

# Pananaaw

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## Philippine president flails in face of protests

By Joe Calugay

In a classic example of Orwellian "doublespeak," Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo recently called opponents of joint U.S.-Philippine military exercises in Mindanao "not Filipinos" and "Abu Sayyaf lovers." It seems she has lumped even elected politicians into her category of "protectors of terrorists," given that the critics include her vice president and members of the Senate and Congress.

It's an artless tactic favoured by despots: If you have no leg to stand on, then label your critics as enemies of the state.

If nothing else, Ms. Arroyo's tirade point to the bankruptcy of her reasoning for allowing the U.S. troops to enter the Philippines ostensibly for training exercises to help rid the country of the Abu Sayyaf menace.

But let's take a closer look at the critics' arguments that the Arroyo administration has failed to rebut.

### CONSTITUTIONALITY

The main argument of Balikatan 02-1 opponents has rested on the need to protect Philippine sovereignty and territorial integrity, hardly the concern of those who are "not Filipinos."

As the legal embodiment of Philippine sovereignty, the 1987 Constitution prohibits foreign troops, military bases or facilities in the Philippines "except under a treaty duly concurred in by Senate." The critics say no such treaty exists, while the government points to the 1999 *Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA)* and the 1953 *Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT)* with the U.S. as their legal basis.



photo by Regie Alam

Protesters in Ottawa denounce U.S. military presence in the Philippines.

## Arroyo's visit: Much ado about nothing

*The following is a first-person account of events during the visit of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo – or GMA – to Ottawa on Jan. 29, 2002. It was written by CUFSA president and Talakayang Bayan radio reporter Aimee Beboso.*

At around 3 p.m. at Place de Ville, I saw some Filipinos in fancy office attire and polished shoes, waiting. I talked to some who came from Montreal and asked them what they expected from the president's visit. One of them said he was interested in hearing what she has to say about the situation in the Philippines. All I can remember is his eyes that seemed full of skepticism.

Outside Place de Ville, CUFSA and Pilipinong Migrante Sa Canada gathered with other Filipino groups from Montreal.

They were all carrying protest placards. Their numbers, including youths, impressed me. I whipped out my recorder and started asking them why they were there. Again, I was impressed by their knowledge of the issues and their conviction against GMA allowing U.S. troops into the Philippines.

The protesters proceeded to the front of the Crowne Plaza Hotel, where GMA was to deliver a speech to some members of the Filipino community, and started their chants. Other members of Pinay, PMSC and CUFSA, stood at each end of the block and handed out protest statements.

"Imperialismo, ibagsak! Pyudalismo, ibagsak! Macapagal-Arroyo, babagsak! U.S. troops out of the Philippines! A people united will never be defeated!"

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