

# Cornucopia or Curse: The Internal Debate on the US Bases in the Philippines

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Supporters of the bases have plumbed the well of sentimental Filipino attachment to the US.

The US military bases in the Philippines have, from the onset, been the subject of great political debate and controversy. The issue concerning continued US military presence has served to draw the lines of differentiation between contending ideological and political groups. The forthcoming re-negotiation of the treaty covering the presence of the bases in the islands shall pose delicate questions on a new government that has, over the last few months, been fighting for its very survival.

Thus, the internal debate has been laden with much ideological symbolism and sentimental imagery.

Opposition to the presence of the bases has been a main rallying point for the nationalist movement. It has also provided the various forces of the Filipino Left with a visible symbol of American imperialism.

It is notable that there has been little explicit advocacy for the maintenance of the bases from major political personalities and parties. This is partly explainable by the fact that nationalist posturing has always had more favorable public response and it would be costly for serious politicians and parties to appear to be taking anti-nationalist stances. Away from the public eyes, however, it has also been more convenient for Filipino political leaders to reconcile with the presence of the bases. This while making the appropriate public gestures and routinary rhetoric to appease nationalist expectation.

The limited public exposure of the issues involved in the debate is due, in part, to the fact that the tenure of the bases has never been the subject of popular decision making. The first treaty covering the use of the bases was concluded with a government in exile as part of a package that includes the grant of independence. The present treaty was negotiated during the period of dictatorship when very little oppositional discourse was possible.



The forthcoming re-negotiation process shall occur under a very different political climate. With an assertive Congress now in place, the various political parties shall likely intervene at all phases of the negotiations. The presence of nationalist-oriented mass organizations shall put strong oppositional pressure on the negotiation process. The possibility of the proposed treaty being submitted to a plebiscite shall necessarily invite intense public discussion of the arguments for or against the retention of the bases.

Given these prospects, it should be worthwhile to review the main arguments for and against the continuation of US military presence in the Philippines.

#### ARGUMENTS FOR THE BASES

As far as could be gathered, the following points have been raised in favor of retaining the bases:

##### A. The Geopolitical Argument

The most frequently repeated arguments for the retention of the bases derive from the bi-polar premises of the Cold War view of the world and the global military strategy of the US.

The continued presence of the bases in the Philippines, this argument goes, is important to maintain the chain of "containment" that inhibits "communist expansionism" and preserves the security of the "Free World." The US military facilities in the Philippines are particularly important to the protection of air and sea lanes in the Southeast Asian region. They constitute an indispensable counter-balance to the Soviet military forces situated in Vietnam. As such, these bases represent a "security shield" behind which the countries of the Southeast Asian region can pursue peaceful economic development.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing the cudgels for the pro-bases argument, former US ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth stated: "Over the past 40 years, the bases have provided important support facilities to American forces in the Asia-Pacific region, have brought significant security and economic benefits to the Philippines, and have contributed to the regional stability important for successful economic development."<sup>2</sup>

The geopolitical argument, apart from the implicit assumption of aggressive Soviet designs for the region, is rendered more emphatic by detailed accounts of the build-up of Soviet military power in the South China Sea. A pamphlet widely distributed by the USIS argues that Soviet military presence in the region constitutes a threat to the ASEAN countries, citing intrusions of Soviet military aircraft into ASEAN airspace as evidence. The pamphlet claims that a monthly average of 25 Soviet ships dock at Cam Ranh Bay as compared to the monthly average of 12 US ships docking at the Subic Naval Base. The same source claims Soviets have stationed a substantial military force at Cam Ranh composed of TU-16 bombers, BEAR reconnaissance and ASW aircraft,



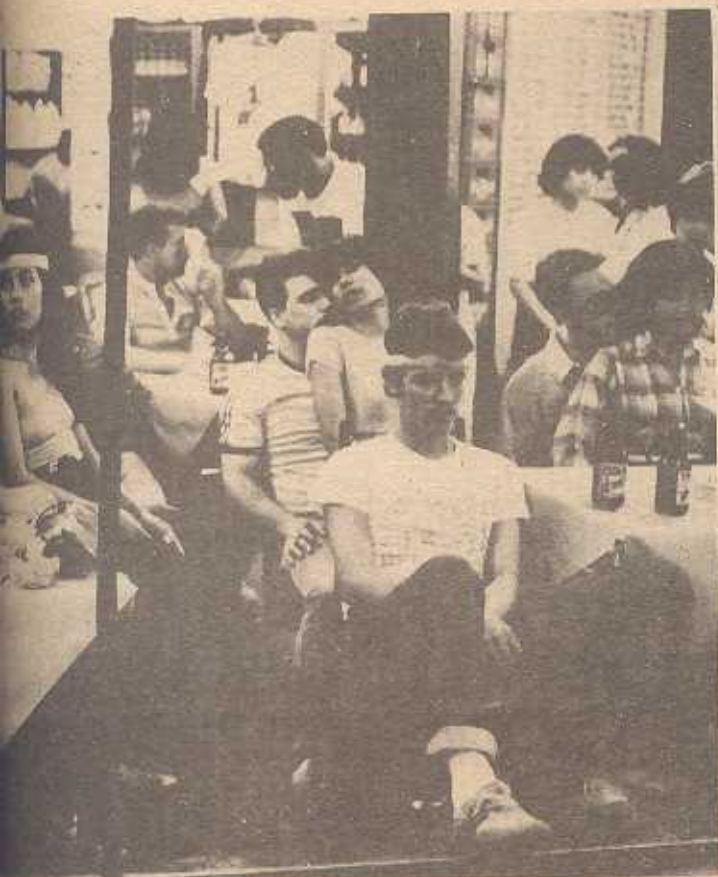
MIG-23 Flogger fighter aircraft, 6 to 8 combat surface ships and 5 to 6 attack and cruise missile submarines.<sup>3</sup>

