

The February “Coup d’etat” and the Left’s alliance with the Military

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ON February 24, a Friday, the Philippine media reported an aborted coup d’etat allegedly launched by rebel military forces against the government of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. It was supposed to be headed by young officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) led by former senator and colonel Gregorio ‘Gringo’ Honasan. He is said to command a group of junior officers and soldiers which has formed an alliance with the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People’s Army. A few days after, the government slapped a bounty of P5 million for the arrest of Honasan who had gone into hiding since that Friday. The government also released a list of over 50 people named as co-conspirators in the coup attempt, although the prize money was only reserved for Honasan who topped the list.

The military hierarchy, however, does not want to call it a coup - not even an aborted one. AFP chief Generoso Senga reported that Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim of the scout rangers regiment visited him at his office that Friday morning, informing him that their troops and some other units were planning to join the opposition rallies that day. Senga disapproved of the plan and immediately put Lim under AFP “custody”. The whole day, no army unit was able to join the protests in the streets, although several SMS or text messages, saying that some army divisions were preparing to join the rallies, circulated till evening.

The day ended up with three separate huge rallies of opposition groups violently dispersed by the police. At around 9 a.m., the first group of 5,000 demonstrators were bombarded with water cannons and clubbed with truncheons by hundreds of riot police stationed at the Edsa Shrine. The second group, whose number swelled to 15,000 during a spirited march toward the People’s Power Monument at noontime, suffered the same fate before they could reach the monument. The third rally, staged by demonstrators who regrouped after the earlier dispersals, was again broken up by the police at half past eight in the evening.

At noon of Friday, President Arroyo declared a “state of emergency” which called on the entire AFP and the police to crush the so-called rebellion and lawless violence in the streets. She talked about a tactical alliance between the military rebels and the CPP-NPA aimed at bringing down her government. She bewailed the conspiracy of the so-called Rightists and Leftists which had cooked up

a plot to depose her, including the aborted march in the streets and the withdrawal of support by some military units. Arroyo specifically railed against an alliance that was supposed to have been sealed between the Magdalo group in the AFP and the CPP-NPA.

Magdalo was the name used by a group of soldiers and their officers who staged a military rebellion in July 2003, popularly known as the Oakwood mutiny. Oakwood referred to a posh hotel in the business district of Metro-Manila which was booby trapped and seized for 20 hours by 300 rebel soldiers who demanded both the resignation of Arroyo and the institution of badly-needed reforms within the AFP. The Oakwood mutiny ended in the surrender of the rebel soldiers. While most of the mutineers have been released since then, 31 Magdalo leaders are still in detention, facing criminal charges both in civilian and military courts. Since December, five had escaped from jail, including Lt. Lawrence San Juan who was rearrested on February 21.

Alliance of Magdalo and various left groups

The arrest of Lt. San Juan was amply covered by the Philippine media. He was taken by military intelligence units while in transit, after an alleged meeting with representatives of the CPP-NPA in the northern part of the country. Seized from San Juan was a flash disk containing the minutes of this meeting between seven Magdalo officers on the one hand, and seven CPP-NPA representatives on the other. The minutes recorded the so-called final talks between the two groups. A formal agreement was said to have been signed by the two camps announcing the establishment of a tactical alliance aimed at ousting President Arroyo. Moreover, there was also an agreement around the formation of a new government (under a Transition Council) and the initial program of action that will be undertaken by this new state authority.

The AFP has since then posted on the internet the transcripts of the meeting between Magdalo and the CPP-NPA leaders, entitled "Document Exploitation Report: Re Magdalo-CPP Alliance". The government has also produced a video documentary named "Conspiracy of Betrayal" which "exposed" not only the conspiracy of the Magdalo soldiers and the CPP-NPA but also the connivance between the former and other left groups. It is no secret among serious political observers in the country that an alliance for the ouster of President Arroyo has indeed been forged by several anti-Arroyo groups, including the left and the military rebels, since the escalation of the political crisis in July last year. It is also no secret that the shadowy organizations of young officers in the AFP have been talking not only with the CPP-NPA but with other revolutionary groups in the country.

