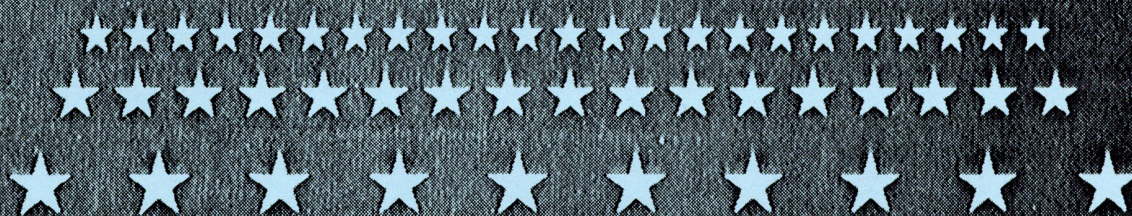




**ACCESS:
IMPERIALIST
EXPANSION IN THE
POST COLD-WAR ERA**



Daniel Schirmer

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ACCESS: POST COLD-WAR IMPERIALIST EXPANSION

by DANIEL B. SCHIRMER

In the upsurge of democratic opinion following the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship, the Philippines adopted a constitution which stipulated that the U.S. military bases at Clark Air Field and Subic Bay, after their legal expiration date in 1991, could be renewed only by a treaty passed by a two-thirds vote of the Philippine Senate. In September 1991 the Philippine Senate defeated such a treaty, bringing the U.S. bases, with their 14,000 permanently deployed U.S. troops, to an end.

On November 6, 1992, a little more than a year later, high military officials including Admiral Charles E. Larson, Commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, and Lisandro Abadia, Philippine Chief of Staff, agreed that the U.S. armed forces would again have access to Philippine ports and airfields. They did this at a meeting of the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Board, set up under the terms of the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951. Encouraged by the use of the treaty to legitimate U.S. access, Philippine political figures then put forward the notion that it covered U.S. military support for the Philippine claim to the much-disputed Spratly Islands in the China Sea. U.S. officials quickly denied this. The treaty, it seemed, was to be used to further U.S. interests, not those of the Philippines.

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The agreement was left vague, putting off possible opposition, but Admiral Larson gave his interpretation:

We anticipate ship visits, aircraft transits, small unit exercises. . . . We simply hope to continue the exercise, the exchange of information, training, logistical cooperation, and coordination.¹

U.S. officials in Manila expressed satisfaction. "We can continue to use Philippine facilities in a fairly liberal manner, without going through another crisis with the Philippine legislature," they decided, adding that they might, "eventually try to win a broader military agreement with the Philippines."² Chief of Staff Abadía evidently shared their outlook, predicting that "military ties could be upgraded and U.S. ships repaired on a commercial basis later."³

For Philippine officials following the development of U.S. policy in South East Asia, it surely came as no surprise when the United States turned its attention to securing access once its Philippine bases had been denied. Even before Mount Pinatubo's eruption made Clark Air Base inoperable in the spring of 1991, the Bush administration had asked Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to consider expanding U.S. access to their military sites.⁴ Commenting on Singapore's agreement to do so, President Bush in January 1992 declared access arrangements would help promote "stability" in the region.⁵ A month later President Aquino wrote Bush endorsing the United States' future use of Subic Bay through access arrangements.⁶ In the spring of 1992, as he successfully campaigned for presidency, General Fidel Ramos declared himself in favor of U.S. access to Philippine facilities.⁷ In October, reports of the United States pressing the Philippine government for access appeared in Philippine newspapers. According to a confidential memorandum obtained by the Manila media, the United States wanted to discuss the arrangements in "military-to-military" channels to avoid a public debate of the contentious issue.⁸

Public debate occurred, nonetheless. In the spring and summer of 1992 most of the popular groups that had taken a

stand against the U.S. bases came out against an access agreement, including the Anti-Bases Coalition Philippines, the Coalition for a Nuclear Free Philippines, the National Democratic Front, and a new alliance of over 100 organizations and individuals called the People's Congress.⁹

