

British Consular Reports on Filipino Anti-Colonial Struggles and Philippine-British Relations, 1896-1902

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At the turn of the nineteenth century, British consular officials regularly reported to the Foreign Office in London the political occurrences in the Philippines. The United Kingdom's huge economic investments in the Philippines prompted London to closely monitor the outcomes of the events. On the other hand, the Filipinos, particularly the government of Emilio Aguinaldo, capitalized on such economic interests by getting British support to the Filipino war for independence. This paper presents the accounts and insights of the British consuls on the two significant historical events that shaped Filipino nationhood—the Philippine Revolution and the Filipino-American War. The consular reports provide perspectives of the events different from the views of the colonialists and the Filipinos. Theirs actually was from a standpoint of a non-participant. Furthermore, this study also examines the United Kingdom's policy and actions throughout the Filipino anti-colonial struggles, as well as the Philippine Revolutionary Government's engagement with the British. Ultimately, this work hopes to contribute to the study of the country's diplomatic history, particularly on Philippine-British relations.

Although Philippine foreign relations were formally established only after 1946 when the country obtained independence, sketches of Philippine foreign affairs can be gleaned even under the colonial framework. The nineteenth century, for instance, provides an essential background in understanding some aspects of Philippine diplomatic history. Several foreign countries with ambassadorial office in the Philippines nowadays trace the beginnings of their official representation to a consulate which was formed in the nineteenth century. The opening of the Philippines to international commerce in 1834 resulted to the influx of foreign traders in the Archipelago and subsequently led to the establishment of foreign consulates in Manila.

The United Kingdom was one of the earliest nations to establish its official representation in the Philippines. Since 1844 until 1903, Britain appointed a total of eleven consuls to Manila and numerous vice-consuls to different provincial ports. One primary obligation of these consular agents was to supply the Foreign Office in London with commercial information. However, consular dispatches were not only about economics; some of them contained narratives and commentaries on various themes of domestic scenes—from the Filipinos' ordinary day in the farm and participation in religious ceremonies to the authorities' inept administration of the colony and the people's anti-colonial struggles. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Filipino anti-colonial struggles were prominently featured in the reports of the British consuls.

This paper discusses British and Filipino relations in the context of two significant events in Philippine History—the Revolution and the War against the United States. The first section presents the accounts and views of the British consuls on the Revolution and the War. The commentaries of the consular agents were derived from their own observations and interactions with the Filipinos; British nationals, mostly traders, who had more frequent dealings with the natives, had supplied information as well to the Consulate. The second section examines the British Government's policy in the Philippines during

the unfolding of the political events. British economic interests in the Archipelago prompted London to initiate courses of actions to protect such interests. The third section examines the foreign policy of the Philippine Revolutionary Government towards the British. The Filipino leaders capitalized on the huge commercial investments of the British in the Islands by drawing on their assistance to support the struggle for independence. The British consul's insights on the Filipino Government are also presented in this segment. The last section accounts British assistance to the Philippine political struggles. Despite the policy of neutrality and the prohibition from authorities to extend help to the revolutionaries, the British provided material and diplomatic support to Filipinos.

CONSULAR REPORTS ON FILIPINO ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES

The immense commercial hold of the United Kingdom in the Philippines led the Consulate to monitor and closely follow the political events. British investments in the Philippines for the year 1896 totaled to about US\$ 100 million (Rawson-Walker to Foreign Office, 30 October 1896). Of the entire foreign enterprises in the Archipelago, 75-80% belonged to the British including the Manila Railway Company which was responsible in the establishment of the country's first railroad system that linked Manila to the northern provinces. Two of the three leading banks in the colony at that time were British-owned, namely, the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China, and the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. The British, through the numerous merchant houses stationed in the various points of the Islands, dominated the Philippine export and import trades. The Philippine Commission Report in 1901 calculated the British share in Philippine foreign trade during the preceding years at 35-40%. The hegemonic British economic presence in the Philippines especially in the second half of the century compelled the London authorities to found vice-consulates in Iloilo, Pangasinan, and Cebu.¹

When the Revolution commenced in 1896, the British Consul in Manila was Edward Henry Rawson-Walker.² He died in service, however, on 2 August 1898 due to severe diarrhea, and consequently Vice-Consul Henry Ramsden temporarily administered the Consulate until 1899. Their accounts of the events were obtained from various sources. Rawson-Walker, being the doyen of the Manila Consular Corps, was able to get information from the consuls of other nations and the Spanish colonial officials, or even from the governor-general himself (Quiason, 1998, p. 410). Ramsden, on the other hand, was able to visit the captured hideouts and trenches of the revolutionaries. Moreover, the British vice-consuls as well as the British merchants and sailors from various parts of the Archipelago supplied the Consulate with news from the provinces. The stint of Rawson-Walker, and later of Ramsden, as acting chief of American and Chinese Consulates provided them access to some confidential information.³

A few days after the discovery of *Katipunan*, the Consulate immediately sent confidential telegraph notes informing London about the rebellion and the declaration of martial law in twelve provinces. On 3 September 1896, two official communications, which confirmed and supplemented the telegraph messages, were dispatched by Rawson-Walker to his superior in London, British Foreign Secretary Robert Cecil, the Marquis of Salisbury (thereafter referred as Salisbury). The former reported on the seizure by the colonial authorities on 21 August of an illegal printing press that reproduced anti-Spanish materials and the plan to end colonial rule. Thereafter, scores of native merchants and mestizos were arrested on suspicion of supporting and organizing the separatist movement. In the succeeding days, "the horde of 'Tagalos' from San Mateo came on Manila and with choppers and a few fire arms and were met at San Juan del Monte and Santa Mesa by some Spanish and Indian Infantry and dispersed with a great loss of the morning of the 29th August. On this occasion they came within 2 miles of the City."