According to the spokesman of President Arroyo, the grand plot to overthrow the government was hatched by the military rebels under the codename "Oplan Hackle," an alleged blueprint of a series of ouster moves against Arroyo that included the aborted coup of February 24. The February 24 plot involved the massing up of tens of thousands of people and the withdrawal of support from the Arroyo government by the military. The plan also disclosed a number of alternate scenarios if the coup failed - there would be another mass up in March which would call for Arroyo's resignation, and should this fail, another big mass action will be staged on May 1, Labor Day, where both the left and the military rebels will again attempt to grab power.

The "walk in the park" tactic

What happened on February 24 is indeed an aborted coup. It was supposed to be an action mainly initiated by the military rebels but also aimed at soliciting the support of the AFP hierarchy toward a "withdrawal of support" from the Arroyo government. One section of the military rebels, represented

by young officers from various military commands, tried to push for this scenario which was reminiscent of the Edsa II withdrawal of support by the entire AFP command to then president Joseph Estrada.

This tactic was blithely called “walk in the park” by the military rebels since it would not entail the firing of even a single shot. But the negotiations with the AFP generals broke down as the generals decided to stick it out with President Arroyo. The tactic backfired, and soon after, the hunter became the hunted as the top brass called on the military to secure under its “custody” the main coup plotters.

The “walk in the park” tactic was the same tactic applied by another group of military rebels on Sunday, February 26, which was supposed to be a sequel to the Friday’s aborted coup. A quiet Sunday afternoon was broken by the news of an unfolding mutiny by a group of marine soldiers protesting the relief of their commander. The head of the unit, Col. Ariel Querubin, gathered his troops in front of the Marines headquarters and called for people’s power support, while other marine units arrived in military tanks to repel them. During the six-hour standoff, reports came that military rebels in several service units were just waiting in the wings to support the action. However, this latest attempt to ignite a coup and a people’s power uprising ended up quickly, when around 15 Marines officers took a vote on how they would resolve the impasse. Most of them voted to resolve the issue “internally”, i.e., to call it a day and to quietly return to the barracks as if nothing had happened.

There is something inherently flawed in the tactic of securing the support of the military hierarchy to institute even a regime change, especially if the military rebels pursuing this tactic have been calling for a radical system change, and not a mere change in the presidency. These are the same military rebels who have come into an agreement with various Left groups that the next people’s power uprising would not be “another Edsa” where representatives of the elite merely took turns in grabbing power for their own ends. There is no doubt that with the participation of the top brass, the ouster of Arroyo will be a sheer “walk in the park”. But what a wasted exercise it will be since it will be “another Edsa” where the military generals and the civilian trapos will again be in control of the new state of affairs. However, events have proven that even ousting Arroyo at this stage is not possible through a unified military action since the top brass is beholden to a president who has showered them with so much cash and privileges in life in lieu of their support. Moreover, the generals do not see any other trapo leader who can match the offers from the presidential palace.

Despite the aborted coups and the fugitive status of some of the alleged coup leaders, the rebels still claim that their forces are intact and ready to take more decisive actions against the Arroyo regime. This may be true but the lessons of the February “coups” should not be lost to the military rebels. Soliciting the support of the AFP hierarchy is a formula for disaster for those who want to pursue genuine changes in the military and in society. Maintaining the regular flow of the chain of command (even at the senior officers’ level) paralyzes any attempt at rebellion, as in the case of the Marines standoff on February 26.

The tactic of a unified withdrawal of support from the Arroyo regime, even as the first phase toward a “calibrated split” within the military during succeeding phases of the struggle, is a defeatist approach for any group that claims to be revolutionary. The prospect of a military rebellion depends on the capacity and will of the military rebels to break the command and to dare defy the existing lines of authority within the AFP. Any revolutionary would know that the reactionary state institution cannot be reformed, and the only revolutionary perspective applicable to an elite army organization lies in breaking up its ranks and in winning over the progressive sections to the side of the masses.

