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Alfred W. McCoy

Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State

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impossible to be totally neutral and descriptive; after all words and categories such as the terms “subject” or “transitive” are theory laden. Maree’s conscious effort to avoid the pitfalls of theoretical debates is one of the reasons why he employed more general categories instead of very specific labels. The result is an eclectic approach to describing grammar that developed organically from the actual data as opposed to using carefully selected data to support a particular theory or viewpoint.

Being a grammatical sketch, Maree’s work is sufficient. Being a grammatical sketch, however, a lot of features and processes still remain undescribed, such as the formation of complex and compound sentence constructions and the internal hierarchy and structure of such constructions, the morphosyntax of affixes, and so on. Given that Maree has an enormous amount of data and access to near-native speaker insight, it is hoped that a full grammar of Ibatan will be written and published soon.

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ALFRED W. MCCOY

Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009. 659 pages.

This latest book of Alfred McCoy, renowned historian at the University of Wisconsin, is sure to raise eyebrows and spark discussion. The result of years of research and reflection, it is a history of Philippine security institutions—police, the Constabulary, and to some extent the government investigative services—from their roots during the Spanish period, with special focus on the American colonial period and the continuance of major—and disturbing—trends after independence and into the recent past.

McCoy opens his opus with US Pres. George Bush Senior’s visit to the Philippines, and his selective memory of the Philippine colonial experience under the United States. He then draws disturbing parallels between the Philippine experience in the early twentieth century and what was currently going on in Iraq. McCoy points out that techniques of control and

subjugation in both countries were similar in many ways, although he is also careful to state that there are many differences. From here he launches into his exploration of the history—particularly the dark underside—of the Philippine government security forces. The relevance of the Philippine experience in the US war on terror is so stark to McCoy that he places his conclusions in the opening chapter of this book, so that hopefully American decision makers will realize the errors of their ways in Iraq. McCoy states: “At first glance, this book seems a study of Philippine policing, both colonial and national, throughout the 20th century. At a deeper level, however, this is an essay on the exercise of American power, from imperial rule over a string of scattered islands in 1898 to today’s worldwide dominion. By focusing on the actual mechanisms of Washington’s global reach, both conventional and covert operations, this study explores the nature of U.S. force projection and its long-term consequences for both the nations within America’s ambit and America itself” (4).

The book is divided into two parts: US Colonial Police and the Philippine National Police. In Part One, he traces the roots of the Philippine police and Constabulary and their techniques—and effectiveness—to quell Filipino resistance toward the Americans. He sorts through familiar details but also adds many new bits of information regarding the early Philippine Constabulary and its officers. He summarizes the highlights of each chapter and thus reinforces the conclusions he had set out in the introductory chapter of the book.

Among McCoy’s major conclusions for Part One are the maximization by the US of the information revolution then sweeping the mainland, and utilizing these new technologies to compile a comprehensive database of potential and actual criminals, brigands, revolutionaries, and other threats to the US colonial regime, and neutralizing them before they could cause any damage. The development of a highly modern and systematic web of intelligence nipped the bud of many uprisings and contributed to the pacification of the Philippines. So successful was the constabulary’s intelligence network that a number of nationalists were allegedly tamed and brought to the side of the Americans—such as former revolutionary war generals and nationalists like Aurelio Tolentino. The compilation of damaging information (sexual innuendos, involvement in illegal gambling, and the like) and the threat of leaking these to the press served as a Damocles sword to keep these individuals in check. Not that the information was always

true: but gossip and rumor could destroy reputations if leaked at the right moment. Even Quezon, McCoy argues, was controlled in this way.

McCoy also concludes that the constabulary and the police served to strengthen the executive branch of government, far beyond the judicial and legislative branches, and thus left a legacy for the postcolonial Philippine government. The use of force was widespread and bloody in the first decade of American rule, and such force was again used by presidents Manuel A. Roxas, Ferdinand E. Marcos, and, surprisingly, Cory Aquino.