Two months after the fighting had commenced, Rawson-Walker provided Salisbury with the background on the secret movement that launched the Revolution, and its Supremo, Andres Bonifacio. The Consul noted at the start of the dispatch that the information he presented was the "Current Spanish Opinion":

A society on the lines of the "Carbonare" was established in Manila about 1891 at first peaceable in its object with a view of improving the social and political position of the Natives, its immediate effects were noticeable in preventing gambling and cockfighting, for instance in Tondo the North suburb of Manila. The Cockpits and Gambling Houses which are a source of Revenue to the Government were almost deserted and some closed.

About 1894 under the direction of Andres Bonifacio (their President) and at his instigation the objects of the Society became a conspiracy. Revolutionary in its tendency and the extermination of the Spaniards its final goal. The name "Katipunan" association (tagalo language) was invented by Pio Valenzuelo, the founder of it, Doctor Rizal exiled to the Island of "Mindanao" (Philippine Group) for political motives was consulted by the Secretary and advised political agitation instead of murder, his opinion which would have acted powerfully on the Indians was kept secret by the President Bonifacio. The first typhoon during the Feast of Binondo late in October was appointed for the slaughter of all the Spaniards in the Tagalo District.⁴

Apparently, the aforementioned dispatch contains erroneous information.⁵ Rawson-Walker wrote that the facts he reported were "obtained with some difficulty from a gentleman who has been many years in these Islands." Furthermore, we can see from the report that the Consul, being a European observer, made a connection with the events in the Philippines to those in his continent. He made a correlation between the *Katipunan* and the *Carbonare*, a nineteenth-century revolutionary movement which was formed in Naples, Italy and advocated for political reforms. From this comparison, it is interesting to note that the Consul recognized the revolutionary character of the *Katipunan*. In fact, in his first consular dispatch after the start of the *Katipunan* Revolt, Rawson-Walker had already referred the event as a "revolution" though he also used "rebellion."

The consular officials also reported of the events in the provinces. Cavite, about eight miles from Manila, was the center of the Revolution. Rebels in the said province, Rawson-Walker reported, had "strongly entrenched themselves therein." Their number had continuously increased, as revolutionaries from the neighboring provinces trooped to Cavite. There was one instance when 10,000 soldiers from Batangas were sent to join the Cavite forces but were stopped by the Spanish forces at the Pansipit River that borders the two provinces (Rawson-Walker to Salisbury, 9 November 1896).

Cavite was one of the earliest provinces easily captured by the revolutionaries from the Spaniards. Several towns here were liberated under the military leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo who soon rose to the rank of general. Rawson-Walker noted that just in the same month when the Revolution commenced, the Katipuneros had already controlled the entire province including the large Recollect hacienda in Imus "with the exception of the Arsenal and a private Dockyard company." Later, 140 arsenal detainees staged a coup, broke out, and killed the prison director and sentinels. The mutiny was easily repulsed and the escapees "were shot in the streets by the soldiers." The Consul added that many of the captured rebels were tried in court martial and publicly executed (Rawson-Walker to Salisbury, 9 November 1896; 20 December 1896).

Major encounters, the Consulate reported, occurred as well in the provinces of Zambales and Pangasinan. The revolutionaries gained control of the railway post in Dagupan and cut the cable line stationed in Bolinao. The British owned both enterprises. The Sual port likewise fell into the hands of the local militia.

The Revolution in the Visayas started rather late. The American forces were already advancing in the Islands when fighting between the Spaniards and the Filipinos in the southern provinces was just beginning. In Cebu, war preparations began since 1897 when the *Katipunan* was established in the province but the actual combat started

only in 1898 as reported by interim Vice-Consul Clive Kingcome to Rawson-Walker on 13 April:

I regret to inform you that a Rebellion against Spanish rule broke out here on Sunday the 2nd [April]. Garrison at the time consisted of only 40 Spanish soldiers, and about an equal number of local volunteers, and as rebels numbered some 5000 all Spanish residents had to take refuge in the fort, where they managed to keep off rebels until Thursday 7th when General Tefeirs arrived with some 1000 troops, and the cruiser "Don Juan de Austria." An attack was at once made upon the Rebels, who were utterly routed with heavy losses, and driven well outside the town—the troops are still pursuing, and I am told have inflicted further severe punishment on the enemy, who have now taken to the mountains, where the troops will have the difficulty in following them. The cruiser bombarded some parts of shore-lying part of the Native Quarter, caught fire, and were utterly gutted. Loss by burning the Chinese Quarter, I estimate at \$1, 500,000.

The Rebels were practically in possession of the city from the Sunday night to the following Thursday morning....

The Revolution in Iloilo came much later. Actually, in the early phase of the *Katipunan* revolt in Luzon, Iloilo remained loyal to Spain and the colonial capital was transferred from Manila to Iloilo City. In early 1898, there was an instance of killings of Spanish soldiers in Panay Island, but Rawson-Walker dismissed it simply as a sort of rebellion. The Revolution in Iloilo and the other provinces in Panay and Negros was in full launch by October:

Telegraphic communication with Iloilo, the Capital and residence of the Spanish Captain General has been interrupted since the 28th [October]. The Cable is laid to the Island of Panay, the shore and reaching land at Capiz. This latter place is connected with landline to Iloilo. The rebels in the island of Panay having risen up in arms with some success have completely rendered useless this landline. Communication with the Southern Islands can therefore only be carried out by means of coasting steamers and is unreliable.

The Island of Negros including the Capital Bacolod is in the hands of the rebels, the Spaniards offering little resistance.

The Island of Panay [with] the exceptions of some parts and the Capital Iloilo is also in the hands of the rebels who are but poorly armed. Iloilo being surrounded but I do not think the rebels can

capture the town as it is garrisoned with Spanish European troops. Aguinaldo has sent some armed expedition to Bisayas Group which have met with but small success (Rawson-Walker to Foreign Office, 16 November 1898).