Seth Cropsey, Deputy Undersecretary of the Navy, claims in a recent article that the Soviets have spent an estimated \$3 billion on the Cam Ranh Bay facilities. This, along with the growth of the Soviet Pacific fleet and diplomatic initiatives are to be understood as "strong evidence that the Soviets aim for a forceful, long-term role in the Pacific."<sup>4</sup>

The geopolitical rationale offered by US spokesmen has been echoed by conservative Filipino politicians and opinion-makers. Former Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile argued that "keeping the US bases in the Philippines was necessary to protect the internal security of the country and maintain the balance of power in the ASEAN region." Saying that the American facilities were needed to guarantee free access to the sea lanes of the Pacific and Indian oceans, Enrile stepped ahead of the policy-making process and declared that "it is the clear intention of the Philippine government to give meaningful support to this objective."<sup>5</sup>

When a new constitution was being written, a compact nationalist bloc moved to render the presence of the US bases unconstitutional. The move could have prospered save for the efforts of such advocates as Commissioner Serafin Guingona who argued that the "bases actually serve as deterrents to attack."<sup>6</sup> The commissioner's arguments followed from the geopolitical premises mentioned above.





## B. The Economic Benefits Argument

Many who support the continuation of the US bases point to the economic benefits derived from the aid package mandated by the bases treaty, direct employment of Filipino workers in the bases and foreign currency inflow resulting from bases expenditures. Two important cities -- Angeles in Pampanga province and Olongapo in Zambales -- are almost completely dependent economically on the continued stay of the bases.

According to data circulated by the USIS, the American military annually spends over \$350 million in the Philippines. As of December 1985, the US facilities employed 20,581 full-time workers, 14,249 contract workers, 5,064 domestics and 1,746 concessionaires for a total direct employment of 42,265 Filipinos. Annual salaries for Filipino workers add up to \$82,885,042 (or about P1,658 million), making the US military the second largest employer after the Philippine government itself.<sup>7</sup>

The present treaty covering the use of the military facilities involves an amount which the Philippine government prefers to view as "rent" for the bases and which the US government would rather consider "assistance." The definitional problem is crucial insofar as it determines whether the US government may intervene in the disbursement of the

amount. At present, the money goes into what is officially called the Economic Support Fund (ESF) administered jointly by the USAID and the Philippine government.

From 1980 to April 1986, a total of \$327.5 million from the ESF was used to build some 2,000 elementary grade classrooms, 1,400 kms. of roads, 28 public markets, 11 vocational high schools, 5 slaughterhouses and 4 hospitals. The 1983 Bases Agreement provided \$475 million for the ESF. President Aquino was promised an additional \$100 million during her visit to the US last year.<sup>8</sup>

The Philippine government has long expressed dissatisfaction with the existing arrangement regarding the compensation package. In the existing arrangement, funds from the ESF are disbursed on a project-to-project basis and require the prior approval of the USAID. The tedious process has resulted in a backlog in the disbursement of funds committed by the US government under the existing treaty.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the ESF, the Philippines receives Foreign Military Sales Credit (FMSC) and Military Assistance (MA) grants from the US. All three are linked to the use of the military bases. In the Agreement covering the period 1985-89, the Philippines is slated to receive \$475 million for the ESF, \$300 million for the FMSC and \$125 million in MA for a total of \$900 million. This compares with the aggregate \$500 million received for the period 1980-84.<sup>10</sup>

Military assistance and military sales credits are, at the moment, considered by some to be indispensable for the Armed Forces of the Philippines. According to Commissioner Serafin Guingona: "In 1985, RP defense budget was \$437 million. If military assistance were to be cut off, much of our spending would go to the payment of foreign loans and to the budget of the military and little would be left for government services . . . The impact of a sudden withdrawal of American forces from the Philippines could well bring about disastrous results to our country's heroic efforts towards economic recovery."<sup>11</sup>

The area around the two major bases -- Clark and Subic -- are so dependent on American expenditure, they have designed their development around the premise of continued US presence. The city plan of Olongapo, for instance, reads: "Because of rugged mountainous topography of the city's northern portion and due to the restrictions on both land and bay water reservation areas imposed by the US naval base, Olongapo cannot flexibly assume varied functional roles. Thus the city should direct and concentrate its development efforts to function as a 'service center area'."<sup>12</sup>

Because of the substantial economic presence of the US bases, pragmatists, particularly from the business community, have favored a policy of maximizing the economic utility of continued American presence. David Sycip, a respected spokesman of the Filipino business community, recently proposed, before a closed-door session of the Senate foreign relations committee, that an annual rental of \$1 billion be demanded for the continued use of the bases. Raising the rent





The other side of Olongapo: poverty and squalor just outside the base.



**ANYTIME BABY...!**

**SUPPORT**



A Marine poster.

for the bases, says Sycip, would ease the pressure on the national government for generating additional revenue and investments. The proposal also reconciles the security needs of the US in the region and the Philippine government's need for fresh funds.<sup>13</sup>

Marginal politicians like Reuben Canoy have gone as far as proposing the transfer of the bases to the "Federated Republic" of Mindanao should the Manila government choose to let the bases treaty expire on 1991. Canoy, whose political fortunes have been declining, has lately engaged in forming - with little success - a separatist bloc of Christian politicians in the southern Philippine island.<sup>14</sup>

The lure of more dollars for the continued stay of the bases shall likely attract more mainline support when the deliberations on the future of the US military facilities intensify.

### C. The Political Realism Argument

Those who refer to themselves as "political realists" have argued for the retention of the US bases because they constitute part of the political "givens" underpinning Filipino political life. Altering present arrangements could create stresses and instabilities whose outcome would probably be costlier than whatever inconvenience the bases now cause.