Breakup of the monolith

The military rebels within the AFP have developed to the extent that they are not only a major and crucial force, but, more so, an enduring component in the struggle for substantial change in the Philippines today. Whereas before the AFP has always been seen as a monolithic institution that advances and safeguards the interests of the elite in the country, there is now a layer within this reactionary army that counters this order of things. Its formation and growth is a phenomenon that resulted from the twists and turns of the Philippine political scene since the early 1980s. The phenomenon is based on the emergence and development of groupings within the AFP that reflect the interests of the junior officers and the enlisted men, rather than the hierarchy of the military institution. It points to a break in a once monolithic and rigidly-controlled structure of the AFP.

The process of the breakup of the AFP monolith began in 1986 when an open military rebellion erupted in opposition to the Marcos regime and the military's chain of command (starting from Marcos who was the commander-in-chief to AFP Chief General Fabian Ver and other generals in the AFP). But the first sign of a crack within the AFP appeared during the formation of the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) in the second half of the 1980s. The public only came to know of this movement in 1985 on the alumni day of the Philippine Military Academy in Baguio City. During the parade march at the PMA grounds, members of the PMA Class 1971 unfolded a long streamer emblazoned with the word "We Belong". When asked by the media what it meant, leaders of Class '71 explained that "We Belong" was the motto of the recently formed RAM.

RAM played a crucial role in the mutiny that spurred the first EDSA people's power uprising in the Philippines. But after the downfall of the Marcos dictatorial regime, the RAM movement was used repeatedly by the anti-Aquino faction of the elite for their own ends, i.e., in order to stage successive coups against the Aquino administration in their bid for power. All these coup attempts failed miserably in the end.

RAM-SFP-YOU

In November 1986, the RAM officers mounted their first coup. The coup collapsed within 27 hours after it began. The rebel troops, realizing that they were going to lose in a firefight, decided to return to barracks. This was followed by the August 1987 coup which also collapsed and ended in the capture of RAM leader Gringo Honasan four months after. During this period, RAM had formed an alliance with the Marcos loyalist forces in the military which called themselves the Soldiers of the Filipino People (SFP).

In August 1988, a new organization of young officers in the AFP was formed. It was called the Young Officers Union (YOU). Its membership was younger than RAM — it recruited from the PMA alumni classes 1978 to 1988 and in the latter class, it had over 60 percent of the alumni joining the organization. Lt. Diosdado Valeroso of PMA Class 1982 became its leader. YOU was considered more radical than RAM. Instead of merely relating with rebel military forces, YOU sought dialogues and an alliance with the revolutionary left. During the initial formation of YOU, a former secretary-general of the Communist Party of the Philippines provided a series of lectures for the organization on topics such as US imperialism and radical nationalism. RAM later on established a tripartite alliance which would involve the SFP and the YOU. It was simply called RAM-SFP-YOU.

The December 1989 coup was the most relentless and daunting of the series of coups staged by military rebels (now under the RAM-SFP-YOU alliance) during the entire period of the Cory Aquino administration. The military rebels almost won this time. The coup was launched in the early

morning of December 1 when units of scout rangers and marines massed up at Fort Bonifacio in the southern part of Metro Manila and thereafter captured the nearby Villamor Air Base. They also captured Channel 4, a government TV station, but could not transmit because the retreating security forces sabotaged the transmitters. Early morning the next day, they flew a helicopter and T-28 bombers which bombed Malacanang palace. Rebel aircrafts also bombed the two camps in Edsa - Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo. Hundreds of rebel soldiers armed with antitank weapons also set up roadblocks outside Malacanang.

What changed the course of events was the “persuasion flights” that the US Air Force made in response to requests from the Aquino government coursed through the US embassy in Manila. At noon of December 2, US phantom fighters flew over Manila and hovered at rebel strongholds. The military rebels retreated and marched toward the country’s financial district and occupied the towers of Ayala.

The next day, after a futile attack at Camp Aguinaldo, the rebels surrendered to the government army forces at noontime. They were asked to return to barracks, and then defense secretary Fidel Ramos mete out the final disciplinary actions against most of the rebels - 30 push-ups. Some of the rebel officers, however, were put in jail inside military stockades, together with some leaders of the revolutionary Left captured by the military at that time. The imprisoned military rebels and personalities from the revolutionary Left were able to mingle inside the stockades and fraternize with each other. This state of things would play a major role in the opening up of links between the military rebels and the left groups.

Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa

In 1990, RAM cut its ties with the SFP while maintaining close alliance with the left-leaning YOU. RAM renamed itself the Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa (Revolutionary Nationalist Alliance) and called for the implementation of genuine land reform, the dismantling of the US military bases in the Philippines, and the legalization of the Communist Party of the Philippines. The change of name is significant as it heralds the first attempt of the organization to transform itself from a military faction into a movement for social revolution. The new RAM started to recruit not only from the ranks of the military, but also among the students and the urban poor sectors, especially taxi and tricycle drivers.

From 1990 onward, RAM and YOU kept the dialogues going with the revolutionary Left both through secret meetings with its underground leaders and through fraternization in the prison yards with jailed Left leaders. From that time on, its relations with the revolutionary Left grew and developed.

It was said that during the succeeding administrations after Cory Aquino’s, i.e., Fidel Ramos’ (1992-1998) and Joseph Estrada’s (1998-2001), the military rebels were effectively “neutralized” by the government. There was not even a single coup attempt during this period. However, forces belonging to RAM and YOU (especially the latter) did join some rallies, demonstrations and activities called by the Left, as in the February 1994 protests against Ramos’ imposition of a one-peso tax on gasoline sales.

Magdalo

Thirteen years after the last coup attempt, in July 2003, another military intervention erupted. This was the Oakwood mutiny that transpired during the administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who became president two years before by virtue of a people’s uprising that deposed Joseph Estrada. The mutiny lasted for 20 hours — after which, the mutineers surrendered under a deal that would release the soldiers and only imprison the so-called ringleaders, the junior officers.

The entire drama of the mutiny was caught on TV, putting into focus the 300 junior officers and soldiers who took over the Oakwood hotel while continually lambasting the Arroyo administration and the AFP for its failure to stop corruption in the military and in the government. The Magdalo leaders also alleged that the spate of bombings in Davao that claimed the lives of many civilians at that time was perpetrated by the AFP under the order of then defense secretary Angelo Reyes.

The mutiny was a turning point in the progress of radicalization among the military. The Magdalo forces constituted a new generation of military radicals different from that of the RAM-YOU, although some of its leaders came from these two groups too. Magdalo was headed by PMA graduates mostly belonging to Class 1990s and beyond. Most of the leaders projected on TV during the Oakwood takeover were honor cadets of their class. Army Capt. Gerardo Gambala, who was the main leader of the mutiny, was the valedictorian of PMA Class 1995. Navy Lt. Antonio Trillanes, a young naval officer, was a very articulate spokesman of Magdalo at that time. Most of the Magdalo leaders were not only prominent in their class but belonged to poor families who managed to send them to the military academy because of government scholarships.

The mutiny showcased the emergence of an independent and conscious force that pursues the interests of the middle and lower ranks of the military establishment. The demands put forward by the Oakwood mutineers consisted mostly of better pay and treatment of rank-and-file soldiers. From that instance on, the Magdalo forces were able to shake off the RAM stigma of being a mere stooge of the elite forces in the defense department and the AFP. It was a stigma associated with its relationship with former defense secretary Juan Ponce Enrile and some anti-Aquino generals during the series of coup attempts staged by RAM in the eighties. One month after the mutiny, a nationwide poll survey reported that 55 percent or majority of Filipinos believed that the mutineers had valid reasons for their action.

Class Analysis in the AFP

The late Captain Rene Jarque, one of the ideologues of the military rebels, wrote about how the AFP hierarchy would react to clamor about radical changes in the government and in the military. It is instructive to note that the pecking order in the military also represents the class differentiation within.

According to Jarque, at the top of the heap are the generals who are the most compromising among the AFP officers because they are also the most corrupted by the system. They favor the status quo and will not want to lose the privileges they enjoy in the system. Even in terms of ousting Arroyo, they know they have much to lose if the president goes. Thus, Jarque wrote, "the status quo and neutrality... is in the generals' best interest. With so much to lose, it is unlikely that [they] will intervene. If they do, it will only be if victory is assured and their interests protected as was the case in 2001."

