

# **`Big Brother' and the death of civil liberties in the Philippines**

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THE OTHER VIEW THAT the TV program based on the Orwellian Big Brother concept has gained popularity is not unexpected from a populace inured to the idea of surveillance (and voyeurism) as entertainment. Now this:

The Senate approved on third reading the so-called Human Security Act of 2007, better known as the Antiterrorism Bill (ATB), to be taken up in a special session called by the President on February 19 to 20. Only Sens. Jamby Madrigal and Mar Roxas objected to the ATB. What happened to the other civil libertarians like Sens. Aquilino Pimentel, Joker Arroyo and Kiko Pangilinan? Why was party-list representative Etta Rosales seen on TV seeming to acquiesce to a repressive bill “we can live with”?

Since 9/11, US President Bush’s “war on terror” has spawned a wide range of repressive measures. While directed at “Islamic terrorists,” these affect not only the “usual suspects” like ethnic or minority groups including Filipinos but “mainstream” Americans, dissenters and critics of the establishment. This is programmatic suppression of civil liberties in the US surpassing the draconian measures of the Cold War and anticommunist hysteria of the fifties.

Of course the latter has never left us. We see it in the Filipino guardians of “national security”—a US trained military, a surrogate government, and elements of the intelligentsia. They are still fighting the Cold War now in the name of battling terrorism.

Timely reading these days is Michel Chossudovsky’s America’s “War on Terrorism” launched recently by Global Research ( Canada ) and IBON Books. Here is a scholarly study of how Washington extends “the frontiers of the American Empire to facilitate complete US corporate control, while installing within America the institution of the Homeland Security State .”

The Canadian professor of economics at the University of Ottawa sees “the war on terrorism” as a complete fabrication based on the illusion that Osama bin Laden outwitted the American intelligence apparatus and that 9/11 was an attack on America by “Islamic terrorists.”

Here in the Philippines , the Arroyo government readily adopted the US war on terror as its own, and joined the “coalition of the willing” by sending troops in the US war on Iraq —part of the US fabrication, with fictitious weapons of mass destruction in Iraq as the excuse. Following the US the regime lobbied for the tagging of the CPP/NPA as terrorist in Europe .

When a Filipino driver was held hostage by Iraqi insurgents, the government withdrew its troops and supposedly lost credibility with the US and allies according to some local media writers. Not so, for with the Visiting Forces Agreement, the government opened its arms to welcome American troops to “train” our jungle fighters and enable them to gather information about people’s struggles. On the side some visiting troops have run afoul with Philippine laws.

Since 2001, in line with Bush’s war on terror, the Arroyo regime has launched Oplan Bantay Laya (1 & 2) that has resulted in extrajudicial killings and disappearances now the subject of UN and other international probes and censure. After a series of repressive measures declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the government has foisted this Antiterrorism Bill.

Discussants at the forum on Chossudovsky’s America’s “War on Terrorism” expect the problem of summary executions and abductions to grow worse with ATB—what with the extended period of time for detaining suspects and denial of their right of communication. Human-rights violations will continue to be committed with impunity by the security forces, and with authorized surveillance and invasion of privacy, the Orwellian dream shall have been realized. It’s martial law all over again.

Thus, the US Patriot Act passed in the 9/11 aftermath has been adopted by our lawmakers and just given another name, Human Security Act of 2007. Anticipate a few “modalities” for implementing it, courtesy of zealous functionaries and unreconstructed military/police elements.

Time indeed for voters to demand that these issues of extrajudicial killings, desaparecidos, human rights violations, and the erosion of our civil liberties be discussed by candidates in this coming election, and to choose lawmakers who will uphold the Bill of Rights and other democratic rights of the people, jettison the ATB—and more.

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