‘At the Door of All the East’

The Philippines in United States Military Strategy

focus on the Global South

Focus on the Philippines
SPECIAL REPORTS

No. 2
November 2007

Focus on the Philippines Special Reports are in-depth and comprehensive reports on specific aspects of pressing contemporary issues.

FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH
Focus on the Global South is a non-profit policy analysis, research and campaigning organisation, working in national, regional and international coalitions and campaigns, and with social movements and grassroots organisations on key issues confronting the global south. Focus was founded in 1995 and is attached to the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) in Bangkok, Thailand. It has programs in the Philippines and India.

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First published November 2007.

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About the cover photo
Rem Zamora's photo of Filipino children and US troops participating in a relief mission in Leyte was first published in the Philippine Daily Inquirer on February 24, 2006. It subsequently won the Gold Prize in the General News category of the First Asian Press Photo Contest organized by the Asia News Network and the China Daily. As will be explained in this report, joining relief missions has been one of the ways by which the US military has sought to achieve access in the country for its global power projection capabilities.

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ISBN 978-971-92886-8-8

Executive Summary

This report seeks to document and explain why and how the United States has been attempting to re-establish its military presence in the Philippines in the period beginning in 2001. Diverging from the common explanation attributing increased US military presence in the country to the so-called "global war on terror," this report instead locates US actions in the Philippines in the larger context of the US' objectives and strategy.

The self-avowed aim of the US is to perpetuate its position of being the world's sole superpower in order to re-order the world. Its strategy to perpetuate its status is to prevent the rise of any rivals. To do this, it is seeking the capacity to deter and defeat potential enemies anywhere in the world by retaining and realigning its "global posture" or its ability to operate across the globe through its worldwide network of forward-deployed troops, bases, and access agreements. Today, the US believes that, of all its potential rivals, China poses the greatest threat and must therefore be contained before it becomes even more powerful. To persuade China that it is better to submit to a US-dominated world order, the US is attempting to convince it that the alternative will be worse; that defeat will be inevitable. To make this threat credible, the US is attempting to enlist countries around China to take its side and to encircle China with bases and troops. Because of its strategic location, the Philippines is among the countries in which the US wants to establish bases, secure access agreements, and station troops. But apart from the Philippines, the US also wants the same in other countries in the region. The problem is, these other countries on whom it is relying for support do not want to go against China and are not necessarily willing to give the US what it needs, thereby posing problems for US strategy. Thus, because of its favorable disposition towards the US compared to other countries, the Philippines becomes even more critical to US military strategy in the region and in the world.

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIA	Bilateral Immunity Agreement
CENTCOM	Central Command
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CFR	Council for Foreign Relations
CSL	Cooperative Security Location
DPG	Defense Planning Guidance
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FOL	Forward Operating Location
FOS	Forward Operating Site
FSL	Forward Support Locations
GPR	Global Posture Review
ICC	International Criminal Court
JSOTF-P	Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines
MDT	Mutual Defense Treaty
MOB	Main Operating Base
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NMS	National Military Strategy
NPA	New People's Army
NSS	National Security Strategy
OBC	Overseas Basing Commission
PACOM	Pacific Command
PDR	Philippine Defense Reform
PNAC	Project for the New American Century
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEB	Security Engagement Board
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
SOVFA	Status of Visiting Forces Agreement
MLSA	Mutual Logistics Support Agreement
VFA	Visiting Forces Agreement
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

"The Philippines give us a base at the door of all the East. Lines of navigation from our ports to the Orient and Australia; from the Isthmian Canal to Asia; from all Oriental ports to Australia, converge at and separate from the Philippines. They are a self-supporting, dividend-paying fleet, permanently anchored at a spot selected by the strategy of Providence commanding the Pacific. And the Pacific is the ocean of commerce of the future. Most future wars will be conflicts for commerce. The power that rules the Pacific, therefore, is the power that rules the world. And, with the Philippines, that power is and will forever be the American Republic."

- US Senator Alfred J. Beveridge, January 9, 1900[1]

In 1992, the Philippines ceased to be the "permanently anchored" fleet that Senator Alfred Beveridge had described it to be when it shut down the complex of US military bases and installations in the country. Covering over 90,000 hectares, boarding an average of 15,000 troops a year for decades, and housing hundreds of ships, fighter planes and submarines, as well as weapons and supplies, the Subic Naval Bay and Clark Air Force Base, along with three support bases and 19 smaller communications and intelligence facilities, were once described by American analysts as "probably the most important basing complex in the world."[2] (See Map 1) Since its colonization of the Philippines starting in 1899, the US had used its bases in the Philippines to intervene in China and Soviet Siberia. Although the US recognized Philippine independence in 1946, the bases remained. Throughout the Cold War, they were key to projecting US power in Asia, used as springboards for the US' war in Korea and Vietnam and for interventions in Indonesia and Thailand.[3] Within the Philippines, the bases were used in operations against communist and separatist rebels.[4]

The 1991 vote in the Philippine Senate that rejected the extension of the US' use of the bases, taken after long and emotional debates, shook the Philippines' relations with its most important ally and forced a recalculation in the US' evolving military strategy in the region. Though the Philippines' formal military alliance with its former colonial master was never rescinded,[5] relations cooled. Few US troops, ships, and planes would come to visit in the next few years.[6]

Now, over fifteen years after, the US has re-established its military presence in the country.

MAP 1

Location of Former US Bases in the Philippines Closed after 1991

Seeking to provide a more comprehensive explanation, this report attempts to answer this central question: What are the aims driving US strategy concerning the Philippines and how is the US attempting to achieve them?