While Washington urged access upon the Philippine government in private, in public, officials like Secretary of State Baker and U.S. Ambassador at Manila Richard Solomon were saying their government would seek access only if asked to do so by the Philippines. Just before the decisive meeting of the Mutual Defense Board, Secretary of Foreign Affairs Roberto Romulo and Defense Secretary Renato S. de Villa assured the Philippine Senate that access was not on the meeting's agenda. As the well-known Philippine historian Renato S. Constantino pointed out, the Philippine people—in the matter of access—were first treated to secrecy and deception, then to a *fait accompli*. It appears that the Pentagon favors secrecy with respect to the access agreement policy. *Global Outreach*, a Congressional study, reports: "Military access agreements are generally classified, on the ground that they might be politically sensitive for the host country; in fact, the DOD (Department of Defense) does not issue an unclassified list of access agreements." Thus Pentagon secrecy withholds this information from U.S. voters as well.¹⁰

Besides Constantino, others spoke out. Editors, columnists, and cartoonists condemned the agreement as a violation of the Philippine constitution. A leader of the fight against the bases, Senator Wigberto Tanada, called for a Senate inquiry into its terms, and the president of that body, Senator Neptale Gonzales, criticized the military for attempting to "dictate policies," asserting it had no business entering into such agreements.¹¹

To some the turn of events recalled the past. The achievement of Philippine independence from U.S. colonial rule in 1946 was a victory for Philippine nationalism, as was the defeat of the bases treaty in 1991. But shortly after independence the Philippine government agreed to the establishment of U.S.

bases on Philippine soil, and this military presence gave rise to U.S. intervention in Philippine affairs culminating in Washington's long-term support for the Marcos dictatorship. Now, after the Senate had thrown out the bases, the Philippine military had agreed to the reestablishment of a U.S. military presence in altered form, and in the process had collaborated with Washington in flouting the Philippine constitution. Was history repeating itself?

The access agreement once more illustrates how U.S.-Philippine relations often bring the general contours of U.S. foreign policy into sharp focus. The history of U.S. empire-builders in the Philippines shows them to be nothing if not flexible and pragmatic. When the colonial form of domination became a liability they turned to informal and indirect means supported by the presence of military bases. Now that the growth of nationalist sentiment has destroyed the bases' viability, they turn to access arrangements. They have changed the U.S. form of manipulation, all the while preserving its content: the use of the Philippines as a means of support for the projection of U.S. military power in the Pacific and the Mideast.

The use of the Philippines in this manner since the Second World War has been integral to a larger picture, that of the United States as a military superpower. An important element in this supremacy has been the presence abroad of locations (like the Philippines) which afford the U.S. armed forces the capability of rapid intervention, stepping-off points, so to speak. These foreign military springboards now take two forms, military bases and access agreements. A U.S. base on foreign soil is controlled and operated by the U.S. military and is accompanied by a permanent deployment of U.S. military personnel, often rather sizable. An access agreement gives the United States the right to use the bases and facilities of a host country with few or no permanently deployed U.S. troops. The first is the older form of forward deployment, typical of the Cold War (and before); the second is the newer, typical form of the post cold-war era. The Gulf War is the foremost

example, so far, of forward deployment in the new mode, having been facilitated by an agreement Washington made with the Saudi royal family giving the Pentagon access to massive Saudi military bases previously built to U.S. specification (according to the "Frontline" documentary, "Arming Saudi Arabia," shown February 16, 1993, by WGBH-TV, Boston).

Today no new foreign bases are being established, while those in existence are being scaled back somewhat (more in Europe than in Asia). But at the same time the number of access arrangements is growing. The staff of the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus of the U.S. Congress in June 1992 issued a research report called *Global Outreach: The U.S. Military Presence Overseas*. This stated that while "... maintaining nearly 100 major bases (of over 500 people) in sixteen foreign countries, the United States has or is currently negotiating arrangements with thirty-eight *additional* countries to allow the U.S. military to deploy troops and equipment." (Emphasis in original.)¹²

The convergence of three factors—the growth of nationalism, the end of the Cold War, and U.S. budget stringencies—seems to account for the fact that access arrangements have overtaken foreign bases as the preferred form for the expansion of U.S. forward deployment.

