

**LOYALTY, TREACHERY BLUR IN DIVIDED PHILIPPINE MILITARY.**By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

748 words

1 September 1987

Reuters News

English

(c) 1987 Reuters Limited

MANILA, Sept 1, Reuter - "Who goes there -- friend or foe?"

That traditional challenge has acquired new meaning here after last week's uprising by elite soldiers who helped President Corazon Aquino to power last year, analysts said on Tuesday.

A senior army officer who did not wish to be identified told Reuters the coup bid had proved loyalty to an individual now weighed more than allegiance to the state.

The August 28 coup attempt pitted rebel Colonel Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, fiercely loyal to opposition leader and former defence minister Juan Ponce Enrile, against armed forces chief General Fidel Ramos, a staunch Aquino backer.

"It was touch and go," said one Western military analyst. He said at one point early in Friday's revolt it was unclear which side many senior officers would take.

"Just two years ago, during the last months of Ferdinand Marcos's rule, Ramos had secretly encouraged Honasan's Reform the Armed Forces Movement," called RAM, the army officer said. "Last year they united to topple Marcos. So who is whose enemy?"

In 1985, the officer said, the cause RAM was fighting for -- better treatment for rank-and-file soldiers and greater professionalism -- had seemed attractive to Marcos's opponents.

"Now those same objectives seem diabolical to the same people," he said.

Unlike the nearly bloodless February, 1986, revolution, the fifth Aquino-era coup attempt sparked the worst street fighting seen in Manila since World War Two, leaving 40 dead and more than 270 wounded.

A senior Defence Department official said Honasan's revolt held costly lessons for Aquino.

Foremost was the shocking failure of intelligence, he said.

Honasan and his rebel troops drove the two hours from Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija province unhindered. They stormed the presidential palace, wounding Aquino's son and killing several bodyguards, then went on to seize two of the largest military camps in Manila and a third just north of the capital.

"There will have to be a rolling of heads," the defence official said, "and any shake-up in the military hierarchy must begin with Ramos himself."

He said Ramos had shown many signs of weak leadership.

When Aquino dismissed Enrile last November after the young, idealistic RAM officers were linked to an alleged coup plot, Honasan and his closest allies were banished from Manila, the official said.

Honasan became a combat instructor at Fort Magsaysay, headquarters of the elite First Infantry Division, which is meant to lead Philippine defence in times of war. "If that kind of unit turns traitor, then what's left?" the official said.

Another RAM leader, Colonel Eduardo Kapunan, was sent as a tactical instructor to the Philippine Military Academy, where about 830 cadets staged a hunger strike to support Friday's coup attempt.

In January, Ramos held back from storming a Manila television station held by about 300 rebel soldiers after an all-night shouting match with RAM officers who threatened to revolt if force was used, the defence official said.

"I think it is vital the government understands the growing public perception that there is both a lack of





cohesive direction and leadership in the military," Ricardo Romulo, chairman of the Makati Business Club, told Reuters.

One Western military attache told Reuters that Ramos's ruthless crushing of the latest coup bid would only increase dislike for him within the military.

"Aquino may feel she needs to replace him to help reunify the army, but if she does, the rebels will have won," he said.

Francisco Nemenzo, professor of Political Science at the University of the Philippines, was blunt in his assessment.

"Let us not look at the military as a monolith," he said. "Bear in mind that they are fragmented, with several unofficial chains of command. Now the best officers are hunted as rebels."

The defence official said Marcos had pampered the officer corps, securing their backing for his authoritarian rule, but had ended up sowing dissension in the ranks.

"Where else in the world will you find a golf course in every military camp?" he said.

Nemenzo said Aquino could no longer afford to be complacent.

"The government seemed to believe that just because we have a new constitution and congress we'll live happily ever after," he said. "That is a naive, legalistic view of reality. Aquino must not forget that in the short run, the only alternative to her is military rule. Do we want that?"

Document Iba0000020011204dj9101a74