While the generals may represent the "ruling class" within the AFP structure, the middle classes may be represented by the senior officers down to the junior officers. The senior officers - the majors to colonels, or those who are already in the battalion and brigade levels in the army - are protective of their careers, as they already have invested at least 12 years in the military service. They are more inclined to follow the generals and be content with the status quo, while wanting some reforms. There are rare exceptions, according to Jarque, consisting of "those who may rise and lead the disgruntled junior officers and soldiers when the situation is ripe." On the other hand, according to Jarque, the junior officers - the lieutenants and captains, from the new 2nd lieutenant to the senior captains with seven or more years in the service - are the most idealistic group in the armed forces

because of their youth. However, “they are too low in the chain of command to be able to lead a ‘constructive’ group and will be closely watched by military intelligence.”

Finally, the “working class” within the AFP consists of the enlisted personnel - the privates, corporals and sergeants “that form the workhorse of the armed forces”. According to Jarque, they are essentially “economic soldiers” who only depend on their salaries for income. Thus, they are more worried about day to day survival. Military records have shown that for almost two decades now, the rank and file soldiers are receiving P60 (a little more than a US dollar) daily subsistence allowance and P240 (\$5) as combat pay a month. This amounts to something like P9,000 (\$175) or less per month, almost similar with the workers’ minimum pay in Metro Manila. Compared to the US soldiers, Filipino soldiers do not receive much benefits and emoluments outside their salary. And compared to the top brass of the AFP, who receive monthly millions of pesos of grease money from syndicate sources alone (gambling, prostitution, drugs and the likes), the ordinary soldier is totally dependent on his meager salary for survival. It is for this reason that, according to Jarque, the ordinary soldiers, if organized, can be a “very powerful bloc” within the military.

The Venezuelan experience

While an alliance between the Left and the military rebels is a new phenomenon in the Philippines, this seems to be the norm in other countries, particularly in many parts of Latin America and especially during periods of revolutionary conflagration in society. One recent example is the alliance of civilians and military forces in Venezuela. The ascent to power of former colonel Hugo Chavez is a model that is being discussed among leaders of the military rebels in the Philippines today. The Left has provided the rebels with books and articles about Chavez and the ongoing Venezuelan revolution, and also video films of the Bolivarian revolution.

In February 1989, in what has become known as the Caracazo, thousands of people in the capital city of Venezuela rose in revolt against the government of Carlos Andres Perez. The uprising was triggered by the doubling of bus fares in the early Monday morning of February 27. The uprising was first characterized by irate commuters overturning buses and burning them. Soon after, the rebellion became generalized, with widespread looting of shops and supermarkets. While a mass insurrection had been anticipated by revolutionary groups as the main vehicle toward seizure of power, they were caught unaware of the Caracazo uprising. They did not expect that it would erupt that soon, and it would take the character of widespread street actions and “expropriation” (looting in layman’s term) of products of the workers’ labor. Even Chavez’ group within the Venezuelan army (the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario or MBR-200) was stunned by the quick turn of events. President Perez called on the troops to smash the uprising and slaughter those who had taken over the shops and were still in the streets. A number of soldiers belonging to the MBR disobeyed the order to fire at the people. One of them was reportedly gunned down upon the order of generals loyal to Perez.

The uprising was crushed before it could develop into an insurrection. The official figure of those killed was 372, but the more probable figure is over two thousand in Caracas alone, according to a sociology professor in Venezuela who studied the event. But despite the killings, the resistance did not wane. The rebellious junior officers led by Chavez continued with the secret organizing of forces within the Venezuelan military. It would take at least three years before Chavez and his group would be able to mount the 1992 mutiny.

The military rebellion in 1992 was not a purely military action. Even before this Chavez-led rebellion, there was a formal alliance between the Chavez group and the revolutionary groups, such

as the Partido Revolucionario Venezolano or PRV and the La Causa R. The blueprint of the rebellion is the combination of military action with strong civilian support focused at laying siege and seizing control of key state institutions and media centers. This combined military and civilian action took place in some areas outside Caracaz. This did not happen in the capital city as the civilian forces under the various revolutionary groups allied with MBR failed to show up at the appointed time to link up with the military rebels.

