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Dictatorship or Democracy: The Power of Grand Strategy & Civil Resistance

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This research presentation explores the persistent struggle between dictatorship and democracy through grand strategy and civil resistance, focusing on the parallel histories and current events of the Philippines and the United States. At the heart of this investigation is Gene Sharp's uncompromising argument in *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, when fundamental rights are denied, resistance, rather than negotiation, is the only viable path to transformation. Sharp's framework, applied across international conflicts, demonstrates that nonviolent action can dismantle authoritarian regimes where dialogue would only deepen them. Maria Ressa's *How to Stand Up to A Dictator* brings these ideas into the present, sharing her fight for press freedom and democratic accountability under authoritarian pressure in the Philippines. Her story illustrates the personal risks and necessity of civil resistance in the digital age. Spoma Jovanovic's *Democracy, Dialogue, and Community* highlights the power of dialogue and grassroots activism in sustaining democracy, particularly through the story of the Greensboro Massacre in North Carolina. Placing these perspectives in conversation, the research presentation will reveal both the unyielding necessity of resistance in the face of dictatorship and the ongoing work required to maintain democracy, even in societies where it is presumed secure. The continued existence of democracy, whether in the Philippines or the United States, depends on a willingness to stand firm when

compromise is no longer possible, and on careful, consistent efforts to uphold democratic principles. Ultimately, it is ordinary people and communities who are courageous, persistent, and hopeful who determine whether democracy endures.

Keywords: dictatorship, democracy, community, Philippines, United States