In an interview, for instance, former Defense Minister Enrile complained that the "amount that is being given us is not enough to really compensate for all these risks that is placed in the Philippines." When asked why the bases are nevertheless maintained, he replied: "Historically, we have been tied with the US."<sup>15</sup>



Although many "political realist" arguments are vaguely constructed, they nevertheless maintain strong pragmatist attraction. During the last Congressional campaign, when most candidates other than those identified with the militant nationalist bloc chose to skirt around the ticklish bases issue, one independent senatorial candidate found sense in staunchly supporting the US bases on this thought: "Filipinos being mostly westernized Christians and pragmatic people, only a small percentage will favor the dismantling of these facilities."<sup>16</sup> The candidate lost but if a referendum on the bases is held at the present time, his confidence will most likely be sustained.

The "political realist" position blends easily with the economic benefits argument as well as the geopolitical paradigm for establishing the indispensability of the US military facilities.

In past debates, the "political realist" position has lent itself to red-scare scenarios that link the withdrawal of the bases to the possibility of a communist take-over. This drift may be noted in Commissioner Guingona's arguments in favor of the bases during the deliberations at the Constitutional Commission: ". . . Let us not forget that we have a serious insurgency problem on our hands and we will need all the friendly assistance and support of our allies, including the United States."<sup>17</sup>

#### D. The Legalist Argument

The presence of the US bases in the Philippines has been defended and attacked on the matter of its legality. This particular aspect of the bases issue emerged as an important one during the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention.

When the possibility of abrogating the bases agreement via constitutional prohibition emerged, Commissioner Guingona responded thus: "Any attempt by the Philippines to unilaterally abrogate the agreement would be violative of *pacta sunt servanda*, a fundamental principle of international law which holds that obligations of international agreements should be discharged in good faith. If we abrogate unilaterally, we would project for our country an image of international delinquency."<sup>18</sup>

Guingona continues: "Those favoring immediate dismantling cite the principle of *rebus sic stantibus* which says that a treaty ceases to be binding when an essential change in circumstances in which it was concluded has occurred. But in order for the principle to be applicable, it would require a substantial change in circumstances as to seriously jeopardize the existence of the State, a requirement which obviously does not exist."

By the Commissioner's reckoning, the bases agreement is valid because: the parties had capacity to contract; the agents were duly-empowered; there was freedom of consent; and, the object was in conformity with international law.

On the matter of possible infringement on Philippine sovereignty, Guingona considers that "the fact that the US

uses and occupies the military bases with our consent does not at all deprive us of sovereignty in much the same way that an owner does not lose ownership over his property notwithstanding the fact that the same is used and occupied by the lessee."<sup>19</sup>

#### E. Fil-Am Friendship Argument

Apart from the arguments pursued within the terrain of pragmatism, supporters of the US bases have plumbed the well of sentimental Filipino attachment to the US.

Beneath the visible nationalist movements and anti-American protests, there runs a stream of pro-American sentiment nourished by memories of common struggle against the Japanese invasion and by kinship links with a rapidly growing Filipino-American community.

Filipino pro-Americanism has been sufficiently broad to keep alive a marginal but significant political movement seeking to make the Philippines an American state. Members of this movement see statehood as the ultimate solution to the country's underdevelopment. Individually, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos are seeking immigration to the United States. The exodus of Filipinos over the last decades has been almost totally towards the US.

There are deep-seated images in the Filipino mind -- particularly among the older generation and among conservative political sectors -- of American benevolence. This was cultivated in an earlier period by a public school system organized by the American colonial government. Until the Philippine government conceded to complaints by nationalists, the 4th of July was celebrated as a public holiday commemorating Filipino-American friendship.

This sentimental bond has been tapped to generate public support for the bases. Within the framework of Filipino sensibility, friendship obligates the Philippines to continue hosting the bases.

The sense of obligation is, however, double-edged as Enrile so aptly articulates: "We felt that it is the duty of the US to give us the wherewithal to build our military capability as an ally of the US under the Mutual Defense Treaty."<sup>20</sup>

In typical Filipino fashion, the expectation of reciprocal obligation is lavished with a positive appraisal of the other party: "We feel that America is a friend, that America has an interest to serve here; that America is a just nation and that we are going to be treated justly."<sup>21</sup>

#### ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE BASES

Over the last two decades, opposition to the continued stay of the American bases in the Philippines moved from the margins to the main arenas of Filipino politics. It used to be that arguing against the bases was an activity confined to the nationalist intelligentsia composed of the likes of Claro M. Recto and Lorenzo Tañada. Today, opposition to the bases has become an important rallying call for the grassroots



political movements spawned during the period of popular resistance to dictatorship.

Before the Marcos dictatorship was displaced by a popular uprising, it was confronted, among others, by the Anti-Bases Coalition (ABC) organized by Tafiada and the late Jose W. Diokno. The ABC brought together major nationalist politicians, mass organizations, cause-oriented groups, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, religious institutions and ecological/anti-nuclear movements. The coalition linked the dictatorship to the US bases.<sup>22</sup>

It is significant to note that opposition to the bases are carried out by organized forces representing a broad ideological and sectoral spectrum. From these organized forces a great mass of anti-bases literature has emerged. The broad range of opposition to the bases shall be borne out by the arguments that shall be outlined in the succeeding portions of this paper.

It must be noted that, at least from the side of the militant nationalist groups opposed to the bases, the resolution of the issue is viewed as inextricably linked with the struggle for political power. It is a political question first and foremost.

Because most of the arguments against the bases are constructed from nationalist and neutralist premises, it is understandable that the geopolitical paradigm favoring the retention of the bases is explicitly rejected. No major argument in opposition to the bases is constructed within the framework of the Cold War view of the world.

#### A. Marginal Economic Utility

Opponents of the continued tenure of the bases in the Philippines have squarely confronted the claim that the military facilities make substantial and positive contributions to the host economy.

