

# **Philippines: Reading the Aquino III Regime. No saviour from on high delivers**

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**After two years, the PNoy government has shown all its worth, the people should prepare themselves for the worst and strengthen their ranks...**

The government of President Benigno Simeon Cojuangco Aquino III (PNoy) has yet to reach its second year in office but it has already exposed itself as protector of the interests of the elite few – a very opposite of its election promises.

The non-stop increase of the prices of oil and basic goods which affect worst not only the more than 50% of the population but also even those who belong to the middle class and the stubborn refusal of PNoy to give in to the demand of these people to implement a short term much more a long term solution. Directly contradicting itself in whose interest it is really serving, (*“kayo po ang boss ko”* or you are my boss. ...and I will always listen to you).

The current energy crisis in Mindanao best exemplifies such situation. The shortage of electricity supplies in this southern part of the country- a host of hydroelectric and geothermal plants has been raised to the Secretary of Energy (Sec Jose Rene Almendras, a member of the inner circle of PNoy) since 2010 but no serious action has been taken except that the remaining government owned energy infrastructures and resources should be privatized to favored investors. Such inaction almost got out of control when daily and unregulated brownouts occurred in the island affecting the whole population or at least those who cannot afford to buy generators. Even the owners of business establishments have been severely affected losing millions of pesos. Local government officials had been at the receiving ends of these complaints and some even made studies of the energy shortages. The governor of North Cotabato, the host of Mt Apo Geothermal plant which produces 100 megawatts daily and the province maximum need is only 25 megawatts a day and yet the province is one of the provinces in the island which is worst hit by the energy shortages (brownouts of 4 to 6 hours a day). It should be recalled that this Geothermal plant is already privatized and owned by the Lopez family (owner of MERALCO and the ABS-CBN). The worsening situation made the governor conclude that the energy crisis is artificially created to justify to the consumers the collection of higher cost of electricity by the greedy investors. Sec Almendras has encouraged selected investors to build Independent Power Plants (Barges) to supply the island with the “needed” electricity but at much higher costs. A few elite like the Alcantara’s and the Aboitez are reaping enormous profits out of the peoples’ miseries. They own the power barges which the government sold to them very cheap and the people will pay higher cost for these sources. It is not circumstantial that Sec Almendras had once worked in the Aboitez family corporation. He was its treasurer.

The greediness of these investors has been moderated (at least for a while) when such scheme boomeranged to PNoy. A double digit decreased in his popularity rating by the latest social survey made his administration backtracked a little. The highest number of these surveyed which voted against PNoy are from the poorest of the poor. A not so very good sign of the times for a popular President voted by the people on the platform of pro-people and anti-corruption. The recently

concluded Mindanao Energy Summit where all stakeholders should have participated together with the President and his men and women but turned into a “summon” of the President. He did not even listen to the ideas and proposals of peoples in Mindanao on short and long term solutions of the energy problem. He had already decided and stubbornly declared that the people in Mindanao have to bite a bullet – which means paying a higher price of energy or be contented with the continuous long brownouts and power interruptions. This is really insulting to the stakeholders as to why they had to attend the summit only to be told and treated like non-thinkers. But it is typical PNoy’s attitude. Again, he has to eat his own words and promise that he has to listen to the people for they are his bosses

Another scheme has been exposed which is becoming a trademark of PNoy administration. That is to short cut democratic processes to solve a problem. The PNoy administration or at least its allies has proposed that PNoy declare a State of Emergency situation in Mindanao so as to have emergency power to solve the energy crisis in the island. He did not even need to formally declare a State of Emergency, he just did it through the “Summit.” He just said what the elite investors would want him to do at the expense of the people. It should be recalled that democratic processes have been shortcutted in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) which virtually makes PNoy a dictator appointing Officer in Charge in the Region who in turn also appointed selected friends to almost all positions in ARMM. And the reason for this is to clean the voter’s list in the Region and solve the graft and corruption problems. As expected, nothing much has happened in all areas and not a thing has been touched to structurally and substantially solve and act upon the reason for depriving the people in ARMM their right to freely elect the people who can best represent their interests.

The dismal economic performance of the country has given another picture of PNoy administration of exclusive framework of development. It should be cleared by now to PNoy and his allies that focusing to anti-graft and corruption alone would not solve the intensifying poverty of the majority of the population. Mobilizing all the government resources to punish and jail the former President Gloria M. Arroyo thru the impeachment and throwing out Chief Justice Renato Corona from the Supreme Court will not bring three meals a day for the families of more than 50% of the population. And worst, giving amount of money to these poor families as dole outs a.k.a. Conditional Cash Transfer will just be a sure incentive for passivity and more miseries for these people and which bears to nothing more but a true perpetuation of structural impoverishment of the people.

But again all these efforts are focus to impeach and remove CJ Renato Corona to get GMA is manifesting the same trademark of PNoy and his allies that anybody who dares come his way and distract his focus will have his Presidential anger even if this can affect the constitutional check and balances in the different branches of government.

