

U.S. PATIENCE GROWING THIN IN HAGGLING OVER BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES

The last scheduled review of the Military Bases Agreement (MBA) giving the United States access to Philippine bases at Clark Air Field and Subic Bay is reaching a critical phase. Though the current MBA runs through September 1991, Manila is using this review of the last two years of the MBA to press Washington to pay more in military and economic assistance; Manila refuses even to talk about a new MBA or bases treaty until this review is concluded. Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus has been in the U.S. since September 11 taking a hard line on the bases and raising the ante. As a result of his demands, American policy makers are contemplating the once unthinkable: abandoning Clark and Subic and building new bases in the region.

The U.S., of course, wants to continue a mutually beneficial relationship with the Philippines, but American patience is running thin. Manglapus's occasionally nasty and even spiteful rhetoric of the past several months may be stretching this patience to the breaking point. If the U.S. has to move, it will, even though a withdrawal would be costly for the U.S. and damaging to Philippine security.

Long-Time Foe. Manglapus flatly opposed U.S. use of Philippine bases before he was appointed Foreign Secretary last October by President Corazon Aquino. Though he has not used his current position to oppose the bases explicitly, Manglapus has been asserting that the bases do not help defend the Philippines, are not relevant in the Philippines' battle against communist insurgents, and, save for Singapore, are not publicly supported by other non-communist Southeast Asian countries. For Manglapus, the bases are still part of some sort of U.S. imperial "manifest destiny."

Manglapus, however, seems to represent only a tiny portion of his countrymen's views. A recent poll reveals that about 70 percent of Filipinos support the U.S. presence. So does the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Philippine Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos states that U.S. forces in the Philippines contribute to its external defense. In addition, says Ramos, the AFP needs the U.S. military aid provided as part of the compensation for the bases to battle the insurgency led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The CPP is now contesting control of about 20 percent of the countryside. The U.S. is the only country giving the AFP substantial military assistance to fight the CPP.

Gorbachev's Diversion. More dangerous than the insurgency may be the growing external threat to the Philippines from the Soviet Union's burgeoning naval and air base in Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay. At risk now are the shipping lanes through Southeast Asia, and, conceivably, the Philippines itself. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev recently offered to pull Soviet forces out of Cam Ranh Bay if U.S. forces departed Philippine bases. In Washington, Manglapus welcomed the offer. Yet, these Soviet promises have little credibility. The late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, after all, promised Jimmy Carter that Moscow would not establish a base in Cam Ranh Bay. Gorbachev's offer, meanwhile, diverts attention from Moscow's deepening relationship with the CPP. Gorbachev probably is deterred from helping the CPP overtly probably only by the U.S. commitment to defend the Philippines as part of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty, which access to Philippine bases makes possible.

The Reagan Administration and the Congress recognize that Corazon Aquino's efforts in the Philippines require extra U.S. help. For this reason they have increased economic and military assistance to the Aquino government to \$403 million for this year and \$303 million for fiscal 1989. This is considerably more than the \$180 million a year pledged in the last bases agreement review in 1983. The aggregate pledge then was \$900 million over five years. The actual total will be about \$1.7 billion. In addition, the bases contribute enormously to the Philippine economy; they employ some 45,000 Filipinos.

Alienating U.S. Lawmakers. Manglapus apparently is willing to jeopardize this and more. He has asked for up to \$1.2 billion per year; the U.S. offers \$481 million. But there is a new wrinkle: Manglapus now demands that the U.S. give Manila about \$100 million in U.S. Treasury Bonds, which Manila will put towards its \$30 billion foreign debt. The bond proposal may be too complicated to work. A failure of the bases review on this issue understandably would make U.S. lawmakers unwilling next year to support even more U.S. aid for the Philippines as part of a \$5 billion to \$10 billion multi-national assistance plan. Philippine intransigence on the current MBA review already has reduced U.S. congressional enthusiasm significantly.

If Manglapus honestly is representing Philippine views, then there is little chance for a long-term military agreement with the Philippines. As such, the U.S. probably should start looking now for alternative base sites. Some in the Pentagon are convinced that the U.S. could move its bases to Pacific islands such as Guam and Tinian for much less than previous estimates of up to \$12 billion. They realize, however, such a move would be a decisive victory for the Philippine communists and Soviet strategic goals in Southeast Asia. In addition, the Philippine military might lose confidence in Aquino, prompting more coup attempts.

The U.S. offer to the Philippines is very generous. It obviously does not satisfy Foreign Secretary Manglapus. It is now up to President Aquino to declare whether her Foreign Secretary speaks for her government or just for himself.

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For further information:

Richard D. Fisher, Jr., "A Strategy for Keeping the U.S. Bases in the Philippines," Heritage Foundation Asian Studies Center *Background* No. 78, May 20, 1987.

Jeanne Kirkpatrick, "The High Cost of Protecting Others," *The Washington Post*, September 19, 1988.