
Interview: Francisco S. Tatad



Philippines Needs Strong and Forward-Looking Leadership

Senator Francisco “Kit” Tatad is one of the senior statesmen of the Republic of the Philippines. Senator Tatad was Majority Leader to five Senate Presidents, and also served as a Cabinet Minister (1969-80) and Senator (1992-2001). He is the author of several books on political affairs. The most recent book, referenced below, is A Nation on Fire—The Unmaking of Joseph Ejercito Estrada and the Remaking of Democracy in the Philippines (Manila: Icon Press, April 2002). This interview was conducted by Michael Billington on Feb. 27.

EIR: Senator Tatad, you have served, until recently, as either a public servant or an elected official in the Philippines for, I think, three to four decades, and are considered by many people to be the senior parliamentarian of the nation. Lyndon LaRouche, when asked about the Philippines’ situation, has often stated that he considers the most severe problem facing the Philippines to be the lack of leadership since the time of the overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos by extra-legal means in 1986. What is your view of the period since that time, a general overview of the developments in the Philippines since Edsa 1 [the name given to the overthrow of President Marcos, after the plaza where the demonstrations against him were centered]?

Tatad: We have, I believe, moved from one hump to another without really overcoming our major problems. The leadership vacuum began after Marcos and continues to this day. In fact, on the last anniversary of Edsa 1, Feb. 25, 1986—that was the overthrow of Marcos—the major players still managed to assemble on Edsa, but there was hardly a crowd. There were more demonstrators, or potential demonstrators [against the Edsa proponents], who were being barred from going into Edsa by the police in various parts of Metro Manila. At the center of the supposed celebration, there was no crowd, and obviously Ramos and Cory [former Presidents Fidel Ramos and Corazon Aquino] were really, really very disappointed. The headline of the leading paper in Manila, *The Inquirer*, the next day screamed, “Where Are the People?”

... I think it is generally realized that this country needs a stronger leadership, and it is not there. I would probably venture to say that if an honest-to-goodness survey were run anywhere in the country today about Marcos, he would win the votes. He would be voted as probably the man we need

today. This is probably one reason why a guy like Sen. [Panfilo] Lacson, whose most important credential is that he was once chief of the Philippines National Police—and under his watch he appeared to have cleaned up parts of Manila, reduced the kidnapping incidents, and shaken up the police organization—that is probably the only reason why he is talked about by some people as the logical man to look at. Of course, elections are still far away, and too early to talk of candidates or aspirants. But this probably explains the inclination to identify certain parties even at this stage.

There are sectors in the country today, who believe that this system is simply exhausted, that it will no longer work, that elections are no longer the answer; that perhaps something else is needed, something quite drastic—which nobody needs to spell out. Then the country will move forward.

In any case, one final sentence: There is total agreement that this country needs to be led, and there is no sign on the horizon of emerging strong leadership.

EIR: On the global crisis, LaRouche has argued that the utopian faction—the war faction within the Bush Administration and in the Congress, which really crosses party lines—is intent on a war in the Middle East primarily to disrupt Eurasian unity, as in the old “divide and conquer” imperial policies; and that the drive for a military presence in the Philippines is, likewise, a geopolitical policy that is aimed more at creating a staging ground for future military operations in Asia generally, and, in particular, encircling China.

I would ask you to comment on the Iraq situation, and then, on the United States military plans in the Philippines that have become a crisis over these last weeks.

Tatad: I would like first to refer to the situation in the Philippines: how our people, the government, the media, and everybody else, are responding to these issues. First of all, there is very limited discussion in depth of these issues. The focus of the country remains mainly parochial and insular, and from time to time, the headlines scream about Iraq, but there is really very little effort to organize the data or the analysis. Even in the Senate, which traditionally concerned itself with foreign policy issues, we are not hearing much.

In fact, last week, the only relevant thing people heard from there was something I said when I went over there at the invitation of the Senate press. I talked about the Mindanao

war, then Senator Aquilino Pimentel followed up. Today, even as we speak, some groups are getting organized, under the leadership of Vice President Teofisto Guingona, to stage an anti-war rally at Manila's Rizal Park. It is expected to be quite big.

