

MARCOS DICTATORSHIP

# **Government (Philippines) - From Marcos to Marcos: Enrile, the consummate political survivor**

Sunday 19 June 2022, by [CUPIN Bea](#) (Date first published: 18 June 2022).

**The veteran lawyer, former defense chief, and astute politician - who is less than two years away from his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday - takes on a role that will require cunning and clarity**

Contents

- [President's legal counsel](#)
- [The Enrile story](#)
- [The Martial Law years](#)

MANILA, Philippines - At the ripe old age of 88 in 2012, Juan Ponce Enrile, then Senate President, found a revival of sorts in his popularity. The lawyer, a veteran of both the legislative and executive branches of government, led the Senate in one of the first big political gambles of the Benigno Aquino III administration: the impeachment of Chief Justice Renato Corona.

Enrile was called a "rockstar," thanks in part to a new generation of news consumers and political observers: the kind that tuned in via livestream and live tweets.

It was a second image do-over of sorts for Enrile - the first being in 1986, when he supported rebel forces against the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, his long-time political patron, in an uprising now called the EDSA People Power Revolution. His role - or at least the prevailing narrative then - "airbrushed" his reputation as the dictator's man. Interestingly enough, both image rehabs happened at the cusp, or right in the middle of, an Aquino presidency.

Nearly four decades after Enrile's first political refresh and a decade after his second, he steps into the political limelight yet again, this time under a second Marcos president, as chief presidential legal counsel to Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the son and namesake of the dictator.

## **President's legal counsel**

As chief presidential legal counsel (CPLC), Enrile will advise and give legal assistance to Marcos on any or all matters, including legislation. Memorandum Order No. 152, issued by then-president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2004, states that the CPLC will review or draft legal orders from the president, decide on "investigations" that involve high-ranking officials including members of the Cabinet, and any other task the President assigns them, among others.

Most recent CPLCs have been close friends of the presidents they served.

President Rodrigo Duterte first picked Salvador Panelo as his chief legal counsel, then picked Melchor Quitain to replace the former when he resigned to run for the Senate. Panelo is a long-time friend of Duterte's, while Quitain was city administrator when Duterte was Davao City mayor.

The late president Benigno Aquino III's longest-serving chief legal counsel was his classmate, now Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Caguioa.

## **The Enrile story**

Enrile's growing up years, as told in his 2012 autobiography, reads like a script for *Maalala Mo Kaya* or *Magpakailanman*. He grew up poor, the love child of a powerful man. The young Enrile persevered, earning an associate degree from Ateneo de Manila, a law degree from the University of the Philippines, and a Masters of Laws from Harvard Law School.

He was the elder Marcos' finance secretary from 1966 to 1968, before being appointed justice secretary from 1968 to 1970. When Marcos was reelected president, Enrile was again appointed justice secretary from 1970 to 1971. He was appointed to the same role in 1972.

A brilliant lawyer, Enrile was first recruited by then-president Ferdinand E. Marcos when he won against reelectionist Diosdado Macapagal in the 1965 election. He was Marcos' first finance secretary for two years, from 1966 to 1968, then justice secretary from 1968 to 1971.

He was appointed defense minister from February 1970 to August 1971, and reappointed to the same post in January 1972. "This period was marked by student unrest and rebellion from both Muslims in the south and a ragtag New People's Army in Central Luzon," wrote Filipino journalist Manuel Mogato.

After Marcos declared Martial Law in September 1972, Enrile stayed on - even involving himself in a staged ambush that would be part of the pretext to declare martial rule. While Enrile himself had said it was staged, he would refute his own claim decades later.

More recently, Enrile changed his mind on China. In 2021, Enrile made an appearance during Duterte's regular address, to talk about his support for the President's pro-China policy. Under the Benigno Aquino III administration, Enrile was supportive of the government's plan to seek support from international allies in its battle against the superpower.

Under a Duterte presidency, Enrile said the Philippines "must do everything to avoid irritating" Beijing.

## **The Martial Law years**

In 2012, Enrile took on the role of storyteller in releasing his autobiography, *Juan Ponce Enrile: A Memoir*. The timing was perfect - he was the "rockstar" Senate president who led the Corona impeachment and his trust ratings were at their highest.

And so tell - or "retell" history, he did.

Rappler editor-at-large Maritess Vitug wrote then about the memoir: "Those who expect him to say *mea culpa* for Martial Law are in for a huge disappointment. In fact, he justifies it."

It shouldn't be surprising then that in 2018, the former defense minister claimed - falsely - that no political dissidents were arrested during the elder Marcos' reign. No less than the late Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel Jr., Enrile's colleague in the Senate, refuted that claim - he himself was arrested four times during the late dictator's rule.

An Amnesty International report from 1975 estimates that over 50,000 people were arrested and detained under Martial Law from 1972 to 1975 - from human rights defenders, labor leaders, to journalists. Current estimates, also by Amnesty International, place the number of imprisoned at 70,000. The group estimates over 34,000 were tortured and 3,240 killed while the elder Marcos was in power. Martial Law was lifted in 1981, almost nine years later, although abuses continued until the dictator was ousted from power.

In a Facebook post days before his appointment was announced, Enrile offered "unsolicited advice" for national security officials in the second Marcos presidency.

"Instead of making soft and [pacifist] statements seemingly intended to quiet and to gain the cooperation, trust, and confidence of the habitual trouble makers in this country, I suggest that they should sharpen their intelligence information," he wrote.

He went on to claim, citing "credible information," that "there are groups in America and in the Philippine (sic) planning and preparing to cause serious embarrassment and trouble for our newly elected president."

Enrile went on to say he would give more information "to the proper officials of the new regime in due time." With his appointment made public, Enrile's going to be among those "proper officials."

How will this part of Philippine history figure into his own long-running story? - Rappler.com

**Bea Cupin**  
@BEACUPIN

---

**P.S.**

- Rappler. JUN 18, 2022 8:49 PM PHT:  
<https://www.rappler.com/nation/juan-ponce-enrile-political-survivor-marcos-jr-presidency/>
- Bea Cupin is a senior multimedia reporter who covers national politics. She's been a journalist since 2011 and has written about Congress, the national police, and the Liberal Party for Rappler.