

Manila calls Washington's bluff over military base agreement

by Gail G. Billington

President Ferdinand Marcos has demanded that the Reagan administration come clean on its intentions toward its closest political friend in Asia, the 7,000-island archipelago of the Philippines. Speaking to graduates of the National Defense College at Malacanang Palace July 18, Marcos put Washington on notice over the most vulnerable issue in bilateral relations between the two countries, U.S. access to the strategic base facilities at Clark Field air base and the Subic Bay naval station.

Without those base facilities the United States will be eliminated as a significant strategic power from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. Despite the best (or worst) efforts of George Shultz's State Department to find alternative sites, the hard facts are that nobody else in Asia wants to become a target of either of the other two regional superpowers, the Soviet Union or China, by accepting U.S. military installations.

Beginning with the cancellation of President Reagan's visit in the fall of 1983—at the height of the furor that swept the Philippines in the wake of the August 1983 assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino—the Reagan administration has slowly but steadily weaned itself from the Marcos administration. Last year Vice-President George Bush, and members of the State Department staff, hosted opposition leader and presidential hopeful Salvador Laurel in the U.S. capital.

Finally, last fall, the U.S. State Department, under the direction of a stable of old Kissinger hands, orchestrated a major coup in U.S. policy evaluation toward the Philippines. These "realists," working with the U.S. Treasury Department, the Pentagon, and U.S. intelligence community concluded that an aging President Marcos, caught between an International Monetary Fund (IMF) "stabilization" program on the one hand and the fastest growing communist guerrilla insurgency in Asia, had to be eased out. Marcos's usefulness, from that point on, was to become a scapegoat for the IMF's "controlled disintegration" of the Filipino economy, while the U.S. reviewed its options.

In short, U.S. policy toward the Philippines is carrying

out a Soviet operation to destroy U.S. presence in Asia and the Pacific and to sever its ties to the most crucial and loyal American allies in the region. Doing the spade work for this Soviet operation has been the International Monetary Fund, which has imposed the conditions of economic collapse that are fueling the recruitment to the Soviet-funded New People's Army insurgency. The IMF is the best friend Moscow has, and the U.S. State Department does the IMF's bidding.

To cover up this collusion with the Soviets, the State Department and company are putting out the line that Marcos is the reason the Philippines has a growing guerrilla insurgency, and State has proceeded to do everything possible to undermine the Marcos government—even if it means destroying the conditions for the U.S. bases in the country. The Philippines has become the sacrificial victim of the policy of U.S. strategic withdrawal from the Pacific first initiated by Soviet agent Henry Kissinger in the Guam Doctrine of 1969.

Drawing the line

The crisis that erupted in mid-July between Manila and Washington, D.C. over the terms of the base agreement marks a new conjuncture in bilateral relations between the two countries. The agreement for the bases was worked out in 1983 between the Philippines government and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. On July 11, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to rip up the five-year agreement that expires in 1989. That agreement, worth a total of \$900 million, calls for \$475 million in economic support aid and \$425 million in military aid, broken into two categories, foreign military sales credits and grant military aid. Payments are in five annual rental installments.

The House, acting under the guidance of Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, junked the Reagan administration recommendation to pay out \$100 million in combined military assistance and \$95 million in economic support. On top of that, the administration requested an additional \$36 million in development assistance and \$42.4 million in food aid under the PL480 program.

The final House version cut the entire \$195 million in base-related aid outright to \$180 million. From there, things went rapidly downhill. The House voted to reduce the entire military aid component to a paltry \$25 million, all in grant military aid, with no money for foreign military sales! Economic support was raised to \$155 million.

The real kick in the teeth to the Marcos administration, however, was the House request to have a watchdog role in the distribution of U.S. development assistance. First, the House requested periodic reports from the executive branch on the progress of distribution. Second, the House incorporated into their version of the overall foreign aid package an amendment, drafted by Rep. Schumer (D-N.Y.), requiring that 20% of the development assistance and food aid be distributed not by agencies of the Filipino government, but by private agencies, especially the institutions of the Catholic Church.