The combination of applied force, surveillance of nationalists, subverting religious reform, harassment of labor unions—all done by the police or the constabulary—pacified the Philippines in record time. But it also strengthened the landed elites, who were persuaded to collaborate with the Americans.

But the nature of the colonial police and constabulary carried seeds that insured that these organizations would be controversial. Apart from the constabulary agents' disregarding personal freedoms through wire tapping, opening letters, eavesdropping on conversations, the police became intertwined with local politicians and also with the crime lords themselves. *Jueteng*, illegal drugs, and crime syndicates were major issues in the 1920s and 1930s as they continue to be today. The hand of the police, constabulary and local politicians frequently abetted these groups, sharing in the proceeds. The police came under the power of mayors, while the constabulary came under the control of higher officials. The separation of forces led to intrigues and jealousy, and outright hostility, including shootouts. Part One sometimes sounds so contemporary that one has to look again to realize that the events happened almost a hundred years ago.

But McCoy makes another interesting conclusion: lessons from the Philippine experience were replicated in the US, particularly during Woodrow Wilson's presidency. McCoy points out that some of the key officers behind the development of surveillance in the Philippines returned to the US after their tours of duty and also created surveillance mechanisms in the US mainland. These included the formal establishment of US Army intelligence and the nucleus of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, particularly during the First World War. Thus, he points out, colonialism was not a one-way street: the US also learned from the Philippine experience. The Philippines was a social laboratory that produced "a virtual blueprint for the perfection of American state power" (17). Even today the archipelago serves as a testing ground for antiterrorist tactics and operations against Muslims.

Part Two, Philippine National Police, carries the story through the Philippine Commonwealth under Quezon, the Philippine Republic from 1946 to 1972, the martial law years, and into the recent past. Individual chapters tackle the presidencies of Cory Aquino, Ramos, Estrada, and Macapagal-Arroyo up to 2007 or so. This covers the anti-Huk campaigns of Roxas, private armies, Metrocom operations against the demonstrations of the 1960s, and martial law. After martial law, the Mendiola Massacre, Kuratong Baleleng, and other extrajudicial killings, and the Hello Garci scandal, jueteng and gambling lords, among others. These incidents show continuities in the use of force by the chief executive, the deep-seated surveillance by the intelligence agencies, the unholy links between police and the underworld. All these had been implanted into the Philippine body politic from the beginning of the American regime.

If, in the 1910s, the Philippine colonial experience led to transplanting surveillance mechanisms to the US, after the Second World War the police and security system kept a venue for continued US intervention—and experimentation—in Philippine affairs, particularly in the fields of intelligence gathering, the conduct of small wars, and psychological warfare. All through the narration, McCoy links American policy in the Philippines with larger US policies and perceptions, which have not changed much since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Other especially interesting points are how the Philippine press exposed PC and police abuses, thus forcing reforms. *El Renacimiento* was especially successful in revealing how the PC maltreated suspects and even committed rape in Cavite in 1905. The PC's chief, Henry T. Allen (after whom the camp in Baguio is named) was even reduced in rank and sent home in disgrace as a result. Excesses in pacification by force caused Washington to rethink its policy and opt to share power with Filipinos, McCoy points out. However, plans to get Filipinos into government had already started years before.

McCoy paints his picture with broad, decisive strokes but also pays attention to details that support his conclusions. This volume is sweeping in scope—something that few historians dared to tread, for it is more comfortable to focus on more limited topics. McCoy must be praised for carrying out this important study.

The book brings to fusion McCoy's two major interests and trends in historical research: Philippine history and the history of drugs in Southeast Asia. McCoy is noted for his earlier contributions to Philippine and

Southeast Asian history such as *Closer than Brothers*, an examination of the Philippine Military Academy's class 1940 and 1972. His first major work was, however, *The Politics of Heroin*, where he studied the drug trade and its links with politicians in Southeast Asia. He is also known for his incisive study of Iloilo and its elites; and Filipino political cartoons and how they mirrored Philippine colonial realities. He also explored power, politics, and ruling families as well as marginalized persons and groups. Teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he has a firm grasp of social and political issues in the Philippines during the colonial regime and after.