I share the concern of many who do not understand until now why the United States seems so intent on waging a unilateral strike on Iraq, given the fact that, first of all, the evidence—the smoking gun, so called—is not there; the inspections are still going on; some 30 million people, from Tasmania to Iceland, came out after the second Blix report to the Security Council, to voice their protest. I've really never understood the rush, the push to war.

When I was in Washington last October, I had a meeting with some friends, who, I believe, have some direct access to the White House, and I raised the question: What happens if and when the two other countries mentioned by President Bush in his "axis of evil" speech—namely North Korea and Iran—should simultaneously initiate their own actions against the United States? After all, they have been named as "enemies," they are on the checklist, and they could presume they would be next. The day after that, I read in the American media, that the North Koreans had, in fact, admitted that they were in possession of nuclear weapons. Until now that story has not changed. In fact, it has been confirmed and reconfirmed, several times. But the approach taken by the United States on North Korea has been markedly different from the approach taken on Iraq. Diplomacy for North Korea, which has proclaimed possession, but war against Iraq, which protests its innocence.

EIR: [Malaysian Prime Minister] Dr. Mahathir, at the Non-Aligned Movement meeting, said that shows clearly that this is a war on Islam.

Tatad: Yes, it provokes that kind of conclusion on the part of some people. I do not have enough data to share the conclusion, but even with this limited premise, one is forced not to entirely discount it. And then, when you read all of the statements coming from the supporters of a unilateral strike, and statements by United States officials, Australian politicians, and others, and even the usually sober intellectuals writing in the American press—when you read what they write, you notice the passion and the readiness to vilify those who take a different view. If you are an American taking a different position, you are branded as a traitor; if you are not an American, but a European or somebody else, you are instantly ridiculed and abused. The quality of political-intellectual exchange in the United States has suffered a lot, simply because they are determined to wage war. But has it improved the moral position of the United States? I wonder.

We have to look at what happened to Afghanistan. All of this was triggered by 9/11, and, of course, the world understands why the Bush Administration is so determined to fight terrorism, as we all are. I don't believe there is any govern-

ment in the world today, that is not prepared to fight terrorism with everything they've got. But first, the decision to go after al-Qaeda and the Taliban was billed as a success up to a point, but the main target, Osama bin Laden, is nowhere accounted for—in fact, the tapes that have come up show that he is very much alive and kicking. In the meantime, Afghanistan has fallen into different hands, and now it's easier to build all those pipelines through Central Asia. So, when you look at Iraq and the history of United States involvement there, you can't help but raise the same questions—are they after Saddam Hussein simply because he is evil, or are those people right in saying that oil is the more important reason after all? That is a most disturbing issue to people so far away from the scene.

United States Policy Toward the Philippines

Now, probably, we should look at the American decision to participate in eliminating the kidnap-for-ransom gang called Abu Sayyaf in Sulu, southern Philippines.

Last year there was a military exercise, *Balikatan*, on Basilan island. Some United States troops were involved, and the same Abu Sayyaf was the target. At the time the exercises began, the international media, confirmed by Philippine authorities, were talking of 70-80 Abu Sayyaf bandits. They poured in thousands of troops, and claimed to have finished off the leader of this gang. Now they are back in Sulu, and they are talking of 400-500 Abu Sayyaf bandits. Are we now being told that after one exercise, where hundreds were killed, many more wounded, and infinitely more displaced, the Abu Sayyaf has multiplied in number?