A Filipino analyst notes that "only a small fraction of American disbursements . . . finds its way into the Philippine economy as invisible income. This is so because most of the appropriations for the bases are actually spent for maintenance and repair which do not entail contract servicing by Filipino firms, and most purchases of consumption goods by base personnel are made at tax-free PX commissions. Income from the bases is, therefore, mostly for off-base housing facilities, for entertainment and recreation services and the employment of Filipinos on-base."<sup>23</sup>

Another analyst notes further that US base spending are mainly directed at consumption rather than capital investment and, thus, do not directly contribute to an increase in Philippine production; on the other hand, they even have inflationary effects on the economy.<sup>24</sup>

It is misleading to say simply that the US bases constitute the second biggest employer to the Philippine government. The number of Filipino employees and workers on the bases does not even amount to 5 percent of the 1.18 million persons employed by the Philippine government. The bases also

employ less than 1 percent of the Philippine non-agricultural labor force.<sup>25</sup> On top of this, Filipino workers are paid less than their peers in bases in other countries.<sup>26</sup>

Complaints on wage rates involve not only comparative terms across countries. Filipino workers complain of unequal pay for equal work between Filipinos and Americans.<sup>27</sup>

Counterposed against the economic and military assistance offered by the US in exchange for use of the bases is the fact that the military facilities block off a large tract of land. About 60 percent of the combined land area occupied by Clark and Subic is arable. Subic's 36,000 acres of land "make it equal to the combined size of the plantation of Del Monte (17,420 acres) and Dole (19,200) on the island of Mindanao which constitutes the center of the world's pineapple industry."<sup>28</sup>

Subic and Clark's combined land area "comes close to some 10 percent of Philippine agricultural land which the Marcos government nominally declared land reform area." They have the potential for producing 8.4 million cavans of husked rice (based on the conservative production estimate of 35 canvas per acre, two harvests yearly) costing a total amount of \$109 million.<sup>29</sup>

US Senator Mansfield in 1975 observed that Clark "covers such a vast area that squatters operating surreptitiously are said to have raised an estimated \$10 million worth of sugar cane on base lands last year."<sup>30</sup> Apart from this, the base areas contain large amounts of timber resources which base authorities are charged with illegally exploiting.<sup>31</sup>

On top of all of these, figures show that the Philippines receives less than preferential treatment in the amount of economic assistance it receives in exchange for allowing the use of the bases. Of the 13 countries hosting US bases, the Philippines ranks only 8th as to the total US aid given. A number of vocally non-aligned countries actually receive more assistance than the Philippines. Moreover, the Philippines, like Japan, is required to contribute financially to the cost of maintaining the US forces stationed in the islands.<sup>32</sup>

#### B. Alternative Uses Argument

Following along the logic of economic pragmatism, opponents of continued US military presence have argued that the Philippines would derive greater benefits if it puts the base facilities to alternative economic uses.

The influential Philippine Chamber of Commerce conducted a study in 1975 and proposed a blueprint for transforming the bases into "agro-industrial and commercial complexes, and transportation communication and tourist centers." The study concluded that "more could be generated when the US military bases are taken over by Government and the private sector."

Specifically:

- 1) Camp John Hay in Baguio could be turned into a recreational/tourist center.



2) Subic could be developed into a major ship-building, repair and servicing yard, with anchorage facilities for laid-up tankers and a variety of related maritime industries. (In fact, the Philippines in 1979 received and considered a joint venture proposal from Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries for the construction of ship-repair facilities at Cabangon point, 10 kms. across Subic Bay).

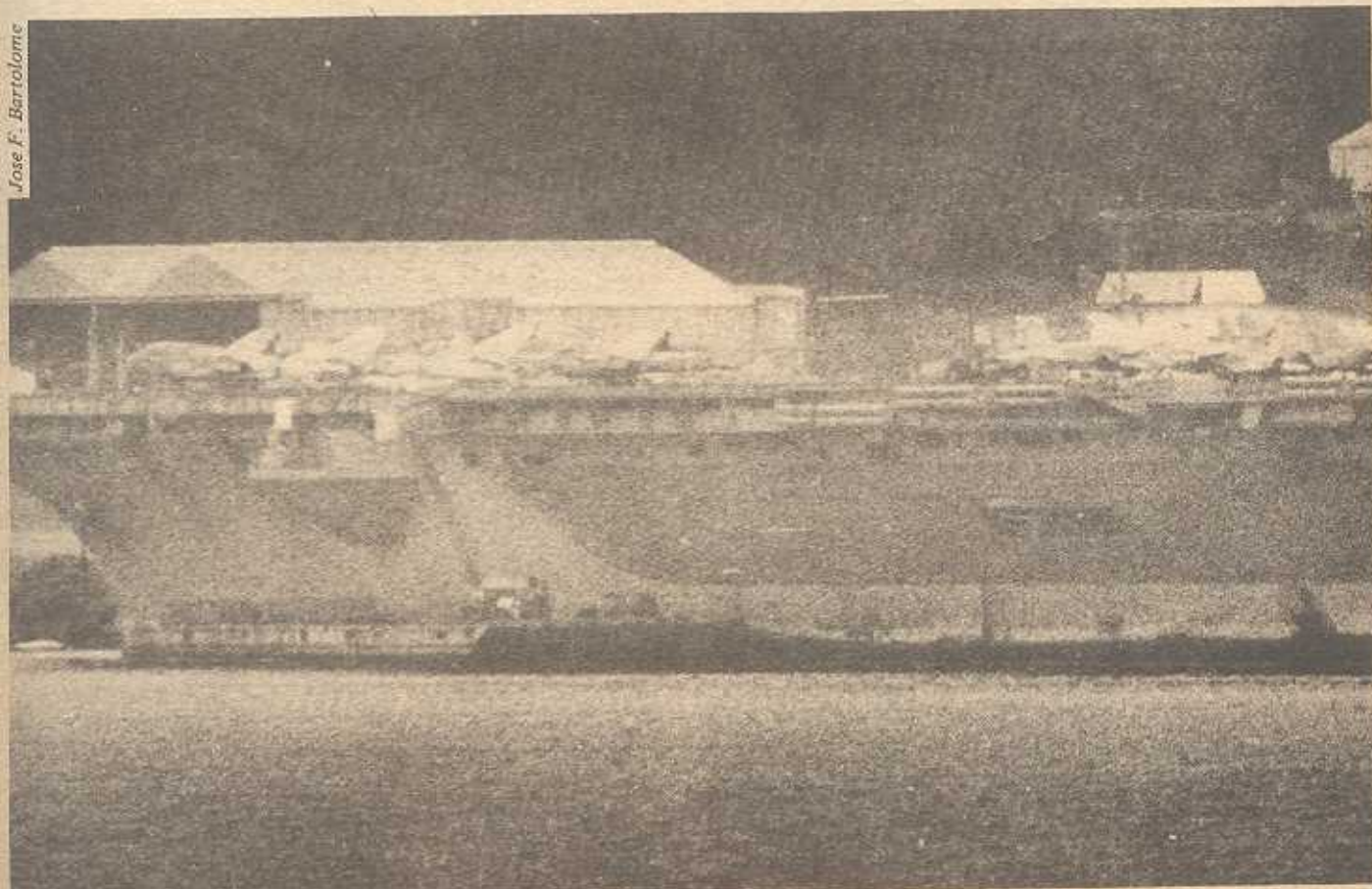
3) For its part, the base area at Clark could serve at least three functions: First, it could be turned into a major international airport for passengers and cargo, with domestic transshipment facilities, and major aircraft manufacturing activities. Second, Clark could be turned into a center for industrial and commercial growth in the densely populated Central Plain region, with an industrial site set aside for the purpose. Not situated beside a harbor like Subic, Clark should consider light industries to minimize transport costs. Finally, Clark is an ideal site for corporate farming. The land occupied by Clark was once the richest farmland in the provinces of Pampanga and Tarlac, representing a significant portion of arable Philippine land. The bases have put hundreds of fertile land out of production.<sup>33</sup>

