

Philippines May Oust U.S. Bases to Deepen Ties to Third World

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos has appointed a committee to re-evaluate all aspects of his country's military relations with the United States — a move that could mean the withdrawal of U.S. military bases from that country. Speaking before the Law Alumni Association of the University of the Philippines, Marcos said it might be time for the Philippines to grow up and cease "being dominated" by the United States.

Marcos called upon the committee to "determine whether these bases do in fact provide us effective protection, or whether they only increase the danger to our country because of the provocation the bases represent." He went on to say that the huge U.S. military presence is blocking the Philippine entry into the group of Non-Aligned Nations and leadership among Third World nations — his government's major foreign policy objective.

In the same speech Marcos attacked the U.S., using as a pretext that the Philippine government and people had been "insulted" by a U.S. State Department report on alleged violation of human rights in the country.

Marcos' move to force the withdrawal of the last U.S. military bases in the Southeast Asian region is indicative of regional opposition to any further U.S. attempts to militarize the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. Since the military took power in Thailand last October through a bloody coup, it has been the major advocate — on behalf of the U.S. — of a regional military alliance. This alliance has been also supported strongly by Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. However, key regional leaders, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, are well aware that any military alliance is a provocation against the Communist states of Indochina and the Soviet Union — with whom these Southeast Asian nations are seeking closer economic relations.

Though the Western press has characterized Marcos' sudden nationalism as a mere "bargaining tactic" in negotiations for the new treaty with the U.S., the fact that it comes at a time when the Philippine economy is facing severe economic problems, including a \$4.9 billion foreign debt, indicates that it is more than posturing.

The Soviet party daily, Pravda, reports Jan. 6 that Philippine "foreign debt soared 42 per cent in 1976 as a

result of the decline of world prices for sugar as well as the lessening of demand." A recent meeting of Philippine sugar producers and labor officials predicted that if the crisis in the industry is not solved, mass layoffs can be expected in March of this year. Sugar is the Philippines' most import export; the industry employs nearly 250,000 workers.

Though Marcos has balked for years on the question of U.S. military bases it is clear he feels his country can no longer afford the isolation from the Third World the bases represent.

A top analyst for a U.S. "think tank" who recently returned from a tour of ASEAN capitals confirmed that, except for Singapore and Thailand, no one wants a regional military pact. In fact, he reported that the Indonesians, Malaysians and Filipinos wanted a U.S. policy for the region that includes recognition of Vietnam and Cambodia as well as U.S. aid for the industrial development and reconstruction of Indochina.

The same source disclosed that Thai Prime Minister Thanin's recent tour through the ASEAN countries to seek support for a regional militarization was a profound failure. Thanin was told that any return of a U.S. military presence in the region was "absurd and ridiculous." Only Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore praised Thanin, in particular for the new Thai junta's murderous anti-communist policies.

Despite its isolation in the region, the Thais have embarked on an "anti-insurgency campaign" and related provocations against Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam which threaten peace throughout the region. The Thai Internal Security Operations Command is coordinating Vietnam-type village-by-village pacification operations in the country's four southern provinces bordering Malaysia. Two hundred insurgents have been killed in operations so far.

Nhan Dan, the Vietnamese Communist Party daily, this week denounced Thailand's contradictory policy of "preaching friendship with the countries of southeast Asia" while carrying out provocations against them. The paper cited the closing of the Thai border with the landlocked Laos and military activity along the Cambodian border. Nhan Dan accused the Thais of "slandering the government and people of Vietnam to mislead public opinion" and persecuting Vietnamese residents in Thailand.