Assuming that to be correct, what is the constitutional and legal basis for the United States combat presence? Very clearly the Pentagon is interested in validating its doctrine that the United States has the capability to project power simultaneously on two or three fronts. If Iraq blows up, that would constitute a major offensive, and Sulu, the smaller scale campaign. But the Constitution of the Philippines does not allow the entry of United States forces to fight our own internal enemies. The Philippine-United States Mutual Defense Treaty, which was signed in 1951, does not allow it either, and the 1998 Visiting Forces Agreement, of which I was one of the principal sponsors in the Senate Resolution of Concurrence, does not authorize anything of this sort at all. In fact, the Visiting Forces Agreement is simply an administrative agreement that defines the legal regime during the visit of United States troops in the Philippines. The visit itself is authorized by a liberal construction of the Mutual Defense Treaty.

So, we have a problem here. Even those who support the United States in almost everything, even the most devoted friends of the United States in the Philippines, have some problems. Looking at what is happening in the South, they can not simply accept it, knowing that it violates the Constitution. It violates our treaty arrangements, and it may not even

be necessary after all.

Now since we do have an excellent relationship, the United States could probably just help equip our Armed Forces so that they could deal more effectively with the problem themselves.

Now the world is being told that our troops are being trained by the Americans. Let us not forget that our soldiers are more experienced in guerrilla warfare than their American counterparts. It was in Sulu, remember, that, under General Pershing, the Americans invented the 45-caliber pistol against the unstoppable Moro fighters. I don't believe that the situation has changed much. We have the most battle-tested warriors in the South. In peacetime they are fighting each other, one family against another, but any time there is an opportunity, they unite to fight the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In this case, they will unite to fight American forces, if the mandate does not change.

So this is a serious problem that must be addressed. It is made much more serious by the fact that there has been no transparency in the whole arrangement. The decisions have just been presented to us as a *fait accompli*. The suspicion is that President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has entered into a secret agreement with President Bush, but more and more people are beginning to think that probably Gen. [Angelo] Reyes, the Secretary of National Defense, is the one who has entered into such arrangements with [United States Secretary of Defense] Donald Rumsfeld, with or without the authority of the President of the Philippines.

In fact, the latest information coming out of Washington seems to support the view that Secretary Reyes is developing his own political agenda on the basis of his contacts with the Pentagon. The formation of the Defense Policy Board last August provokes certain serious questions. If you recall in the time of President Quirino, when the Philippines government was fighting the Huks [in the 1950s], the United States government at the time indicated to Quirino that he could get more military aid if he named Ramon Magsaysay of Zambales, Secretary of National Defense. Quirino obliged. He replaced Defense Secretary Ruperto Kangleon, put Magsaysay in, and then—boom!—that's the end of Quirino. He was immediately subjected to intense black propaganda, while Magsaysay was being built up in the local and the United States press. Under the direction of the famous CIA guy, Edward Lansdale, Magsaysay became the next President.

Now, some people think the same recipe could work again. But this does not describe what the United States might have in store for the country, especially in Mindanao.

EIR: What do you think should be done, or could solve, the problem with the Moros?

Tatad: It would be useful if a sector of the American public, both in the media and in government, were to take notice of the situation and express their views on it. The trouble is that even in the Philippines, those who express a contrary view

are isolated, because the mainstream media are, basically, acting as mouthpieces of the Administration, and are so easily impressed by American troops kissing babies in the Southern Philippines.

EIR: There have been, repeatedly, proposals made for major infrastructure-development projects in the South, as the necessary prerequisite for really dealing with the social problems there. Why do you think that's always been stalled?

Tatad: I'm afraid I do not have enough data on the projects; but the usual complaint in Manila, of people in government, and even outside government, is that because of the extent of corruption—and this is not only in the South, this is all over the country—many projects are not implemented as planned. Sometimes the money just disappears. All the documentation is usually finished, and for all intents and purposes, the projects should have been completed. But when you look at the ground, they are not there. So, that is one problem. It is not so easy for government auditors to insist on politicians in the troubled areas liquidating their cash advances. Many political warlords tend to regard the public funds as something that could be utilized for private purposes. That is a major problem.