It was the growth of Philippine nationalism, as reflected in the Senate vote, that precipitated the change in the form of the U.S. military presence in that country from bases to access. In recent years such nationalist sentiment has forced the U.S. government to close down important bases in both Spain and Greece. In 1970, Libya, under Qaddafi, compelled the United States to abandon an air base in that country, and the Mideast as a whole has been extremely allergic to the presence of the U.S. military. Here even cooperative Arab rulers have refused to grant the United States basing rights, fearing the rise of radical nationalist opposition to their regimes.

As a result, in the 1980s, after the fall of the Shah of Iran, when Washington felt it necessary to have an active military presence in the Mideast, U.S. bases were deemed to be politically inexpedient, and the procedure of access was widely adopted instead.¹³ "We went for a major change in the normal American way of doing things in South West Asia," a Defense Department official later wrote. "We went for facilities, not bases."¹⁴

Characterized by the use of facilities that are the property of the host government and are operated by it, with few or no permanently deployed U.S. troops, access arrangements, by their very nature, offer a diminished target for nationalist opposition and minimize formal sovereignty issues.

Since large numbers of U.S. troops could not be permanently deployed in the Mideast, the rapid deployment of forces from bases in the United States and elsewhere became a necessity if military intervention in that area were to be effective. This called for the development of rapid deployment techniques and technology: highly mobile combat forces, increased airlift and sealift capability, pre-positioning of supplies and equipment, etc. While the methods and materiel of rapid deployment first arose out of the needs of the access arrangement model, they can now be seen as contributing to its spread.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War, the Cold War began and the U.S. government adopted the dual goal of checking its military rival, the Soviet Union, and stopping the spread of Soviet communism. To accomplish this the Pentagon set up a chain of military bases stretching from Korea and Japan through the Philippines and Australia, to Turkey, Greece, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, England, and Iceland, in effect ringing the Soviet Union. To block what was portrayed as the danger of a massive Soviet invasion of Western Europe, U.S. bases were established there (most heavily in West Germany) with over 300,000 U.S. troops. In the early days of the Cold War the Pentagon followed a similar

pattern in other parts of the world, with the long-term deployment of large numbers of troops on U.S. bases.

Today the Soviet Union has collapsed and the Cold War has come to an end, but not the forward deployment of the U.S. military. This has expanded and taken a new form, corresponding to what the Pentagon sees as the new global challenge and the conditions under which that challenge must be met.

Officials, military and civilian, made this fairly clear, as the U.S. military presence in the Philippines moved from bases to access. When he opened the November meeting of the Mutual Defense Board, Admiral Larson spoke in this vein:

A new day has dawned. The Cold War is over. . . . The challenge is regional stability. Any development that threatens to interrupt the flow of ideas, capital, resources, and trade—we've got to meet this regional challenge with regional solutions.¹⁵

In an address on the eve of the withdrawal of U.S. personnel from Subic Base, Ambassador Solomon struck a similar note, saying the end of the Cold War had diminished the need for overseas military bases, but the United States would like to continue to have a presence in the region to insure stability for its business interests.¹⁶

Both Larson and Solomon laid emphasis on the end of the Cold War as the chief cause of the change-over from bases to access in the Philippines, in this way glossing over the defeat Philippine nationalists had inflicted on the Pentagon in the disruption of its operations at Subic. But it was the embassy spokesperson, Morton Smith, who put things in the best light for the U.S. commander-in-chief under whose stewardship the U.S. military had lost a valuable asset. According to Smith all was going on in accordance with a security plan drafted by the Bush administration that put a premium on "places not bases."¹⁷

The third factor causing the change in forward deployment is of course the U.S. budget squeeze. It is obviously

cheaper to rotate fewer troops in and out of forward deployment (to "join local nations in training exercises") than it is to keep them permanently abroad in larger numbers. Foreign bases have often been accompanied by heavy U.S. aid payments to host governments, but now in the Philippines, for example, with the bases gone, such payments have been cut by more than half. With the U.S. economy in relative decline and the U.S. government head-over-heels in debt, access arrangements have become a distinctive feature, providing imperialism on the cheap.

The reasons that U.S. post cold-war expansion takes the form of access have been discussed, but not why such expansion occurs in the first place. The answer to this is suggested by the fact that some thirty of the thirty-eight access agreements, currently set up or under negotiation, are with governments of the Third World.