This is a daunting book: all of 540 pages plus 126 pages of notes. It has a few shortcomings, as all works of this magnitude are bound to have. Unfortunately it has no bibliography, and determining McCoy's sources—many of them primary—involves straining one's eyes in the notes. The cover photo is striking but not quite apt: it shows Medal of Honor winner Jose Calugas, who was with the Philippine Scouts and had nothing to do with the PC or the police. But the image of a Filipino in uniform with the American and Philippine flags flying behind seems to portray the message McCoy brings forth in the book.

While McCoy emphasizes parallels in the Philippine and Iraq situations, he does not make similar comparisons with American policy during the Vietnam War or the occupation of Japan, which might not have fit into the framework McCoy advances. While the anti-Huk campaign provided a pattern to apply in Vietnam, the experiment was not successful. Police and security policies have to consider different historical and cultural traditions in order to succeed. Iraq, militant Islam, and suicide bombings are a far cry from Philippine nationalism fighting for political and economic independence.

McCoy states that the US had the most efficient and advanced police and security system in the Philippines, linking data gathering and filing to early IBM machines, the typewriter, telegraph, and the Dewey Decimal system adopted by the Library of Congress. Intelligence, however, is only useful if it reaches the persons most in need of information. In the case of the Philippines, even the "Argus-eyed Constabulary" could not predict or stop the many uprisings that did take place during the American regime, such as the *colorum*, *pulahan*, and Sakdal revolts. Quezon and Aurelio Tolentino may have been manipulated by the Americans, but they had minds of their own and were not exactly that malleable or predictable. Neither did the

intelligence agencies predict Enrile's and Ramos's defections from Marcos in 1986.

In trying to prove the superiority of the US surveillance system in the Philippines, McCoy examines the security and police forces of colonial France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Britain, and concludes that the Philippine Constabulary was far more efficient. Theodore Friend in his 1988 book, *The Blue Eyed Enemy*, did not agree and stated "the routine level of political surveillance under the Americans was inexact and unsystematic" (48) compared with that of the Dutch. And the PC, as well as the police, was also part of the problem since some of its men were themselves protecting criminal syndicates and gambling lords—which McCoy admits. Filipino officers in the Philippine Scouts (a purely military unit in the US Army) did not want to absorb the PC into the fledgling Philippine Army in 1935, lest the "bad eggs" and corrupt practices in the PC spoil the new army. And noting how today's Armed Forces of the Philippines treats reports and other papers (many are left to rot and others are burned) makes one wonder how efficient the "surveillance state" really was. Files get lost (deliberately or otherwise) and key items of evidence cannot be produced in trials.

One may in fact question whether the Philippines was ever a surveillance state in the first place. Definitely the Philippines under the Americans was not like North Korea; and even with the advance of technology with close circuit TV and computers, files can be destroyed or conveniently lost. Captives in the National Bureau of Investigation detention cells have been known to escape. Similarly, surveillance in the US may have been strong at times, particularly during the Cold War, but it did not anticipate Pearl Harbor or 9/11.

The impact of the Philippine experience on the development of surveillance in the US (particularly against the Japanese-Americans and communists) may have been strong, but the creation and evolution of military and police agencies can also be linked to other personalities and needs. The Philippine background of Ralph H. Van Deman, father of US military intelligence is given much focus, and justly so. Van Deman maintained files on suspected troublemakers and communist sympathizers in the US well into the McCarthy years, and held much embarrassing information on public and private persons—not to mention Filipinos. But one wonders if there were other players with other backgrounds.

