

CHAPTER THREE

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EVENTUAL GOAL OF SELF-GOVERNMENT: FINAL ACCEPTANCE OF FILIPINO FREEDOM "UNDER BENEVOLENT AMERICAN GUIDANCE"

Throughout the colonial period it was generally accepted by the White House that it was in the American national interest to hold the Philippine Islands. Public pronouncements guided by political considerations were seldom in keeping with the private understanding of the colonial issues that were influenced by military factors as well as pressure groups. Therefore public sympathy shown by a few US Presidents for the Filipino sentiment and desire for independence has to be taken only at its face value. And token gestures of goodwill for the people of the Philippines and of preparing them for ultimate "self-government" expressed through certain legislations are to be understood in its proper perspective keeping in view the domestic factors in the United States, events unfolding in the colony itself and the regional security environment in Pacific region which led to enacting such legislations.

Self-serving Rationalization

What President William McKinley told a committee

representing the General Missionary Committee of the Methodist Episcopal church on 21 November 1899, with all its imaginative and self-serving rationalization, remained a justification of American colonial rule over the Philippine Islands. McKinley said:

....When the war broke out, Dewey was in Hong Kong and I ordered him to go to Manila and to capture and destroy the Spanish fleet, and he had to go; because...if the Dons were victorious they would likely cross the Pacific to ravage our Oregon and California coasts....

When next I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confess that I did not know what to do with them.... I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight, and I am not ashamed to tell you gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way - I don't know how it was, but it came: (1) That we could not give them back to Spain - that would be cowardly and dishonourable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France or Germany - our commercial rivals in the Orient - that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves - they were unfit for self-government and would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them...and the next morning I sent for the chief engineer of the War Department (our map maker), and I told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United States...there they are and

there they will be while I am President!¹

While it was not necessary to christianize a people who had been adherents of the faith for more than three centuries, the President's speech did echo "the voices of Mahan, Lodge and Roosevelt..."²

"Liberty-loving" Expansionist

McKinley's assassination brought the bellicose Theodore Roosevelt to the White House. Roosevelt was disturbed by sentiments pressed by some in Congress and the public that the United States should prepare the Philippines for independence. He was prepared to subscribe to the concept in the abstract--as would any "liberty-loving" American expansionist! He wrote in his autobiography: As regards the Philippines my belief was that we should train them for self-government as rapidly as possible, and then leave them free to decide their own fate. (However,) I did not believe in setting the time-limit within which we would give them independence, because I did not believe it wise to try to forecast how soon they would be fit for self-government....³

1 Quoted in Garel A. Grunder and William E. Livezey, The Philippines and the United States (Norman, 1951), pp.36-37.

2 Ibid., p.37.

3 Theodore Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography (New York, 1922), pp.502-503.

What Roosevelt meant was that the United States should hold on to the Philippines as long as the Islands were needed to promote American purposes. He was dismayed to find that Congress and the people did not show adequate enthusiasm for expanding the military bases in the Philippines. If the United States did not and the Philippines by itself could not build the necessary base structures what would be the purpose of holding on to the Islands. They could even be a liability from the security point of view, Roosevelt felt. If that were so, eliminating the liability by speeding independence for the Philippines might well be the only solution. Roosevelt argued, "To keep the islands without treating them generously and at the same time without adequately fortifying them and without building up a navy second only to that of Great Britain would be dangerous in the extreme".⁴ The real point of Roosevelt's argument was that it would be folly on the part of the United States not to take early and vigorous action to fortify the Philippines and strengthen the navy.

Quoted in John Milton Cooper, Jr., The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt (Cambridge, 1983), p.112.

