

# Emmanuel Pelaez, 'Mister Right' of Philippine politics

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and countryside development.

In a way, Macapagal, who had styled himself as the "poor boy from Lubao," had tried to approximate the Magsaysay charisma in his own campaign for the presidency against President Carlos P. Garcia. And in taking Pelaez as his running-mate, he would like a little of the Magsaysay magic to brush off on him.

But apparently stopping Pelaez from becoming another Magsaysay, Macapagal appointed him to the foreign affairs portfolio. Pelaez had wanted to become agriculture and environment secretary.

But there was no denying Pelaez's fitness to become president. As foreign secretary, he tried to negotiate the terms of the American bases treaty and advanced the Philippine claim to Sabah.

Macapagal was also adept at foreign policy (he had been assistant foreign secretary prior to becoming congressman), but circumstances militated against him taking over the world stage.

When the US Congress failed to pass a measure that would benefit

Philippine veterans of the Second World War, Macapagal hit back at the Americans by switching Philippine Independence Day from July 4 to June 12.

Washington was incensed at Macapagal, but felt it had to repair relations with Manila. So when Pelaez was in Washington, President John F. Kennedy asked for a meeting with him.

The gentlemanly Pelaez only agreed to the meeting after clearing it up with Macapagal. But the White House photo-op that showed Kennedy and Pelaez—both of them handsome and talking as equals—clearly upstaged Macapagal.

### Singular cry of pain

After his defeat in the NP convention, Pelaez refused Marcos' offer for him to become his running-mate and later, to head the NP Senate ticket. He wisely reclaimed his old congressional seat in Misamis since he felt his expertise really lay in agriculture reform policy-making.

He was to run again for the Senate and win, but when martial law was declared in 1972, he had to confront the reality of his warning to

the nation in 1965 against a Marcos presidency:

"Whether you agree with me or not, my assessment is that today the greatest danger to this country is for a man of the character of Ferdinand Marcos to ascend to the presidency."

He had said in 1965 that Marcos was raised under the "politics of violence of the Ilocos," and that a Marcos propagandist had even written that Marcos "has no specific program of government, nor a definite philosophy, except power," which, Pelaez pointed out, was similar to the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's.

Pelaez himself was to suffer from the fascism of the Marcos dictatorship, and over an issue that was close to his heart: agriculture.

As assemblyman of the Interim Batasang Pambansa during martial law, Pelaez criticized the coconut levy collected from farmers at a time of falling world prices of coconut oil, impoverishing both coconut farmers and producers, or at least those producers not close to Marcos.

According to Navarro: "It was an open secret... that the levy... had created a super-monopoly headed by Danding Cojuangco (Marcos' close associate and supporter). The coconut funds, which over the next 10 years had piled up to about P9 billion, were put under the control of a shadowy maze of corporations that in time would buy and control San Miguel Corporation... and built up the United Coconut Planters Bank... into one of the biggest banks in the country."

On the late evening of July 21, 1982, Pelaez's Toyota Crown Sedan was trying to head home in New Manila when it was cut by a car that sprayed it a hail of bullets. Pelaez played dead while the gunmen dragged out his driver, Arsenio Rogero (Pelaez did not have bodyguards), and shot him dead.

As he was wheeled to the operating room of St. Luke's Hospital, Pelaez said he wondered, "Had brute force taken over from the rule of law?"

When he saw Gen. Tomas Karingal, the chief of police of Quezon City, Pelaez uttered what was to be the singular cry of pain and injustice that would be on every Filipino's lips: "What is happening to our country, General?"

As Navarro writes, "It was a question that would soon be heard across the nation and reverberate around the world, encapsulating in seven words what would come to haunt the Marcos regime in its final three years of power."

Powerfully told and well-written, *What's Happening to Our Country?* is the biography of a vice president that may well eclipse presidential biographies. In a way, perhaps, Pelaez didn't really miss his date with destiny. ■

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# Muñoz loses, Vera wins in UFC 96

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From the very start, it appeared that Muñoz had opening round jitters. Hamill took the fight to him, continuously stalking and backing the smaller Muñoz into the octagon corners. With a five-inch reach advantage, Hamill used a blistering left jab to fluster the Fil-Am from Vallejo, CA. Muñoz tried to use his wrestling to his advantage but Hamill defended Muñoz's takedown attempts well, making it a stand up brawl.

Midway through the first round, Hamill continued to pound Muñoz with left jabs. With Muñoz back towards the octagon, Hamill threw a vicious right kick to Muñoz's head, instantly knocking the latter out.

Replays showed that Hamill's shin connected dead-on around Muñoz's left temple. As Muñoz was falling, his head hit his right knee before he slumped down on the corner of the octagon. Medical officials immediately brought out a stretcher and cared for Muñoz, who according to his sister Rheanne, was okay afterwards.

"He walked out on his own," said Rheanne to this reporter. "We will keep you posted."

An arranged Asian Journal post-fight interview with Muñoz was cancelled.

With the loss, Muñoz record falls to 5-1. Hamill's record improves to 8-2.

### Vera making a comeback

A new slim and fit Vera showed that he still has the skills that made him one of the most dangerous fighters in 2007. After struggling in 2008 because of weight issues, Vera nicknamed "The Truth" showed he should be mentioned among the deep and talented UFC light heavyweight class. Fighting against Patt White, Vera controlled the fight early with vicious leg kicks. It wasn't much of a contest since the shorter White couldn't even get in range to attack Vera.

In the second round, Vera continued to pepper White's left leg with right kicks. Finally, Vera had enough and finished White with a vicious right kick to White's left kneecap. White hobbled and fell to the floor. Once he got back up, Vera kicked White's ailing left leg again before the referee signaled the match was over.

"I'm back baby," said Vera. "2008 was a tough year for me but I want everybody to know that the Truth is back."

Prior to this win, Vera had lost three of his last four fights, most in the heavyweight division. Vera's record now improves to 10-3. (*Joseph Pimentel*)



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