The physical plant at Subic includes three major wharves bigger in capacity than the country's major port in Manila. Both Clark and Subic have superior runways, vast storage spaces and immense fuel storage facilities. The National Economic Development Authority, however, has recently admitted that the Philippine government has yet to devise fallback plans and make its own blueprints that would minimize economic dislocation from a pull-out of the bases.<sup>34</sup>

Jose Ma. Sison, a leading leftist intellectual, has proposed: "The two bases in the country can be turned into fuelling depots serviceable to any vessel or aircraft of any nationality, provided that monetary compensation be paid. This undertaking will be in accordance with the Tydings-McDuffie Law which stipulated that the US military bases serve as fuelling stations only."<sup>35</sup>

The proposal to convert the bases facilities to "peaceful, productive civilian use" has been supported by popular organizations in the area as indicated by a recent statement issued by the Central Luzon Alliance for a Sovereign Philippines (CLASP).<sup>36</sup> The cue was picked up by Congressman Lazatin of Pampanga (whose district is host to Clark). Lazatin deplored the absence of a government alternative in his district.<sup>37</sup>

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Subic Naval Base in Olongapo City: The biggest military facility outside the US mainland.



*An Amerasian at the Clark perimeter: "if subjected to land reform, the land could benefit 3,800 farmer families."*

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arms in the Western Pacific. This information was confirmed more recently by former Rear Admiral Gene La Roque who testified before the US Congress on June 28, 1983 that tactical nuclear weapons are indeed stored in the Philippines and that "they serve no useful purpose and only make the chance of a catastrophic US-USSR confrontation much greater."<sup>44</sup>

More alarming, a study done by the Brookings Institution in October 1982 found that targets of the USSR Far Eastern Rocket Army included US nuclear ammunition sites, and air and naval bases in the Philippines, Guam and Hawaii.<sup>45</sup> A nuclear attack on the US bases in the Philippines would

A study done by the National Council for People's Development (NCPD), a consortium of non-governmental and people-based organizations engaged in development work, argues that: "The Philippines has 'thrown away' an annual income of more than P456 million that could have been generated had the land been cultivated (referring to the 53,000 hectares of land occupied by Clark)." A spokesman of the NCPD said that even if only half of the land covered by the base were put to productive use, it would yield 1.52 million cavans a year or an annual income of at least P456 million. If subjected to land reform and distributed in 5-hectare parcels, the land could benefit 3,800 farmer families.<sup>38</sup>

Related to this, Congressman Felicitio Payumo of Bataan announced his intention to file a bill in the House of Representatives seeking to determine the government's alternative should it be decided that the bases would not be extended beyond 1991.<sup>39</sup> Reference has been made to the 1981 Development Plan done by the National Council on Integrated Area Development which identified 18,286 hectares of present base lands suitable for agro-forestry production. Moreover, there are large tracts of open grassland that can be transformed into pastureland.<sup>40</sup>

Late last year, the municipal council of Mabalacat, Pampanga supported by a petition from residents, passed a resolution formalizing their protest over aircraft noise pollution. The town lies beside the Clark perimeter. The resolution stated that sonic pollution affected livestock production in Mabalacat. Specifically, the noise has been established as the cause of declining egg-laying capabilities of fowls. The town mayor added that 90% of Clark's total area belonged to Mabalacat, depriving the municipality of some P3 million in annual revenues from realty taxes.<sup>41</sup>

### C. Nuclear Attack/Interventionism

The presence of the US bases has also been opposed on the grounds that they function as magnets for nuclear attack and staging grounds for American intervention in internal Philippine affairs.

