

briefed on the “evil axis” speech in advance, and hit the ground running, calling for North Korea to let in all the UN nuclear inspectors, “or else.” “People in Seoul are asking whether the U.S. is trying to get rid of President Kim,” one diplomat said.

Destabilize the Region

None of this is in the interests of the American people, or the population of Asia, or President Bush. The Armitage plan is to destabilize the entire region, not just Korea. Its second major plank is to reverse Japan’s rapprochement with Korea and China—they have begun holding joint heads of state summits as the “Plus 3” group—by turning Japan into the Pentagon’s “unsinkable aircraft carrier” in Asia. Already on Sept. 14, Armitage told Japan’s U.S. Ambassador Shunji Yanai that he wanted to “see the flag of the Rising Sun flying in the Indian Ocean,” demanding Japan send its navy abroad for the first time since 1945. “There are no 50% or 60% measures,” he said. “It is whether the government and the people of Japan are with us or not. . . . If you are involved in this, you cannot cherry-pick one thing you might do. You have to participate across the board, because this is a global disease.”

That deployment, and similar Armitage operations in Japan, have significantly soured the country’s relations with Korea and China since last Fall.

Clips of the very large, even thuggish Mr. Armitage were more recently featured on Japanese TV, when Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi fired his Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka on Jan. 29, “under State Department pressure ahead of the visit” of the Bush cabinet, an irate Tokyo Foreign Ministry source said. Armitage has been demanding Tanaka’s ouster ever since she refused to see him after her appointment last May. Tanaka had been promoting the “Plus 3” alliance, and was trying to shift the balance inside the ministry away from the powerful “State Department wing,” toward the “China wing” and “Russia wing,” the bureaus most friendly to the Eurasian Land-Bridge policy.

The *Far East Economic Review* on Jan. 24 noted that the State Department plans to redouble pressure on Japan to “play the key security role in Asia envisaged in the report authored by Republican Richard Armitage.” The “Armitage Report,” as it became known, published by the Pentagon’s National Defense University in November 2000, called for ditching Clinton’s pro-China policy, in favor of a more “pro-Japan” policy under which Tokyo re-arms as an American military surrogate.

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Philippines: 1,2,3. . . Many Military Exercises

by Michael Billington

On January 31, the “Balikatan-02-1,” or “Shoulder-to-Shoulder,” joint United States-Philippines military exercises officially began in and around the largely Muslim southern island of Mindanao. There have been months of political protests against the “exercises,” in which hundreds of U.S. Special Forces and combat troops will deploy on the front lines, together with the Philippines Army, in search-and-destroy missions against the terrorist Abu Sayyaf group.

One day after the opening festivities, on Feb. 1, an American military aircraft was fired upon during a supposedly unrelated “exercise” taking place in the northernmost island of Luzon. The suspected culprits were the Communist Party’s military arm, the New People’s Army (NPA), which is active in the area. The NPA, like the Abu Sayyaf, is on the official U.S. list of terrorist organizations. The NPA also warned the government a few weeks ago, in regard to the U.S.-Philippine operations against the Abu Sayyaf, that they would fight if U.S. forces came into areas they considered to be part of their territory.

A curious aspect of the shooting incident is that the general population, and at least some among the political leadership, were not even aware of the existence of this second exercise, involving 400 U.S. Special Forces personnel, despite the intense debate over the constitutionality of the operation in the South. An American hiker had been killed in the region the day before. Although the NPA denied responsibility for this act, they were initially suspected. Since the U.S. aircraft was engaged in a low-flying, counter-terror operation, it raises the question as to whether it may also have been engaged in a live-combat “exercise,” as in the South.

Are there more “exercises” in process? With many political leaders and journalists in both the United States and the Philippines recalling the “slippery slope” that led to full-scale war in the nearby jungles of Vietnam in the 1960s, and in the context of the manic flight-forward by the Clash of Civilizations faction in the U.S. government, the actual intentions of the United States and Anglo-American assets within the Philippines are suspect.

Response to the State of the Union

Those who consider the Balikatan exercise to be a flimsy cover for illegal U.S. involvement in combat operations on Philippines soil—including even President Gloria Macapa-

gal-Arroyo's Vice President and Defense Minister, Teofisto Guingona—were either strong-armed into acquiescence, or ignored. The direction of Philippine government policy has come increasingly from retired General and former President (and continuing asset of Anglo-American financial interests) Fidel Ramos, who has openly threatened President Arroyo with a coup if she fails to follow the dictates of "civil society and the business sector," referring to his networks among the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Makati Business Club, which runs the financial sector.