The military rebellion failed but it opened a new chapter in the Bolivarian revolution. The surrender of Chavez did not demoralize the mass movement, also because Chavez' statement on television urging the rebel troops to lay down their arms "for the moment" (por ahora) gave a note of anticipation to all. The people knew that the battle was not yet over. Chavez and his co-conspirators in the army were imprisoned, but the mass struggle continued and through unrelenting public pressure, President Perez was impeached and replaced by a new liberal government which released Chavez and other rebel leaders in due time.

This boosted the confidence of the mass movement and led to the unification of the fractured groups of the Left. The Left coalesced in a group called Polo Patriatico. Using the popularity of Chavez, they organized a few months' tour of Venezuela where Chavez could explain directly to the people the program of reforms they were seeking. This set of reforms was soon enshrined in the Bolivarian Constitution that would be adopted later on by the Venezuelan people. Aside from campaigning for radical reforms, the Left groups formed an electoral coalition called Movimiento Quinta Republica (MVR), or the Fifth Republic Movement, to launch Chavez' bid for presidency.

Although Chavez' ascent to power was through an election, it could not be said that the revolutionary groups in Venezuela only pursued an electoralist tactic. The tactic goes beyond the usual electioneering - it is a combination of intensified street actions by the masses, intensified education and politicization of people, and organizing of the workers and the poor in the barrio level. From the Caracazo uprising of 1989 till Chavez' victory from the presidential polls in 1998, the number of demonstrations and street protests was averaging two per day. This hammers the point that it was the upsurge of the mass struggles that really brought Chavez to power via the elections.

Comparisons

The radicalism among young officers in the AFP today is often compared with the military radicalism in Venezuela. That is why it is important to find out exactly how the Philippine radicalization fares in comparison with Venezuelan experience. Walden Bello, a renowned anti-globalization activist, wrote that the military radicalism in Venezuela, or other Latin American countries, is different compared to the Philippines in a number of ways:

First, unlike the Philippine army, the army in Venezuela has a revolutionary tradition. It is the tradition imparted by Simon Bolivar, a revolutionary general who fought against the Spanish colonizers and liberated a great portion of Latin America in the 1800s. The anti-imperialist stance of Simon Bolivar has long been etched in the memory of Latin American people, including in the Venezuelan Army which has a number of camps named after the great hero.

The Philippine military does not have a revolutionary nationalist heritage. The AFP is organized in 1935 during the period of direct American colonization of the country. Initially, it acted as an auxiliary force to support US occupation troops, then it was tasked to maintain public order during the colonial period. It backed up the US forces fighting the Japanese invaders during the Second World War, and since the granting of Philippine independence in 1946, the AFP has "maintained very close links to the US military via aid and training programs."

Second, according to Belo, the Venezuelan army adopted the Andres Bello program in the 1970s, which means sending military officers to the university to pursue their degrees. He added, "The Philippine military has not had the equivalent of an Andres Bello program, where officers were systematically immersed in the civilian educational system and consistently exposed not only to the latest technical and managerial concepts but also to progressive ideas and movements."

Bello also noted a higher proportion of poor people in the Venezuelan officer corps. However, this is becoming the case now in the Philippines, according to a lawyer handling the court case of the Magdalo officers. In a TV talk show where he was the guest, the lawyer observed that the PMA, which is where the officer corps of the AFP trains, is the "new UP today", meaning it has replaced the University of the Philippines as a hotbed of student radicalism, and as a university that houses more scholars coming from poor families.

Third, according to Bello, in contrast to Venezuela, where the military had an ambivalent relationship with the political Left - fighting them as guerrillas on the one hand and absorbing their ideas and proposals for change on the other hand - in the Philippines, the military sees the NPA as its enemy unto death, both institutionally and ideologically. We have to clarify though that the radicalized military rebels in Venezuela also viewed the Maoist Left, represented by Bandera Roja (Red Flag) which had been waging a guerrilla war in the Venezuelan countryside for decades, as a force that they could not ally with. Chavez, who reached out to all the Left groups in Venezuela, drew the line against Bandera Roja, saying that he never talked for more than five minutes with any leader of this group.

