

# Marines and Mini-Coup Hit The Philippines

by Michael Billington

U.S. Special Forces from several branches of the armed services, and regular U.S. Army troops, are deploying into the Philippines for direct military search-and-destroy operations against one or more terrorist and separatist groups in the predominantly Muslim regions in the South. In world headlines about this first military action after Afghanistan in the U.S. “war on terrorism,” what is crucial is being omitted: The action is explicitly counter to the Philippine Constitution; it is virtually open-ended, in an environment in which multiple, long-standing rebellions are currently escalating into open warfare on several fronts; and a “mini-coup d’état” was effected in Manila in the days preceding the announcement of the American deployment.

The “gradual” coup is being run by the same figure, Gen. Fidel Ramos, who has carried out several such coups in the past, with full backing from his sponsors in Washington.

The fact that the Philippine Constitution explicitly forbids foreign troops to engage in combat on Philippine soil has been flaunted, in a manner which is guaranteed to create further chaos. The country is already reeling from the global economic breakdown and endemic political instability. Before mid-January, several dozen U.S. military advisers were training and advising Philippine troops in anti-terrorist activities, but the government of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo insisted that only Philippine troops would be engaged in combatting the Abu Sayyaf, a kidnapping-for-ransom gang with ties to the Afghansi terrorist networks.

The attempt to keep the policy change within constitutional restrictions was so contemptuous of reality that it made matters worse. “Malacanang [the Presidential Palace] should stop the deceptions!” said Sen. Rudolfo Biazon, a former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, and an author of the Visiting Forces Agreement which governs U.S. military operations in the country. He has called hearing in the Senate for Jan. 22, challenging the constitutionality of the U.S. military role.

The cover story is ridiculous. Portions of the 160 U.S. Special Forces and 500 Army troops will accompany Philippine forces to the front. They will be fully armed, and permitted to use their weapons if attacked. Nonetheless, Philippines Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes said the U.S. personnel were only trainers. He claimed the military operation was actually

a “joint training exercise,” called Balikatan (Shoulder-to-Shoulder), although the “exercise” would be held on the front of an active war, and would last up to one year, rather than the normal two weeks!

Moreover, U.S. troops will deploy not only to the island of Basilan, where the Abu Sayyaf is holding three hostages (including two Americans), but also to the island of Jolo, where the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)—the oldest Muslim separatist movement in the south—has broken a long-standing peace agreement with the government, and is engaged in bloody confrontations with the Philippines Army. Under the announced rules of engagement, if U.S. troops in Jolo become involved in a military conflict, they could find themselves in military operations against a broad array of organizations representing the Muslim population across the entire southern part of the country.

## Philippine Shift Announced by Wolfowitz

The dramatic Jan. 9 reversal by the Philippines government was telegraphed in the Jan. 8 *New York Times* in an interview with U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. Wolfowitz is the leading spokesman for the faction within the Bush Administration demanding war against Iraq and other Islamic targets—a policy intended to destroy the coalition put together by President Bush and Russian President Putin, and to unleash a global “clash of civilizations.” In the interview, Wolfowitz acknowledged that President Bush had not agreed to the Iraq war scenario, and suggested that he (Wolfowitz) and his allies were pushing for the initiation of military campaigns against secondary targets, naming Somalia, Yemen, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Wolfowitz told the *Times* that Indonesia’s government, like Somalia’s and Yemen’s, was “extremely weak” in certain areas, suggesting that only U.S. military forces could deal with “Muslim extremists and Muslim terrorists” in those areas—a threat arousing great concern in Indonesia. Of the Philippines, he said that, although the government was “very anxious to do it themselves,” he nonetheless believed that U.S. involvement “might include direct support of Philippine military operations.” The next day, Gen. Diomedio Villanueva, the Chief of Staff of the Philippines Armed Forces, announced that U.S. troops “would be allowed to join the front-line Filipino troops fighting the Abu Sayyaf.”

How did the Wolfowitz cabal turn the Philippines government to accede to a policy both dangerous, in total disregard for the Philippines Constitution, and threatening a broader and more tragic war?

