THE UNITED STATES AND THE PHILIPPINES: AN INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR PAUL D. WOLFOWITZ

FORUM: Remarkable changes have occurred in the Philippines in recent weeks. Marcos has been deposed and Corazon Aquino is now leading the government there. I'd like to ask you whether you can now define, in this new situation, the basic tenets of our policy in the Philippines.

WOLFOWITZ: I'd also observe I'm no longer the assistant secretary for East Asia, and have been out of touch with the situation there for the last few weeks. But I think I can say with some considerable confidence that we retain the same basic interest that we had before, which is that we'd like to see a Philippines that is stable and economically prosperous. We're very concerned about the insurgency there. We continue to feel that that's a major threat, not only to our interests, but to the basic interests of the Philippine people. An independent, democratic Philippines that retains close ties with the United States is important to our interests and important to the Filipinos.

FORUM: There also seemed to be an enormous amount of cohesion among U.S. foreign policy making groups that led to a successful policy of Marcos leaving without an enormous amount of violence. What do you think galvanized U.S. foreign policy makers to make a major reappraisal of our policy in the Philippines? Was it the assassination of Benigno Aquino in August 1983, or was it the reports coming from [Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman] Admiral Crowe and the Senate Select Intelligence Committee on the importance of the New People's Army?

WOLFOWITZ: It really dates from the time immediately after the Aquino assassination, when it was clear that there was a major crisis in the Philippines. As time went on, we got more and more reports that tended to deepen the level of concern, including the reports that you mentioned

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about the growth of the communist insurgency, which were the most disturbing element of all in the picture. But I would say essentially from the time of the Aquino assassination until now, the Philippine situation has been recognized within the executive branch as an issue of major importance. We've spent enormous amounts of time on it at all levels, including that of the president himself. We have worked very hard at each stage of an evolving situation, when our policy had to evolve with the situation, to make sure that we maintained that consensus because, if you have two policies competing within the government and competing through leaks to the press and all of the many channels by which that kind of thing gets communicated, you end up with no policy at all. So it's very important to have that consensus that we worked very hard — and I think successfully — to achieve.

FORUM: It seems, though, that there was also a shift in policy from a desire not to remove Marcos or to destabilize the government as was stated in the National Security Study Directive of November 1984, to a major push for broader political liberalization, which seemed to be the outcome of what I understand was a key interagency meeting held in July 1985. Can you tell us some of the reasoning behind that change?

WOLFOWITZ: I'm not sure what meeting you have in mind, but there certainly wasn't a change. Right down to the end, it was not our policy to destabilize, or, for that matter, to push Marcos out. Marcos effectively pushed himself out. By the time we stepped in and urged a peaceful transition to a new government, there was no possibility of his staying on in any meaningful or stable way. Our policy from the beginning was not one of destabilization; it was an attempt, frankly, to restore stability to a country that had been badly destabilized by a succession of policies and particularly by the murder of Aquino. A key element of that policy was promoting a broader and more open political process. Certainly no one could have predicted the particular course that events took. When people said, "Well, the task of the United States is to find a new leader to replace Marcos and to pick him" — they always said "him" — and install him, our position was no, that it's not the task of the United States; that's the task of the Filipinos and it requires a true political process. You can't just anoint someone; that person has to somehow grow from native soil, if I might put it that way. That was our policy all along. It was a positive policy promoting the kinds of institutions and outcomes that we believe in. It was not a negative policy; it was not an anti-this or anti-that or anti-individual.

FORUM: So you're saying, then, that there was a major continuity in our policy and no major change since the Aquino assassination?

WOLFOWITZ: In the basic principles, that's correct. Obviously the situation changed so that, at one point, perhaps the most important issue in early 1984 was the parliamentary elections of that year. At another point, it was putting together the IMF package. At yet a third point, our priority was on military leadership, cleaning that up. And then obviously, when Marcos declared the elections — and that was his own idea — immediately the whole electoral process went to the very top of the agenda. So the issues changed, and you had to constantly apply your policy to specific issues, but the basic principles were really quite clear from the beginning.