Nationalists are disturbed by the fact that while the terms of the 1978 agreement referred to the bases as "Philippine bases" incorporating "US facilities", and that the US is no longer granted "use" but "access" to these bases,<sup>42</sup> the Americans have effective operational control over the facilities and Philippine authorities have no way of checking the presence of nuclear weapons in the bases. US troops still have the right to "unhampered military operations" and free movement around Philippine (not just bases) territory.<sup>43</sup>

Alarm has been raised over the presence of US nuclear weapons in the bases, raising the possibility not only of nuclear attack but also of nuclear accidents.

As early as 1975, the Center for Defense Information identified at least 54 tactical nuclear weapons stored in the Philippines. This makes them a major storage area for nuclear



cause unimaginable disaster, considering that these are located in the region of greatest population density.

The public anxiety is best expressed by the editorial of a leading daily: "The presence here of US bases, which are believed to harbor sophisticated arms, makes the Philippines a ready target . . . Unfortunately, despite our inability to participate actively (in the nuclear arms race), we find ourselves caught in the crossfire, thanks to the presence of American bases in our midst."<sup>46</sup>

The National Organization Against Nuclear Power and Weapons (No Nukes), a coalition of cause-oriented groups, has presented Congress with a proposal to "enact a law that will immediately abrogate the US-RP Military Bases Agreement within the time frame 1987-1991, specifying the dismantling of all nuclear facilities, and the pull-out of all US soldiers and personnel within one year. . . . Unilateral abrogation by the Philippines (must be done) in the event that: a) there is a violation of the Philippines' nuclear weapons-free policy; b) the nuclear weapons-free policy could not be enforced because of American intransigence, non-compliance or non-cooperation."<sup>47</sup>

The new Philippine Constitution bans nuclear weapons as a matter of state policy. Consistent with this ban, two bills have been filed in both houses of Congress seeking to translate the Constitutional provision into more specific ordinances. It is generally considered that with such legislation, the strategic value of the bases for the US shall be vastly diminished.<sup>48</sup>

US interest in maintaining the bases is considered sufficient motive for intervening in the internal affairs of the host country. In the last phases of the Marcos dictatorship, Washington was visibly engrossed with ways and means for preventing an emergent political crisis from turning into a situation highly unfavorable for American interests in the country and the region.<sup>49</sup>

With a highly successful left-wing insurgency, the accession to power of the Aquino government has been viewed as the best possible outcome for American strategic interest in the country. The US moved quickly to endorse the new democratic government, rehabilitate the Philippine military and extend assistance for economic recovery. US assistance to the Aquino government has, however, been limited by two factors: budgetary stringencies and uncertainty about the ability of the Aquino government to use large amounts of additional aid effectively.<sup>50</sup>

One American analyst noted: "The United States must play a critical role if stability in the Philippines is to be achieved. There must be a willingness to make a significant and on-going commitment of resources on a variety of levels. As noted, it is crucial that there be economic support for key programs such as land reform, designed to alleviate the needs of the rural poor. Should full-scale fighting resume, American military supplies, equipment, and training will be central to the outcome of the struggle as was true during the Hukbalahap

era."<sup>51</sup>

It is precisely such view that distresses Filipino nationalists who feel that internal differences ought to be settled by the Filipinos themselves. Apprehension has been raised that wargames conducted jointly by Filipino and American soldiers from the bases herald not only the commitment of US logistics in the event of a civil war, but US troops as well.<sup>52</sup>

In left-wing circles, the recent coup attempts and the increasing political assertiveness of the military establishment is linked to a larger gameplan to clear the way for the renegotiation of the bases agreement.<sup>53</sup> Such anxiety is not at all

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*Servicemen on R & R: Base-related prostitution has been described as 'mass, transnationalized and institutionalized'.*



relieved by right-wing American analysts who tend to magnify the political potential of the revolutionary Filipino Left for the consumption of policy-makers.<sup>54</sup>

#### D. The Legality of the Bases

One aspect of the debate on the bases that tends to be over-looked concerns the legality or constitutionality of foreign military facilities on Philippine soil.

Jose W. Diokno, a respected nationalist and constitutional lawyer, tried to build a case arguing the illegality of the bases.

Tracing the historical antecedents to the present arrangement, Diokno recalls that in 1933, the US offered to recognize Philippine independence on the condition that it be allowed to retain military bases in the islands. The proposal was popularly rejected.

The Philippine Independence Act of 1934 (Tydings-McDuffie Act), which set the date for the grant of Philippine independence, subsequently contained no provision on the retention of US military bases in the country. This act was accepted by the Filipinos and made part of the 1935 Constitution.

In 1944, before the US re-occupied the islands from Japan, the US government was able to exact from the Philippine government-in-exile an agreement to retain the bases as a precondition for independence. This agreement clearly violated the Tydings-McDuffie Act and the promise of full sovereignty made by Franklin Roosevelt on behalf of his government. On March 14, 1947, the Bases Agreement was signed.

Since the Tydings-McDuffie Act was approved by referendum, and the Bases Agreement altered that law, it required a process of popular approval. Since this was not done, the Diokno argument goes, the Bases Agreement was illegal from the start. The same illegality applies to subsequent amendments to the Bases Agreement.<sup>55</sup>

#### E. Social Costs of the Bases

The presence of the US bases becomes a highly emotive question when discussed in terms of its social costs. There is usually a shrill public outcry when young Filipino scavengers are attacked by trained canines or shot by American guards, when servicemen guilty of crimes are spirited out of the country. On a more sustained basis, there is growing public concern over prostitution, increasing crime rates, drug-trafficking and sexually transmitted diseases in the vicinity of the bases.