## Ramos’ Mini-Coup

The answer is revealed in the timing: Jan. 8, the Wolfowitz interview; Jan. 9, the announcement of the change in policy in the Philippines; and Jan. 10, the announcement that President Macapagal-Arroyo had established a “Council of State,” headed by Fidel Ramos, to “advise the government on all



*The sudden and anti-constitutional long-term deployment of U.S. military forces into the Philippines is part of a rapidly growing crisis of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's Presidency; she is threatened with a creeping coup by former President Fidel Ramos (shown with U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen in 1998), who has long saluted British and U.S. policy in the Philippines.*

matters of national importance.” London and New York’s favorite oligarch-in-residence in the Philippines, Ramos had carefully orchestrated this “mini-coup” over previous months.

Important aspects of background are needed to understand this mini-coup. General Ramos, in 1985-86, under the direction of the U.S. State Department, led a military coup against Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos, whom he had served as head of the Armed Forces. That coup was coordinated with the Wall Street-allied financial elite in Manila—centered in the Makati Business Club, the press under their control, and corrupt elements within the Catholic Church, centered around Cardinal Jaime Sin—who together rallied millions of demonstrators onto the streets of Manila to provide the appearance of what was called “people’s power,” providing a cover for the coup.

Marcos was replaced by Corazon Aquino, the widow of opposition leader Benigno Aquino, who had been assassinated upon his return from self-imposed exile in the United States in August 1983. Cory Aquino ruled at the whim of Ramos and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and her regime left the economy in shambles. By the time of the 1992 elections, with electricity blackouts across the country, and a general breakdown of the economy, Ramos won the Presidential election himself, posing as a strong leader capable of putting the economy back together.

Indeed, he immediately coerced the Congress to grant him emergency powers, including the right to sign contracts with foreign investors, without review. He then proceeded to sign sweetheart contracts with the Anglo-American financial and energy cartels, placing all the risk upon the government of the Philippines—i.e., upon the Filipino people. When the Asian economies collapsed under the speculative assault of the Western hedge funds in 1997, devaluing the peso and shutting

down much of the economy, the country was left holding huge debts which the devaluations multiplied, and contracts which forced the government to purchase *unnneeded and unused* electricity and other products.

When the 1998 elections came around, Ramos tried several means to run for a second term, including efforts to lift the constitutional ban against succeeding oneself. However, with the population wracked by the impact of the economic collapse, he did not prevail. His Vice President, Joseph Estrada, a populist extremely popular among the poor, was elected in a landslide.

Within a year, Ramos and his cohorts from the 1986 coup were at it again—and, again, the shots were called in Washington. Estrada, despite his continuing huge popular support, was charged with corruption, and pilloried by the press. When Ramos, the Makati Business Club, Cardinal Sin, and the press again produced a critical mass of warm bodies on the streets of Manila, creating the appearance of yet another “people’s power” revolt, Ramos returned from a Washington “visit,” broke most of the resistance within the active military leadership to the unconstitutional usurpation of power from the elected President, and seized power. He installed Estrada’s Vice President Macapagal-Arroyo as President, assuming he could control her, as he had Cory Aquino.

### Round Three

The new President, while generally trained in the monetarist orthodoxy of the IMF and the New York/London free-trade oligarchy, was confronted by the devastating effects which the collapse of that system has had upon her country. She took steps to strengthen relations with the nations of East and Southeast Asia, including establishing ties with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad, whose sovereign measures of defense against the demands of the IMF had

saved Malaysia from the worst effects of the crisis. However, she has been unable or unwilling to take similar kinds of emergency, sovereign measures for the Philippines. The subsequent, continuing economic decay, intensified by falling U.S. and Japanese importing capacity as the world economy careens into depression, left her vulnerable to a (now almost traditional) Philippine-style coup d'état. And Fidel Ramos was soon up to his old tricks.

