

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Thursday, July 21, 2011

A handful of Filipino protesters in six US cities and Toronto would hardly come up to a hundred. But a sleazy writer in San Francisco figured nobody would notice if he inflated the numbers, and he did, and passed on his distorted article with such a triumphant tone to all those who cared to publish. Were the simultaneous protest rallies a publicity stunt to wangle favors from Malacañang Palace ? Why, of all people, would two "dumb lawyers" (as Bobby Reyes calls them) and a "toxic" veterans' advocate whip up such mass actions?

PREROGATIVE

The Spratlys Protest – A Case of Distorted Reporting

Written by
Thursday, 21 July 2011 17:36 -

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TORONTO - "On July 8," says a news item on the online Fil-Am Forum, "hundreds of Filipino Americans demonstrated in front of all six of China's consular offices in the U.S. to protest China's dispatch of its giant oil rig to the Spratly Islands which is within the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone of the Philippines".

The story was written by a sleazy writer named Rodel Rodis, a San

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Francisco-based lawyer who gained some notoriety after his arrest by police on suspicion of passing what police had thought was a fake \$100-bill in a Walgreen store a few years back.

Reviewing images by at least four photographers posted on the organizers' website, it would appear that Rodis' description of "hundreds" was an egregious mistake, a deliberate lie to mask organizers' failure to attract public support.

His account contrasted significantly with the bare facts. As the saying goes, pictures tell a thousand words, and the small gathering in the published pictures did not even approach a hundred in each of the six protest areas in the US.

"Hundreds" could mean anywhere from 100 to 999 and when use to estimate crowds, it usually indicates at least a thousand. Had I been his editor, and he should feel lucky I'm not or he would have a hard time proving his competence, I would question him a hundred times on why he wrote "hundreds" when the number of warm bodies hardly qualifies.

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During the many protest rallies preceding the People Power Revolution of 1986, and before that, the run-up to martial law, the police and military tended to be on the conservative side, meaning they minimized numbers so as not to scare the occupants of the presidential palace or give credit to the opposition.

On the other hand, protesters were more inclined to exaggerate their ranks if only to boost their morale and attract more supporters. Journalists would take note of the conflicting claims and make their own estimates, usually based on historical precedence.

But the non-journalist Rodis never had that opportunity. He fled the Philippines when war was afoot, afraid of losing the earthly comforts of his inconsequential life and settled in the safe embrace of the United States where he sweet-talked his way to an American citizenship.

For him now to characterize the picketers as in the "hundreds" is not only wrong, it was clearly intended to inflate the numbers and create a false sense of widespread public support for their protest. For a while I thought he had the hundred-dollar-bill that had triggered his arrest fresh on his mind when he wrote the piece.

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"Dozens" would be more accurate to quantify the protesters. In Toronto, for example, there's a handful, not even a dozen-and-a-half who joined. The same was true in

New York City

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Chicago

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San Francisco

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Los Angeles

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San Diego

and

Houston

as shown in the pictures by different photographers.

In San Diego, my home for 16 years, the "usual suspects" – people I personally knew who would mouth scripted lines and are quite notorious for their involvement in monetary scandals there – were on hand, dressed in yellow shirts, their faces camouflaged by dark glasses. I honestly believe that for them, it's another photo opportunity rather than a protest rally. Just look at them smiling their best.

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Absent images of the picket, those reading Rodel Rodis' account may be led to believe that "hundreds" really went to the mass action. It could thus engender a "snowball effect" for whatever agenda Rodis' group, which includes Loida Nicolas-Lewis, Eric Lachica and some NaFFAA (National Federation of Filipino American Associations) agents, is pushing.

In the context of the political and economic ramifications that the Spratly conflict could cause, the coordinated protests were innocuous barks of a few pranksters out to foment a diplomatic crisis between China and the Philippines. A crisis is a business opportunity, somebody has said. Who financed them and why?

Rodis, ambulance-chaser-cum-immigration lawyer, and Lewis, the wealthy-by-accident matron, are unalloyed yellow, loyal supporters of President Noynoy Aquino, and before him, his mother Corazon Aquino, the first yellow reformist who rose to the Philippine presidency by a combination of luck, opportunity and accident. Lachica is the so-called veterans' advocate San Diego Congressman Bob Filner had called "toxic".

Were Rodis, Lewis and Lachica, fully brown Americans, voicing out real concerns for the Philippines against the Chinese? Why would they suddenly whip up the Filipino-American communities in the

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United States
and in
Toronto

,
Canada

, to a picket? Was the Spratly controversy a convenient and timely issue to launch their publicity stunt?

Diplomatic sources in Manila said the triumvirate and their cohorts may be trying to impress President Noynoy Aquino that they enjoy public support in North America

and could quickly summon people for their cause, to wangle some favors from

Malacañang
Palace

. What those are, are still not clear.

Who's likely to gain if President Aquino decided to embark on a military adventure against the Chinese to assert Philippine sovereignty in the contested area? I heard that Lachica was proposing "defensive measures" that would involve huge sums of money.

I asked Rodis, Lewis and Lachica some questions related to the protests but

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instead of responding to the issues, Rodis barked his usual ad hominem: "Do you know anything at all about 'honest journalism' or is that a totally alien concept to you?"

Here we're talking about the Spratlys and Rodis couldn't get past his obsession with fellow journalist Bobby Reyes who exposed Rodis' bankruptcy filing the moment one of his clients sued him to recover some money as a result of a court decision finding Mr. Rodis guilty of legal malpractice.

How can one trust this guy with global issues like the Spratlys'? And to think, my sources tell me and this has not been confirmed, he's trying to win some juicy appointment in the Aquino government.

Lewis' answer, though relevant, raises another question. She said, and I quote verbatim: "Being militarily deficient in terms of armaments and number of soldiers/navy and economically superior, the Philippines is an easy frail target and we its citizen should come to its rescue when our territorial integrity is being threatened."

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After saying "we its citizen", I asked her again: "But I thought you're an American citizen?" – the implication being that why should an American interfere with a purely Philippine problem. That's when she admitted being a dual citizen.

"The rally is meant to alert everyone willing to listen," Lewis said in another emailed reply. "Due to the noise we created, China has not moved its giant rig."

Lachica, perhaps too engrossed with finding boats to face the Chinese, never bothered to reply.

Whatever Rodis, Lewis and Lachica hope to accomplish with the Chinese and the Philippine officials in Malacañang, I am certain that the three are embarking on an expedition for greener pastures. My opinion is that they should just stay where they are – Rodis and Lewis at NaFFAA (National Federation of Filipino American Associations), and Lachica with the depleting ranks of Filipino veterans.

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The Filipino Web Channel at YouTube:

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cT74cbxq6ak>

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