The first phase of the Filipino Revolution against Spain ended with the Pact of Biak-na-Bato on 14 December 1897. Rawson-Walker told Salisbury that General Aguinaldo and other revolutionary leaders had received from Spain an indemnification of "some Two million dollars" in exchange for their surrender and banishment from the Philippines.⁶ The Consul accounted the deportation of twenty-seven Filipino leaders to Hongkong aboard SS Uranus which the Spanish Government chartered from privately-owned Compania Maritima. Before the vessel left the Sual port on 24 December 1897 "a portion of the indemnity [was] paid to the Rebel Chiefs and the residue on the arrival of the steamer at Hongkong" (Rawson-Walker to Salisbury, 7 January 1898). The British Consul interpreted the signing of the pact as the proclamation of "peace."

In Hongkong, as Aguinaldo and his men organized another wave of revolt upon their return to the Philippines, the United States worked its way to interpose in the Philippine affairs. American intervention had actually started early in 1898 in another Spanish colony, Cuba, that eventually led to the Spanish-American War. Their conflict soon extended to the Philippines, which set off in a clash at Manila Bay on 1 May 1898. After the American success in the naval battle against the Spaniards, the United States invading army began to arrive in the Philippines.

From the preceding discussion, it is noticeable that the Consulate sent relatively few reports to London from most of the year 1897 until the first quarter of 1898. This can be possibly explained by Consul Rawson-Walker's poor health condition which was troubling him even before his appointment in Manila. By the time when the U.S. were beginning to establish its presence in the Philippines, Vice-Consul Ramsden, who acted as interim consul after the demise of Rawson-Walker, was administering the British Consulate.

Ramsden witnessed how the American expeditionary forces had prohibited the Filipino revolutionaries from entering Intramuros and the nearest suburbs, and how the U.S. army officials took over the supervision of the Spanish Government institutions in Manila despite no formal turnover of power was so far done. The Vice-Consul reported that the American forces were beginning to control economic transactions like enforcing new customs house regulations and completely changing existing tariff rules (Ramsden to Salisbury, 23 September 1898).

In the last quarter of 1898, the Filipino anti-imperialist campaigns were intensified as the U.S. Government's intention to annex the Philippines became evident. When the outcome of the Treaty of Paris between the U.S. and Spain was made known, "the rebel papers began a strong campaign advocating complete independence, and some went so far as to indulge in proposing severe measures if opposed to the realization of their ideal, and it was even hinted that force of arms would be employed if necessary." Ramsden strongly felt that war would erupt any time soon, and despite the obstacles that beset the Revolutionary Government, he was inclined to believe that the Filipinos would be united "and make common cause against the Americans" (Ramsden to Salisbury, 22 December 1898).

The Philippine Revolutionary Government formally terminated its amicable relations with the U.S. on 8 January 1899 in the light of American dispatch of its warships to Iloilo and the proclamation of General Elwell Otis as the military governor of the Philippines. The Filipinos somehow anticipated hostility with the U.S. forces. In fact, from what Ramsden learned, Aguinaldo was already preparing for possible armed conflict with the America as early as December 1898. The Vice Consul reported that "numerous trenches, some with artillery and machine-guns, have been thrown up by the insurgents in the neighbourhood of Manila" (Ramsden to Salisbury, 22 December 1898).

Ramsden, however, believed that the officials of the Revolutionary Government were caught unprepared when the Filipino-American War broke out. In fact, he blamed them for misguiding the Filipino people. This opinion is contained in the dispatch he sent to the Foreign Secretary four days after the commencement of the War:

I have to report to your Lordship the breaking out of hostilities between the United States' forces and the insurgents under Emilio Aguinaldo on Saturday evening, the 4th [February 1899].

Before proceeding to detail the actual engagements, I trust I may be permitted to review certain recent events which may possibly be considered as an explanation to the unprovoked attack on Manila.

The Governing Body of the insurgents at Malolos, it is my strong belief, did not anticipate the rupture of peaceful relations; I may still go further, and state that they were unprepared for such an event; the fact that most of the rebel Generals were at Malolos at the time of the attack tends to give credit to the above belief.

Nevertheless, the blame, if any, may be attributed to the Chiefs and educated natives who had, by means of the native press and other sources, misled the masses and soldiery to such an extent, that the general opinion was rife that the Americans were unable to resist their advances, and were even held in contempt.

The good-will and wish of the United States' authorities was interpreted as cowardice; their forbearance as weakness.

During the last month, the advanced posts of the Americans have had to submit to frequent indignities, the more so, as the occupation has been purely a military one.

Several bands of armed insurgents, in some cases led by under-officers, have forcibly attempted to cross the American outposts, the orders to these latter being that they were to avoid open hostility, and had, consequently, to retire on the main body, when, after parleying the insurgents, again retired to their own lines. This procedure not only became frequent, but also inspired the natives with further courage, and the soldiers were chafing under the restraint.

I am led to believe that it was such an act of this kind that led to the breaking out of hostilities, the Americans this time resisting the advance of the insurgents. Firing began at 8:30 p.m. on the 4th instant, which extended to all the lines. The different regiments were immediately called to arms, and the measures taken for a surprise appear to have been excellent. During the whole night the insurgents

poured in a heavy fire, the Americans answering when they saw their mark.

Some natives in the city and near suburbs with knives made attacks on detached officers, but were shot down.⁷

In the same letter, Ramsden related the continued defeat of the Filipinos due to inferior arms and poor defense. A day after the start of the encounter, the Americans were able to easily extend control as far as ten miles from the city, and the "rebels have been greatly surprised at the rapidity of movements of the American troops." On the third day, the invading foreigners had seized the water reservoir, one of the important facilities guarded by the local militia. In spite of this, the Filipinos continued to give "great resistance."

In Ramsden's estimates, some sixty died, including five officers, and 150 were wounded on the part of the Americans. Filipino casualties, on the other hand, were said to have reached between 1,500 and 2,500. When the British official visited the captured trenches of the revolutionaries, he had the following observations:

The dead rebels were mostly hit above the shoulders, the head, when appearing above the earthworks, having evidently been the target. I also noticed thousands of cartridges, both Mauser and Remington, which had missed fire. As many of these were reloaded by the rebels, I concluded that this was the reason why the caps had missed fire (Ramsden to Salisbury, 8 February 1899).