Since the signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) signed in 1998, a steady stream of US troops have been arriving in the country for regular and recurring military exercises involving as many as 5,000 US troops, depending on the exercise.[7] After the 9-11 attacks in 2001, the Philippine government gave the US permission to fly over the country's airspace, use its airfields and ports, and travel on its sea-lanes.[8] And with the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) signed in November 2002, the US was allowed to store and pre-position equipment in the country, construct structures and be provided with the full range of logistics and operational services it requires during deployments.[9] Beginning in early 2002, a US military unit, composed of about 100 to 450 US troops in rotation, has based itself indefinitely in southern Mindanao. In 2006, another agreement was signed, establishing a Security Engagement Board (SEB) and expanding the scope of US troops' role in the country. Then, in 2007, a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA), giving similar legal privileges given to US troops by the VFA, was signed with another US ally, Australia, which in the past few years has also begun to be involved in military operations in the Philippines. Between 2002 and 2006, the US had been providing an average of $54 million per year in military aid to the Philippine government, up from $1.6 million annually in the period after the closure of the bases and before the signing of the VFA.[10]

Incrementally but steadily, the United States has been re-establishing its presence in and reinforcing its relationship with the Philippines. At no point since the historic closure of bases has the alliance been more robust; with arguably no other country in Southeast Asia are the ties stronger.

The common explanation for this, as advanced by the US and Philippine governments and as propagated for the most part by the media, is that the US military has come back as part of its "global war against terror." Indeed, six groups operating in the Philippines and in neighboring countries have been officially designated as "foreign terrorist organizations" by the US Department of State.[11] But while "terrorists" may indeed be a concern to the US in the region, explaining the resumption of US military presence as being driven – let alone, as being driven exclusively – by the threat they pose

is incomplete and therefore inadequate. First, it takes it for granted that the "terrorist"organizations pose such a significant threat to the US that they – much more than any other perceived threat – are shaping and driving US military policy and action. To accept this is to fail to contextualize US military presence in the Philippines within the larger and rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape and thereby to disregard the larger, arguably more decisive, goals driving the US. Finally, by taking it for granted that "terrorists" are indeed the target, the explanation is unable to account for aspects of US military presence which are clearly not aimed at defeating "terrorists." For example, the pre-positioning of US military equipment far away from operations against "terrorists" or the holding of large-scale combined exercises and maneuvers for conventional ground wars, are obviously not aimed at the 200 or so Abu Sayyaf Group members hiding in the thick jungles of the isolated islands of Sulu. While the so-called "war on terror" has provided the justification for the resumption of US military presence in the country, it does not explain it.

Another commonly held explanation is that the US military has returned for the natural resources, particularly energy resources, of the Philippines, in general, and of Mindanao, in particular. Indeed, at least one joint military exercise between the US and the Philippines is known to have been conducted in an oil and gas field in Palawan, with the simulation of an attack on an actual offshore platform operated by a consortium that includes Shell and Chevron.[12] While the US Energy Information Administration considers the Philippines to have "limited oil and natural gas resources," much of its potential remains relatively unexplored.[13] Securing "access to key markets and strategic resources" remains one of the US military's self-expressed missions.[14] That it has established bases in Iraq, the country with the second largest oil reserves in the world, is no coincidence.[15]

In itself, however, the existence of resources does not sufficiently explain US military presence where those resources are located: the US military has bases in places where there are a lot of resources, but it is also present in places where there are relatively little. This explanation, moreover, is founded on the premise that the US military's interest is limited only to securing the economic interests of capitalists or of corporations and that this interest always and everywhere drives US military actions; in other words, it assumes that the US state and its military has no separate interests of its own. While the invasion of Iraq may have been motivated by the prize its oil resources offered, larger strategic objectives ensured that it happened.[16] The US military's goal of securing access to resources must be seen in the context of larger overarching geopolitical aims. And though Mindanao, where the US military seems to have been concentrating on in the past few years, holds resources being explored by US-based multinational oil corporations,[17] the US has also resumed its presence not just in Mindanao but all over the Philippines.

Seeking to provide a more comprehensive explanation, this report attempts to answer this central question: *What are the aims driving US strategy concerning the Philippines and how is the US attempting to achieve them?*

In seeking the answer to these questions, the report describes current US strategy – as articulated by those who are in the position to shape and carry it out, drawing on official documents, public pronouncements, government- and military-sponsored studies, etc. and as validated by the US' actual moves in recent years – and then locating the Philippines within it. This report takes the view that the US state and its military – while driven by economic interests –has its own political and geo-strategic interests that often, but not always, coincide with these economic interests.[18]

This report argues that the US' strategy to preserve its permanent global superiority by preventing the rise of rivals drives US military objectives in the Philippines. The self-avowed aim of the US is to

THERENCE KOH

A US soldier in Sulu.

perpetuate its position of being the world's sole superpower in order to re-order the world. Its strategy to perpetuate its status is to prevent the rise of any rivals. To do this, it is seeking the capacity to deter and defeat potential enemies or rivals anywhere in the world by retaining and realigning its 'global posture' or its ability to operate across the globe through its worldwide network of forward-deployed troops, bases, and access agreements. Today, the US believes that, of all its potential rivals, China poses the greatest threat and must therefore be contained before it becomes even more powerful. To persuade China that it is better to submit to a US-dominated world order, the US is attempting to convince it that the alternative will be worse; that defeat will be inevitable. To make this threat credible, the US is attempting to enlist countries around China to take its side and to encircle China with bases and troops. Because of its strategic location, the Philippines is among the countries in which the US wants to establish bases, secure access agreements, and station troops. But apart from the Philippines, the US also wants the same in other countries in the region. The problem is that these other countries on whom it is relying for support do not necessarily want to go against China and are not necessarily willing to give the US what it needs. Because of its favorable disposition towards the US compared to other countries, the Philippines becomes even more critical to US military strategy in the region and in the world.