In the cold-war years the first target of the U.S. military was the Soviet Union, but there was a second target—radical nationalist movements in the Third World. Indeed the two big U.S. wars of this period were waged against radical Third World nationalists in Korea and Vietnam. Now the first target is gone, but the second remains. In the Cold War these two targets tended to overlap: the Soviet Union often supported nationalist movements in the Third World and communists often led such movements, as in Korea and Vietnam. Since Moscow's support for Third World nationalist movements (especially in terms of military aid) has diminished, intervention in the Third World carries less risk for the Pentagon.

It is in the Third World that the Pentagon, today, is especially concerned with what it calls "challenges to regional stability." Besides the proliferating access arrangements there are other indications of the Pentagon's interest in the Third World as a locus of military intervention and confrontation.

There is the U.S. intervention in Somalia with the declared goal of humanitarian aid to starving people. The Congressional research document, *Global Outreach*, reports:

Somalia concluded an air and port access agreement with the United States in 1980. The United States does not currently recognize a functioning government in Somalia, but could revive access rights under a new regime.¹⁸

The present intervention could lead to a new government in Somalia. Renewed access in Somalia would once more provide the Pentagon with support for possible activity in both Africa and the Mideast.

In September, 1992 William Arkin, a nuclear weapons expert connected with Greenpeace, wrote on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* that scientists and strategists at the Los Alamos Laboratory were at work on a new generation of very small nuclear weapons for use in the Third World. They were doing this with the tacit approval of the Bush administration.¹⁹ Even more significantly, perhaps, the *New York Times* of February 25, 1993 reported that General Lee Butler and his planners at the United States Strategic Command, without having yet advised the President or Secretary of Defense Aspin, were "in the early stages of building and testing computer models that would enable Mr. Clinton to aim nuclear weapons at Third World nations that threaten the interests of the United States or its allies."

As an example of enlarged military capability for the same purpose, the *New York Times* columnist, Leslie Gelb, on July 26, 1992, cited the existence of five lightly armed Army divisions and three Marine divisions, all designed to move quickly into trouble spots against Third World powers.

Global Outreach reports (as of June 1992) that while reducing its presence in Europe, Washington has increased its pre-Gulf War military presence in the Gulf more than ten times (from 2,000 to 23,000 troops), has concluded or expanded defense cooperation agreements with three Gulf countries (Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain), and is currently negotiating with three others.²⁰

The same report notes that the deployment of U.S. Special Forces Units in Africa has tripled in 1991 and will reach twenty to twenty-five Special Forces operations in 1992.

Special Forces Units give instruction in counter-insurgency operations, the training of medical teams, etc.²¹

Lending greatest emphasis to the Pentagon's obsession with the Third World at the present time are, of course, the direct and outright military interventions it has conducted in the past few years: the airforce bombing of Qaddafi in 1986, the military overflights directed at Manila in 1989, the invasions of Grenada and Panama, and, pre-eminently, the Gulf War.

The results of U.S. military supremacy are plain to see in relation to the Third World itself. The dominant role of the United States in the Gulf War secured the control of Mideast oil to the U.S corporate elite by rebuffing Hussein's challenge to the royal families of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Washington's clients.

Not so obvious perhaps are the results of this policy in relation to another problem the United States currently faces. The bipolar world of the Cold War in which the Soviet Union presented a military challenge to Washington has been supplanted by a tripolar world in which two emerging centers of power, gathered around Japan in Asia and Germany in Europe, threaten U.S. economic supremacy. The U.S. military domination of the Third World tends to offset the relative decline of the U.S. economy *vis-à-vis* these two rising power centers. In remarks likely colored by the interests of the organization he represents, a senior Pentagon official told Thomas L. Friedman (*New York Times*, June 28, 1992) why U.S. forward deployment was "good for business" in the face of commercial rivals in Asia:

We are protecting those countries and they owe us. Don't think it does not come up in our trade negotiations. It gives us leverage. The Japanese know we are protecting their investments in Korea, Taiwan, and all over Asia, and that gets their attention when we ask them for money. For years we had an understanding with Taiwan that if an American company's bid came within 10 percent of a Japanese bid, we could get the contracts. They would tell us, "The Japanese make it better, but you're protecting us."