The thinking behind the House bill is the worst conceivable hypocrisy. On the military assistance side, the idea is to put a leash on the Armed Forces of the Philippines, which are under a cloud of suspicion and suspected contamination following the Aquino assassination, while giving just enough to sustain the status quo of government counterinsurgency operations against the growing New People's Army guerrilla insurgency. In the same vein, Rep. Solarz recently succeeded in getting a foreign aid package through the Congress that will provide \$10 million in aid, including military aid, to the noncommunist Khmer resistance in Kampuchea.

Solarz may be a hypocrite, but he is no fool. The sum offered is just enough to keep the fighting going, and no more. Worse, intelligence sources agree that the strongest fighting units in the Khmer resistance are those of mass murderer Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, and aid to the resistance coalition aids and abets Pol Pot.

Similarly, in the Philippines case, by demanding that development assistance and food aid distribution be handed over to the agencies of the Catholic Church, Solarz et al. are handing government power over to the people who are out to bring down Marcos and kick out the U.S. bases! The Philippines, the largest Catholic diocese in the world, is the diocese of Chinese-born Cardinal Jaime Sin, who has openly taken the side of the International Monetary Fund and Wall Street against Marcos.

In a June 2 speech to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Cardinal Sin demanded that the United States eliminate all military aid to the Philippines, and called for "a new face, and a new leadership" in Manila. It is common knowledge, in Manila and throughout Asia, that the "public works" side of the Filipino Catholic Church are rife with "liberation theologian" priests who provide an extensive logistical and command structure for the New People's Army. One of the most famous NPA commanders, Conrado Balweg, is a not-so-"ex" Jesuit priest.

The U.S. State Department is fully complicit in pushing

the destabilization of the Marcos government, most importantly, by its full support for the IMF's "stabilization" program. In fact, the State Department has learned a few tricks from the IMF and is engaged in open economic warfare against the Philippines, according to allegations lodged by Sen. John Melcher (D-Wyo.).

According to Melcher, the State Department has blocked U.S. wheat sales to the Philippines for political reasons, a move that could lose American farmers their control over the Filipino wheat and rice market, as well as to starve Filipinos. State wanted to eliminate the appearance of "preferential" treatment toward the Philippines. Melcher reports that, under nonstop pressure from the State Department, President Marcos finally "came unglued" when Shultz's boys demanded that the sales be conducted through private agencies, not the government. Melcher added that 59 out of 60 countries that buy wheat from the U.S. purchase it through government agencies!

U.S. Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, one of the Kissinger boys who "cut his teeth" on the Latin American debt crisis before moving to Manila, openly embraces the IMF's ham-handed restructuring of the Philippines economy, as the pathway to economic "stability" for the country. An IMF delegation left Manila last week, and is rumored to have demanded further devaluation of the Filipino peso and tax hikes from the government.

Secretary of State George Shultz, during his three-day trip to Australia last week, also made no secret that he was shopping for alternative base sites for Clark Field and Subic Bay. One way or the other, either at the end of Marcos' boot or at the hands of the NPA, our ever-loving State Department is planning a cowardly escape from the Philippines.

Who's in charge here?

The one ray of hope in the situation is that President Marcos does not intend to be dictated to by either the U.S. State Department or the U.S. Congress on the base agreement. In his July 18 address to the National Defense College graduates, Marcos laid the issue squarely at the door of President Reagan. "We have an agreement with the party that is in power," Marcos said, "Now let the party in power tell us what is happening. Do we need to renegotiate or not?" Marcos then called for the creation of a commission to consider abrogating and/or renegotiating the treaty.

Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile has indicated his willingness to make good the Philippine government threat to break the agreement. On July 16, 27 ministers and deputy ministers caucused to discuss abrogating the treaty. Enrile volunteered to sponsor a bill to stiffen the terms of the treaty, to make it a binding pact, when the National Assembly reconvenes July 23. Two days earlier, Defense Minister Enrile charged the House of Representatives with "virtual blackmail and blatant interference" in the internal affairs of the Philippines.