Compared to that in the Philippines, radicalism in the Venezuelan military has a long history. As early as 1977, Chavez had formed a short-lived revolutionary armed group called the Liberation Army of the Venezuelan People. Then in 1982, as a lecturer in a military school, he formed the aforementioned group MBR. This type of radicalism is not only framed around a nationalist ideology, but develops around Marxist ideas that circulated among a number of officers in the Venezuelan army - an ideology which is unheard of even among the radicals in the AFP today. Hugo's elder brother, Adan Chavez, Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba today, was the one who provided political education to the Chavez group. Adan was a leader of the Partido Revolucionario Venezolano, an open revolutionary organization set up by Douglas Bravo, a guerrilla leader who split from the Communist Party of Venezuela in 1966. Adan introduced Chavez to Bravo in 1982.

On the other hand, unlike Venezuela, the radicalization of the young officers within the AFP developed almost on its own, i.e., without an infusion of Marxist or socialist philosophy from the outside. It's a radicalization that has sprung up as a reaction to the rotten system and a product of a disintegrating institution.

The major alliance

For the first time in the Philippines, radical groups arose among the ranks of young officers in the AFP structure, groups that are already allying themselves with the Left forces in order to establish a transitional revolutionary government that will implement a program of radical reforms in society. The alliance is founded on a unity platform consisting of immediate economic relief and political reforms that aim to dismantle the neo-liberal economic policies and the elite rule in the country. These represent giant openings and opportunities for the advance of the working class revolution in the country.

The advance of the revolution and the seizure of political power from the elite class by the working masses have become ominous today through a combination of intense mass struggles and a military

uprising. The transition government that will be set up can be founded on the alliance of the revolutionary forces and the military rebels. Until now, the idea of a transition government is based on a sharing of power among groups and classes that would bring about Arroyo's downfall. It is bound to include even opposition figures belonging to the elite. But the concrete character and composition of the transition government will vary depending on the strength and capacity of the major alliance between the revolutionary Left and the military rebels.

This is both a historic opportunity and a historic challenge for the Left today. If in the past, the major alliances built by the revolutionary forces in order to oust previous despicable regimes are alliances or united front with the bourgeois opposition - the major alliance posed today is that of one between the revolutionary forces and the military rebels. Why should it constitute a major alliance today?

Firstly, because of the crucial role that the military rebellion plays in overthrowing the reactionary state and in building revolutionary power. No revolution will be successful without breaking up the resistance of the elite military, winning over the progressive soldiers to the side of the revolution, or at the very least, neutralizing the military forces.

Secondly, because the alliance with the rank and file soldiers, including with the junior officers, is a strategic one. The ordinary soldiers and the junior officers are strategic allies of the working class revolution. The ordinary soldiers may represent the working class layer within the military structure, while the junior officers, on the other hand, represent the layer of petty bourgeoisie in the class hierarchy of the AFP.

Thirdly, because the rebel groups within the military have gradually grown in number and are capable of undertaking swift but decisive actions that are crucial in the final seizure of power. The military rebels are also developing closer political attachment with the Left groups. This points to the possibility of close political collaboration among the Left and military rebels as the struggle continues.

The military rebellion is in fact not only a military question but a political one. For the revolutionary forces, it is a question of political tactics. All successful revolutions have advanced their own set of tactics aimed at breaking up the reactionary military institution, arousing and winning over to its side the radicalized sections of the military, or in the minimum, neutralizing the reactionary armed forces. It has always been the aim of the revolution to develop the capacity of the exploited and oppressed masses to arm and defend themselves and to win over to their side the ranks of the rebel soldiers, as what happened during the great Russian revolution of 1917.