But in addition, we don't have the type of major projects we are seeing or hearing about in mainland Southeast Asia, or in other parts of Asia. For instance, when you look at Thailand, you're impressed with what you are seeing there. They are talking of mega-projects. You have all those road and rail projects aimed at linking vast parts of Asia through Thailand. We're hearing of canal construction that would link the Andaman Sea to the Gulf of Thailand. These are great ideas that, somehow, they are able to implement, but we don't have these things in this country, and least of all in the South. But these are some of the things that we need.

It's not only Southeast Asia, but China. And India's involved. Russia is involved. I think the idea of the "strategic triangle" should become much more alive in the Philippines. It should spill over. Of course, we are an archipelago; we are not connected, and we will not benefit from a trans-Asian railway system.

EIR: Let me ask now on the economics side. *EIR* recently wrote an article titled, "Philippines Confronts 'Argentine' Crisis" [Dec. 13, 2002], showing that the International Monetary Fund and the international financial institutions, which are facing a massive, global financial crisis in their own advanced-sector banking system, have decided to simply cut off some of the most indebted countries, which, of course, has already happened in Africa, and is now happening in Argentina, and could very well happen to the Philippines.

What is your sense of the financial crisis?

Tatad: That's our great fear. During the "Asian Flu" [of 1997], we took pride in saying that we were the least affected. The flu started in Thailand. Now Thailand is fully recov-

ered—not only fully recovered, but leading the region, not only in terms of actual recovery, but in terms of great ideas. The best ideas on how to speed up recovery in the region seem to be coming from Thailand, led by the very impressive new Prime Minister, Thaksin.

Let us start with the American dollar. The dollar is declining vis-à-vis all major currencies, probably a reflection of what is happening to the international monetary and financial system, which is dominated by the American dollar. But the Philippines' currency is deteriorating against the United States dollar! It is a very bad situation, very ironic, saddening, truly saddening. But what can we do?

We're not producing anything that sells outside the country any more. The old investors have relocated. There are no new entrants. The debt has grown faster than GDP, and all the indicators are simply not looking good. So, there is a general fear that we could be the next Argentina. And what do we do? We talk about politics every day. We talk about who is going to be the next President in 2004, etc. We are not talking about how to change the system at all. There is a need for us to relate to our stronger neighbors and learn from them, and together, address the larger issues, so that we can deal with the smaller issues within our national boundaries with some ease.

I don't see any economic team looking at the global picture at all, and I think that is a fundamental defect. Thailand has come so far from 1997, simply because it had the right ideas. Of course, the United States succeeded in crushing the idea of an Asian Monetary Fund, but it is from Thailand that we first heard the idea of an Asian bond market. Now those are great ideas, which could be useful in helping the countries solve individual economic problems. But we don't seem to connect at all. We just look at our day-to-day survival. Sometimes it is not even real survival; it is simply virtual survival. So long as we look good in the media, we say we are all right.

EIR: Butch Valdes, the leader of the LaRouche Society in the Philippines, whom you know well, has called on the Philippines to endorse LaRouche's proposal for a New Bretton Woods System, to return to a fixed-exchange-rate policy—

Tatad: Yes, Butch presented this statement in our Citizens' Caucus. I happen to be the convenor of a group called the Citizens' Caucus, and we are trying to formulate what we call a "Citizens' Agenda." Since we are not getting anything from anybody, we decided we the citizens should worry about the salvation of the country. In one session, Butch presented a paper, and I think we are all in agreement; but it is too big an idea for our local officials.

Probably I should arrange a forum for Mr. LaRouche himself, where these officials could have a candid and lively exchange with him, so that his views, which are becoming increasingly valid, could provide them some kind of guidance.

EIR: Let me switch from there to ask a couple of questions on the political situation internally. In your book on the 2001



President Ferdinand Marcos, whose overthrow in a U.S.-directed coup in 1986 was portrayed as a "people's power" revolution. The nation has been looted by the International Monetary Fund ever since.

so-called "People's Power" coup against President Joseph Estrada, you did not particularly defend Estrada, but you insisted that the manipulation of public opinion and the breach of the Constitution in replacing him had institutionalized a lawless means of overthrowing elected officials. What do you think is the legacy of that today, after two years?

