occurred in the high places of the military organization. This directly impaired the effectiveness and efficiency of the troops in the field. Medical, dental, logistical, transportation, financial and other support units failed to reach the field units because most of these resources were rechanneled to units operating in Metro Manila which were the seat of power. Likewise, the procurement of goods and services was appalling. Where can one find government-issued combat boots that cannot last at least two major military operations because the soles could easily be removed? Where can one find a battalion or a brigade operation where there are no doctors around, not even an aidman, or if ever there is an aidman, there are no medical kits available? Where can

one find fatigue uniforms whose cloth easily rips or shrinks? How could one expect a soldier to fight when the soldier himself knows that if he gets wounded in the field, he will just have to stay there and die?

D. Organization Issue

The organization structure that was created overtime during Marcos' reign was highly centralized to the extent that even an appointment to the position of company commander in the Philippine Constabulary or a battalion commander in the Army had to be cleared first with the President. These Presidential clearances have to be channeled to General Ver who, not coincidentally, was one of the closest aide of the President.

There were numerous task forces and ad hoc bodies that were created to duplicate the work of the existing units. These siphoned even further the meager resources of the organization. One battalion, would be under the administrative control of a Brigade but operationally under the control of the Task Force. There were so many intelligence units with police powers that they ended up spying on one another. The highest intelligence unit, the National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA), became the personal political arm of the President and lorded over other government agencies. Most of its personnel were military men who came from the Presidential Security Command (PSC). Most of them were assigned to spy on government officials as well as legitimate opposition leaders.

Conclusion

The Ram: A Creation of Historical Experience

A close analysis of the existence of the RAM reveals that the ultimate aim of the organization was to have a powerful yet informal organization within the AFP, mainly as a fallback position to the dysfunctional AFP organization. Many RAM members believed that with the prevailing situation in the AFP, the downfall of the whole military organization was simply a matter of time. An informal organization in the form of a movement was a natural outcome of the sad state of the armed forces. The movement filled up the vacuum of professionalism which had long been absent in the AFP. Many soldiers and officers believed that the enemies are not only the communists but also the equally-destructive forces that lurk from within - the corrupt and inept members of the AFP. The RAM as a strong informal organization challenged the chain of command (the formal organization) to respond to the inequities that were practiced in the armed forces.

Being a loosely organized and heterogenous movement, there were many members who had their own personal beliefs with regard the approach to reforms. There were those who were very vocal about the necessity of a coup, the short-cut

road to reforms. Others were for the individual cleansing process called internalization. The dialectics in the movement made the RAM spread like bush-fire. Many felt that if reforms could not be attained moderately and peacefully, radical military reforms that did not exclude the use of violence would have to be done to insure the survival of the military. Many RAM members felt that if they had to intervene in the political life of this nation, they would do it not because they had become ambitious but because they were forced by the circumstances to intervene.

The coup attempt of February 22 which turned out to be a successful mutiny, ensured the survival of the military organization. That is why Gen. Fidel Ramos as the new Chief of Staff was quick in affixing the word "New" onto the AFP. The mutiny of the RAM completed the process of the final downfall of Marcos. The military -- the last pillar of strength of the Marcos regime -- snapped-off and intervened politically. The military at that time could not be faulted for what it had done. It was forced to enter the political arena to ensure the survival of the military organization. The ouster of Marcos was a strategic victory for the AFP. Had it stuck to Marcos, it could have spelled the extinction of the organization. Soldiers do not only value their personal survival but the survival of the organization as well.

The RAM stepped out of its former line not because they do not value the chain of command but because they saw few able leaders in the top level chain of command. They entered the political arena not because they wanted to be the political leaders but because they have lost faith in Marcos and in the kind of political leadership they have experienced. They were unable to reconcile their professionalism with the kind of corrupt, inept and power hungry political leaders they saw in their midst. They felt that there can be no military reforms in a political system (where the military is considered a subset) that was rotten. Since whoever controls the political system dictates on the military, many RAM members felt trapped by a political system that did not insulate the military from the caprices and abuses of politics. They felt offended when they were told not to participate in partisan politics because in the first place it was the politicians who coerce, bribe and even intimidate soldiers to engage in partisan affairs. They felt injustice in the fact that while traditional politicians busy themselves for their reelections, they were forced to do responsibilities that the local leaders were primarily assigned to do to check the insurgency problem.

Because the immediate historical experience has shown that the unwavering loyalty and obedience of the military towards the political leadership can be abused, it would take some time before the credibility of the Philippine political leadership could be reestablished in the eyes of the military. The present civilian leadership must show that the military will not be used in partisan politics. To ensure effective control over the military, the political leadership must never consider

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the military as a tool in partisan politics. To ensure effective control over the chain of command, top military leaders must not allow themselves to be duped by their senior commanders. And given the level of politicization in the military especially after the Aquino assassination and EDSA 1986, it would be a blunder for the present or future political and military leaders not to learn from Marcos' experience.

In this author's own analysis, a faction in the military, especially the 'ambitious' members of the RAM cannot be faulted if they marched out of cadence. They entered the political arena with specific demands and they may never withdraw unless their aspirations are met. They want a clear definition of the soldier's role in the political system, the elimination of the 'imminent' communist threat, and a change in the political ethics in Philippine politics.