The Japanese contributed generously to help finance the U.S. effort in the Gulf War, and they pay large sums to help maintain some 45,000 U.S. personnel on fourteen major bases. In fact, *Time* magazine of November 16, 1992, reports; "By 1995, Tokyo will be paying nearly \$4 billion a year to cover the expenses of American forces in the country, which will make it cheaper to station them there than at home."

It is against this picture of U.S. policy in the world at large that the access agreement with the Philippines must be placed, its value weighed. Because of the Philippines geographical location the U.S. military presence in that country gave support to both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and during the Gulf War provided the U.S. naval forces in the Gulf with 70 percent of their supplies.²² The Pentagon currently considers the Mideast and Korea the two regions most likely to produce "challenges" requiring a U.S. military response.

It is the access agreement that once more puts before the Philippine people the prospect that the Pentagon will use their country to promote U.S. intervention in the Third World. It was Bush (and Reagan before him) who pursued U.S. military supremacy while changing the form of forward deployment from foreign bases with permanent U.S. military personnel to access agreements with a highly mobile military and increased airlift and sealift capacity. But Bush was defeated in November 1992 and Clinton promised change. Will the new president's foreign military policy be significantly different?

Philippine military leaders evidently asked this question of their U.S. counterparts who were in Manila for the meeting that resulted in the access agreement. Philippine Defense Secretary Renato S. de Villa told the press of a conversation he had with Admiral Larson, Commander of the Pacific Fleet and Rear Admiral Thomas Mercer, Commander at Subic.

I asked them, "What can be expected in the security and defense areas from the Clinton Administration?" and Admiral Larson said he doesn't believe there will be any radical changes.

Then de Villa added his own comment: "I understand that to mean that the future U.S. administration will not radically change force deployment in this area."²³

A week later the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* of Manila carried the report of a speech Clinton gave at a Veteran's Day gathering in Arkansas; it seemed to bear out Admiral Larson's prediction. Under the headline, "Clinton vows to keep U.S. a superpower." The story went on,

President-elect Clinton promised to keep America's armed forces the strongest in the world. . . . Repeating a promise he made during his campaign, he said efforts would be made to increase military mobility, including investments in more airlift and sealift capability.²⁴

But carrying out the Bush policies of military hegemony could involve Clinton in certain difficulties in view of other campaign promises. Take the matter of access agreements, Bush's new "security plan." *Global Outreach* reports that,

Close to *two thirds* of the governments with which the United States has agreements are anti-democratic: they are one-party states (by law or practice), have dominant militaries, or are monarchies which deny their citizens political involvement,

and "well over *half* of the governments with whom we have arrangements have repressive human rights records showing basic mistreatment of their citizens."²⁵ (Emphasis in the original.)

It is a fact, of course, that anti-democratic and repressive governments in the Third World often serve to bolster a status quo friendly to global corporations on the lookout for cheap labor and raw materials. But how does this access policy, a policy of alliance with undemocratic partners, square with Clinton's promise to practice a foreign policy that puts a premium on support for democracy and human rights?

Again, it is the Reagan/Bush preoccupation with U.S. military supremacy that has done much to weaken our national economy and foster the budget crisis. How will Clinton

reconcile the goal of military supremacy with his promises to revitalize the economy, reduce the deficit, and rebuild our country?

The answer to these questions remains to be seen. But one thing is sure—President Clinton will feel pressure from powerful sources to keep the United States on line as a military superpower, to the continued detriment of living conditions in our country. (Ex-President Bush's last minute foray against Saddam Hussein was only the beginning of such pressure.) Consequently, if Clinton is to move away from Bush's policy in this important regard, there would seem to be a need for a strong counter-pressure, coming, perhaps, from forces marked more by numbers than by wealth.