"We Want Taft"

William Howard Taft was the head of the second Philippine Commission and became the first Governor General of America's Asian colony. When he was offered the post of a judge in the United States Supreme Court by President Roosevelt in 1903, about 6,000 Filipinos petitioned him not to accept the appointment. Posters in Manila bore the slogan: "We want Taft". The expression of good-will so soon after the Philippine American war was "an agreeable shock", but induced the feeling that American rule was a grand success. The nature of the success was appropriately described by the New York Commercial Advertiser which said: "If ever a man was animated by the true missionary spirit, he (Taft) is....He is dominated by the wish and determination to make American control a help and a blessing".⁵ In 1908 Taft submitted a special report to the President on the Philippine Islands. He asserted in his report that as steps toward self-government became greater and greater, the "ultimate conclusion" was "ultimate independence". The time-lag for the "ultimate" independence was not indicated.

5 Quoted in Mark Sullivan, Our Times, 1900-1925 (New York, 1971), vol.1, pp.583-84.

As President subsequently, Taft's policy remained one of "indefiniteness and drift".⁶ He promoted W. Cameron Forbes, the Bostonian grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson, to the Governor-Generalship from the post of Vice-Governor. Forbes was a "do-gooder" and reportedly on occasion dug into his personal resources for funds when public funds were not available to meet the expenses of project regarded as worthwhile in the Philippines. He was given credit for giving the Islands a good system of highways.⁷ Forbes was also a shrewd person who was always in favour of strengthening the American position in the Philippines. When the question of relative power of the Philippine President and the American High Commissioner came up for discussion during the passage of the H-H-C Bill in 1933 it was Forbes who moved an amendment that weakened the former and strengthened the latter.⁸

6 Romeo V. Cruz, America's Colonial Desk and the Philippines, 1898-1934 (Quezon City, 1974), p.130.

7 George A. Malcolm, American Colonial Careerist (Boston, 1957), p.27.

8 Theodore Friend, Between Two Empires: The Ordeal of the Philippines, 1929-1946 (Manial, 1969), p.99.

Promise of Independence

President Taft's successor, Woodrow Wilson was a Princeton Professor in 1899 when he said that a larger role for the United States in world affairs was a tonic for American politics and government. Although he was skeptical at first about the acquisition of the Philippines, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the policy of suppression of the rebel freedom-fighters by force. He applauded the "young (American) men who prefer dying in the ditches of the Philippines to spending their lives behind the counters of a dry goods store in our eastern cities. I think I should prefer that myself. The Philippines offer an opportunity for the impetuous, hot-blooded young men of the country to serve their country according to the measure of their power".⁹ He wrote in the Atlantic Monthly in 1900 that American possession of the Philippines "has put us in the very presence of the forces which must make the politics of the twentieth century radically unlike the politics of the nineteenth. They concern all nations, for they shall determine the

9 Cooper, n.4, pp.57-58.

future of the race".¹⁰

However, after becoming President he sought to depict himself as different from diehard imperialists. He abolished the Philippine Commission and set up an elective bicameral legislature in the colony. The Civil Service was increasingly staffed at the lower levels by the "Little Brown Brothers".¹¹ During his administration the Jones Act was passed which promised independence for the Philippines. When the members of the Military Order of the Carabao, a branch of an organization of American veterans who had fought against the "Insurrectionists" in the Philippines made sarcastic references over his softness, Wilson administered a chastisement in a letter which he gave to the press. He wrote:

What are we to think of officers of the Army and Navy of the United States who think it fun to bring their official superiors into ridicule and the policies of the government...into contempt? If they do not hold their loyalty above all silly effervescences of childish wit, what about their profession do they hold sacred?¹²

10 Ibid., p.61.

11 E.M. Hugh-Jones, Woodrow Wilson and American Liberalism (London, 1951), p.187.

12 Quoted in John Dos Passes, Mr. Wilson's War (Garden City, New York, 1962), p.81.

All said and done, Wilson's actual policies apart from the cosmetic actions mentioned, did not reveal any interest to relax American control over the Philippines. He too believed that control of the Philippines was essential to execute America's Far Eastern policy. The Republican and Democratic Administrations' policies towards the Philippine Islands were, in fact, different only in degree and not in essential content.