Perhaps McCoy might be overstating the case in linking the Philippines to the birth of the US Army's intelligence network, G-2, or the FBI, as

there were other key players. Before the Philippines was taken over, the US Navy had its Office of Naval Intelligence which developed alongside the US Army's intelligence arm. It might also be remembered that officials in the State Department in the 1920s frowned upon code-breaking operations, saying that "Gentlemen don't read each others' mail," leading to budget cuts for the early cryptographers.

One problem with doing work on police and internal security is the nature of reports submitted by agents. Some of these were hearsay, gossip, and rumor, or else taken out of context. Reading some of the Second World War intelligence reports by the Office of Strategic Services on Filipinos reveal some bloopers and totally wrong information. It is thus sometimes difficult to place total faith in these reports. And yet, due to the shortage of alternative sources—criminals and agents do not usually leave a paper trail or accessible biographies—one sometimes has no other alternative. War heroes write memoirs, but jail wardens seldom do. McCoy does an able job in trying to sift through the available reports, knowing that the complete picture will never be completely revealed.

Despite this book's thickness and scope, some periods in Philippine history are skipped. The Commonwealth chapter does examine Quezon's failed attempt to remove the municipal police from the powers of the mayors by creating the State Police, and the constabulary's campaign to control *jueteng*. But it does not go into Quezon's—and the landlords'—attempts to control peasant unrest in Central Luzon, making the PC a virtual private army and leading to Quezon being called a dictator. Presidents who did not use their police and security powers as visibly as Roxas, Magsaysay, Marcos, and Ramos are not studied—President Garcia is not mentioned at all. The question as to why not all presidents used their full powers is not asked. Neither is the fact that Garcia and Macapagal, as well as Marcos in his second term, faced hostile congresses. Instead, there is a quick jump to martial law. Private armies, criminal syndicates, and local warlordism reached their peak during these years. The Japanese occupation is also skipped entirely, unfortunate because the security and police forces became especially known for corruption during those short years.

It might have been interesting to have seen more of the Filipino players. Much is made of Harry H. Bandholtz and the Americans in the PC and police forces. Filipinos—during the American regime—are not quite as visible. Rafael Crame and his intelligence system is, but Emmanuel Baja—who McCoy

acknowledges as "the country's leading police expert" (156)—is not mentioned in more detail. There were professional Filipinos who sought the reform of the service. Indeed, McCoy strips the fabric from some of our public figures, but does not build up the true heroes (not that this was an objective of his).

As for the postwar Philippine presidents, McCoy found their penchant for using the police to coerce rather than negotiate distressing. "This coercive capacity," McCoy states, "was fashioned under colonial rule, legitimated by the country's later constitutions, and reinforced by popular demands for public order in the face of rising criminality" (520). This is a valid observation, although McCoy included in this group (Roxas, Marcos, Arroyo) Cory Aquino, which can be debated (especially since she had to use the police to counter the coup attempts of Gringo Honasan).

McCoy also observes, "For the past half century, Washington has found it far easier to revitalize Philippine security forces than to reform the country's underlying social inequality" (520). This point is valid to some degree, but it overlooks the US economic and cultural efforts at the same time. When the Philippine Senate voted against retention of the US bases, the Philippines plummeted in terms of priority for US military aid; the Philippines still has not gotten sufficient military hardware as set forth in the Mutual Assistance Agreement.

McCoy concludes: "Again and again America has supported allies who have not only crushed terrorist enemies but also distorted political dynamics, slowing social change and political progress. Whether inherent or incidental to the exercise of American power, such social retrogression has often followed U.S. unilateral intervention and bilateral alliances across the span of five continents and as many decades" (540). Again this is a valid observation, and, as this book points out, the Philippines—without much of a voice—played an important role in the development of surveillance and pacification operations.

An eye-opener of a book, this should be must reading for concerned Filipinos, not only to be able to understand their own police forces—and criminal world, as well as their politicians—better, but also to see deeper into United States designs and policies.

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