Tatad: Well, when I sat on the impeachment court as a judge, I thought my only duty was to do what was right. I voted along with ten other Senators not to open an envelope that, to us, appeared irrelevant and immaterial at the time. We were eventually proven right, when the envelope was finally opened. But that was the thing that triggered the walk-out of the prosecution, and took the case to the streets, and provided the excuse to get rid of Estrada. We were savaged in the media, and everywhere else, for doing what was right. For a while, I thought I would not be able to recover from that.

So I went away, wrote the book, and now, two years later, I see the same people, who were really intently agitated about the position that I took, and there seems to be some general agreement that they had made a very serious mistake. They had destroyed due process.

You are correct: I did not defend Estrada. It was not my duty to do so, and I was not in a position to do so. That would have been wrong, because I sat there as a judge, and my duty was to defend and preserve the constitutional process. Among

law professors and lawyers, it is now generally conceded that the Supreme Court justices not only erred, but rather violated the Constitution; that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo remains an illegitimate President; and that Estrada never vacated the Presidency, except that he is detained without bail right now.

When Gloria said that she's not running in 2004—that was in December—I said that, well, this is really an admission that she could not hack it, so she should not only not run, she should step down. If she does not, then the Supreme Court justices who ruled that Estrada had resigned even without having done so, should now be able to construe Arroyo's statement as a resignation.

EIR: You don't accept her claim that she was dropping out of the race in order to unite the country, and to begin to solve the severe problems of the country?

Tatad: Everything was a ploy. And I'll tell you why she did it. She was not governing, but simply campaigning at the time. Everybody was seeing through everything she was doing, and she was not getting any headway at all. The poor communities, which she had tried to win over with several visits, each time with a lot of goodies, were simply not responding. There was also intense talk on the ground, of restiveness in the military at the time. So some advisors, including some friends of mine, told her that the only way to calm down this restiveness was for her to say she was not running in 2004. This she said, but she never gave up the idea.

In fact, I wrote an article two days ago, where I said that the major diplomatic quarters in Manila now assume that she is running in 2004. I just received a document from the South, saying that in the Mindanao State University, the President there has organized a 4,000-strong chapter to work for her candidacy under the direction of the presidential assistant for development of that area. So, if elections are held as scheduled, she would be a candidate, assuming her relations with President Bush do not sour overnight.

EIR: Since she was put in power, Gloria has established fairly strong relations with Dr. Mahathir, and has moved, very hesitantly, but has moved somewhat, to try to work with



The four Presidents since Marcos was overthrown (clockwise from top): Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. When Estrada threatened to assert some degree of Philippine nationalism, he was subjected to a rerun of the 1986 "people's power" coup—the subject of a book by Kit Tatad.

ASEAN and the ASEAN+3 grouping [the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, plus China, Japan, and South Korea]. Do you think that—given that she will be President for the next year and a half, most likely, and given that this is a period of probably the most intense crisis in history in the world economy, and that Asia is very much the center of development—do you think that she might be brought to take more serious leadership as a result of her relations with these leaders?

Tatad: The real problem, Mike, is that her only base of support right now, really, is the United States. It is the perceived support of President Bush that keeps her politically alive. She does not have a local base. She was put in there by the civil society, the military, and big business, and, of course, some hierarchs of the Church. Now the churchmen are stopped from criticizing her. She is the baby, so while the Bishops are appalled by the corruption and immorality in her government, they are simply stopped from saying anything.

The same with big business. But if you talk to the Makati businessmen, privately, you will be told that they are looking for someone they could support in 2004. Now, I'd like to believe that between now and 2004 is only a matter of a year and a few months, and we should all be able to wait. But more and more people are saying she should not be allowed to finish. That is my fear. With the developments in Mindanao, I believe that sentiment will intensify, and depending on what we see later today—there's going to be an anti-war rally led by the Vice President, whom she installed in office with the help of the Congress—we'll be able to forecast the immediate future a little more correctly.