FORUM: Can you tell me what you think the role of Congress was in both galvanizing public opinion about the elections and in influencing U.S. policy toward the Philippines in the month of February 1986?

WOLFOWITZ: Clearly the presidential observer delegation, headed by Senator Lugar and Congressman Murtha, played a major role. I think that's clear; it was intended to. It's one of many examples you can find in the course of this issue of very close legislative-executive cooperation. Even though there may have been some important points of disagreement, we had a fairly high degree of cooperation between the two branches, and that was also helpful to policy. One problem here is for Americans to exaggerate their role and to look for the biggest possible role they can play in Philippine internal affairs. I'm not taking the other extreme and saying we shouldn't play a role and we shouldn't exercise influence; it's obvious from the record that we tried very hard to exercise what influence we have. But not only do we have to realize the limits of what we can actually accomplish in someone else's country, we should also recognize that for any given outcome, it's better that it happens through the actions of Filipinos themselves than if it's somehow attributed to the actions of the U.S. government and U.S. Congress. Frankly, a lot of the resolutions which were passed in Congress during those last few weeks with an aim to influencing the situation in the Philippines mostly were just ignored. Filipinos were really doing it themselves; the things they were paying attention to were the things going on in their own country. And I think that's a healthy thing.

FORUM: Does that mean that you feel the U.S. role was not crucial in bringing about the change in government? Could Marcos have been

deposed without the efforts that had been made on the part of the United States?

WOLFOWITZ: In our view, what is important isn't properly described by talking about Marcos being deposed. What is important is that there was a remarkably successful democratic process, that the transition to a new regime was a largely peaceful one, and that the new regime seems to offer great hope of doing better than the last one. If our influence was crucial, I'd like to think it was crucial in contributing to a peaceful and democratic outcome, and hopefully, though it's too early to say, one that offers a genuine improvement over the past. Now, as to whether our influence was crucial or not: I remember once working very hard on a lobbying effort on a Senate vote; we won by a fifty-fifty tie. Everybody's effort was crucial and I suppose, in a sense, ours was a crucial influence during the transfer of power in the Philippines. But that shouldn't take away from the point that the major, the most crucial effort was that of the Filipinos themselves. Without their doing what they had done, no amount of hectoring or advice or resolutions from the United States would have done any good at all.

FORUM: Let's look at what the Filipinos did do, specifically, at General Ramos's and Defense Minister Enrile's move to Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo. Was there communication between them and U.S. government officials before they made their move?

WOLFOWITZ: No, not in the sense that I think you mean with your question. We had no prior knowledge of what they were going to do. These are important figures in the Philippines; we've been in touch with them over a long period of time. But this took us by surprise and I think, frankly, it largely took them by surprise too.

FORUM: Was there any evidence or indication that this kind of action was in the offing?

WOLFOWITZ: No. There was indication of a certain amount of factionalism within the armed forces and we had been doing our best with all the people that we were in touch with to try and discourage a resort to violence, which we thought and continue to think would have been harmful. I think the action of Ramos and Enrile was precipitated by the move by General Fabian Ver against them, or at least against people associated with them.

FORUM: There are indications in the press that a rebel helicopter [loyal to Ramos and Enrile] landed at Clark Air Force Base and may have been refueled there. Is this true, and what implications does that have for the U.S. role in the "coup"?

WOLFOWITZ: During the course of the movement against the Marcos government led by Defense Minister Enrile and acting Chief of Staff Ramos, six defecting helicopters landed at the U.S. facility at Clark Air Base and requested fuel. After receiving firm assurances from Enrile and Ramos that the helicopters would be used only for defensive purposes to protect Camp Crame where the Enrile and Ramos forces were located, we agreed to refuel the helicopters. We did not, however, rearm the helicopters. The short answer is that what occurred happened quite late in the day; it was really rather minor.