PNoy and his administration does not want to learn the virtue of patience in the country’s governance. He wants the people to think and do things like him. He is always comfortable within the zone of his classmates, friends and gunmates. A good example is Abad (Secretary Florencio “Butch” Abad) family where one is in charge of the Budget Management of the government, one is in charge of the Presidential Management Staff, another is second in command with the Government’s Department of Finance and the other one is Chair of the Finance Committee and Chairperson of Energy Committee in the House of Representatives. The financial affairs of the country can already be discussed in a family dinner and when PNoy is invited then decision on such area can already be reached that easy.

This kind of thinking and mentality will always lead to self destruction because the basic core values of honesty and truthfulness in government performance can always be hidden for they know how to please PNoy and they will always say and do things on this regard to please PNoy even if this

displeases the nation and the people.

But worst still is that when such mentality or framework is applied to understand and build solution to the country's insurgency situation. Knowing or even saying that the best way to address the insurgency situation is to address the root causes of such phenomenon which are poverty, inequality and sovereignty is never enough. But doing concrete steps to address the root causes with all sincerity and transparency with the people and other stakeholders can be the best move towards the Straight Path to peace.

For almost two years now, the PNoy administration have clearly manifested and its allies the program and attitude towards the different revolutionary organizations in the country which is divisive and very alarming.

This situation is very pronounced in the case of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the ongoing peace talks with the PNoy government. After so much hope created by the protocol breaking event in Tokyo much less has been done ever since. Basically it is because PNoy and his allies have already decided that solution to the Bangsamoro struggle led by the MILF will be within and only within the Constitutional framework without considering that the MILF in essence has been operating outside the Constitution of the Philippines. An inclusive framework has never been in the mind of PNoy and his peace advisers. For them they can always declare the slogan of "all out justice" if and when the MILF cries foul and will do something in protest. In fact one cannot see much of a difference between former ERAP Estrada's basis for the declaration of "all out war" against the MILF and the "all out justice" of PNoy and its allies. Not a few people will therefore think that peace talks are very good political and diplomatic camouflage for the preparation of the opposite - WAR. And the only constant and common denominator is the victim - the People.

The steady purchase of the military hardware by PNoy administration like Naval ships and the arrival of F16 Jets Squadron in the guise of territorial defense in the case of Spratly but it can also be for those who threaten the territorial integrity of the Republic even in the form of a Sub-State.

The massive recruitment and military trainings of the MILF combatants in the different areas in and outside ARMM territories and the constant filling in of its weapons armory are clear signs that the time for peace talks are becoming thing of the past.

The peace talks between PNoy administration and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) is not only discouraging but fast deteriorating. Again the main stumbling block is their mutual exclusivity in their frameworks. Choosing and putting performance of those in charge in the talks because they know the root causes of the national and democratic struggle led by the CPP or even knowing the people who are in the other side will not be an assurance of achieving substantial gain for peace. War against poverty and inequality should be genuine and revolutionary (out of the box frame) it should not be directed against the insurgents (counter insurgency operations). Rather, it should be geared directly towards the upliftment of economic, political and cultural well beings of the people which can only be done with and by the people themselves. The virtues of patience and determination are needed and can even be decisive in this kind of struggle.

The more peace is seen as the actual signing of an agreement between the contending parties the less it can become genuine and sustainable. The building and gains of peace should be manifested in the process of winning the battles against poverty and making a step towards achieving substantial victory against social inequality in the country. And these developments can best be seen in the qualitative changes in the peoples' lives.

The reward and fruits of peace here is more on the journey rather than its nominal end and the so-

called signing of an agreement. Peoples' empowerment is strengthened in the process of improving peoples' welfare and well being and which should be the focus and end view of both negotiating panels and both their principals.

Both PNoy administration and the CPP leadership do not show positive signs towards achieving genuine and substantial peace. Both of them show that peace is not achieved if one leaves its framework and agrees with the other framework. They both cannot see that the people's framework based in their interest and the process they achieve them are the genuine and sustainable framework for achieving peace in the country. They are both blinded in seeing the small gains and victories in the community-based and people centered journeying for peace because they are being concerned in outmaneuvering each other. With both of them talking peace, the people should rather prepare for the outbreak of a war by increasing their gains and victory and choose and build their own government.

It has been almost two years since PNoy has been elected by majority of the people but he has already manifested a clear bias for the few elite in the country and willing to serve the interests of the global capital. Just like his mother the former President Corazon C. Aquino, who refused to use her vast power vested on her by the people who ousted the dictator Marcos for the peoples' interests. She stubbornly honored the debts albeit stealing incurred by Marcos and his cronies to make the people pay. The development of the country is turning full circle with PNoy but the people have shown manifestations that they are refusing to accept this kind of subtle dictatorship of the so-called popular President. They are now in the process of cutting off this kind of social contract. But they have to make their move fast. And indeed the revolutionary organizations have the central role to play in leading the path towards revolutionary righteousness with the people.

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