TABLE 1
US Military Personnel Worldwide
as of September 30, 2006

The distribution of US military personnel worldwide is constantly changing, depending on current deployments. The table only provides a snapshot at a certain period.

Region/Country	Total
United States and Territories	1,100,000
Europe and former Soviet Union	96,227
East Asia and Pacific	74,530
North Africa, Near East, and South Asia	5,452
Sub-Saharan Africa	1,699
Western Hemisphere	2,059
Undistributed (Ashore and Afloat)	105,000
Total - Foreign Countries	**284,967**
Total – Worldwide	**1,384,960**

Source: Department of Defense, "Active Duty Military Personnel Strengths by Regional Area and Country (309A)", September 30, 2006.

The Grand Strategy

The US troops currently stationed in the Philippines are just a few of around 285,000 American soldiers deployed or posted in about 144 countries around the world,[1] some fighting actively in wars, others waiting for action from approximately 860 US military bases, installations, and facilities in more than 40 countries worldwide.[2] (See Table 1,2; Graph 1; Map 2) The Filipino troops training with US soldiers are just some of the 100,000 soldiers the US trains around the world in over 180 countries.[3] The exercises they have been holding in the country constitute a small portion of the over 1,700 exercises and engagements the US Pacific Command (PACOM) conducts;[4] the Visiting Forces Agreement is only one of over 90 similar agreements they have with other countries.[5] (See Table 3) The MLSA is taken from a template of similar agreements with around 76 governments worldwide.[6] (See Table 4) The $20 million in grants earmarked for the Philippines to purchase US-made weapons, services, and training is but a small fraction of the total $4.5 billion disbursed by the US in 2006.[7]

Understanding why US troops are in the Philippines, why they come for exercises, why they seek the kind of legal agreements they require to govern their stay, why they fund and train the Philippine military, and whether and how they want to establish bases in or secure access to the country – all these require understanding the larger aims and strategy of the United States; the role of its military in attempting to secure these aims; their perceived threats, enemies, and constraints; and their expressed needs and requirements to carry out their strategy, overcome their constraints, and achieve their objectives. Only in light of all these could we assess how the Philippines fits in – how it meets their requirements and what role it plays in the larger strategy.

With over one million troops, the largest fleet of ships, planes and tanks ever assembled, the world's most devastating weapons, with allies and bases in every corner of the world, and with their military spending accounting for almost half of the global total, the United States is far and away the most powerful military in the world today and in history. As the US' own Overseas Basing Commission (OBC), an official commission tasked to review US basing, has observed, the reach of US global military deployment and its network of bases has "eclipsed

GRAPH 1 **Distribution of US Military Personnel in Foreign Countries**
As of September 30, 2006

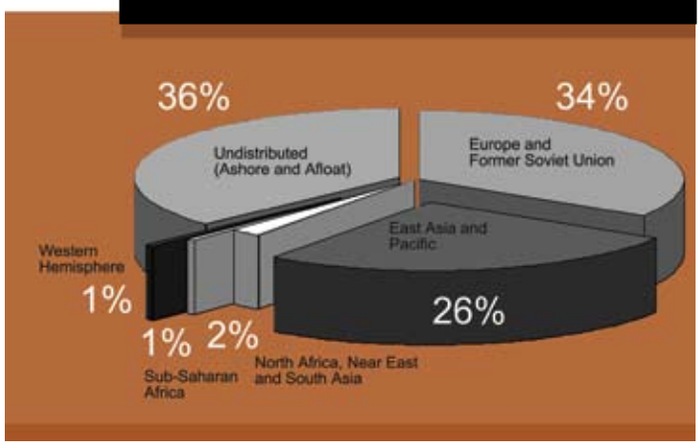


TABLE 2
Tally of US Overseas Bases by Size

US military bases, installations and facilities are categorized by size according to their "total property replacement value (PRV)." Large ones are those with PRV greater than or equal to $1.5 billion. Medium ones have PRVs of between $829 million and $1.5 billion. Those with PRVs of less than $829 million are considered small.

Small	**826**
Medium	**21**
Large	**15**
TOTAL	**862**

Source: US Department of Defense, Base Structure Report 2004, http://www/defenselink.mil/pubs/2040910_2004BaseStructureReport.pdf cited in Mahyar A. Amouzegar, Ronald G. McGarvey, Robert S. Tripp, Louis Luangkesorn, Thomas Lang, Charles Robert Roll Jr., Evaluation of Options for Overseas Combat Support Basing (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006) p. 11.

anything the world had ever seen, far surpassing in scale and scope the impressive historical antecedents of the Roman, Mongol, Ottoman, and British empires."[8] The historian Paul Kennedy calls it "the greatest superpower ever."[9]

To perpetuate this unparalleled and unrivalled military superiority in order to re-shape and re-order the world is the self-avowed objective of the United States. Described by the historian John Lewis Gaddis as "the most important reformulation of US grand strategy in over half a century,"[10] the US' 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), a legally required document to officially express US goals, states:

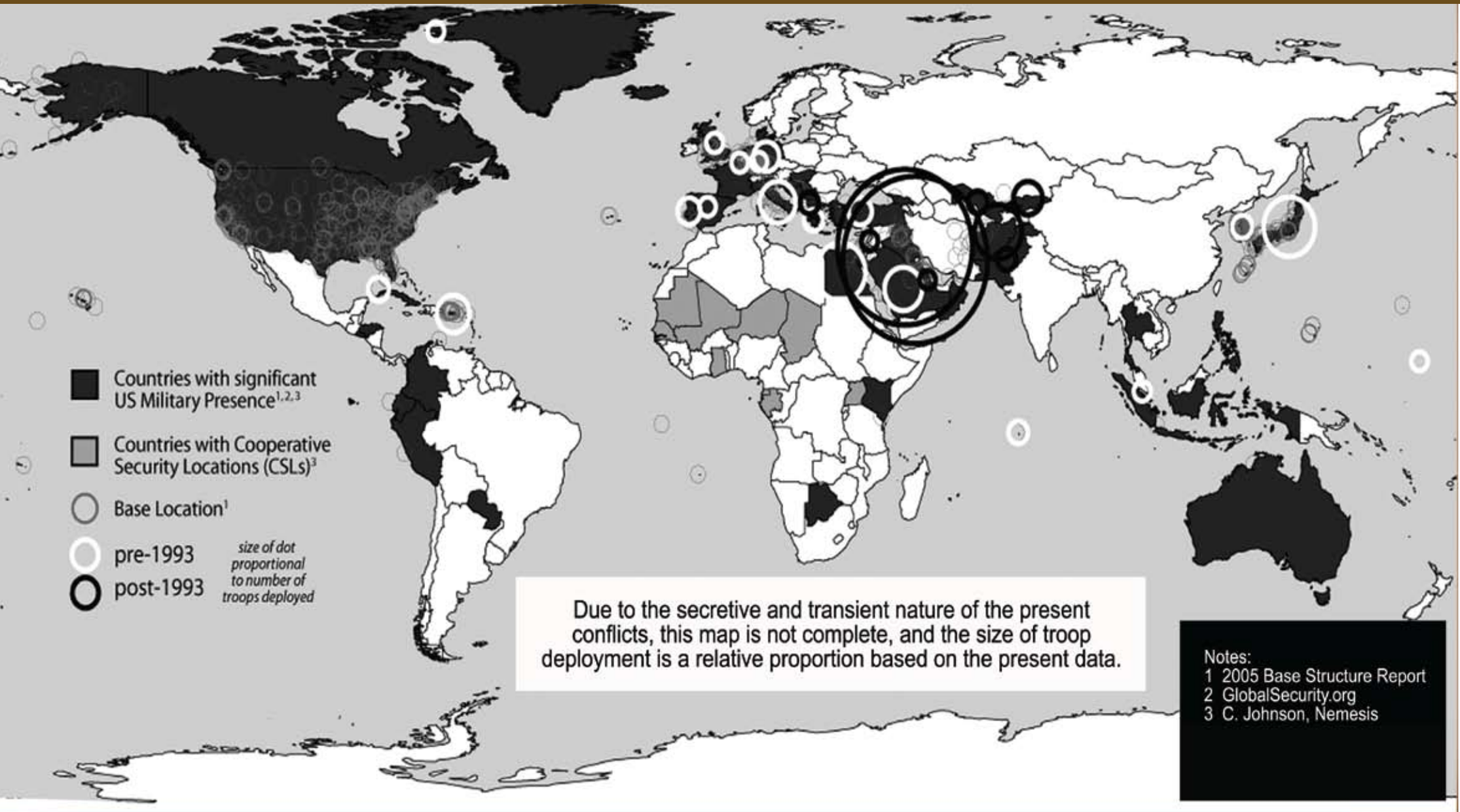
> "The United States possess unprecedented – and unequaled – strength and influence in the world… The great strength of this nation must be used to promote a balance of power that favors freedom."[11]

Defining "peace" as the period after the Soviet Union collapsed – and therefore, as the period in which the US faces no rivals – and "freedom" in terms of promoting liberal democracy and free markets, the NSS states that the US will "take advantage of an historic opportunity to preserve the peace" and "use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe."[12]

Though couched in more diplomatic language, the core ideas of the NSS had earlier been advanced and elaborated on by the same people who had since assumed the power to implement their proposals.[13] In 2000, before President George W. Bush was elected, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), many of whose key personalities would subsequently occupy key government positions and many of whose recommendations would subsequently be carried out after Bush's election, had argued:

> "At present the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and expand this advantageous position as far into the future as possible..."[14]

MAP 2 **US Military Presence Around the World**



Adapted from map produced by Fellowship of Reconciliation/ Brian McAdoo, in Sarah Irving, Wilbert van der Zeiden and Oscar Reyes, Outposts of Empire: The Case Against Foreign Military Bases, (Amsterdam, Netherlands, Transnational Institute, 2--7).

Understanding why US troops are in the Philippines, why they come for exercises, why they seek the kind of legal agreements they require to govern their stay, why they fund and train the Philippine military, and whether and how they want to establish bases in or secure access to the country – all these require understanding the larger aims and strategy of the US

Earlier in 1992, then Defense Secretary and now Vice President Dick Cheney tasked his deputy Paul Wolfowitz to come up with a document that would guide the US' post-Cold War military planning.[15] Crafted by individuals who would eventually assume pivotal roles in the Bush administration, the draft's key ideas, subsequently disavowed but later re-embraced, put forth the key goals that would eventually be enshrined as official US strategy:

> "Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that formerly posed by the Soviet Union…Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any future potential global competitor."[16]

Echoing this, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), a document required by the US Congress from the Pentagon to articulate US military strategy, states:

> "The choices that major and emerging powers make will affect the future strategic position and freedom of action of the United States, its allies and partners. The United States will attempt to shape these choices in ways that foster cooperation and mutual security interests. At the same time, the United States, its allies and partners must also hedge against the possibility that a major or emerging power could choose a hostile path in the future."[17]