FORUM: A February 22, 1986 article in the *Washington Post* by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported: "Reagan is not alone. Wolfowitz and [National Security Council member and present Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Gaston] Sigur agree that a cutoff of military aid probably would not topple Marcos but could ultimately leave the communist New People's Army as the nation's most effective force." A number of people both in and out of the U.S. government believe that aid could be used as a form of leverage or to simply maintain ties with a government in the Philippines with which we simply still needed to be in contact. For example, after the declaration of martial law in 1972 we virtually doubled our bilateral assistance to the Philippines; after the elections in 1981, although they were widely regarded as fraudulent, we continued our aid. In fact, as far as I understand, there was not a vote to curtail our military aid in the Senate until a week before Marcos left. This seems to indicate that although our policy was to promote political liberalization in the Philippines, aid was still crucial. Why was aid so crucial? Was it a way in which we could continue to influence this political liberalization?

WOLFOWITZ: Well, aid was crucial for several reasons. One of the important things is that we were working and continue to work to strengthen the Armed Forces of the Philippines. It's one of only two organized forces in the Philippines, and if that army were to disintegrate, all you'd have left is the New People's Army. Neither President Aquino nor any other democratic leader could survive very long. It's a point we've been making for a long time; our aid doesn't go to prop up Marcos, although opponents of it tried to say that was its function. It went to

strengthen the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and for the most part we tried to use it in specific ways to encourage the professionalization and influence the reform of those armed forces. It is a fact that we maintained reasonable levels of military assistance, although Congress succeeded in cutting what we had recommended, and it is a fact that during that period this rather remarkable reform movement grew up within the Philippine armed forces. I can't argue a close cause and effect to you, but it certainly seems to me that maintaining the contact that we did was very important and very valuable, and we are finding now that it's going to take a long time, even in the new climate, to rebuild the basic capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. People who argue that we should exert our influence by cutting off our aid are really arguing for a kind of posturing. It would have been a strong symbol but a very ineffective one in my view, one that not only would have had a very destabilizing effect in the armed forces, which is a key institution of stability in that country, but would have thrown away a lot of our influence, which was an important influence, with the Marcos government. When we got down to the very end, in the last few days, I was one of those who argued that if the army were used to fight the army that we should in fact threaten the cutoff of aid, as we did on that last weekend. Those were very different circumstances. People who threaten aid cutoffs for every single small thing that comes up, or even some large ones, are in addition to everything else, throwing away influence that you may want on another occasion.

FORUM: There's another argument, though, too. We gave some $2.5 billion in aid to the Philippines between 1972 and 1983, and a number of observers feel that, by doing so, Marcos apparently received the message that was opposite the one that the U.S. wanted to give. That is, he felt he continued to have the firm, staunch support of the United States and by doing so, he seemed to thwart one of our main goals, which was to encourage political liberalization in the Philippines. Did not the aid policy backfire?

WOLFOWITZ: You're covering a very sweeping period there. Certainly in the last few years it was quite clear to Marcos that there were things with which we were seriously unhappy. And the fact that he paid some attention to our views was a very important part of bringing about some correction. If we'd cut off all our aid years ago and had nothing to do with him, he wouldn't be much interested in our opinion. The likely end result would have been a Philippines much more harshly polarized between right and left. The Marcos regime would have been much more

dependent on martial law, which probably never would have been lifted, and just maintaining control through force until such time as it was pushed aside by violent forces from the left. Without defending every particular step on the way, I think that the right way to proceed was the way we proceeded in the last few years, which was to make clear our strong support for positive programs in the Philippines, including support through aid and at the same time using the channels which that opened up to us to express very strong views privately and even publicly as to what we thought was needed in the way of reform.

FORUM: Can you explain why there was such concern and confusion about the NPA, a group that has been called "more nationalist than communist" by one observer and also "the new Khmer Rouge" by another? After all, the NPA receives almost no aid from abroad, has apparently no love for Moscow and very little trust in China, whose policy now is to woo ASEAN leaders and to cut its ties with communist insurgents in ASEAN.

