

# Philippines Is Dragged Along In Cheney's Drive for Fascism

by Mike Billington

These quotes come from different sides of the world, yet represent very similar circumstances:

- “There would be no system of checks and balances as we now have. . . . In other words, they can do pretty much what they want, and there is nothing people can do to stop them, except mount a revolution or a coup d’état.” (*Philippine Inquirer* journalist Neal Cruz, speaking about President Arroyo’s plan for “Charter Change,” to replace the Philippine’s Presidential system with a parliamentary system.)

- “Charter-change will kill the present system of checks and balances by killing the Senate.” (Philippines House of Representatives Minority Leader Francis Escudero)

- “This curtails the investigative powers of Congress in flagrant derogation of the constitutional principle of separation of powers and checks and balances.” (Sen. Aquilino Pimentel, Opposition Leader in the Philippines Senate, speaking of a Presidential Executive Order forbidding government or military officials from testifying before the Senate without the President’s permission.)

- “I am concerned that, if confirmed, this nominee will further erode the checks and balances that have protected our constitutional rights for more than 200 years. . . . The liberties and rights that define us as Americans, and the system of checks and balances that serve to preserve them, should not be sacrificed to threats of terrorism or to the expanded power of the government.” (U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy [D-Vt.], speaking against the confirmation of Judge Samuel Alito to the U.S. Supreme Court.)

- “A State of War is not a blank check for the President when it

comes to the rights of the nation’s citizens.” (Retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, in a ruling countering the Bush Administration assertion of rights above the Constitution in the “war on terror.”)

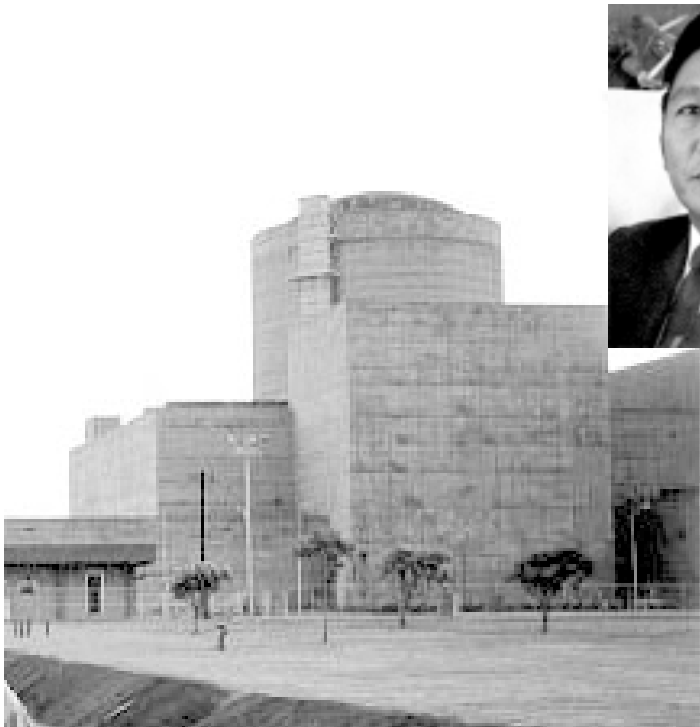
- “This [unitary executive] policy has already been adopted wholesale by the Bush/Cheney Administration with their promotion of NSA spying, torture, and other abhorrent policies typical of dictatorships. This has brought our nation to the brink of totalitarian rule.” (From a document opposing the Alito confirmation, signed by 19 elected U.S. officials at the state and local level, published in *Roll Call*, a paper for the Congress, on Jan. 24.)

The last three quotes, from U.S. statesmen and jurists, describe the current criminal campaign of Vice President



Michael Rey Baniquet-OPS-NIB Photo

*“The Gang of Three [shown here, left to right]—House Speaker José de Venecia, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and former President Fidel Ramos. These three are behaving as if they own the Philippines . . . like a crime syndicate no different from the Mafia or Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. They want a new constitution and a parliamentary government, and they’re going to have them even if 80 million Filipinos don’t want them.”—Philippines Inquirer journalist Neal H. Cruz, Jan. 18.*



*In 1982, the IMF issued a scathing attack on the government of President Ferdinand Marcos (inset), denouncing its 11 major industrial and agricultural development programs, including especially the first nuclear power station to be built in Southeast Asia (shown here).*

Dick Cheney and President George Bush to dispose of the Constitution under the Nazi-era doctrine known as the “unitary executive,” as pronounced by Cheney, Bush, and their Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito. The doctrine asserts that, in a national crisis, the executive cannot be restrained by Congress, the courts, the Constitution, or any law whatsoever, in order for the President to “defend the people.”