Lay Catholic organizations and militant feminist groups have chorused over the rampant prostitution in the two cities of Angeles and Olongapo that service Clark and Subic respectively. Human rights groups have condemned prostitution as a violation of human rights. Increased evidence of child prostitution around the bases have generated opposition

even from normally conservative sectors. As compared to other localities, base-related prostitution has been described as "mass, transnationalized and institutionalized."<sup>56</sup>

One concerned physician bitterly wrote: "Certainly, Angeles and Olongapo are almost completely dependent on the bases, but the social consequences have been a heavy price to pay in terms of the problems associated with the two cities' economic mainstay, the "R & R" (rest and recreation) trades. Prostitution, drug abuse, "souvenir babies" (Amerasians) . . . The US Naval Medical Research Unit (NAMRU) may provide free AIDS anti-body testing for hospitality girls, but these are clearly designed to protect the servicemen rather than the women."<sup>57</sup>

The public, it appears, is now more alarmed over spreading cases of AIDS traced to the US bases than the possibility of nuclear attack. Last year, the Ministry of Health confirmed that 12 hospitality girls in Angeles and Olongapo were found positive for AIDS. A broad coalition of women's organizations immediately responded by issuing a statement calling for the immediate removal of the bases and requiring the US government to shoulder the costs of supporting AIDS victims and their dependents.<sup>58</sup>

#### THE FUTURE OF THE BASES

Those opposed to the presence of US bases in the Philippines are divided between militants demanding immediate and unilateral abrogation of the Agreement and those who desire a clear and phased perspective of withdrawal.

Those demanding immediate expulsion of the bases cite Article 56 of the Vienna Convention of the Law of Treaties as basis in international law. The Military Bases Agreement contains no provision regarding denunciation or termination and thus falls into a category of treaties where unilateral denunciation or termination is expressly allowed.<sup>59</sup>

In objective political terms, however, there is little possibility for unilateral termination of the bases agreements. Official policy commits the Philippines to honoring the existing Agreement which ends in 1991. More important, the Aquino government, besieged from the Right and Left and dependent on American support, is in no political position to open unnecessarily a new source of political strain.

There is probably merit in the estimate that if a referendum on the bases is held now, assuming no change in the expressed views of the Aquino Presidency, the bases would be retained by a definite majority.

One American analyst is probably right when he said: "For many Filipinos, the bases are a powerful and reassuring symbol of continuing American commitment to the welfare of a former ward. Such support is even more important now because of the threat posed by the NPA. For this reason, successful US-Philippine negotiations on the bases will tend to solidify the Aquino government's position. It can be expected that a new accord on the bases will be vigorously opposed, not



only by the Communists, but also by a growing class of nationalist and non-Marxist members of the left. While such opposition is strong – its strength a legacy from the years of US support for Marcos – it is still a minority view, as will be shown if, as is possible under the new Constitution, the bases treaty is submitted for popular approval in a referendum.”<sup>60</sup>

The growing mass movements and the increased influence of nationalist political leaders puts the momentum on the anti-bases side of the debate. Vice-President and former Foreign Affairs Secretary Salvador Laurel stated that “all bases must go, sooner or later.”<sup>61</sup> Senate President Jovito Salonga is quoted thus: “I am against the indefinite stay of the bases in this country – with the (word) indefinite being italicized.”<sup>62</sup>


There might be a tendency to assume the constancy of public opinion on the bases. A recent survey surprised political analysts by demonstrating that only 34% of all Filipinos are aware the American facilities exist in the country.<sup>63</sup> The remaining bulk of the population would likely vote in a referendum on the basis of the particularities of the political situation. That undecided number could also be convinced in the interim by educational campaigns mounted by mass organizations opposed to the retention of the bases.

A sharp wave of anti-Americanism may be provoked by stronger evidence of interference in internal affairs – including those initiated in a private capacity by right-wing American adventurers. There is a significant following, for instance, for the interpretation of the latest coup attempt as the handiwork of right-wing American operatives bent on creating a political situation more preferable to the retention of the bases.<sup>64</sup> Should convincing evidence surface to support this interpretation, there shall definitely be an upsurge of anti-bases support not only from the politicized masses but from crucial political leaders as well. In a hypothetical situation where a popular President Aquino takes a clear stand against retaining the bases, it will be likely that the majority in a referendum would shift from supporting to rejecting the retention of the bases.

Given the political stresses and the renewed polarization of political forces, the bases question puts the government in an extremely dilemmatic position. At the very least, it will have to satisfy growing nationalist pressure by taking a much tougher line at the negotiating table than the Marcos government ever dared to do.

Continued public frustration over the amount of actual American support coming in might serve to dampen the enthusiasm and dilute the credibility of Filipino opinion-makers bearing the cudgels for the retention of the bases.

It would be tautological to say that public opinion tends to be volatile when the political situation is extremely fluid. Needless to say, the present situation in the Philippines is characterized by great anxiety and fluidity, with social divisions deepening and public frustration rising with the slow pace of reform and economic recovery.

Those who find comfort in the thought that a majority of Filipinos, *at the moment*, would support the retention of the bases ought to take a second look. The referendum to be conducted a few years from now would probably be held under altered political circumstances and a qualitatively different public mood. Greater attention shall have to be paid to the complex undercurrents expressed in seemingly disconnected instances of political turbulence. 

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>US Information Service, *Background on the Bases: American Facilities in the Philippines* (Manila, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, Foreword.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup>Seth Cropsey, “Moscow in the Pacific” *National Review* (5 June 1987) pp. 28-30.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Jose P. A. Torres, “The Aquino Government and the US Bases: Compromising for Staying Power” *Collegian Features Folio* (University of the Philippines, Quezon City, July 1986) p. 30, Enrile was subsequently removed from his post.

<sup>6</sup>Guingona, Serafin V.C. “The Military Bases Issue” *Record of the Constitutional Commission*, Vol. 4 (Editorial and Publications Unit, Constitutional Commission, 1986) pp. 978-979.