These self-declared goals – of retaining US supremacy, of preserving it by preventing the rise of rivals, and of using it to re-order the world – are by no means groundbreaking. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States had struggled with the question of what to do with its unrivaled military capacity in the sudden absence of an enemy that justified its retention. And as the military historian Andrew Bacevich has pointed out, a consensus on the answer had since emerged and endured: Not only have American political and military elites agreed on the desirability of preserving US military power; they had also sought to perpetuate

TABLE 3
Countries with Status of Forces Agreement with the US

Afghanistan	Haiti	Palestine
Albania	Honduras	Peru
Argentina	India	Philippines
Armenia	Indonesia	Poland
Australia	Iran	Portugal
Austria	Iraq	Romania
Belgium	Israel	Russia
Belize	Italy	Saudi Arabia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Japan	Senegal
Bulgaria	Kuwait	Serbia
China	Latvia	Singapore
Colombia	Lebanon	Slovenia
Croatia	Liberia	Somalia
Cuba	Libya	South Africa
Czech Republic	Lithuania	South Korea
Djibouti	Luxembourg	Sri Lanka
Dominican Republic	Macedonia	Syria
East Timor	Malaysia	Taiwan
Egypt	Marshall Island	Tajikistan
El Salvador	Mauritania	Thailand
Estonia	Moldova	Turkey
Finland	Mongolia	Ukraine
France	Myanmar	United Arab Emirates
Georgia	Nepal	Uruguay
Germany	Nigeria	Uzbekistan
Ghana and Senegal	New Zealand	Venezuela
Guyana	Pakistan	

Sources:
U.S. Department of State, "1997-2006 Treaty Actions, http://www.state.gov/s/l/index.cfm?id=3428.
GlobalSecurity.org, "Status-of-Forces Agreement (SOFA)," Military, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/sofa.htm.

DATA COMPILED BY JOY MANAHAN

"At present, the United States faces no global rival. America's grand strategy should aim to preserve and expand this advantageous position as far into the future as possible... At no time in history has the international security order been as conducive to American interests and ideals."
- **Project for the New American Century,** *Rebuilding America's Defenses*

their strategic advantage over all other rivals and to continue to use the power that such advantage afforded to advance the US' long-standing goal of opening and ensuring access to markets for US trade and investment.[18] Power, in other words, is not to be pursued for power's sake. Rather, re-asserting the role it has played since after World War II, the US is intent to use its power to preserve and extend a capitalist world order, with the US as the ultimate power.

In fact, even before the Bush administration came to power, the 1997 QDR prepared by President Bill Clinton stressed the US' determination to retain global military superiority and to prevent the emergence of rivals in order for the US to maintain "leadership."[19] That the US would retain its overseas bases and not allow US troops stationed in Asia to fall below 100,000 – despite the disintegration of the Soviet military and its withdrawal from the region – was affirmed during the Clinton administration.[20] It was Clinton's State Secretary Madeleine Albright who famously asked Colin Powell, "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?"[21] Since the end of the Cold War, Bacevich notes, successive administrations regardless of partisan affiliations have relied on militarism as an instrument of statecraft.

What has varied has been the degree to which the US has deployed its military prowess – over other such instruments – to press for its objectives. This, in turn, has been determined by differing assessments of the limits of US military power, as conditioned by diverging evaluations of its capacity to make means meet ends. During the Cold War, US strategy against the Soviet Union and Third World nationalisms deemed threatening to US interests has vacillated between containment, which merely sought to prevent the enemy from expanding its reach and power, to aggressive roll-back, which aimed to actively defeat and reduce the power of adversaries. Those who saw limitations in US military capacity tended to advocate the former; those who believed such limitations could and should be overcome pressed for the latter.

These differences endured after the Cold War. Bush Senior refused to order the US military to proceed to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein after it had driven his forces out of Kuwait. While Clinton did engage in more overseas military interventions than most presidents would have dared during the Cold War – in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan -- his was of the late 20th century-style "gunboat diplomacy" using cruise missiles[22] since no large conventional ground forces engaged in open-ended occupations. From the US' defeat in what the Vietnamese call the American War, through the 1983 bombing of a US Marines base in Lebanon which prompted Ronald Reagan to withdraw troops, to the 1993 "Black Hawk Down" debacle in Mogadishu that shook the Clinton administration, US reliance on force had been tempered by public aversion to military casualties as well as by the American establishment's own recognition of the limits of what US military force can accomplish. But as has been powerfully demonstrated by successive invasions of Afghanistan and the launch of the "global war on terror" in 2001, the "shock and awe" operation to invade Iraq in 2003, and continuing threats against

TABLE 4
Countries with Acquisition and Cross-servicing Agreements/Mutual Logistics Support Agreements with the US

Afghanistan	Honduras	Poland
Argentina	India	Portugal
Armenia	Indonesia	Russia
Australia	Iran	Saudi Arabia
Austria	Ireland	Senegal
Belgium	Israel	Serbia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Italy	Singapore
Bulgaria	Japan	Slovenia
China	Latvia	South Africa
Colombia	Lebanon	South Korea
Croatia	Liberia	Spain
Cuba	Lithuania	Switzerland
Czech Republic	Macedonia	Sri Lanka
Denmark	Malaysia	Syria
Djibouti	Mauritania	Taiwan
Dominican Republic	Moldova	Thailand
Egypt	Mongolia	Turkey
El Salvador	Nepal	Ukraine
Estonia	Nigeria	United Arab Emirates
Fiji	Pakistan	Uruguay
Finland	Palestine	Uzbekistan
Germany	Peru	Venezuela
Ghana	Philippines	

Sources:
U.S. Department of State, "1997-2006 Treaty Actions," http://www.state.gov/s/l/index.cfm?id=3428.
GlobalSecurity.org, "Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)," Military, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/acsa.ht

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"Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that formerly posed by the Soviet Union...Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any future potential global competitor."
- 1992 Defense Planning Guide

Iran and North Korea, what is new is the prevailing centrality of military force in the current grand strategy and the shedding of restraint in its use.