Coup rumors are nothing new in the Philippines, but the current round became more serious in December, when a suspicious former junior officer, claiming to represent military organizations which had been involved in previous failed coup attempts, turned over "evidence" of a new coup to government-linked NGOs, and promptly got a bullet through his head on the streets of Manila. Meanwhile, the People's Consultative Assembly (PCA), the primary non-governmental organization (NGO) in the overthrow of President Estrada, broke from the Macapagal-Arroyo government, and called for a new "people's power" movement if she refused to resign. The head of the PCA is one Salvador Enriquez, a Ramos man who ran the budget during his Presidency!

Then, in rapid (and predictable) order, Cardinal Sin threw in his hat, on Jan. 9, saying that "the people are tired," while Gen. Fortunato Abat, the head of a retired military association connected to Ramos, and the first military man to publicly call for the military to withdraw support from Estrada last year, piped in on Jan. 10, that the President was not interested in the people, and that "the people are wiser now."

Later that day, Macapagal-Arroyo blinked, announcing the formation of the Ramos "Council of State," and praising his knowledge and experience.

Ramos' attempt at Round Three was part-bluff, since it is unlikely that the "warm bodies" would have been available for the media-show required to justify a "people's power" coup. The population is sorely disappointed that the economy continues to decay under Macapagal-Arroyo's leadership, but few would rally to a Ramos standard any longer.

However, Macapagal-Arroyo is now essentially wedded to Ramos' policies, including IMF-dictated austerity, the sell-off of the nation's industries and banks to foreign speculators, and the introduction of the U.S. military. She will thus find it extremely difficult to reverse the damage. Ramos and his U.S. backers are unlikely to be satisfied with the position of "adviser" for long.

Ramos is clearly behind the decision to deploy U.S. troops. Is he also ready to consider the return of U.S. bases, or allow a new base to be set up elsewhere, such as General Santos City in Mindanao, where the United States recently built a \$2 billion state-of-the-art airport and port facility? Many in the American war faction have called for exactly that.

As with the demise of the state of Argentina, and others now on the chopping block, national leaders must act to assert sovereignty in the onrushing global economic breakdown, or face their nations' downfall.

## Colombia: 'Peace' With Terrorists Disintegrates

by Gretchen Small

When President Andrés Pastrana went on national radio and television Jan. 9 to announce to the Colombian nation that peace negotiations with the largest narco-terrorist force in the Western Hemisphere, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), had failed, a new political-military geometry opened in the Western Hemisphere. The President gave the FARC 48 hours to pull its forces out of the vast, Switzerland-sized demilitarized enclave which, with U.S. State Department encouragement, his government had handed over to FARC control over three years before.

It was a shift in U.S. policy which tipped the scales in Colombia, U.S. Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche wrote on Jan. 12. "The significance of the virtual break between President Pastrana and the FARC, is that this represents a dramatic shift in U.S. policy, away from the pro-drug-legalization policy, toward a traditional anti-drug policy. It is, otherwise, a crucial step toward implementing a combat against the spread of international terrorism, whose funding relies chiefly on proceeds of drug and weapons trafficking. The point has been reached, that either those two logistical features of terrorist forms of irregular warfare are virtually ended, or there is no chance of civilized life continuing on this planet for the foreseeable future."

### The Grasso Factor

As indicated by LaRouche, the ramifications of the collapse of the peace with narco-terrorism in Colombia extend far beyond even the Andean region, where the legalization policy had become the dominant reality. Immediately affected, too, are the City of London and Wall Street, whose New York Stock Exchange chairman Richard Grasso has staked part of *his* political capital on his chummy relationship with the FARC's *Comandante* Raúl Reyes.

The response within Colombia was electric. The government would finally reassert its authority over the entirety of the national territory, and end the nightmare of a surreal "peace process" under which an unending stream of foreign dignitaries and top Wall Street financial honchos had flown in to negotiate with FARC commanders in their enclave, even as the FARC kidnapped children and adults across the country, wiped out whole towns in their assaults, shut down highways, blew up electricity installations and oil pipelines—and of course, ran massive amounts of drugs into the U.S., at will.