WOLFOWITZ: None of that is too far off of the Khmer Rouge, although they obviously received some significant help from Vietnam at one stage, but they certainly became highly nationalistic, so nationalistic that they provoked a Vietnamese attack on them. The idea that nationalism and communism were in competition I had thought would be an idea relegated to the early 1950s. These people are committed communists; I don't think there should be any doubt about that. I don't think we should have to go through another exercise of the 1960s with the National Liberation Front [of South Vietnam], these supposedly broadbased movements that, once they get into power, really show their ruthlessness. And that is the point. I don't think anyone is saying we know these people will be like the Khmer Rouge; the point is they could be. They have a doctrine that is as basically committed to the ruthless restructuring of society, in which violence is a very deliberate and important tool and where the more they get a hold on power the more the tendency is historically — in the case of this movement specifically — to show that face.

FORUM: What do you think the keys are to a successful counterinsurgency effort against the NPA?

WOLFOWITZ: I think it's got to be a combination of things, as the Filipinos themselves learned in fighting the Huks in the 1950s. In fact in many ways that experience, as well as the British one in Malaysia, are

the textbook examples of the right way to go about fighting an insurgency. The Philippine armed forces have a very good idea of what you do, and that is that in the first place you try and address the grievances that the insurgents are using as their recruitment base, try to do something about the economic conditions, try to improve the basic political conditions, and conditions of justice in the countryside. You try to do what you can to encourage desertions and defections from the insurgency, and we saw that very dramatically a few years ago in Thailand. Many former Thai communists are now officers in the Thai army. That can be part of a successful counterinsurgency campaign. Though people often say — and say correctly — that we can't fight an insurgency like this with military means alone, you also can't fight it without military means. You've got to have an effective armed force, and that's got to be part of the package as well.

FORUM: Is Corazon Aquino going to be able to turn around the economy fast enough to thwart the causes that bring peasants to look toward the NPA and not toward the government? Right now the Philippine economy is still ridden with debt; prices for its basic commodities are at an almost all-time low; and there is massive corruption and a huge bureaucracy that historically has had very little ability to deal with local problems. You also have a report from the Senate Select Intelligence Committee that says if trends continue, in perhaps three to five years the NPA can fight the AFP to a stalemate. Is there time to turn this around?

WOLFOWITZ: It is an urgent situation; it's not something that people can be relaxed about. But I think this new government has a lot going for it in the economic area, which you correctly stressed. Our experts in the Treasury Department — perhaps it's only because they're a bit jaded by dealing with so many Latin American cases — say that this economy actually is in a good position to begin a recovery. Inflation rates are relatively low. The key here is going to be confidence. If there is a reasonable degree of confidence in the future of the country and in the way the economic game will be played, and if people can invest their money without it getting stolen by some crony in some form or another, then there's a lot around to work with. I'm told the Philippines has one of the highest savings rates in Asia, in the neighborhood of 25 percent. If you take that number, you're talking about $16 billion a year in savings, which, instead of going to mattresses or Hong Kong banks, could go into productive enterprises in the country. So there's a lot to be hopeful about, and if people start to see change taking place, that will have a big effect. It doesn't have to all be solved overnight. Trends

are very important. If the trends start to turn around, that's going to have a powerful psychological and political impact.

FORUM: Former President Marcos obviously has an awful lot of wealth; much of it is sought after by the Philippine government. I believe Congressman Stephen Solarz has found that this type of issue can be dealt with by the federal court system instead of just by the state courts. We seem to have nothing to gain and an awful lot to lose in the legal battle between the Aquino government and Marcos for the wealth. Why do we not bring this to an international arbitration commission? There seems to have been some precedent for this. There was a case in 1917 of the former leader of Costa Rica, named Tinoco, whose wealth was retrieved through an international arbitration commission.