But even as the military operations were going forward, President Bush's belligerent State of the Union address has kindled a new concern over them, from nearly every layer of Philippines society.

The most outspoken opponent has been Sen. Rudolfo Biazon, a former Chief of Staff of the Philippines Armed Forces and principal author of the Visiting Forces Agreement, which redefined United States-Philippines military ties. Senator Biazon had already protested that his questions on the rules of engagement for U.S. troops had simply been ignored. Following Bush's speech, he warned that the existing "Terms of Reference" for the exercise would allow the United States to "act unilaterally if the Armed Services of the Philippines or the Philippine National Police are not able or are not willing to remove the threat." This, explained Biazon, "is the exact meaning when Bush said: 'If you don't want to act, we will. . . .' What is the limit to what they can do? When they are under attack, can they just call planes in from Guam and bomb Mindanao? I am alarmed by this."

Even the leading supporters of the U.S. military deployment reacted warily to the Bush speech. Ramos himself complained that "his speech was not well researched by his ghost writers." Justice Secretary Hernando Perez said: "It's clear in my mind that one president of a friendly country does not threaten another friendly country. We don't depend on what the Americans claim to be necessary. We do seek assistance from them in case of need, but that doesn't mean they will run our foreign policy."

On the opposition side, Congresswoman Imee Marcos, daughter of late President Ferdinand Marcos (deposed by Ramos et al. in 1986), said: "This is frightening, because it tells us that America will come in whether we like it or not. It really makes me wonder: If we do not have a Balikatan, do we have a choice?" Others warned of American arrogance and possible unilateral actions.

Sitting on Several Powderkegs

This backlash, which is in keeping with the response throughout the world to the tone adopted by the United States from the State of the Union speech, has led U.S. and Philippine officials to go to great lengths to make assurances that the "exercise" will not get out of hand. President Arroyo herself, in an interview with the Feb. 3 *Washington Post*, while she was in the United States for the World Economic Forum, denied any evidence of al-Qaeda connections to the Abu Say-

yaf since at least 1995, and said that she had informed President Bush that the "United States must not engage in combat," and that the operation was strictly limited to six months, despite earlier reports that it could go for one year or longer. Also, Adm. Dennis Blair, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, has repeatedly denied the charge that the United States intends to use the conflict as an excuse to set up a permanent military base in the region.

Nonetheless, the rules of engagement as they now stand are such that these pledges can be made irrelevant in the case of provocations, either accidental or intentional, by any of the numerous armed organizations operating in the country. In Mindanao, both the NPA and the Moro Islamic Liberation Movement (MILF) have warned that they will fight any U.S. incursion into their areas of operation. The absurdity of the situation was demonstrated by a report from Eduardo Ermita, the Philippines peace negotiator with the MILF, who called on them to set markers on the ground to designate their areas, and to "make sure that they will not let the Abu Sayyaf enter their territories while [the latter] are being pursued by the armed forces. They should take precautions so they don't get run over."

The MILF signed a cease-fire agreement with the government late last year, but sporadic clashes still break out, including two separate attacks on Feb. 4 which left two soldiers dead. A major faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), whose leader, Nur Misuari, is now in prison pending trial for leading an assault on an army camp that left over 100 dead, is also active in the area of the American/Philippines "exercises."

In the United States, the slavish capitulation of the Congress to the media-created popular opinion in support of anything related to the "war on terrorism," has left the Philippines military deployment completely unexamined and unchecked, although there are some officials who are privately concerned and may hold hearings when the smoke clears from the State of the Union speech.

There are some sane voices, however, questioning the dangerous charade. Gerald Finin, a Philippines specialist at the government-funded East-West Center in Hawaii, wrote that it is "unclear whether the U.S. mission is really for training, rescue of the American captives, or subduing al-Qaeda sympathizers. Moreover, the mission does not appear to have a clear exit strategy or timetable."

Finin told *EIR* that if the United States really wanted to do something about Abu Sayyaf, it could have been done more effectively, and more safely for all involved, by simply providing more advanced equipment. He made the point that in the jungle environment of Mindanao, there would be no effective way for U.S. combat troops to distinguish between armed combatants of the Abu Sayyaf and those of other organizations, some of which represent broad layers of the population—precisely the kind of mistake now being admitted to in Afghanistan—which could turn the "exercise" into another ugly war in Asia.