In the next dispatch, the acting Consul conveyed the events that occurred in some districts of Manila and in the Visayas. He extensively narrated the American occupation of Caloocan on 10 February, which started with the bombardment of the place at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and culminated with the hoisting of the U.S. flag at 5 o'clock that same afternoon. The whole district, including its church, was heavily destroyed by artillery fire. The colonizers yearned for the immediate control of Caloocan because the train workshops and first railway station to Dagupan was located here. In addition, information had reached the American intelligence that the district had become the hideout of Filipino revolutionaries.

In districts where defenses were weak and inadequate, the native troops had resorted to burning their possessions just like what happened in Paco, Sta Cruz and Tondo. Below is Ramden's account:

On the 20th [February], a serious fire broke out in the neighbourhood of Paco. This was due to rebel incendiarism. Some straw huts to windward of the American barracks were set a light in the hopes of the fire drawing toward the American Quarters. Fortunately the wind changed and the whole native district was burnt instead.

On the night of the 22nd a serious fire broke out in the district of Sta. Cruz. This was also was due to the Rebels, and as the district is composed of timber Godowns the conflagration spread and assumed enormous proportions. Some Natives were shot in the act of cutting the hose of the different fire engines so as to render useless their efforts to check the spreading. Some five were [bayoneted] and two shot while committing this dastardly act.

Simultaneously other fires started in the various districts of Manila, and immediately increased as the dry season is far advanced. Tondo, a native district was fired in various places and at midnight the rebels were assembled at the sound of the bugle (Ramsden to Salisbury, 24 February 1899).

The capture of Gen. Aguinaldo in 1901 was the signal, not only for the Americans but also for the Consulate, of the conclusion of the "organized resistance to the United States authorities" (Sinclair to Foreign Office, 10 July 1901, quoted in Cushner, 1986, p. 534).

BRITISH POLICY IN THE PHILIPPINES

The revolutionary climate in the Philippines spelled risks for British mercantile interests. At that time, there were about two hundred British merchants residing in Manila and other provincial ports, plus over a thousand sailors plying the Philippines seas. The United Kingdom avoided any action that might compromise the interests of its citizens, hence pronounced a neutral stand during the Philippine Revolution, the Spanish-American War, and the Filipino-American War. London issued a memorandum to the Spanish and American consulates in Asia forbidding the two nations from sourcing their weapons from the colonies of the United Kingdom. London, likewise, prohibited all of its Asian

colonies to be fields of Filipino revolutionary activities. The official gazettes at Hongkong and Singapore published the instruction sent to the "Governors at both the above-mentioned places that no arms were to be allowed to be exported from the two Colonies to the Philippine Islands and that no employment was to be given to the stations of these Islands during the Rebellion" (Rawson-Walker to Salisbury, 9 November 1896).

At the outset of American intervention in the Philippines affairs, the British nationals in Manila, mostly residing in Sta. Ana and Sta. Mesa, feared of the possible partition of the colony between the U.S. and Spain (Cushner, 1968). If this would happen, British investments and properties were at big risk and *ipso facto* the United Kingdom began to initiate adjustments in its policy in the Philippines. In case Spain retained the colony, Britain was willing to compromise with the restrictions imposed on foreign trade. If the Spanish regime ended, it was also willing to accept the takeover of America, reputed to advocate an "Open-Door" policy in East Asia.

When Spain's defeat became apparent, Britain began to align itself to the U.S. officially, though, continued to proclaim a neutral position. London authorized its Consul in Manila and Vice-Consuls in Iloilo and Cebu to accept the U.S. officials' offer to temporarily run American consular offices in the said cities. The interim administration of Rawson-Walker of the U.S. Consulate had given him access to some information necessary to determine the fate of the Philippines. Moreover, Hong Kong authorities had secretly permitted some U.S. naval ships to call at this port for coal refueling. The British-controlled island was also used as a field of American war communications.

The triumph of America over Spain ended the speculation on partition but generated one big question: what would the U.S. do with the Philippines? The world, particularly the European super powers with interests in the East, waited for America's next move. Suppositions circulated that America was uninterested in annexing the Philippines, and that she was thinking of either returning the colony to Spain or

selling it to Britain. The Filipinos, on the other hand, had obtained information that the powerful countries, including the U.S., had agreed to divide the Philippines among themselves. In one version that reached Benito Legarda, Britain had recognized the U.S. sovereignty over the Philippines and agreed to divide the Archipelago between them: Luzon was said to go to the British and the Visayas to the Americans (Taylor, 1971).

Due to the huge British land and business assets in the Philippines, the United Kingdom intended to purchase the former Spanish settlement. The plan did not materialize because Britain could no longer afford maintaining and administering another possession due to its vast empire. Adding one was seen as possibly detrimental not only to its prized colonies but also to the metropolitan. Britain's next move was to suggest to Washington that the latter acquire the Philippines. Why did London prefer the United States?

Aside from Britain, another European power interested in the Philippines was Germany. Aguinaldo's Government knew of this German interest. Britain was determined to keep Germany from taking over the Philippines or meddling with Philippine affairs. London criticized Berlin for its protectionist economic guidelines. In the event that the latter would occupy the Philippines, Britain feared that the erstwhile Spanish territory would be closed to British commercial transactions, thereby bringing severe damage to many of its merchants. Germany was also reputed for its aggressive expansionist stance and, if she obtained control of the Philippines, Britain suspected that Germany might also develop an interest in Hongkong, Singapore, or other British controlled territories in the East. On the other side, Britain viewed the Americans as supporters of free trade, and no threat to its businesses in the Philippines. It was for this purpose that the United Kingdom allied itself with the U.S., and eventually supported too the latter's occupation of the Archipelago. This Anglo-American cooperation to protect each other's interests in Southeast Asia was best expressed by John Barret, American Minister to Siam, in a speech

delivered at the House of Commons in London on 26 April 1899. The speech was reported at *The Times* the next day:

Mr. Barrett said that British and American interests in the Far East were becoming inevitably interwoven without intention or plan on the part of their diplomatists. The two countries were developing the same interests without even the impulse of sentiment, but by the influence of immovable geographic positions occupied as the unexpected results of war. This signified that America side by side with Great Britain must bear her share of the white man's burden in the uttermost parts of the earth. Manila was the most central city and port of the entire Asiatic-Pacific coast, more so even than Hong-kong and Shanghai, because of its being on the direct route to Australia and nearer to the range of southern and Australian ports.