While there were cosmetic differences in political pronouncements of Democratic as well as Republican Administrations, the content of their policies toward the Philippine Islands remained almost the same. The continuity of the US policies was maintained by the Bureau of Insular Affairs of the State Department.¹³ The climatic development in the Wilson administration was the involvement of the United States in the First World War. At the end of the war the United States had emerged as a creditor of the major European Powers and an active participant in power politics on a global scale. The

13 Cruz, n.6, p.130.

Bolshevik revolution had introduced a new element in the threat perception of the US policymakers. During the war Japanese forces were in Marianas, close to the Philippine Islands. In 1915 Tokyo presented to the Chinese president a list of twenty-one demands in order to insure Japan's position in China. Japanese efforts to take possession of former German held islands in the Pacific coupled with Tokyo's perceived expansionist designs in China served to kindle the feeling in the American establishment that a future contest for the control of the Pacific Ocean would probably be between Japan and the United States. The post-war efforts of the Japanese to increase their naval strength was vigorously sought to be countered by Washington even as it responded to the prevailing mood of war weariness by promoting and participating in international disarmament conferences of which the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22 may be noted.

While the assessment of the military establishment was that holding on to the Philippines was essential for the defence of Hawaii and for the United States west coast, there was anxiety expressed by the few politicians concerned with the maintenance of peace and geopolitical

realities. They sporadically expressed the view that the distant location of the Philippines and logistical problems that would be involved in defending it might lead to future complications. However, barring the relatively small and scattered groups of pacifists, socialists and anti-imperialists, few leading personalities of either major party advocated the relinquishment of the American control over the Philippine islands. Developments in the Asian colony were not a major theme of public interest during the years from the advent of Wilson in 1913 to the close of the second Roosevelt administration. Involvement in the World War under Wilson, isolationism, and the frenzied of the prosperity decade during the era of Harding and Coolidge and the privations brought by the Great Depression subsequently had left little scope for a sustained interest in the Philippines on the part of the media and the general public. Occasional references to the Philippines by the Presidents were generally of the routine pious nature and occasionally even facetious. While it may be relevant to chronicle briefly this aspect of presidential behaviour, the issue to be kept in mind is that the policy remained one of holding on to the

Philippines for strategic reasons at least in so far as the Japanese threat was seen to remain. The persistent upholders of the course were the military establishment and the officials of the Bureau of Insular Affairs.

Wood-Forbes Mission

An affable, upright and overtrusting, but intellectually mediocre person became the twenty-ninth president of the United States in 1921, succeeding Woodrow Wilson. He was Warren Gamaliel Harding, the first president to be born after the Civil War and at the same time one of the weakest presidents that the people of the United States had ever elected. Harding was earlier a Senator and during his six years in the Senate he was "an amiable nonentity". After becoming the President he depended more on the Congress, on his Cabinet and advisers for leadership.¹⁴ Shortly after his election to the presidency he sent General Leonard Wood and General Cameron Forbes to Manila to prepare a report on the probable effects of

14 The World Book Encyclopedia, vol.9, p.60.

independence on the Philippines. The two generals had previous experience in the Philippines--the former during the Moro uprising and the latter as Governor General from 1909-1913. They were supporters of the concept of "White Man's Burden". Leonard Wood was subsequently appointed as the Governor General of the Philippines in 1921.

Wood and Forbes found that the people in the Philippines were "happy, peaceful, and keenly appreciative of the benefits of American rule". One would only wonder at the prevailing state of "happiness" as reported by Wood and Forbes, in the Philippines in 1921 when the mother country was afflicted with economic depression and widespread corruption and scandal. Harding himself had brought many of his friends, some were untrustworthy, to Washington who later came to be known as "the Ohio gang". However, the main recommendation of Wood and Forbes was that "the experience of the past eight years...has not been such as to justify the people of the United States in relinquishing supervision of the government of the Philippine Islands, withdrawing their army and navy, and leaving the islands a prey to any powerful nation coveting their rich soil and potential commercial advantages".¹⁵

15 Claude A. Buss, The United States and the Philippines: Background for Policy (Washington, D.C., 1977), p.12.

"Silent Cal"

