

Bush in the Philippines

The U.S. President's short Oct. 16 visit to Manila went like clockwork, presumably due to extensive security considerations by both administrations. The streets where his motorcade passed to the Malacanang Presidential Palace, and on to the Batasan (legislative building), were devoid of people. Some children and a few others were allowed to welcome the leader of the most powerful country in the world, but, on most occasions, even pro-U.S. groups were not allowed to go near President Bush. This wariness on the part of security groups was evident throughout the visit, justifiably so, considering the level of hatred America seems to have brought upon itself these past years.

Historians were quick to point out, that the first time we were visited by a U.S. President, President Eisenhower, he rode in a white Cadillac convertible, seated on top of the back seat, waving to thousands of admiring and grateful Filipinos, lined along the streets to Malacanang. In contrast, today's world leader rides in a limousine—one of three identical vehicles, to confuse possible attackers—a bomb- and bullet-proof Cadillac from which he did not venture to wave—to police, who were the only onlookers.

Bush's address to Congress can be described basically as a "feel good" speech, praising Filipinos as long-time allies in Asia, and more recently, as partners in the fight against terrorism. The portion of his speech which received

the most applause, was his clever quote from Pope John Paul II during the latter's 1995 visit to this city, wherein His Holiness referred to Manila as a source of light, which should shine and enlighten all of Asia and beyond, the way Bethlehem was to the rest of the world—a reference to the Philippines as the only Christian country in this part of the world. But Bush was clearly referring to our government's "anti-terrorist" stand.

There was a general promise of aid to Mindanao, on the condition that lasting peace is achieved; which can be interpreted as "peace before development," and not "peace through development." We can, therefore, expect an escalation of war in southern Philippines, as Bush dangles an imaginary carrot to this Administration. Unless President Gloria Arroyo pursues the assistance and diplomatic intervention of Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia (despite his pending retirement), and designs a settlement along the principles of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years' War, neither peace nor development will come to Mindanao, nor to the rest of our country. And surely, Mahathir realizes that peace in the Philippines is vital to Malaysia and the whole of Southeast Asia as well.

The only relief felt by all Filipinos after President Bush's visit, was neither in economics nor in politics, but in the fact that nothing untoward had happened during his brief stay. The thought of the Beast-man Cheney directly in command is frightening—like jumping from the frying pan into the fire.—*Butch Valdes*