It is worth stressing that 9-11 alone – and the threat posed by the so-called Al-Qaeda network[23] –does not account fully for this shift. As Michael Cox points out, 9-11 is "better understood as a catalytic converter for a debate that was already under way." It is one of those cases "when significant events outside of anybody's control have been used to great effect by those with a preexisting set of policy preferences."[24] If anything, 9-11's concrete effect was to significantly reduce domestic public aversion to militarism that had constrained US military actions, buttressing those factions within the US that had long advocated a more aggressive and more militaristic strategy.[25]

As discussed earlier, the contours of that strategy had been proposed long before the 9-11 attacks. The assumptions underlying its acceptability –the desirability of retaining US military superiority, preventing the rise of rivals, and so on – was already the consensus before 9-11. The changes in tactics that were proposed to implement the strategy, which will be discussed below, had been set in motion before 9-11. And as US officials themselves acknowledge and as has been made evident since, 9-11 has not fundamentally changed these strategies, assumptions, and tactics. Even as the US military did embark on actions targeting "terrorists" and has thoroughly incorporated this threat in its planning, preserving its military superiority – something that the al-Qaeda network cannot dent nor match – and preventing the emergence of a rival approximating the Soviet Union – something the al-Qaeda network cannot be – remain as the overarching goals of US military strategy.

Transformation

Seizing the opportunity to use its unrivalled coercive power to perpetuate its dominance and claiming for itself the right to police the globe in the name of "freedom," the US has embarked on what its advocates have touted to be the most radical and most comprehensive overhaul of its military since the end of the Cold War, if not of World War II. Though similar plans have been proposed before, it is only now that they seem, at least for the moment, to be gaining ground. In light of the grand strategy that the US has committed to carry out, the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) states that what is required now is no less than "the transformation of US forces, capabilities, and institutions to extend America's asymmetric advantages well into the future."[1] It is in the context of this attempt at "transformation" in the hope of achieving perpetual superiority that the US' particular objectives concerning the Philippines could be more accurately understood.

The ongoing project to revamp the military reflects America's bolder ambitions. During the Cold War, the US military at one point aimed to plan with "two-and-one-half wars" in mind, that is, to fight two simultaneous major wars, with the half referring to smaller operations in the rest of the world. As the Cold War waned and the US sought to align ends with limited means, the plan was scaled down to a "one-and-one-half" possibility.[2] Now, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and its allies, the US has reverted to its aim of planning to fight two major wars at the same time while still being able to respond to smaller contingencies.[3] As part of its normal preparations, the US military under Bush has been ordered to prepare 68 war plans – two plans more than the 66 required during the Clinton administration.[4] In determining the US military's size, the US set what became popularly known as the "1-4-2-1" criterion ordering the military to defend the US (1), deter aggression and coercion in four (4) critical regions, swiftly defeat two (2) adversaries simultaneously, while retaining the option to topple a regime (1). If the 2001 QDR set as its target the ability to operate in four regions – Europe, Middle East, the so-called "Asian littoral," and Northeast Asia -- the 2006 QDR is even more ambitious: it states that the US must be able to operate not only in and from these four regions but anywhere in the world – in the fastest time possible.[5] Instead of "1-4-2-1," some analysts are even now urging the military to replace 4 with "n" – an unknown and variable number.[6]

Central to the ambitious transformation that the US has embarked on is the ongoing project of redefining, reorganizing, and realigning the US forward-presence.(See Map 2) The reason is clearly stated by the 2005 National Defense Strategy (NDS):

> "Our role in the world depends on effectively projecting and sustaining our forces in distant environments where adversaries may seek to deny us access. Our capacity to project power depends on our defense posture and deployment flexibility at home and overseas, on the security of our bases, and our access to strategic commons."[7]

As demonstrated by the invasion of Iraq -- which required the use of bases in Diego Garcia, Italy, Japan, and others -- and of Afghanistan -- which necessitated more than 80 over-flight, refuelling and other agreements[8] -- the US' overseas presence is more important than ever.

The US has embarked on what its advocates have touted to be the most radical and most comprehensive overhaul of its military since the end of the Cold War.

Contrary to earlier predictions, prevalent during the 90s, that technological advances had somehow made overseas basing obsolete and unnecessary,[9] the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan proved that the US could still not do without them. It is these bases after all which allow the US to "take the battle to the enemy."[10] US planners remain convinced that forward-deployment is critical in achieving what they call "Full Spectrum Dominance" or "the ability to control any situation or defeat any adversary across the range of military operations."[11] That they will be able to use their presence to strike with relative ease is in itself an important element of deterring would-be challengers. Overseas troops convey a "credible message" that the US is prepared to wage war as they "clearly demonstrate that the United States will

"The military must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world."
- US President George W. Bush

react forcefully should an adversary threaten the United States, its interests, allies, and partners."[12]

Apart from being launch-pads for intervention and means of intimidation, bases and other forms of US military presence can be used for local intelligence-gathering[13] and for conducting what is termed "military operations other than war" which is envisioned to be the nature of most future overseas military operations.[14] Aside from these discrete and one-time operations, US forward presence facilitates long-term personal and institutional relationships with host governments and their military personnel. As one report on the future of US bases puts it:

> "One of the principal benefits gained by a robust US military forward presence is building defense and security relationships with host countries and other regional partners… This requires extended contact over a long period of time, and is accomplished through a wide variety of engagement or security cooperation activies including exercises, joint training, senior officer visits, and the implementation of assistance programs."[15]