The first three quotes, similar in nature to those from the United States, come from Filipino statesmen and journalists, where, *under the direction of exactly the same individuals who are running the drive for fascism in Washington*, there is a campaign to eliminate the Presidential System altogether, replacing it with a parliamentary system, without the checks and balances of the Presidential system.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who is not the architect of this scheme, but has been coerced to promote it to save her Administration from otherwise certain doom, does not hide the fact that the problem to be eliminated is the pesky opposition from the Senate—precisely the checks and balances which are designed to prevent totalitarianism. “The problem of the Presidential form,” said Arroyo, “is that the legislature and the executive are separate, so they are conflicting by nature. In the parliamentary form of government, they are one. The decision of the executive presumes already that the legislative is part of the decision-making, therefore

the laws will move faster.”

While the battle over the drive for fascism is now raging in the U.S. Senate, so also the Philippine Senate is thus far refusing to buckle under to strong-arm tactics from the local spokesmen for Cheney and his neo-conservative cabal. The coming days and weeks are crucial.

## **The Role of the Philippines in Asia**

The Philippines has a critical mission in the future course of events in Asia, as the scope of global development shifts from a Eurocentric world to one focussed on Eurasia as a whole. The Philippines is the gateway to Asia from the Americas, in more than a geopolitical sense. Its colonial history under Spain, and as a U.S. territory after the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-U.S. War, until its independence in 1946, is certainly the source of many deep-rooted problems for the nation, but also created a unique cultural characteristic as a complex interface of East and West. The United States holds a special responsibility to the Philippines. The commitment of President Franklin Roosevelt to make the Philippines a model for the de-colonization of all Asia from European colonial powers after World War II, was subsequently sabotaged, but nonetheless succeeded to a significant extent in turning the island nation into a developing nation with great potential—until 1986.

In 1982, U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, his deputy Paul Wolfowitz, and his close ally Henry Kissinger implemented a policy, for what is today known as “regime change,” in the Philippines. Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos had been tolerated during the U.S. colonial war against Indochina, since the United States depended on the U.S. military bases at Clark Airfield and Subic Bay. But after the defeat of the United States in Vietnam, the international financial institutions, headed by the International Monetary Fund and its American sponsors, demanded the subservience of developing nations to a global economic order, to be enforced through economic conditionalities on debt. In 1982, the IMF issued a scathing attack on the Marcos government, naming its 11 major industrial and agricultural development programs, including especially the first nuclear power station to be built in Southeast Asia, as wasteful government spending. The IMF and the World Bank demanded that the public investments in these projects be diverted to debt payments, and particularly condemned the creation of state industries. Such independence from the “free market” neo-colonial cabal in New York and London, and especially the potential independence from the oil cartels through nuclear power development, was not to be tolerated.



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*Some of the “warm bodies” that were brought out to cover for the U.S.-backed military coup by Fidel Ramos, which downed the Marcos government in February 1986.*

The murder of opposition figure Benigno Aquino in 1983 by factions in the military, although never officially solved, was nonetheless blamed on President Marcos, and used to rally popular support against him, especially from the younger generation in Manila. By 1985, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Stephen Bosworth was meeting for several hours daily with Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Fidel Ramos, a fact which was exposed by *EIR* in August of that year. Despite denials from both the United States and from their asset General Ramos, events proved that *EIR* had been deadly accurate. Ramos led a U.S.-sponsored military takeover of the Marcos government in February 1986, under cover of mass demonstrations—“warm bodies” brought out to protest by a complicit media, the Catholic Church, and the U.S.-linked business community. The military coup was declared internationally to have come from “people’s power.”

The IMF was quickly given a free hand in the Philippines, and the rape of the nation’s economy and people by the international financial cartels has accelerated ever since. In fact, the Philippines became the model for IMF- and U.S.-sponsored “regime change” and economic looting throughout the world, based on a generation of Filipinos who believed, *and believe still to this day*, that the U.S.-controlled military coup which stole their national sovereignty *was a victory of the “people” against a tyrant.*

### **The Basis for Ramos’s Power**

Ramos no longer enjoys wide popularity within the Philippines, but still wields tremendous power. He did not take direct power after the 1986 coup, but served as the power behind the throne for President Cory Aquino, the wife of the slain opposition leader. Cory Aquino had been turned into a symbol for the “people’s power” campaign. As President, she followed IMF dictates—her first act in office was to close down the fully constructed nuclear power plant. Ramos only took over himself in the 1992 election. After manipulating the Congress to grant him emergency powers to deal with recurrent energy blackouts, Ramos did not do the obvious—

open up the nuclear plant—but rather brought in Enron and like-minded oil and energy corporations, signing energy contracts which dumped all the currency risk (and other risks) upon the Philippines government, ensuring the near-term bankruptcy of the nation.