Hong-kong and Singapore already felt the quickening influence of the new life in Manila, and it was estimated that over £250,000 had been spent in Hong-kong by the American navy and army alone since April, 1898. England was more concerned than any other nation after the United States in the future of the Philippines, as British trade there had during the last 25 years exceeded that of all other nations except Spain. The British firms there paid six times as much as the German firms in Customs duties. The total foreign trade of the Philippines was about £6,000,000 per year, and under the new conditions of trade he looked to its increasing to £20,000,000, with consequent benefit to the British colonies, provided they were alert and seized their opportunity. Having regard to their position strategically and commercially, it was desirable that the Philippines should not be controlled by any nation whose policy was a menace to British Imperialism. The policy of the United States with regard to the Customs tariff would be a fair field and no favour, and the conditions of trade would not in any circumstances be more unfavourable than they had been under Spanish control.

The great effect of the American occupation of the Philippines on the British colonies would be to develop mutual advantages to both and to establish in South-Eastern Asia an immeasurable united influence for Anglo-American domination of Asia's millions of people and trade.

THE AGUINALDO GOVERNMENT

On 23 June 1898, in Cavite, the Revolutionary Government was established under Aguinaldo's presidency. By September, the seat of Government was transferred to Malolos, Bulacan. The Consulate had

come to know of the Filipino leaders' activities and was quite impressed with the constitutional and bureaucratic progress of the Aguinaldo Government. Aguinaldo's Organic Letter issued on 23 June 1898 ordered the formation of four administrative departments including the Department of Foreign Affairs composed of three divisions: Diplomacy, Navy, and Commerce. The diplomatic division was tasked "to study and handle all matters concerning diplomatic negotiations with foreign nations and the correspondence of this Government with them" (Mabini, 2007, p.186). Furthermore, the Revolutionary Committee was formed abroad to "make arrangements with and negotiate with foreign cabinets for the recognition of the Philippines' state of belligerence toward Philippine independence" (Mabini 2007, p. 193). Part of the Committee's function was to represent the Philippines abroad through the correspondents chosen by the Aguinaldo government. The Committee's Hongkong bureau was one of the most important foreign posts of the Revolutionary Government. The British-controlled port served not only as a propaganda office but also as a listening post and an arms and funds procurement station (Agoncillo, 1960).

Until January 1899, the president of the Revolutionary Government handled the Foreign Affairs department as there was no one yet appointed officially to the position. Since Aguinaldo turned mostly to his counselor, Apolinario Mabini, on matters concerning foreign relations, the Government's foreign policies were practically ideas of Mabini. Throughout Mabini's tenure as Aguinaldo's adviser and, later, Foreign Affairs secretary, the Revolutionary Government's primordial objective was to obtain international recognition of Philippine independence.

On 6 July 1898, Aguinaldo disseminated a circular to all foreign consular representatives in Manila informing them of the military triumphs of the Filipino revolutionaries. The message, penned by Mabini, "implores the support of all civilized world powers and begs them earnestly to recognize the Revolution and the Independence of

the Philippines for these are the means designated by Providence to maintain balance among nations” (2007, pp. 209-11).

Among the many nations that maintained consular representations in the Philippines, Mabini was particularly riveted at building good relations with the British. He wanted to capitalize on the United Kingdom’s commercial interests in the Philippines by giving them special trade privileges in exchange for financial and military aid and political recognition of the Filipino Government. Mabini counseled Aguinaldo to explore all possibilities at winning British support to the Filipino side especially since Mabini had learned that “the English [were] angry with the Americans because the latter were obstructing their commerce” (*The Letters of Apolinario Mabini*, p. 59). Mabini advised the President to grant British ships duty-free access to ports controlled by the revolutionaries but, in exchange, the sailors must accord Aguinaldo the honor appropriate to a head of state. Mabini was even ready to give more trade rights to the British companies only if they could pledge the Revolutionary Government a loan of twenty to forty million pesos and ask English periodicals in Hongkong and Singapore to stop criticizing Philippine intentions and instead support Filipino struggles.

Some British companies like the Manila Railway Company were open to grant recognition and assistance to the Aguinaldo Government but demanded for a perpetual concession of their businesses.⁸ However, Mabini considered the attractive proposal bait and detrimental to Filipino political and economic interests. He feared that granting the British permanent business rights might disgust other countries especially the U.S. In a letter to Fernando Canon, another member of Aguinaldo’s cabinet, Mabini expressed his sentiments regarding establishing relations with the British:

If the Enterprise [Manila Railway Co.] should bring here its capital before our fate is decided, it could mean, in a case of Filipino-American conflict, for England to intervene under the pretext of protecting the interests of the Enterprise; and maybe, an agreement between England

and America to exploit us will not be far off.

If we wish to seek the friendship of America, we should not give away that field of speculation for its capital. It is very probable that America may become deeply disgusted with that concession, which we give to the English instead of saving it for the Americans for their good will, or for any other nation for their recognition and help.

We are no longer children to be satisfied with simple promises. Let us tell Higgins [manager of the Company] to work on his government so that it would recognize us as a nation and help us, and to influence English businessmen so that they would guarantee us a loan of 20 to 40 million. We shall grant them what they are asking for with this proof of the sincerity of their friendship (*The Letters of Apolinario Mabini*, pp. 64-65).

Though cautious of avoiding any action that might antagonize the Americans, the Revolutionary Government was nevertheless critical of U.S. intentions and activities in the Philippines. By the last quarter of 1898, the Filipino public was sensing the American imperialistic motives for the Philippines and had started to voice out their sentiments for independence. In the dispatch of the Vice-Consul on 23 September 1898, he informed London that "several native newspapers, in the Spanish language, and advocating complete Independence, have commenced printing daily editions."