That in the general opinion of the American public all was well with American rule in the Philippines was brought out in the manner in which President Calvin Coolidge, known as "silent Cal", found it possible not only to be loquacious but also facetious in off-the-record comments about America's Asian colony. George H. Mayer referred to Coolidge, as a "shy, silent New England Republican who led the United States during the boisterous Jazz Age of the 1920s" and added that the "close-mouthed Coolidge...issued few unnecessary public statements and rarely wasted a word". According to two other historians, the President who "rarely wasted a word" in fact "could be so talkative as to appear almost garrulous" only "when he felt that what he said would not be subject to misinterpretation or used against him". Coolidge told reporters on 4 September 1923:

I have a suggestion here that on account of the very great calamity (earthquake) that has overtaken Japan, the United States might consider turning over to them the Philippine Islands....I don't know about the Philippines. They haven't proven a source of income to our Government. I don't know whether they would prove to be a source of help to the Japanese Government. I am interested in bringing

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that to the attention of you because it shows an inclination to take up the work and shows that America is glad to do everything possible for the help of the Japanese people.¹⁶

Is this remark of "silent Cal" to be regarded as illustrative of his alleged ignorance on many issues as some have tended to believe? To the present researcher the President's remark which was strictly intended not for publication were characterized by mock facetiousness while bringing out his feeling that Japan might have its eyes on America's Asian possession. Coolidge was expressing his discontent over those Americans whom he considered ill-informed, who were inclined to dismiss the Philippines as of no value to the United States and indeed as a liability. What the President was telling was that if the anti-colonialists were ever to have their way, the Japanese would surely come into the picture.

The President stated in a press conference in 1923:

16 Howard H. Quint and Robert H. Ferrell, ed., The Talkative President: The Off-the-record Press Conferences of Calvin Coolidge (Amherst, 1964), p.226.

An Inquiry about Philippine Independence. I haven't any clear and definite information about that. There is a bill known as the Jones Bill that it is my impression, I think I am right, promises independence to the Philippines some time in the future. I suppose my own position is the well-known position that has been reiterated from time to time by the Government of the United States, of a desire to see the Philippines under self-government as soon as we felt warranted in withdrawing. We are anxious... to show them the way toward good governmentAs soon as that can be done, we will then feel at liberty to withdraw.¹⁷

It was the same old platitude characterized by a show of good intentions and total unwillingness to set any definite date for the termination of American rule. That Coolidge was convinced about the importance of keeping himself informed about developments in the Islands is brought out by the fact that he often called on Henry L. Stimson, a former Governor General of the Philippines and war time Secretary of War, for briefings. He thought if there was unrest in the Philippines, "a Stimson can quiet them".¹⁸

17 Ibid., p.227.

18 The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge (London, 1929) pp.196-97.

Yet Another Mission

One of the devices by which the colonial rulers sought to give an impression of willingness to move towards eventual self-government for the Philippines was to appoint commissions. President Herbert Clark Hoover too followed this expedient when he named Colonel Carmi Thompson to head yet another commission to the Philippine Islands. There is no evidence to indicate that there were any serious apprehensions in the military establishment or the Bureau of Insular Affairs that such a commission might set an early date for American withdrawal. ~~Indeed~~, as in the case of every previous commission there was probably general awareness that the report of the commission be supportive of the case for continued American rule over the Philippines. Because of the President's known interest in expanding American commerce and because of the unsuitability of highlighting security concern in a public report Colonel Carmi Thompson placed heavy emphasis on commercial factors that made continued US control over the Philippines necessary.

His report stated that "From the standpoint of American commercial interests in the Far East, it would be

unwise to relinquish control of the Philippines at the present time. Our trade with the Orient has been expanding year by year and all indications point to an increased volume of business for the future. We need the Philippines as a commercial base, and the retention of the Philippines will otherwise be of great benefit to our Eastern situation...."¹⁹ The key expression in the report should be seen as "of great benefit to our Eastern situation". That expression could only be characterized as an euphemism for the strategic concerns of the United States in respect of Far Eastern-Pacific security.