An insurrection does not only constitute the direct actions of the civilian mass. Historically, its form includes a combination of general workers' strike and the mobilization of the masses on the streets. But a natural component of an insurrection is a military mutiny that combines with a mass uprising. If there is no military uprising, or if there is no break up of the military, it is almost impossible for a revolution to succeed or for the revolutionary forces to seize political power. This is the conscious tactics applied by the Bolsheviks in their drive to seize political power during the Russian revolution of 1917. At an early stage, the Bolsheviks deployed their key cadres, such as Alexandra Kollontai — one of the first feminist Marxists who became the only woman member of Lenin's government in 1917 — who visited the war fronts to do propaganda and organize the soldiers. The role of the revolutionary forces in organizing a successful military rebellion is nothing but crucial. Like any other aspect of the tasks of the revolution, there is a need for revolutionary leadership, a vanguard party, to ensure that this component of the revolution will take off and develop.

Our Key Tasks

In the light of opportunities that have opened up in terms of developing an alliance of the Left and the military rebels toward the strategic goal of ending elite rule in the country, the Left has to consciously carry out four related tasks that will ensure the success of the alliance.

First, it is crucial that the Left itself hurdle the disunity and fragmentation of its forces and attain a higher level of unity among its ranks. Each of the so-called political blocs of the Left should understand that there exists no single bloc that has the capacity to win the revolution today. The forging of a strong united front with the military rebels is premised on the capacity of the Left to unite and to constitute itself as a broad formation that can negotiate with any political groupings now. This is where the project of building a broad left coalition like Laban ng Masa is of utmost importance. It is no wonder that concrete and effective steps in the strengthening of the Left-military alliance are now carried out primarily through this coalition which brings together the principal Left leaders and the various political blocs in the country.

Second, we need to consciously establish a higher level of unity with the military rebels. This unity should not only be based on coordinating each one's initiatives but should aim at the following:

- A unity in the agenda and platform of the transitional revolutionary government. This guarantees the basis of a strategic alliance that we want to open up with them. A unity in the platform will ensure that in the new government, where the Left and the military rebels will be major players, concrete steps will be taken to defend and broaden the interests of the broad masses. This opens up the possibility that the alliance with the military rebels will continue and hold on till the next stages of the revolution.
- A unity in the concrete execution of the two components of the insurrection - the mass uprising and the military rebellion. We should not fall into the framework that the mass movement is a mere prop or support to the military rebellion. We should ensure that the two components develop and assist each other in a combined manner. We need to concretely discuss with the rebels key questions of the struggles, such as the tactics and plans, even the blueprint of a combined mass uprising and military rebellion. This is also our way of strengthening the terms of cooperation and relations with the military rebels.

Third, we should start widespread and intense propaganda and consciousness-raising work among the ranks of the soldiers. We should not be content with meeting and relating with the leaders of the military rebels. We should not ignore the fact that the ordinary soldiers themselves have gone through intense anti-communist propaganda and constant exposure to "Red scare" syndrome. Their idea of the Left vastly differs from the military rebels that we are now relating with. This means that we need to undertake continuing propaganda among their ranks to counter the erroneous views that they have been exposed to for years on end. We need different types of information and propaganda work to do this, such as the publication of a Left paper that is oriented toward the ordinary soldier, film shows, short lectures held secretly in their camps, or the likes.

Fourth, we should not also tie ourselves down with the idea that we merely wait for the military action as the trigger to a mass uprising. We should find out the most effective means in mobilizing the masses in street actions and in preparing them for the eventual eruption of the struggles that combine with military actions. This upsurge in the struggle may not be like past Edsa struggles where the masses are mainly confined in a small stretch of road along Edsa and have been used as mere cheering crowds for the new trapos.

We should develop the capacity of the mass movement to the level that it can undertake paralyzing

actions, launch strikes, set up barricades in the streets, and at opportune moment, seize and occupy key institutions of the state and the mass media.

On this point, we have to prepare for an upsurge of the mass struggle down to the municipal level and large working class communities. Preparations for this will have to include the following:

- The continuation of the tactic of combining local mass struggles with the political struggle based on the campaign to oust Arroyo and establish a transitional revolutionary government.
- The formation of people's power councils (some groups call it labor power councils or struggle committees) at municipal and major community levels. The councils act as centers of mobilization, of mass struggles and centers of uprising at opportune moment.

Finally, we should be prepared that in the intensification of the struggles, the people shall have the capacity to defend themselves, especially from severe state onslaught. This may involve the formation of self-defense units and militias in the factories and communities where the masses are prepared to fight.

P.S.

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