Since the U.S. forces controlled Intramuros, the Filipino revolutionaries had concentrated themselves outside Manila particularly in Cavite and Bulacan. Aguinaldo proclaimed military victory in fifteen provinces in Luzon and held 9,000 war prisoners. Ramsden estimated the number of captives at Luzon between ten and twelve thousand, including military, civil employees, civilians, and the clergy. Despite such proclamation, the commander-in-chief of American forces in the Philippines, General Elwell Otis, had declared, on several occasions, that the U.S. did not wish to recognize the Revolutionary Government and continued to regard the Filipinos as Spanish subjects. This position of America, being an emerging world power, had a great influence over other foreign powers' unfavorable treatment of the Aguinaldo Government. The foreign

Consular Corps in Manila was hesitant to officially forward their concerns to Aguinaldo because the consuls viewed the "Rebel Government" as "powerless" (Ramsden to Foreign Office, 16 November 1898). On the part of the British, Rawson-Walker confirmed receipt of Aguinaldo's circular about the establishment of a Philippine government but clarified that his stand was unofficial and that he, in his capacity, refused to regard the Aguinaldo Government until officially recognized by London (Agoncillo, 1960).

The Revolutionary Government was also beset with internal problems. The provinces in the Visayas had refused to acknowledge the authority of Aguinaldo, and desired instead to establish their own leadership.⁹ The Vice-Consul had come to learn of these setbacks and reported them to London on 23 December 1898:

Although little news leaks out from the interior, it is now positively known that the Revolutionary Government is divided into factions, some of which have resorted to force of arms, the most notable being the "Guardià de Honor," in the Province of Pangasinan, and already some skirmishes have taken place, several villages having fallen into their possession. This party is composed of officers and men who had served during the revolution against Spain, and as the Government of Malolos does not recognize their rank or services, they have openly shown resentment of this treatment.

Again, many insurgent Generals of prestige show little inclination to obey orders from the Revolutionary Government, especially when these orders are against their wishes.

The troops of the Revolutionary Government, it is reported, are deserting, which would appear reasonable, as they receive no pay, and the food, when obtainable, is very meagre. To accentuate the strained relations, it is persistently rumoured that the Revolutionary Government have published orders prohibiting the importation of cattle or rice into Manila, but up to the present no want of the above commodities has been felt.

Aguinaldo, notwithstanding the levying of taxes and war contributions, is unable to secure enough money for the peremptory needs of the Government. The collection of these taxes is resented by the people, as the Presidents of the various provinces, who are entrusted with the carrying out of these orders, avail themselves of the opportunity of reaping for their own pockets, and consequently

the contributions exacted are higher than those stipulated by the Government, which in their turn is considered heavier than those exacted by the Spanish Government.

BRITISH ASSISTANCE TO FILIPINOS

Although the United Kingdom Government had apparent inclinations to Spain and the U.S., a number of British residents showed sympathy for Filipino anti-colonial struggles. They had high regard, too, for the revolutionaries. In fact, Spanish Governor-General Ramon Blanco and Consul Rawson-Walker had some misunderstanding on the issue of giving aid to Filipinos. When the Consul requested that a British man-of-war be permitted to anchor in the Pasig River, Blanco agreed on condition that no revolutionary should be allowed entry into the warship. Rawson-Walker, however, was adamant to accept the condition, "knowing how humane our [British] laws are under this heading and how we often risk the good relationship existing between Great Britain and another friendly power by giving sanctuary to Refugees to other countries" (Rawson-Walker to Salisbury, 9 November 1896). Nonetheless, the Consul did not want to put into any possible risk the lives of British residents in Manila, so he provisionally agreed with Blanco's terms.

Some British merchants continued to transact business and render help to the revolutionaries despite warnings from the colonial authorities. In August 1898, a Thomas K. Evans sold kerosene gas, pepper, and ink to the Filipinos (Philippine Revolutionary Records [PRR] Roll 15, 179-1). On 9 February 1899, five days after the start of the Filipino-American War, the rice mills in Pangasinan and Tarlac owned by Smith, Bell & Co. donated one wagon of rice to the troops of Aguinaldo (PRR Roll 7, 41-7). In the book that chronicles the history of Smith, Bell & Co. in the Philippines, the British firm proudly tells of its ties with the revolutionaries:

Throughout all this trying period, Smith Bell's officers maintained a friendly—if not actually sympathetic—attitude towards the Filipino rebels. Thus, if the insurgents needed some river vessel for their use,

Smith Bell quietly acceded. When military operations were under way in northern Luzon in 1898 and 1899, D.M. Clarke, Smith Bell's manager at the Bayambang rice mill, sent Aguinaldo through General Teodoro Sandiko a carload of rice for the native army. Philippine insurgent records testify that the Smith Bell rice mills in Pangasinan and Tarlac donated hundreds of sacks of rice to General Francisco Makabulos and other insurgent units during this period (*Under Four Flags*, p. 27)

Even after the capture of Aguinaldo in March 1901 Filipino resistance against the colonizers persisted as U.S. pacification campaigns continued. Lending of support and assistance by foreigners to revolutionaries was forbidden. In September, the agents of British firms Smith, Bell & Co. and Warner, Barnes & Co. were accused by the American war officials of "aiding and abetting of the insurgents still in arms in the island (which is blockaded & under martial law), by the payment to them of a species of tax on the number of their native employees." The merchants denied the allegations and, together with acting British Consul W. H. Sinclair, met the American military officers to personally inquire about the charges thrown at them. The accusation against the two firms, according to U.S. General R.P. Hughes, was borne from the "native sources & that the contributions complained of were given in the form of rice." However, Sinclair believed that the Americans had employed torture on the Filipinos to extract information from them. He furthermore associated the allegation to the British dominance in hemp trade (Sinclair to Lansdowne, 24 September 1901):

I am strongly of opinion that the charges originated in rice being handed to the rebels by persons who had dealings in hemp with the two firms involved & who had dealings in hemp with the two firms involved & who had managed to obtain permits from the US Authorities to buy rice & take it into the country.