Not to be underestimated is this posture's use for deploying "soft power." As the Overseas Basing Commission (OBC) notes, "We cannot hope for much influence without presence – the degree of influence often correlates to the level of permanent presence that we maintain forward."[16] The US global posture also serves non-military purposes such as for supporting diplomatic, economic, and other goals.[17]

Past levels of overseas power projection capabilities, however, are no longer seen as adequate. Largely unchanged since the 1950s,[18] the US' overseas basing structure has to be changed in light of the US' military objectives. "The military," stated President George W. Bush, "must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world."[19] Heeding this, the US Army, for example, has set for itself the objective of being able to deploy "a brigade combat team anywhere in the world in 96 hours after lift-off, a division on the ground in 120 hours, and five divisions in theater in 30 days."[20]

Such a goal is, of course, far from novel. As early as the 1960s, the US military had aimed to achieve "flexible response" or the ability to respond any time to whatever situation with whatever means.[21] With an external environment perceived to be more favorable, however, this goal is now thought to be more attainable. Towards this aim, US defense and military officials, strategists, and analysts have since 2001 –prior to the 9-11 attacks – been thoroughly reviewing the US' network of overseas bases and access arrangements, planning to move thousands of troops from one base to another, to close or scale down bases while establishing new ones, and to deploy soldiers to more missions in various locations. The process accelerated after the invasion of Iraq.[22] In August 2004, President Bush released the Integrated Global Presence and Basing Strategy, an internal document that lays down the specific changes the US aims to introduce.[23] The Defense Department had by March 2005 submitted a report on the actual locations of the bases to be shut down or to be established. Aiming to complete what has been described as a "rolling process" in over ten years, diplomats and military officials have been crisscrossing the globe negotiating with governments to implement the recommendations even as actual changes are introduced on the ground.[24]

Underlying the changes is a fundamental reorientation in the way the US' forward-presence

"We are not talking only about basing, we're talking about the ability of our forces to operate when and where they are needed."
- US Defense undersecretary for policy Douglas J Feith

is conceptualized. The new term "global defense posture" does not just refer to the over 850 physical bases and installations that the US maintains in around 46 countries around the world.[25] As US Defense undersecretary for policy Douglas J Feith explains it, when they refer to "posture": "We are not talking only about basing, we're talking about the ability of our forces to operate when and where they are needed."[26]

With the new grand strategy in place, perhaps the single most important change underlying the restructuring of the US' global posture is its change in orientation: from ostensibly defensive to openly offensive; from having standing troops to "surging" ones; from static deployment to "expeditionary" missions.[27] While US bases were obviously used for "offensive" interventions in the past, they were located where they were and in the forms that they took largely in response to the dynamics of the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union and its allies. As the NDS explains:

> "In the Cold War, we positioned our forces to fight where they were stationed. Today, we no longer expect our forces to fight in place. Rather, operational experience since 1990 indicates we will surge forces from a global posture to respond to crises."[28]

With this in mind, the 2006 QDR reports that the Pentagon has since been aiming to move away from "obsolete Cold War garrisons" to "mobile, expeditionary operations."[29]

Such an orientation, however, presents complications. First, it is difficult to know well in advance who the enemy or enemies will be and where they will need to be fought. "In the Cold War we believed we knew where our forces would fight,"

notes the Pentagon.[30] But now, "[t]he U.S. cannot know with confidence what nation, combination of nations, or non-state actors will pose threats to vital U.S. interests or those of our allies and friends decades from now."[31] The so-called "war on terrorism" is especially problematic. As one analyst notes:

> "The degree of uncertainty surrounding the makeup of the future war on terrorism must be acknowledged up front. All military planning and operations face uncertainties, but the level posed by this war is especially great."[32]

Not only must the US military be prepared for all kinds of operations against all sorts of enemies in the "war on terror," they would still need to be ready to fight conventional regional wars at the same time, and be ready to do whatever it takes wherever, now and in the future. "Adapting to surprise – adapting quickly and decisively – must be a hallmark of 21st century defense planning," stresses the Pentagon.[33]

Second, in the face of all these possibilities, it is also difficult to know beforehand which bases will be required and which countries will allow their territory to be used for whatever contingency arises. A study for the US Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations which sought to systematically determine the range of basing requirements of the US for 2003-2012, for instance, found that "literally hundreds of cases" would need to be evaluated for each permutation of alternatives.[34] Even then, there is no assurance that what is required will be met. As a US Army-sponsored study acknowledges, "the U.S. military will face considerable unpredictability in who can be relied on to provide assets and access."[35]

As it is, since the 1980s, there has been growing unwillingness and sensitivity on the part of governments to host bases or allow access.[36] As early as in 1988, a US government commission created during the Reagan administration had concluded that, "We have found it increasingly difficult and politically costly to maintain bases."[37] Indeed, in the past couple of years, the US has seen some of its bases and facilities closed down -- or the agreements allowing their use terminated -- in response to domestic public opposition. Such has been the case with the bases in the Philippines, in Puerto Rico, Ecuador and Panama, just to name a few.[38] In Japan and Korea, huge public mobilizations have erupted on the issue of US bases.[39] Even long-trusted and reliable allies may not agree to all kinds of uses for bases they are already hosting. There is a long history of the US military being constrained by its hosts.[40] Turkey's recent decision not to allow US troops to use its bases in that country to invade Iraq underscores how vulnerable it is to changes in its host-governments' decisions.[41]