EIR: One of the things I sent you this morning was Mr. LaRouche's own State of the Union Address, and in that, you will see that he has a very striking formulation of the fact that George Bush, although he is totally unqualified to be President of the United States, *is* the President, and will be for the next two years, which is the most crucial period in history. And therefore, LaRouche approaches this not so much based on the weaknesses of George Bush, personally, but that we have to move the Presidency, of which the President is only a part of the broader institutions that really make up the Presidency. That is what I was getting at in my question, because, as you have said, if we have a continued, repeated transfer of power from one person to another, without establishing a legitimate basis, then nothing will get done, because nothing will change.

Tatad: There is greater respect for institutions in the United States than in the Philippines, unfortunately. I've seen some of the books written about George W. Bush. Some of your politicians still continue to say that he was elected by the Supreme Court, not the American people. Some of the same statements are being made here with respect to Gloria, except that there is a distinction. In the case of George Bush, the Supreme Court interpreted the law in his favor. Here, the Supreme Court *invented* the facts to support Arroyo. So, the respect for the Supreme Court remains in the United States. Here, I conducted a survey in my last caucus. I asked a question about the Supreme Court, and out of 302 respondents, 226 said that the decisions of the justices are tainted with political considerations when they decide cases affecting Arroyo.

This is the problem, Mike. It happened with Cory Aquino. There were seven coup attempts, despite the fact that she was supposedly popular, simply because she did not have a mandate. Now, there are some well-meaning people, who are saying, "Okay, it is a very short time between now and 2004; we're in the middle of a very serious crisis. Why don't we get together, forget Gloria, and just push the country forward." Now, many are willing to do that. Unfortunately, many others cannot forget Gloria, because she is there, she's on top. And now her political ambitions have resurfaced. That is a big challenge.

EIR: Lastly: With the severity of the current crisis, and with the future of mankind depending to a great extent on Asia, being the home of most of the world's population; and with the revolutionary transformation that has taken off over the last few weeks, mostly in response to the threat of a unilateral war on Iraq, an international alliance has been created which has the potential, not only to prevent the war, but could also forge a new world economic system, along the lines that Mr. LaRouche has proposed. What is your sense of the mission of the Philippines as a nation, in the context of this world historic crisis?

Tatad: I'd like to believe, Mike, that there is a role, an important role, that a country like the Philippines could play. The world is in a state of moral decay, and it has got to be renewed morally. This is a function of leadership. The Philippines is a Christian country, the only Christian, predominantly Catholic, country, in this part of the world. If it takes this quality seriously, and learns to impose some rigid moral criteria upon its political leaders, then there is still a chance of producing a morally upright, forward-looking political leadership, that could make its voice heard in the community of nations.

But, having said that, I will have to insist that, while morality is an important and indispensable requirement, it is not enough to be simply moral. One has to be competent and forward-looking, and receptive to new ideas. Great ideas are needed, and we must have the power and the will to implement those ideas. If the global financial system is in disarray, it has to be reconstructed to benefit all its parts. I think that in Asia today we have the advantage of having a large dynamic population capable of supplying all our manpower needs for yet a generation or two or more, without having to worry about such things as aging or greying of the workforce. These are not our problems. So we could confidently begin to work on the ideas that are already on the table. The Strategic Triangle of cooperation that was put forward in 1998, by [Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni] Primakov, and was taken up by the leaders of China and India, could be one such great idea.

If we could begin to work on this, and forget for awhile the enmities that divide us, we could surge ahead. The leaders of this country should be able to look far beyond its territorial boundaries, and see everything there. The large Asian projects that are either already on the ground or in the pipeline, which could change the face and future of Asia and Europe—they have to involve us now. We have to take a serious interest in them, and try to be part of them. Not having the capital or the technology, we must now seek long term agreements that would allow us to share capital, technology, expertise with our neighbors, so that we could implement large common undertakings. This is what should possess the minds of our leaders now. We must stop thinking small. It is the only way we can have an impact on the region and beyond.