Considerable feeling exists in American circles here against the British firms here who practically control the hemp trade & who owing to having been established here over fifty years in many cases, possess the complete confidence of the natives.

Moreover, the British authorities granted the Filipinos in Hongkong political refuge as long as the terms of neutrality were not violated. In

particular, Galicano Apacible, chief of Revolutionary Committee in Hongkong, was thankful for the liberal treatment to him and came to praise the United Kingdom as the best government:

I must confess, and I am glad to say it publicly, that the British Government of Hong Kong had treated us not only with decorum, but with benevolence....The political refugees from many countries residing there were protected by the same English laws and English spirit of equity. English chivalry inspired the Hongkong Government to fulfill sacred duty towards all political refugees. In our conflicts with some agents of the American secret service the British Government helped us and protected us properly, its officials declaring that so long as we complied with the laws of the colony and we did not violate the avowed neutrality of England in that conflict, we could rest assured that we would receive the protection of the British Government....From my experience, gained through continuous and extensive dealings with officials of the British Government, not only during the Revolution, but before and after it, I am pleased to say that the British Government is the best government I have known, the most equitable towards residents, especially during international conflicts (Alzona, 1971, pp. 61-62)

In Hongkong, the Americans continued to intimidate the Filipinos. U.S. military attaché John Mallory, disturbed by the Filipinos' massive weapons acquisitions, proposed to the Governor of Hongkong the eradication of the Revolutionary Committee in that British colony. However, the Governor decided in favor of the Filipinos and told Mallory that the U.S. government's request to suppress the Philippine Junta was "impossible for [the British] Government to comply with" (Minutes of the Filipino Republican Committee of Madrid, quoted in Agoncillo, 1960, p. 261).

British assistance to Filipino anti-colonial struggles may not be as stark as obvious. Prominently noted from the preceding discussions are British material aid and immunity support to the revolutionaries. In a different light, however, Filipino historian Jaime Veneracion underscores the British takeover of Manila in 1762-64 as one of the factors that helped pave the road towards the Philippine Revolution. According to him, the Occupation compelled Spain to evaluate its administration of the colony and introduce reforms. Such reforms

gradually enlightened the Indios and helped them transform their discontent to an organized resistance. The success of the British in Manila, moreover, provided an ethos to the Filipinos that in order to overthrow the colonizers, an organized and united action is needed.

CONCLUSIONS

The British consular dispatches on the Filipino war for independence provide historically essential accounts. The information drawn from them validate the prevailing historical knowledge on the *Katipunan's* earliest assaults, condition of the Revolution in the provinces, surrender of arms and exile of Filipino leaders abroad, refusal of the Americans to allow the revolutionaries to enter Intramuros, and dilemmas within the Aguinaldo's Government.

The consular reports, moreover, show how the Filipinos persevered to achieve independence despite being "badly armed with bows and arrows, lances made of bamboo, a few rifles taken from their enemies and primitive guns and cannon made from iron tubes wrapped around with wire" (Rawson-Walker to Salisbury, 7 January 1898). Even with inferior arms, the Filipinos continued to give the enemies "great resistance." Vice-Consul Ramsden had similarly observed the admirable fighting spirit of the natives when he commented that "notwithstanding the want of provisions and munitions of war by the insurgents, I am inclined to believe that, in the event of rupture, the rebel parties will consolidate, and make common cause against the Americans" (22 December 1898).

Consular commentaries are, of course, not free of prejudices. The consuls' frequent reference to revolutionaries as "enemies," "insurgents" and "rebels" and the belief that the Americans had come to bring the Filipinos "good will and wish" connote an aligned stand. This partiality can be possibly understood as British confidence to the capability of the U.S. to keep the Philippines in a stable political situation which for the British was a necessary condition for the growth and solidity of British economic enterprises in the colony.

Although consular dispatches are embedded with political inclinations, they remain important sources of historical information. The challenge for students of History is how to extract “historical truths” from biased accounts and reconstruct a narration of the events from the Filipino point of view (Constantino, 1971, pp. ix-xii). Diokno suggests that in obtaining the value of foreign accounts, there is a need to eliminate the author’s interpretation and focus on the evidence presented in the document (1997). From this evidence, students of History can produce new historical knowledge or form a different perspective. For example, Vice-Consul Ramsden viewed the burning of the natives of their own houses and of the American-captured quarters as a “dastardly act.” Utilizing the same information, this can be interpreted using a nationalist view: for the Filipinos, who very well knew the superiority of U.S. weapons, the burning of their own homes was the best strategy to show their intense dissension to the intrusion and aggression of the Americans, and so that the burned properties could no longer be useful to the colonizers.

Similarly notable are the silences of the British consular dispatches on a number of significant issues and events. There is no mention, for instance, of the leadership friction between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio and of the continued Filipino anti-colonial resistance after the signing of Biak-na-bato Pact. In contrast with the French consular reports, acting French consul Menant had reported and commented on the rivalry in the Katipunan leadership, on Aguinaldo’s execution order of Bonifacio, and on the perpetuation of resistance despite the deportation of some revolutionary leaders to Hongkong.¹⁰

In the duration of Philippine anti-colonial struggles, the Filipinos were provided with a brief period to exercise diplomacy. Aguinaldo’s Revolutionary Government had consistently asked for the recognition from the foreign nations of Filipino independence. The Philippine Government sought the assistance of Britain being one of the world’s powers and having maintained the biggest commercial interests in the Philippines. Filipino correspondents were sent abroad to seek

support for the continued anti-colonial activities. British-controlled Hongkong was the center of overseas Philippine revolutionary activities. Apart from providing Filipinos with political sanctuary, the British in Hong Kong discreetly allowed them to purchase weapons and launch independence propaganda.

