

# Showdown in the Philippines

by Linda de Hoyos

Although Philippines President Corazon Aquino took home with her, from her four-day state visit to Japan Nov. 10-14, promises of \$210 million in economic aid, the most significant aspect of her visit was that her absence from Manila prompted the most severe crisis yet to face her government. Upon her departure, Aquino warned those in the military who were reportedly preparing a coup for her overthrow: "Any coup or other military action by misguided elements must contend with my opposition, which means with the power of the people."

Aquino's affirmation of the "power of the people" is in fact an admission that her government is dead, as the Philippines crisis—begun with the U.S.-directed campaign against Ferdinand Marcos—unfolds into civil war.

Coup rumors were particularly fed in Manila by Aquino's own group of close advisers, the human rights mafia including former Communist Party member Teodoro Benigno (her presidential spokesman) and executive secretary Joker Arroyo. This is the nest that links the Malacang Palace to "the power of people" in coordination with the *éminence grise* of the Aquino administration, Cardinal Jaime Sin.

On the other side of the spectrum is Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, who has loudly attacked Aquino's policy of "appeasement at all costs" to the terrorist New People's Army. For days before Aquino's departure, the charge raced through Manila streets and newspapers that Enrile would execute a coup while Aquino was in Tokyo.

Indeed, on Monday, Nov. 10, tensions in the city of Manila rose to a peak, with expectations that fighting might break out within the military itself between forces loyal to Enrile and those loyal to Armed Forces Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos, who had functioned as a mediator between Enrile and Aquino with the backing of the U.S. embassy. In a tense meeting between Enrile and his backers and Ramos's forces, the chief of staff's "middle position" was reportedly eliminated, and the military unified behind Enrile. "There is no one in the military who does not want to fight the NPA," said a knowledgeable Filipino source.

The country is now locked into a showdown. On Nov. 14, the day of her return from Tokyo, Rolando Olalia, the leader of the May First Movement, the trade union arm of the NPA's National Democratic Front, was brutally murdered. Since Aquino's coming to power, the May First Movement has grown tenfold to some 500,000 members. Olalia was also a leader of the Bayan Party, which overlaps with the NDF and whose thousands provided the "people's power" for the February Revolution.

The NPA and its various political fronts immediately blamed the murder on the military, and specifically Enrile. José Sison, the founder of the Philippines Communist Party who was released from prison soon after Aquino came to power, put the responsibility for the murder at the door of the United States: "The U.S. is obviously doing everything in its power to make sure that every obstacle to the perpetuation of U.S. military bases and other U.S. privileges is removed."

Similar to the "gang vs. countergang" murders that preceded the civil war in El Salvador and Nicaragua in 1980, three days later, gunmen murdered David Puzon, a close associate of Defense Minister Enrile.

The May First Movement general strike for Nov. 17, called in protest of the Olalia murder, did not appear to mobilize the "people's power" Aquino's statements would imply exists. A funeral march for the murdered trade unionist Nov. 21 brought out only 100,000 people—not the 2 million that Aquino's aides say are prepared to defend Malacanang.

Nevertheless, ceasefire talks between the NPA and the Aquino negotiators have fully broken down, and the tempo of confrontation between the military and the Theology of Liberation's NPA has reached the point that full confrontation is viewed as inevitable.

## Who rules Manila?

Coming to power on the battle cry of "democracy," it has taken the Aquino government only nine months to expose itself as the very kind of "democracy" deplored by Plato in *The Republic*—mob rule on behalf of the oligarchical families who covertly back and deploy that mob.

The NPA itself proclaimed, from its demonstrations of protest for the Olalia murder, that its protests were directed only toward the military. "It's not directed at her [Aquino], at all," said J.V. Bautista, an official of the pro-NPA Bayan Party.

Even before she left for Tokyo, Aquino had already factored out the military as an element of her government, whether she still chooses to call Enrile her defense minister or not. Malacanang Palace is not being guarded by any official agencies, but by the Yellow Army, a selected group of military men and others whose training was funded by Aquino's brother Pepe Cojuangco, of the Chinese oligarchical Cojuangco family, at the family's hacienda in Tarlac. The Israelis provided the funding and most of the weaponry of this 2,000-man force.

In addition, the New People's Army has deployed another 2,000 military cadre into Metro-Manila to counter a coup attempt. An NPA communiqué declared that Enrile "desperately rides" on the anti-communist campaign to "set the stage for a military takeover to gain full control of the government. . . . NPA units are in urban areas to thwart evil designs of the ultra-rightists to once more gain total control of power by staging a coup."

The Sandinistas of the Philippines already inhabit Malacanang, in the person of Joker Arroyo et al., who have waged a months-long campaign to force Enrile's ouster. Also part of this grouping is Agapito Aquino, the first lady's brother-in-law, who moved into Malacanang during her visit to Tokyo.

This is the first tier of defense of the current government. The administration itself is reportedly run by an Executive Council run by the Cojuangco brothers of Aquino. This Council operates in coordination with Central Bank chief Jobo Fernandez and Finance Minister Jaime Ongpin, who were installed on behalf of the Philippines' international creditors.

A scandal breaking in the press Nov. 16 that Aquino's brother José Cojuangco had been implicated in car smuggling is but a tiny fraction of the evidence of gross corruption on the part of the wealthy landowners and families who comprise the so-called Executive Council. It is the Executive Council which derives the maximum profit from the various government franchises, including the government-sanctioned casino gambling operations. It is also these families that funded the "Light a Fire Movement" and other terrorist operations in 1972, which forced the Marcos declaration of martial law.

Aside from the Cojuangcos and their associates, the most powerful figure in the government is Cardinal Jaime Sin. Sin's own *Veritas* newspaper had warned Aquino not to go to Japan, but the first lady insisted, demanding that Cardinal Sin himself delay a trip to Rome in order to be on hand in defense of Malacanang should there be a coup. A full one-tenth of the NPA is comprised of priests and nuns, and in any village or town where the NPA is in the vicinity, the insurgents can be reached through the local Catholic Church. It was Cardinal Sin, and not Vice-President Salvador Laurel, who greeted Aquino at the airport upon her return from Tokyo.

It is the plan of the Enrile forces to force the ouster of the "Sandinista" faction infested in Malacanang, maintain Aquino as President, but install a cabinet that would permit the military to take effective action against the NPA. For such a scenario to begin to work requires a total overhaul of the government's economic policy in which development and national sovereignty, and not debt, are made the priorities. Otherwise, well-placed sources in Manila believe that the Philippines will not hold out for more than a year against a full Sandinista solution. Time, these sources point out, is on the NPA's side.

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### Contents

- I. The emergency war plan to fight AIDS and other pandemics
- II. The real story of AIDS in Belle Glade, Florida
- III. AIDS in Africa: the unfolding of a biological holocaust
- IV. The biology of AIDS
- V. Flow cytometer and other laser technology potential for combatting AIDS
- VI. The relevance of optical biophysics for fighting AIDS: designing a Biological Strategic Defense Initiative (BSDI)
- VII. How Kissinger and Pugwash destroyed America's biodefense against AIDS and other deadly diseases
- VIII. The Soviet command and control of WHO's AIDS Policy
- IX. Why the Reagan administration has tolerated the CDC cover-up of the AIDS pandemic
- X. The necessary public health program to fight AIDS

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