When the 1997-98 “Asian financial crisis” forced massive devaluation of the Philippine peso (a result of speculation by the burgeoning new hedge fund network created by U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan’s hyperinflationary monetary policies), the Philippines was left holding huge, unpayable dollar-denominated debts, largely due to Ramos’s corrupt energy deals.

In this environment, a populist candidate, Joseph Estrada, a former movie star turned politician, swept the 1998 Presidential elections against Ramos’s chosen candidate, House Speaker José de Venecia. While not free of the corrupting influence of the international financial institutions, Estrada was clearly not under oligarchical control, and the Ramos machine went to work. Using charges of corruption (which, like the WMD in Iraq, proved to be fanciful constructions of those running the operation), a replay of the “people’s power” hoax of 1986 was manufactured. An impeachment trial ensued, and when it became clear that Estrada would not be convicted, the opposition walked out, called out the “warm bodies” to the streets, and called in the marines. Ramos, after getting the all-clear from Washington, ordered the military to repeat the 1986 takeover process. On Jan. 20, 2001, *the very day of George W. Bush’s inauguration as President of the United States*, Estrada was deposed by the military.

The puppet President this time was the current President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who had been Vice President under Estrada. Like Cory Aquino before her, Arroyo’s first act was to pay obeisance to the international energy cartels, in this case by privatizing the national energy sector.

The Arroyo regime has been utter chaos, with the economy spinning out of control, IMF-dictated austerity, huge foreign borrowings at “junk bond” interest rates, courtesy of the Anglo-American rating agencies such as Standard and Poor’s (better known as “No-Standards and Whores”). More than half the population lives in poverty, with one in six experiencing hunger in this once-developing nation.

Add to this the exposure of vast vote fraud in the Arroyo re-election campaign in 2004—her conversations with election officials discussing the rigging of the vote were illegally taped by military intelligence, and released to the public. The President’s popularity, and her capacity to govern, have fallen through the floor.

In stepped Ramos, with his old pal, Speaker de Venecia, to use the crisis as a convenient opportunity to impose a dictatorship. President Arroyo faced a collapse of her government in July of 2005, as former President Cory Aquino turned against her, and ten of her Cabinet members resigned, demanding her resignation; Ramos and de Venecia ran to her



EIRNS/Michael Billington

*More than half the population of the Philippines lives in poverty, with one in six experiencing hunger in this once-developing nation. A shanty town in Manila, 2001, is shown here.*

support—on one condition! She must demand a Constituent Assembly or a Constitutional Convention to write a new Constitution to change to a parliamentary system. Arroyo conceded.

Ramos has been toying with Arroyo ever since, demanding that she step down as President next year (rather than 2010 when her term ends) or he would withdraw his support, then rescinding the threat; meeting with representatives of former Presidents Estrada and Aquino to discuss a united front to oust Arroyo, then denying it; and so on, nearly every day. Several different military factions loyal to Ramos have openly declared their intentions for a military coup, while Ramos coyly declares that he's no longer affiliated with them. President Arroyo, meanwhile, is hanging by a string from Ramos's middle finger. Conrado de Quiros, an editorial writer for the leading establishment newspaper *The Inquirer*, described Ramos's toying with Arroyo in a Jan. 16 article: "What's wrong with this picture? It is not that Ramos can't seem to make up his mind on when Arroyo should resign. What's wrong with the picture is that, quite simply, who the hell is Ramos to be telling anyone what to do? Who the hell is Ramos to be deciding what kind of government we should have and who should head it? Who the hell is Ramos to be declaring the future of this country?"

A good point—but what's *really* wrong with this picture, is that the answer is as clear as day, but the Filipino "people's power generation" doesn't want to face it. Ramos has power because he speaks for his American controllers, who are now waging pre-emptive wars on nations of their choosing, openly pushing for fascism in the United States, and controlling the flow of international credit according to political conditionali-

ties. The reason Filipinos don't want to admit that, is that they don't want to admit that their heroic "people's power" revolution of 1986 was a foreign-dictated military coup which cost them their national sovereignty.

## The Senate

In the United States, the Senate is the institution in which the defense of the Constitution against the threatened dictatorship is being fought out. In the Philippines also, the Senate, including those who are otherwise supporters of President Arroyo, has thus far refused to accept the Ramos/de Venecia/Arroyo demand to form a Constitutional Convention. Ramos is threatening to "reinterpret" the clear meaning of the Constitution in such a way as to claim that Senate agreement is not required to hold such a Constitutional Convention.

To stop this push for dictatorship, patriots of the nation, both friend and foe of President Arroyo, must unite against the charter change. Even more important, they must express their full support for those in the United States who are leading the fight to defeat the fascist drive in Washington. If fascism comes to the United States, there will be little hope in Manila.

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