On the part of the British, their immense economic investments in the Philippines necessitated their consular officials to closely follow the events that would bear important outcomes on the political future of the Philippines. The United Kingdom's particular interest was to secure political stability in the Archipelago since such a condition was vital to its citizen's commercial undertakings. However, given the unpredictability of the outcome of the political events, it was important to Britain to profess its neutrality. Nonetheless, British residents in Manila and key provincial ports had clandestinely extended assistance to Filipino revolutionaries. Reports from the consular agents show that Spanish and American authorities harassed British merchants for aiding the local militia. The dispatches, furthermore, reveal that the British consular officers placed high admiration to Filipinos for their indefatigable belligerent spirit despite weak military capability.

The aforementioned discussions are a few manifestations of early and informal relations between the Filipinos and the British. Consular reports, notwithstanding its biased character, are essential sources in mapping the history of Philippine-British relations. Hopefully, future research can further enrich this aspect of Philippine diplomatic history.

Notes

¹ For discussions of British mercantile ventures in the Philippines during the nineteenth century, see Volume IV of Report of the Philippine Commission to the President (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901). For the British participation in the construction of railway system, see Arturo Corpuz, *The Colonial Iron Horse: Railroads and Regional Development in the Philippines 1875-1935* (Quezon City: UP Press, 1999).

The British, through the English East India Company, had been conducting commerce with the Philippines since the sixteenth century. Their need for silver to be utilized for their transaction in China directed them to Manila as one of its immediate sources. However, because of Spanish restrictions, the British resorted to

clandestine trading. See Serafin Quiason, *English Country Trade with the Philippines, 1644-1765* (Quezon City: UP Press, 1966).

Moreover, when the British forces invaded Manila in 1762-64, they saw the potential of the Philippine products for export trade. By the following century, the British greatly facilitated the exportation of Philippine products to Britain and its colonies in exchange for British manufactures. In other words, the Philippines became one of British sources of raw materials and of the markets for finished goods. See Benito Legarda Jr., *After the Galleons: Foreign Trade, Economic Change and Entrepreneurship in the Nineteenth-Century Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999).

² Rawson-Walker was appointed consul to Manila in March 1895 but arrived in the Philippines only in December because of his protracted leave of absence. Prior to his assignment in Manila, Rawson-Walker had been posted in various cities like Cagliari, Sardinia Province, Italy; Pernambuco, Brazil; La Coruna, Spain; and Charleston, South Carolina, United States of America.

³ When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, Washington ordered its consul in Manila, Oscar Williams, to leave the Philippines and turnover the administration of the American Consulate to the British Consul. In the case of the Chinese, many of them were either harassed or imprisoned because they were suspected of participating in the activities of Katipunan. The Chinese Government pleaded to London for assistance. In response, British Foreign Secretary ordered Rawson-Walker to provide "unofficial" assistance to the Chinese in Manila.

⁴ All quoted consular dispatches in this paper, unless stated otherwise, are obtained from the CD-Rom "From Britain to the Philippines," a collection of consular reports and archival documents about the Philippines from the British Archives digitally compiled by the British Embassy in Manila on the occasion of the Philippine Independence Centennial celebration in 1998. The documents in the CD-Rom are in typescript format. For this paper, the author utilized more than fifteen consular dispatches dated between 1896 and 1902. Most reports were written by the chief consul in Manila and addressed to the Foreign Secretary in London. Some of the consular reports were beforehand used, quoted and annotated by two historians. See Nicholas Cushner (1968), "British Consular Dispatches and the Philippine Independence Movement, 1872-1901," *Philippine Studies*, volume 16, pages 501-534; Serafin Quiason (1998), "The Philippine Revolution and Her Majesty's Consul plus Two British Officers," *The Philippine Revolution and Beyond*, Volume 1 (Manila: Philippine Centennial Commission and NCCA), pages 408-439.

The articles of Cushner and Quiason incorporate from the consular reports a plethora of details that include, among others, the consular undertakings in giving protection and assistance to British nationals and the Consulate's role as interim administrator of American and Chinese consulates. Hence, this paper extracts from the consular dispatches informations that focus particularly on Filipino anti-colonial struggles. It also presents reports from the vice-consuls assigned in the provinces which are not featured in the essays of Cushner and Quiason. More importantly, this study utilizes consular accounts which have not been published previously, for examples, on the Filipino-American War and the Aguinaldo Government.

⁵ Katipunan was founded on 7 July 1892. Pio Valenzuela was one of its prominent members but was neither the Katipunan's founder nor the coiner of the

movement's name. He was sent to Dapitan to talk and seek the advice of Jose Rizal regarding the revolution. See Teodoro Agoncillo (1956), *Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City: UP Press).

⁶ According to Emilio Aguinaldo, the capitulation payment was P800,000. Apart from Aguinaldo, among other deported leaders were Gregorio del Pilar, Mariano Llanera and Manuel Tinio. See Teodoro Agoncillo (1960), *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City: UP Press).

⁷ In truth, the War was instigated by the firing of a Filipino soldier by American sentry Pvt. William Grayson at San Juan Bridge. See James Blount (1913), *The American Occupation of the Philippines, 1898-1912* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons).

⁸ Horace Higgins, the general manager of the Manila Railway Company (MRC), was actually left with no option but to assent to some demands of the Revolutionary Government. The permanent nature of railroad business, unlike, for instance, in the case of banks and insurance companies in which their assets could be easily transferred to the British warships, MRC's properties could not be kept safe during armed conflicts. Higgins' only choice was to recognize the Aguinaldo Government and pay revolutionary taxes.

⁹ The Negros province was one of the first to accept U.S. sovereignty of the Philippines. The elites of Negros, including Iloilo, hardly acknowledged Aguinaldo's government. Desiring protection for their economic interests, the ilustrados in Western Visayas, even before the outbreak of the Filipino-American War, had showed support to the Americans. See Milagros Guerrero (2001), "The Provincial and Municipal Elites of Luzon during the Revolution, 1898-1902," in Alfred McCoy and Ed de Jesus (Eds.), *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformations* (Quezon City: ADMU Press).

¹⁰ See *French Consular Dispatches on the Philippine Revolution* by Ma. Luisa Camagay (1997), Quezon City: UP Press.

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