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The Evil Empire Strikes Again

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., May 05 (PinoyGlobal) - Sun Tzu, the ancient master of the “Art of War,” said 2,500 years ago: “When torrential water tosses boulders, it is because of its momentum. When the strike of a hawk breaks the body of its prey, it is because of timing.” With that in mind, what the Evil Empire did in the past few weeks couldn’t have been more timely.

First, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo consolidated her political power by taking over as interim president of her political parties, KAMPI and LAKAS. Second, her allies in the House have accelerated the Charter change (Cha-cha) train to full speed. Third, Rodolfo Noel “Jun” Lozada, Jr. was arrested for alleged “perjury.” And fourth, AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Alexander Yano stepped down 44 days before his scheduled mandatory retirement. Indeed, with just a year to the 2010 presidential elections, Gloria has got all her ducks in line and all the bells and whistles in place that she would need in the event she decides to stay in power beyond 2010.

On April 13, 2009, LAKAS President and Speaker Prospero Nograles, and KAMPI President and Congressman Luis Villafuerte simultaneously resigned as leaders of their respective parties to give Gloria a “direct hand” in merging the two parties into a powerful political machine.

The House has a small window of opportunity to pass a resolution to convene Congress as a Constituent Assembly (Con-Ass) for the purpose of amending the constitution. However, if the House fails to pass the resolution by the end of the regular session on June 5, 2009, Cha-cha will be as good as dead. But with the four Arroyos --

First Sons Juan Miguel and Diosdado, and the First Gentleman’s siblings Ignacio and Lourdes -- in the House acting as Gloria’s “whips” to keep their party members in line, it is highly probable that Gloria would get it any which way she wants.

The question is: What if Cha-cha died in the House? Many people believe that in such an event, Gloria would go for “Plan B” -- martial law. She would then need the military to get behind her just like it did when she took over the presidency in 2001 when Erap Estrada was forced to resign amidst the EDSA II “people power revolution.” But this time around, her main concern would be how to prevent another “people power” should she decide to stay in power beyond 2010.

Had Gen. Alexander Yano remained in his Chief of Staff post until he reached his mandatory retirement age on June 13, 2009, Gloria would have lost the momentum and timing she needed to put her “Plan B” in motion. Many people believe that the four remaining weeks of the regular session of Congress would be crucial should Gloria and her House allies make a final push for Cha-cha. I am pretty sure that if that came to pass, Gloria would need an AFP Chief who would support her up to the hilt. And Yano was not the man to do that.

It did not come as a surprise then when Yano stepped down from his post last May 1. Whether he voluntarily stepped down or not would be speculative at this point. However, as a face-saving gesture, Yano was appointed as ambassador to Brunei.

In his place, Gloria appointed Gen. Victor Ibrado

who was the Chief of the 80,000-strong Philippine Army. And taking over the Army Chief post was Lt. Gen. Delfin Bangit, the South Luzon commander, who is perceived as an Arroyo loyalist and her “Man Friday.” Bangit used to be the head of the Presidential Security Group, a position which requires absolute loyalty to the President.

But here is the stinger: Ibrado would reach his mandatory retirement on March 10, 2010. And guess who would most likely be his replacement? Bangit. The timing would be perfect because Bangit’s promotion to Chief of Staff would happen before March 25, 2010 when the 45-day ban on appointments to new positions or promotions was to take effect. And he would be the perfect man to quell any public disturbances protesting the push for Cha-cha.

As to Lozada’s arrest, why? He’s already been “neutralized” since the NBN-ZTE Senate investigation collapsed. In my opinion, Lozada was arrested for any or all of the following reasons: (1) he would be the dog that Gloria would wag to distract the people as she maneuvers for Cha-cha; (2) he would be prevented from campaigning for the opposition candidates; and (3) he would also be prevented from running for Senator or any other elective office.

But there could be a Machiavellian twist to all these. Cha-cha could be the ultimate “wag the dog” scheme to distract the public from her real objectives which are: (1) bankroll her hand-picked candidate for President; (2) make sure that her KAMPI-LAKAS congressional candidates would win overwhelmingly; (3) she would run for Congress herself; (4) she’ll lead the move in the new Congress to change the form of government to parliamentary system; and

(5) the newly elected President whom she bankrolled would appoint her as Prime Minister of the new Parliament. The elected President would then become the ceremonial head of state and Prime Minister Gloria Macapagal Arroyo would reign.

This scheme worked a few years ago in Russia when then President Vladimir Putin ran for Member of Parliament. His protégé, Dmitry Medvedev, ran for President. After both of them won in the elections, Medvedev appointed Putin as Prime Minister.

I would not be surprised at all if Gloria would hand-pick Vice President Noli de Castro as her party’s candidate for President. De Castro is the perfect candidate: he is popular and non-controversial, he has no money, he doesn’t have a political base, and he is perceived as a weak leader. He wouldn’t mind becoming a ceremonial President, after all that’s what he was accustomed to when he was a ceremonial Vice President under Gloria.

The only thing that could stop Gloria would be a strong and united opposition. I wouldn’t be surprised if Gloria would secretly bankroll another candidate to weaken the opposition. And this brings to mind Erap Estrada’s plan of running for President, which reminds me of what happened in the 1992 presidential elections. When Imelda Marcos ran for President, it weakened the candidacy of Danding Cojuangco. But Imelda didn’t have any money then because all her assets were sequestered by the government. I wonder who bankrolled her candidacy? It’s funny but history has a way of repeating itself.