They have become ambitious not because they want power but because they see no political future for their country. In developed countries, soldiers behave because their politicians know and practice the rules of the political game.

Post February Analysis: The Emergence of Politically Inclined RAM Members

Right after the February revolution many RAM members felt that some of its members were becoming too political in their approach to reforms. They have forgotten the initial aspirations of RAM - which was to reform the AFP. The issues they were presenting were becoming more political than military. This situation was increasingly sustained until it climaxed in November 1986. The events in November frustrated once again the ambitious members of RAM. The cooler and more patient top ranking members of the AFP led by Gen. Fidel Ramos prevailed over the more politically inclined members of RAM who were closely identified with then Minister Juan Ponce Enrile. Had the chain of command not been steadfast in its decision to resist the attempted coups, the aborted coup in February could have been finished in November. The coup attempts could very well mean that this breakaway group from RAM were not just out to initiate reforms in the AFP but were prepared to run the political life of this nation.

Dialectics in November

The events in November was a continuing episode of the aborted coup in February. However, this time the new set of military leaders were not for adventurism especially so if it is in the realm of partisan politics. The new AFP chain of command has maintained its belief not to make military decisions on entirely political issues. However, there is a general perception that had the issues in November not changed from military to political issues the planned event in November could have been attained successfully with the concurrence of the greater number of top military officials.

Military Issues

There is general agreement among military leaders (RAM and non-RAM alike) on the following issues: First, that the real enemy are the Communists. Second, there has been a considerable growth of the Communist insurgency during Marcos' era. Third, that time is running out on the government and the military to be able to reverse the communist insurgency. Fourth, the government does not have a clear-cut policy on how to deal with the insurgency problem.

Political Issues

There are differences among the politically inclined members of RAM and the AFP leadership on certain political issues. First, the politically inclined members of RAM do not believe that President Aquino really won the February presidential elections because not even the Commission on Elections could ascertain who really won. The top AFP leadership felt that Pres. Aquino won the elections. Second, politically inclined members of RAM believe that the AFP is being isolated from the people because of certain governmental actions or inactions, such as 1) the creation of the Presidential Commission on Human Rights that deals only with human rights violations of soldiers; 2) the creation of the new AFP Anti-Graft Board; and, 3) the non-inclusion of the AFP in the MNLF and CPP/NPA/NDF ceasefire negotiations. Third, level of barangays brought about by the Officer-in-Charge designation problems. Fourth, the presence of left of center cabinet members in the Aquino government. Fifth, the political moves of the President such as the proclamation of the Revolutionary Constitution, the abolition of the National Assembly, and the appointment of Constitutional Commissioners all of which were perceived to be dictatorial in character.

First Event: GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

Having stepped inside the political arena last February, the politically inclined members of the RAM once again tried their luck to fulfill the February aborted coup. The alleged

plot was to perform a 'surgical operation' in order to isolate the Queen, in the person of the President, from the left-leaning cabinet members and other left-leaning personalities who were in the government. But this plot would mean that in the process of saving the President, she will subsequently become a symbolic, ceremonial, and powerless queen. This means that the politically inclined members of RAM saw the President as a mere symbolic head and not the Chief Executive of the land.

The God Save the Queen scenario was finally put off when the politically inclined members of the RAM were able to get concessions from the AFP hierarchy. A bill of particulars regarding military issues was presented and both sides agreed that reforms would be initiated along those lines.

Convene the Batasan Move

The negotiations between the politically inclined members of RAM and the AFP hierarchy changed course when the former demanded for political concessions. They wanted a return to the 1973 constitution and the reconvening of the National Assembly. The latter could not agree to this as it was tantamount to a 'political coup'. Gen. Ramos alerted his forces and was able to neutralize the military forces who were out to support the reconvening of the National Assembly. When the coup plotters were blocked, they did not anymore force their way out from the military camps to avoid bloodshed among soldiers.

The coup plotters were trying to achieve a *modus vivendi* with those who do not want to participate. Those who do not want to participate were to remain neutral during the coup process to include the top military leadership. General Ramos did not remain neutral. He went out of his way to neutralize the coup plotters. His orders were to disregard orders from former Defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Colonel Gregorio Honasan - chief security of the minister. With the ouster of former Defense Minister Enrile, the politically inclined members of RAM fell out of grace. Another chapter of RAM ended.

Putting together the unprecedented events that the AFP experienced since the February Revolution, it could very well mean that a cleansing process badly needed in the AFP had just begun. Given a new lease on life after the February Revolution, the new top AFP hierarchy must not be able to show that reforms are to be initiated and implemented in the military organization. The RAM as a strong informed organization in the AFP was not destroyed after the downfall of its politically-inclined members. Only history will be able to judge whether they were right or wrong. They might be right but as of the moment they are totally wrong.

Other members of RAM who did not fall out of grace but who even participated to neutralize the coup are earnestly waiting for reforms to be initiated and implemented within the AFP. The events of that historic 1986 are only the beginning.

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