WOLFOWITZ: Well, that's the reason we have lawyers: to find legal solutions to these problems, and that's the way it ought to be done. Where there is some role for executive branch discretion, I think we would certainly support efforts by the Aquino government to recover any property that rightfully belongs to the government of the Philippines. But I do think this is a matter that needs to be handled according to law. One of the reasons we have a system of laws and not men — the terminology I think was used in the eighteenth century — is that you want the laws to properly govern all cases and you want a system that can both rightfully return property that belongs to the government of the Philippines, but at the same time one that doesn't allow some Khomeini-type government to go taking money away from Baha'is or other people they persecute. So it is something that ought to be handled according to law. I do think that it would be a mistake both for us and for the new Philippine government to become preoccupied with this as issue number one. That's not to say it isn't an important issue, but the key to getting the Philippine economy working again in my view is getting sound economic policies in the Philippines and getting the appropriate levels of international support and backing from the governments, from international banks, and from the private sector. And that's where the first priority ought to be, economically. If the Philippines is going to be able to overcome its present problems, it's going to be by looking to the future, not by dwelling on the past.

FORUM: Let's look to the future for a moment, and to the implications of what's happened in the Philippines for a number of other countries. There seems to be an impression among some members of the press and elsewhere that the U.S. is now willing to promote democracy abroad,

even in countries which have dictators or authoritarian leaders who are friendly to us. South Korea alrady seems to have taken a large cue from what's happened in the Philippines. Taiwan has a situation that in some ways is similar to the Philippines: they've had martial law for a long time and a long-standing opposition group there. Chile is much the same way. Are we going to run into the same situation again? Is our policy toward South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, and other countries the same, in terms of encouraging political liberalization?

WOLFOWITZ: You know, something that I really get a little frustrated with are the comments that suggest that this administration has belatedly become concerned about democracy overseas. That's something we've been concerned about from the very beginning. We have approached it in a way that I think is different from the last administration; we've been conscious of that. Promoting democracy, for example, has been behind our policy in El Salvador from the beginning, including our support for reform in El Salvador and strong support for elections in that country. At the same time, we've supported the basic security conditions that are essential in that country for democracy to succeed. That was, I think, behind the cutoff of armed assistance to the former government of Guatemala before the new democratic government came in. I'm talking about things that were done in the first few months of this administration.

I'd just like to quote you an excerpt from a memo that we sent to Secretary Haig when I was head of the Policy Planning Staff in the middle of 1981, when the debate was over whether or not to continue with the Bureau of Human Rights in the State Department. Of course, as you know, we did continue with it; we've had a vigorous human rights policy under Elliott Abrams, who took over that office, and now under Mr. Schifter.

> Past approaches to human rights have been highly interventionist on isolated cases in the short term, without being able to alter underlying conditions that will continue to produce new deprivations of freedom in the long term. A truly serious policy would have a much bolder long-term objective, but a more sophisticated and realistic near-term approach. The most important task of such a policy is not negative but positive: to help create the security, political, ideological, and economic conditions necessary for free political orders gradually to emerge. The positive thrust of such a policy may be better understood by regarding it as a policy for freedom and decency than as a human rights policy per se.

I think that very much describes what we've been trying to do in the Philippines; it emphasizes the fact that what is possible in terms of human rights is not judged by haranguing a particular case or ten cases or a hundred cases; it's the broader conditions. And the broader conditions in the Philippines were on the whole much friendlier to the forces of democracy than you'll find in most places in the world. And that's a credit to the Filipino people.

In each case you have to look at what seems feasible, and what should have priority; but to take the case of Korea, we've placed an emphasis from the beginning of this administration on political development. We have strongly supported the commitment of President Chun to a peaceful transfer of power in 1988. If this takes place, it will be the first such transfer of power in Korean history, at least modern Korean history. One has to recognize that Korea is very different from the Philippines, that one is starting in a sense with smaller steps. In the Philippines, it was easier; you were going back to a tradition of elections, a tradition of peaceful turnover of power, things that people had a great deal of familiarity with. That doesn't mean we aren't interested in democracy in Korea. On the contrary, we think that the long-term stability of that country depends on political development. But we will take our broad principles, which I think are consistent across the board, and then apply them in individual cases to individual conditions.

Let me just add two last observations. Number one: in the process of promoting democracy, you don't want to destabilize countries in such a way that you go from a regime that may have its defects to a regime that is irretrievable, either of a Khomeini variety or of a communist dictatorship. Finally, when you're talking of communist dictatorships that have no record of positive change at all, you've got to look at yet a different set of instruments if you want to accomplish anything.