<sup>7</sup>USIS, “Background on the Bases...” *op cit.*

<sup>8</sup>Ibon Facts and Figures (30 June 1987).

<sup>9</sup>See: US Government Accounting Office, Economic Support Fund Assistance to the Philippines, Report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, 27 January 1984.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Guingona, *op. cit.* p. 979.

<sup>12</sup>City of Olongapo, *City Plan/Zoning Ordinance 1987-1992*.

<sup>13</sup>“Sycip proposes P1 B yearly rent for the bases” *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (4 September 1987) p. 10 (Considering that Sycip proposes to increase “rent” five times over current levels, he must be speaking in dollar not peso terms.)

<sup>14</sup>Reuben Canoy, “What Kind of Future Awaits Us?” *Malaya* (5 September 1987) p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>“On the US military bases in RP: Aid or Rental” (excerpts from an interview given by Juan Ponce Enrile to Robert Trumbill of the *NYT*) *Malayan Pilipino* (Vol. 5 No. 1 Jan. to Mar. 1984) p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>“Senatorial bet backs US bases” *Manila Bulletin* (5 May 1987) p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>Guingona, *op cit* p. 979.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*



- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid* p. 978.
- <sup>20</sup> "On the US military bases. . ." *op cit* p. 5.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid* p. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Roberto Coloma, "The ABC: Continuing the Fight against Military Bases on our Soil" *Who Magazine*, (23 March 1983) p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Alejandro Fernandez, *The Philippines and the US: Politics of Security* pp. 325-326.
- <sup>24</sup> Patricia Ann Paez, *The Bases Factor: Realpolitik of RP-US Relations*, (CSIS-Dispatch, Manila: 1985) p. 164.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid* p. 165.
- <sup>26</sup> Civil Liberties Union of the Philippines, *US Bases and Philippine Survival and Development* (Manila: 1979) p. 13.
- <sup>27</sup> Paul Hutchcraft, "US Bases, US Bosses: Filipino Workers at Clark and Subic" *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, Issue no. 89 (April, 1983) pp. 88-89.
- <sup>28</sup> Paez, *op cit*, p. 184.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 184-185.
- <sup>30</sup> Mike Mansfield, *Winds of Change: Evolving Relations and Interests in Southeast Asia: A Report to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Washington D.C., 1975) p. 14.
- <sup>31</sup> Paez, *op cit*, p. 175.
- <sup>32</sup> R.P. Views: *A Brief Guide to the Philippine Views on the US Bases* (Quezon City, 1986) p. 10.
- <sup>33</sup> Quoted in: "Some Notes on the Economic Aspect of the US Military Bases Issue" *NAJED Discussion Papers* (No. 1, August 1986) pp. 5-6.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibon Facts and Figures* (Vol. X No. 12, 30 June 1987) citing a report in the *Malaya* (23 December 1986).
- <sup>35</sup> Quoted in Torres, "The Aquino Government and the US Bases. . ." *op cit* p. 25.
- <sup>36</sup> Cited in Elmer Cato, "Gov't asked to find uses for bases sites" *Manila Chronicle* (8 August 1987).
- <sup>37</sup> Elmer Cato, "Profitable alternative to the present site of the bases" *Manila Chronicle* (10 August 1987).
- <sup>38</sup> Marites Sison, "Gov't losing P.5 B annually through Clark, says study" *Manila Chronicle* (24 August 1987).
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>41</sup> Jo Clemente, "Reeling from Noise Pollution" *Malaya* (31 Aug. 1987) p. 13.
- <sup>42</sup> *Exchange of Notes Constituting an Agreement Between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America Amending the Military Bases Agreement of 1947*, 7 January 1979 (mimeo).
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>44</sup> R.P. Views. . . , *op cit* pp. 17-19.
- <sup>45</sup> Robert P. Bermen and John C. Baker, *Soviet Strategic Forces: Requirements and Response*, The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C. 1982 (cited in Jorge Emmanuel, *The Immediate and Long-term Consequences of Nuclear War in the Philippines* (Durnham N.C. 1983) p. 1.
- <sup>46</sup> "Hiroshima at 42: a symbol endures" Editorial, *Manila Chronicle* (6 August 1987).
- <sup>47</sup> *Ten-point Proposal by the No-Nukes* (presented to the members of Congress to concretize the "nuclear weapons-free" provision in the Constitution) August 1987.
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- <sup>50</sup> Evelyn Colbert, "The United States Policy in Southeast Asia" *Current History* (Vol. 86, no. 519, April 1987) p. 146.
- <sup>51</sup> Peter Bacho, "US policy options toward the Philippines" *Asian Survey* (Vol. XXVII, No. 4, April 1987) pp. 438-439.
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- <sup>53</sup> Allan Jasminez, "Game of the Generals", *Pahayagang Bayan* (special issue, 21 September 1987) p. 5.
- <sup>54</sup> See for instance: William Chapman, "The Big Red Machine" *The New Republic* (6 April 1987) pp. 19-20.
- <sup>55</sup> Jose W. Diokno, "Preface" in Simbulan *op cit*.
- <sup>56</sup> R.P. Views. . . , *op cit*.
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- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>59</sup> R.P. Views. . . , *op cit*.
- <sup>60</sup> Peter Bacho, *op cit*, p. 438.
- <sup>61</sup> Chit Estella, "Laurel cites change in RP view of bases" *Malaya* (9 September 1987) p. 1.
- <sup>62</sup> Quoted in a report for the *Washington Post* by Keith Richburg, "The new 'pragmatism' on the US bases issue" reprinted in the *Manila Chronicle* (19 August 1987).
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- <sup>64</sup> Ellen Tordesillas, "Bases seen as motive for US role in coup" *Malaya* (7 September 1987) p. 1; Joel Paredes, "US may use soldiers' revolt to keep bases" *Malaya* (8 September 1987).