

Theres The Rub

Who's afraid of Rep. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo?

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Was there ever any doubt she'd cling on?

I've gotten hoarse shouting it from the rooftops, feeling at some point like Cassandra given the gift of prophecy and the curse of not being believed. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself justifies her decision to run as representative in this wise, or unwise: "Public service is emblazoned on my DNA."

One can imagine many things imprinted on Arroyo's DNA, but public service is not one of them. Greed is so, a greed so claspng, grasping, and clutching that nothing is too low for her to stoop down to. Ambition is so, a need for power so vast, so overpowering, so vital to her being that she cannot for one second live without it. Her voice is so, nobody even bothering to ask whether it was really her caught on tape plotting with Virgilio Garcillano to kidnap a public school teacher in Tawi-Tawi, the raspy croak with the kolehiyala accent being so distinctive, so DNA-imprinted, so her for anyone to think otherwise.

The slings and arrows of outraged fortune came flying thick and fast. "As president, Arroyo will hold the power and funds to crush the opposition," said Nene Pimentel. "She is drunk with power; I think she needs professional help," said Teddy Casiño. "Her ultimate goal is to become House speaker and ram through Charter change; (she wants) to render Noynoy's victory useless," said Mar Roxas. "I am not surprised; she is still motivated by political survival at all costs," said Kiko Pangilinan.

I agree that Arroyo is everything that these statements say she is. And I agree that Arroyo will do everything that these statements say she will. But I disagree—and this is truly important—that all this represents any great threat today.

When I was warning shrilly about Arroyo dragging the country to hell first before she allowed herself to be dragged away from the throne room, she was still in a position to drag the country to hell. I have little doubt she will still try to. But I have just as little doubt she won't get far. Not today, not after the sea change that has happened to the country. She will thrash about, she will curse about, she will banzai or bonsai about, but none of it will do her any good. She will continue to screw the country, but she will not benefit from it. She will continue to screw the country, but she won't prevent her downfall from it.

The notion that she can escape prosecution by becoming representative is silly. Being a representative does not give immunity for crimes over and beyond the call of self-preservation. Arroyo didn't just steal money—though that is staggering enough in itself: Erap only made it as the 10th biggest crook in world in Transparency International, she should make it to third, after Suharto and Marcos—she stole the vote. Arroyo didn't just steal the vote—though that is staggering enough in itself: she turned the electoral exercise, as nobody had done since Marcos, into a minor calisthenics, voters trekking to the polls to fill out ballots that would not be counted—she stole lives.

She not only stole lives—though that is staggering enough in itself, ushering as it did the culture of impunity, which is really a pale phrase to describe the murder of crows or the slaughter of the innocents or the gunning down of suspects and burying them in shallow graves—she stole everything else. She stole this country's hope, she stole this country's spirit, she stole this country's life.

Being congressman did not save Romeo Jalosjos from jail for the rape of a minor. Being congresswoman will not save Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo from jail for the rape of a nation.

The notion that Arroyo will be in a position to win friends and influence people, least of all the congressmen, is even sillier. It is the product of having at once too much imagination and too little. Too much imagination because it presumes that even if she became speaker of the House, and even if she became as powerful as Jose de Venecia once was, she would continue to dictate the course of this country. Look where De Venecia is now.

And too little imagination because it fails to grasp what happens when one is out of power, which is what no longer being the president is. You stop being top dog, you lose everything. One would think that should be obvious from the defections violently rocking Lakas-Kampi-CMD today with Gibo's miserable showing. While Arroyo is still president—or so in title if not in vote.

In fact, it wasn't the Muslims who invented "political entrepreneurship," it was the Christians. It wasn't the warlords of the south who discovered that the best way to keep power was to be a source of beneficence to your supporters, while trumping your enemies in heinousness and firepower, a logic the Ampatuans merely drove to hellish heights. It was the political clans of the north, recognizing early on that the only way to control wealth was to control power, and the only way to keep power was to distribute loot to supporters, while trumping your enemies in force and armed might, a logic Marcos and Arroyo merely drove to sublime depths.

Without the loot and lard of Malacañang, how can Arroyo keep anyone in leash, least of all the congressmen whose emblem consists of an outstretched open palm with the motto, "Your credibility is good, but we need cash"?

And all of this forgets the change that has made this country unrecognizable since Aug. 5. Since that watershed, GMA's fortune has plunged faster than a torpedoed WWII ship in the Atlantic. The lucky SOB has run out of luck she should thank whoever it is she thanks that her malas hasn't rubbed off on Manny Pacquiao. Arroyo is through, Arroyo is finished. Arroyo is dead. The massacre wreaked by her allies, the Ampatuans, in Maguindanao just drove the last nail on her coffin.

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By Conrado de Quiros

P.S.

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