It was because of his conviction on this point that President Hoover strongly opposed Congressional supporters of the Hare-Haws-Cutting Bill of 1933 which called for the granting of independence to the Philippines under certain conditions after ten years of inauguration of a new government.²⁰ The President found it intolerable that there should be in Congress individuals who could take so shortsighted a view about America's security requirements.

19 H. de la Costa, S.J., Readings in Philippine History (Manila, 1965), p.264.

20 For details see, Harris Gaylord Warren, Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression (New York).

He vetoed the Bill when it was passed by Congress and when the veto was overridden, Hoover was outraged. He asserted: "We are in a pitiful position. Whatever the subject, there are not thirty senators we can depend upon".²¹ Henry Stimson also regretted over the repassing of the H-H-C Bill by Congress. He said that the effect it "would inevitably have upon our prestige with Far Eastern countries can be imagined".²² The passage of this Bill in a way was a success for the farm and labour groups, who, grievously affected by the Great Depression wanted to protect their domestic market from the incursion of Philippine exports and labour. American corporations with investments in the Philippines, however, campaigned against the Independence Bill. They were the Manila Electric Company, the Philippine Islands Telephone Company, the Philippine Railway Company, the Spreckles sugar interests, the California Packing Company, the Spencer-Kellogg Company and the Standard Oil Company.

21 Edgar E. Robinson and Vaughn D. Bornet, Herbert Hoover: President of the United States (Stanford, 1975), p.288.

22 Henry L. Stimson, The Far Eastern Crisis: Recollections and Observations (New York, 1936), p.203.

American Guidance

Even as the rigours of the Depression led to increasing pressure of the agrarian and the labour interests on Congress, the White House was confronted with the problem of evolving a strategy which while setting a satisfactorily distant enough date for the Philippine independence would ensure adequate safeguards for the strategic as well as the economic interests of the United States. The H-H-C Act became infructuous because of its rejection by the Philippine Assembly. It was reborn again as the Tydings-McDuffie Bill which was passed into law by Congress and received the signature of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1934. This law for the first time set a definite date for Filipino independence. That the legislation was enacted during the administration of FDR has led his numerous apologists among liberal American historians to describe it as a *trail* blazer in the field of national liberation of peoples under colonial rules. An Indian specialist on Roosevelt, while giving Roosevelt due credit for many other accomplishments, have persistently challenged the mythology of characterizing FDR as a champion of national liberation of colonial peoples. He says of

Roosevelt:

He was among the most beloved of America's presidents and was recognized in his own lifetime as worthy of being classed among the greatest of them. He entered the White House at a time when the United States was in the throes of the most serious economic crisis in its history....At a time when in many other parts of the world the aftermath of war and the grinding misery of the Great Depression spawned totalitarian regimes of varying degrees of degeneration, his leadership kept the spirit of democracy ...flowering in the United States....As the principal leader of the great coalition against the Axis Powers, he attained a position of power and influence perhaps unparalleled in modern history. Of course he faltered at times....²⁴

In another work the Indian scholar describes where Roosevelt faltered. He says:

Roosevelt did falter on the issue of freedom for the countless millions who lay under the yoke of colonial domination. Thereby he missed that "Rendezvous with Destiny" -- to use his own expression -- which would have justly insured for him a place among the great liberators, the true soldiers of freedom, in mankind's history.²⁵

24 M.S. Venkataramani, ed., The Sunny Side of FDR (Arkansas, 1973), p.1. (emphasis added).

25 M.S. Venkataramani, "Roosevelt America, and the Indian Freedom Struggle: Some Reflections", in M.S. Venkataramani and B.K. Shrivastava, Roosevelt, Gandhi and Churchill (New Delhi, 1983), p.350.