NOTES

1. *Daily Globe* (Manila), 7 November 1992.
2. Philip Shenon to the *New York Times* from Bangkok, 6 November 1992.
3. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), 9 November 1992.
4. Philip Shenon to the *New York Times* from Singapore, 27 July 1992.
5. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 5 January 1992, as quoted in Ma. Socorro I. Diokno, "The Philippine Bases Beyond 1992: 'Post-Bases' Scenarios," p. 6.
6. Aquino letter of February 3, 1992, as quoted in Diokno, "The Philippine Bases," p. 7.
7. *Philippine News Digest*, Utrecht, vol. 3, no. 21, 16 November 1992.
8. Ibid.
9. Conversation with Ma. Socorro I. Diokno, early October, 1992.
10. *Daily Globe* (Manila), 11 November 1992.
11. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), 8 November 1992.
12. *Global Outreach*, pp. 1-2.
13. See "Middle East Bases—model for the future," by Denis F. Doyon, chapter 13 of *The Sun Never Sets*, edited by Joseph Gerson and Bruce Birchard.
14. Op. cit., p. 286.
15. Julius Fortuna, *Daily Globe* (Manila), 7 November 1992.
16. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), 25 November 1992.
17. Julius Fortuna, *Daily Globe* (Manila), 28 October 1992.
18. *Global Outreach*, p. 8.
19. *New York Times*, 9 September 1992.
20. *Global Outreach*, p. 30.
21. *Global Outreach*, p. 34.

22. Speech of Rear Admiral Thomas Mercer, *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), 22 November, 1992.
23. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), 6 November 1992.
24. *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), 13 November 1992.
25. *Global Outreach*, p. 2.

Money is the *pimp* between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life. But *that which* mediates *my* life for me, also *mediates* the existence of other people for *me*. For me it is the *other* person. . . .

If *money* is the bond binding me to *human* life, binding society to me, binding me and nature and man, is not money the bond of all *bonds*? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, the universal *agent of separation*? It is the true *agent of separation* as well as the true *binding agent*—*the* [universal] *galvano-chemical power of society*.—Karl Marx, "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society," *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

POSTSCRIPT, written after Monthly Review article, for discussion at the 20th anniversary conference of the Friends of the Filipino People, October 1993.

It has become clearer than ever that the Friends of the Filipino People must continue to oppose the so-called "access agreement." When this was first announced in November 1992 after a meeting of the Philippines - U.S. Mutual Defense Board, high military officials of both countries described it in diminished terms, mentioning ship visits, air-craft transits, and small unit exercises --- to make it easier for the Philippine public to swallow.

But six months later at a press conference after the next meeting of the Mutual Defense Board Admiral Charles Larson, U.S. Pacific commander, was more forthright, according the Philippine News (San Francisco) of June 16-22, 1993. When Donald Westmore, U.S. chargé d'affaires in Manila, drew the journalists' attention to "brewing conflicts" in Cambodia, the two Koreas, and the Mideast, Admiral Larson, noting that Washington was prepared to use troops in these places, declared the Philippines may be used as a staging area for U.S. operations should the United States initiate military involvement. In other words the U.S. bases may be gone but the Pentagon still intends to use the Philippines as a jumping off point for U.S. military forces in Asia and the Mideast, as has been the case repeatedly for nearly one hundred years (in China in 1900, Korea and Vietnam in the '50s and '60s, the Gulf War in the '90s). That's what access means for Filipinos. A rose smells as sweet by any other name!

Philippine Foreign Secretary Roberto Romulo was enthusiastic about the "military inter-actions" of the June meeting, marking, he said, "the starting point of a fresh and soon to become an intensive engagement between our two countries." Several Philippine senators expressed reservations, however. Senate minority leader Wigberto Tanada said, "We will have to ensure that in entering into such an alliance, it does not violate the constitutional ban on foreign military forces on our soil."

For some twenty years the Friends of the Filipino People has opposed the U.S. use of the Philippines as a springboard for U.S. military intervention in Asia and the Mideast; that is one of the main reasons we called for the removal of the bases.

The Cold War is over but Pentagon hawks still dream of being global police to the colored peoples of the Third World, threatening U.S. unilateral intervention wherever they deem necessary. And for the Pentagon to play this role the Philippines, because of its location, serves as such a convenience. This is the reason U.S. military leaders, like Admiral Larson, show arrogant disregard for the post-Marcos democratic constitution of the Philippines.

We, in the Friends of the Filipino People, should urge the Clinton Administration keep its focus on our country's many and urgent domestic problems and at the same time show a decent respect for Philippine sovereignty. Let's keep calling for the immediate abrogation of the Philippine-U.S. access agreement!

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