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Gloria's End Game

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., Dec. 29 (PinoyGlobal) - Like in a game of chess, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is now playing the end game of her nine years of tumultuous -- and scandalous -- presidency. Indeed, her adroit chessmanship in the art of Machiavellian politics has earned her the scornful enmity of the people. Her recent net satisfaction rating of -38 is the lowest since 1986 in the waning days of the Marcos dictatorship.

With six months left in her presidency, how is she going to play the end game? Is she going to end it with the hallmark of magnanimous statesmanship or is she going to clear the board and move in for the kill?

Run for Congress

When Gloria filed her certificate of candidacy last November 30 for Pampanga's Second Congressional District, many people were bewildered why she would want to remain in the political arena after serving almost a decade in the highest post of the land? After filing, she said: "I have been mulling of different ways to stay involved. Tiningnan ko ang pagbalik sa pagturo (I looked at possibly going back to teaching)... After much contemplation, I realized I am not ready to step down completely from public service. Gayang alam ninyo, hiniling rin ako ng mga mamayan ng aking tahananang distrito sa Pampanga na manatili sa buhay publiko (As you all know, the constituents of my home district in Pampanga asked me to remain in public life). After much soul-searching, I have decided to respond affirmatively to their call. To that end, I will file my candidacy for Congress

in order to serve the hardworking people of my home province." Poignant, indeed.

However, the question is: Did the people of Pampanga really clamor for her to run for Congress? Or were they primed by "power of suggestion" manifested in Gloria's 50 campaign-like visits to her home district in the past 11 months? I tend to believe that Gloria orchestrated her province mates' outpouring of support for her to run for Congress.

What's strange though is that her son, Mikey, is currently serving as congressman of her home district and is still eligible to run for one more term before being termed out of office. But why did a promising young politician give way to his mother? Mikey could have told Gloria, "Mom, instead of serving the constituents of the second district, you can best serve the entire nation and all the people in a statesmanlike fashion like what your predecessors, Fidel V. Ramos and the late Cory Aquino, have done. You could have become the 'grand lady' of the Philippines."

But Mikey didn't have the heart -- or courage -- to tell his mother that. Gloria was hell-bent on running for Congress even at the expense of her own son; thus, denying her son the opportunity to remain in the House of Representatives, a stepping stone to higher office. She was determined to cling to power... at all cost. And to what end?

The end justifies the means

There are several theories why Gloria is running for Con-

gress. The most popular theory is that she wants to amend the constitution to change the government to a parliamentary system. Recently, she admitted to that. It is presumed that once elected, she would vie for the Speakership of the House of Representatives, which would seem to be a piece of cake since her party, Lakas-Kampi-CMD, would likely be in control of the House next year.

But that is only one factor in the equation. For the whole equation to work, the newly elected president next year, whoever that might be, must be in sync with Gloria's plan to amend the constitution. It is not surprising then that Gilberto Teodoro, her party's presidential candidate, is openly in favor of Charter change. If Teodoro wins the presidency, then Gloria's plan will be in play. And if everything works out as planned, she would become the country's Prime Minister -- with an indeterminate term of office.

What if?

But what if Teodoro lost the election? That would totally wreck Gloria's plan. As a consequence, her House allies would desert her -- nobody wants to associate with a loser -- and start kowtowing to the new president who holds the key to the disbursement of their pork barrel allocations. Ironically, it's the control of the pork barrel that gave Gloria the "power of patronage" which she cunningly used to keep the congressmen in line and acquiesce to her demands.

This is a scenario that would certainly scare Gloria to wit's end. And with Teodoro's approval ratings hovering in single digit, Gloria needs a contingency plan that she could invoke at any time should the prospect of Teodoro losing the election becomes crystal clear. And the key component of that contingency plan is the military whose top brass is

seemingly loyal to her.

Militarization of the election

In the aftermath of the Maguindanao massacre, Defense Secretary Norberto Gonzales is in the process of arranging with the Commission on Elections (Comelec) a plan to deputize the military and put it's personnel at the "full disposal" of Comelec. The overt objective of the plan was to "curb private armies and prevent a repeat of the Maguindanao massacre." But what would prevent elements of the military from covertly doing -- or supplementing -- the work of the private armies of warlords allied with Gloria? Weren't elements of the military used in the massive election cheating in Mindanao in 2004 and 2007?

Automated election system to go haywire

With the Smartmatic-TIM automated election system way behind schedule in delivery, testing, and training of the tens of thousands of election personnel, the likelihood of an "election failure" is not remote. And if that happened, Comelec could then recommend to Gloria to declare the election of national officers as "inconclusive" and therefore null and void. In that event, no president, vice president, and senators would be proclaimed to take office. Then what?

End game

Gloria would then put in place a "Transition Council" -- a disguised civilian-military junta -- with Gloria as its head. It was the brainchild of Defense Secretary Gonzales during his stint as Gloria's National Security Adviser. Coincidence?

In politics nothing happens by coincidence.