According to the same author Roosevelt was a man of humane instincts, was willing to speak in generalities of freedom for "all peoples" at some "undefined time in the future". But "in concrete terms he was ready to commit himself only for the unfattered freedom of European victims of the Axis--and to freedom for the Philippines under benevolent American guidance". Franklin Roosevelt's vision of the future in the last mentioned case was of the United States as a reasonable, generally well-intentioned "patron" and of an independent Philippines as a cooperative and accommodating client. Neither he nor his close associates believed that the Islands should be given freedom without any sort of conditions being attached. As a matter of fact FDR, as a young school boy at Groton, used to argue in debates "for a larger navy, against the independence of the Philippines...."²⁶ And when he was the President, he often proudly spoke of the American "benevolent" colonial rule in the Philippine Islands and training of the Filipinos for self-government. Once he boasted before Winston Churchill: "....They (the Philippines) get their independence, you know, in 1946. And

26 James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox (New York, 1956), p.15.

they've gotten modern sanitation, modern education; their rate of illiteracy has gone steadily down...."²⁷

In a radio talk on the eve of the seventh anniversary of the Philippine Commonwealth on 15 November 1942 he said: "I like to think that the history of the Philippine Islands in the last 44 years provides in a very real sense a pattern for the future...a pattern of a global civilization which recognizes no limitations of religion, or of creed, or of race".²⁸

Franklin Roosevelt was a student of Alfred T. Mahan and a staunch navalist. He was a strategist with insights in geopolitics. Once he told his son Elliot that the British "don't begin to understand our thinking in terms of the Philippines, as a future base for operations against Japan" and added that "perhaps they don't appreciate the fact that the Filipinos will rally to our flag, inasmuch as they could hardly expect their colonials to rally to theirs". Like Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt also held the post of the Assistant Secretary of Navy.

27 Elliott Roosevelt, As He Saw It (New York, 1946), p.37.

28 James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom, 1940-1945 (London, 1971), pp.378-79.

Just before the outbreak of the first World War when there was a probability of a Japanese surprise attack on Hawaii and the Philippines, Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of Navy, fully agreed with General Leonard Wood to take necessary measures, stating that it would be criminal folly to leave the Asiatic Squadron in so precarious a position at a time when hostilities could be started at any moment.²⁹ During the 1920s Roosevelt repudiated imperialism in public, but strongly defended the use of marines in Haite and Santo Domingo and General Wood's tough policies in the Philippines.³⁰ Franklin Roosevelt was among those who had for long believed in the likelihood of an inevitable conflict between the United States and Japan for domination in the Pacific region. Recognizing the vulnerability of the Philippine Islands and the need for strengthening its military defences he deputed General Douglas MacArthur to serve as Chief of Staff of the Commonwealth Army. The attack on Pearl Harbour and the subsequent overrunning of the Philippines by the Japanese invaders were traumatic

29 Kenneth I. Davis, FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882-1928 (New York, 1972), p.330.

30 Ibid., p.688.

developments for American people and their President. While Roosevelt was confident of ultimate victory over the Japanese, he became also interested in the geopolitical security requirements of the United States in the post-war era when the nation would have achieved its "Manifest Destiny" to be the pre-eminent military power in the world. In that future Roosevelt and his closest military and national security advisers saw a vital need for access to strategically located overseas bases in different parts of the world. In such a scenario the Philippines continued to figure in his thinking as a vitally important location for the projection of American power in the Asia-Pacific region in the post-war period. As M.S. Venkataramani writes:

"...the influentials were convinced that the transfer of power to the Filipinos should be coupled with appropriate provisions for the protection of US economic interests and for the maintenance of US military bases...."31

And in order to preserve and protect these "appropriate provisions" it was necessary that the independent Philippines should be "under benevolent American guidance".

31 Venkataramani, n.25, p.345.

Roosevelt did not live to see the post-war developments. Upon his death on 12 April 1945 his Vice-President Harry S. Truman succeeded him. Truman granted independence to the Philippine Islands on 4 July 1946, but took appropriate steps to keep independent Philippines "under benevolent American guidance" for the protection and enhancement of American interests in Asia. He signed an agreement with President Sergio Osmena of the Philippine Commonwealth on 14 May 1945 to establish "fullest and closest military cooperation" after independence of the Philippines. At about the same time President Truman held a conference with President Osmena, Senator Millard Tydings and the Secretaries of State, War and Navy held discussions on plans for future military base requirements in the Philippines.³²

32 William D. Leahy, I was There (New York, 1950), p.370.