Both of these complications compound the objective constraints that the US is facing: just 1.3 million soldiers are expected to conduct all their missions the world over – in at least two simultaneous major wars and smaller contingencies at the same time, as their planning goes. As big as the American military is, it has only five per cent of the world's total troops, just about half of China's 2.5 million, and just a little larger than the one million plus each of India, North Korea, and Russia. And while the size of the US military has declined since the Cold War, their actual operational tempo, or frequency of missions, has increased.[42] The occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan have only accentuated just how strained US military capacity is in terms of personnel: in April 2004, it was reported that nine out of the US' ten Army

The problem facing the US as it undertakes its strategy is that, despite its immense size and capacities, it only has a limited number of troops, equipment, bases, and allies to be able to respond to the entire range of possibilities that its strategy requires. The attempt to surmount this constraint drives the on-going restructuring of the US' global posture.

divisions were deployed.[43] In September of the same year, a Pentagon-appointed panel of external experts concluded that the US does not have enough soldiers to meet demands.[44] By May 2005, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had to warn that the US military was finding it more and more difficult to launch any more military actions because they were tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan.[45] As advanced as it is, the US' military capabilities are not suited to the kinds of contingencies the US may have to respond to: for example, while cruise missiles are useful for "shock and awe" bombardments, they are next to useless for long-term pacification on the ground.[46]

Simply put, the problem facing the US as it undertakes its strategy is that, despite its immense size and capacities, it only has a limited number of troops, equipment, bases, and allies to be able to respond to the entire range of possibilities that its strategy requires. The attempt to surmount this constraint drives the ongoing restructuring of the US' global posture.

First, in order to be able to prepare for the broadest range of contingencies possible, the US is expanding the total coverage of the area within which its posture would allow it to carry out interventions while putting emphasis on those regions in which it is, according to its own assessments, more likely to intervene than in others. The problem, in a view that appears to have become the conventional wisdom among US planners, is that the bases that the US currently has are not located where they should be. As Bruce Nardulli, in a US Army-sponsored research, wrote:

> "The geographical distribution of likely commitments stemming from the war on terrorism does not match well with the Army's existing overseas assets in terms of prepositioning, infrastructure, and support, with the notable exception of the Army's material in the Persian Gulf. If the Army is increasingly to operate in remote and austere locales, this distribution will prove inefficient and stressful for its support assets, as well as a possible drag on overall responsiveness."[47]

In an apparent effort to solve this, since 2000, the US has constructed – or has announced plans to construct – new military bases and facilities in Aruba, Curacao, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Kosovo, Turkey, Bulgaria, Iraq and, for the first time, various places in Africa.[48]

In order to be able to realign its bases, the US is seeking to enlarge and deepen its network of alliances and security relationships with various governments across the globe. As the NDS states:

> "We will expand the community of nations that share principles and interests with us. We will help partners increase their capacity to defend themselves and collectively meet challenges to our common interests."[49]

A key aim of what it calls "security cooperation" is to mobilize its allies to support US military goals and, where necessary, join it in its operations.[50] This explains the emphasis on training and achieving

"inter-operability" so that US troops and its allies and partners could more effectively fight alongside each other when needed. Dispersed around the world, the allies are also to be counted on to underpin the US' global posture. As one analyst explains:

> "Cooperative security has another objective as well: the provision of access for US forces and supplies…Should military intervention be required, the United States needs timely and sustained theater access. Achieving this requires the political support of host countries. Forward deployments and host country bases constitute the best guarantee that the United States can respond rapidly to a military crisis."[51]

To make the most of its resources, the US is streamlining its posture so that its forces can be more agile and more flexible in order to more quickly cover long distances, fight simultaneous wars, and conduct various other operations. As the Pentagon notes, "Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have brought home an important lesson – *speed* matters."[52] [italics in original] Hence, instead of concentrating its troops and equipment in only a few locations for specific scenarios, the US will reduce the number of large well-equipped bases and increase the number of smaller, simpler bases in more locations.[53] Marine Gen. James Jones, commander of US forces in Europe, described the aim as developing a "family of bases" that could go "from cold to warm to hot if you need them" but without having the "'small town USA'-feel, complete with schools and families that have typically come with such bases."[54]

Apart from enhancing agility and flexibility, this kind of leaner but meaner posture also achieves other objectives. For one, it lowers US exposure to attacks. Unimposing and less visible, it helps appease growing domestic opposition to bases as inflamed by accidents, crime, environmental contamination, and perceived intrusions on sovereignty. As US Navy Rear Admiral Richard Hunt, the Joint Staff's deputy director for strategy and policy said, "We don't want to be stepping all over our host nations…We want to exist in a very non-intrusive way."[55] The aim, says the Pentagon, is to "reduce the forward footprint"

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- US Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld

of the military.[56] The goal is to reduce the total number of overseas military installations by almost one-third, from 850 to 550,[57] while increasing their coverage and efficiency. This does not mean that the US is in the process of diminishing its forward presence. As analyst David Isenberg explained:

> "The Global Posture Review (GPR) is not primarily about withdrawing US military forces around the world; it is about reconfiguring US global military basing structure to make it easier to deploy forces in the future… Nothing in the GPR should be taken as a sign that the US military intends to militarily intervene less in the world. Indeed, if anything, its supporting planning documents assume a more interventionist role in the world…"[58]

In order to lower its profile, while at the same reducing strain on resources, the US military will, according to the QDR, "increasingly use host-nation facilities with only a modest supporting US presence."[59] In other words, the US will not just operate from US-owned infrastructure but also those technically "owned" by other countries.

To ensure that these more dispersed, more spartan, and increasingly host-nation-run facilities are still able to efficiently support its troops, the US is set on improving its global logistics and pre-positioning system.[60] Pre-positioning, or storing equipment, weapons, supplies, and other materials overseas before they are actually needed, contributes to rapidity and agility without arousing as much opposition as large permanent bases do.[61] Noting that it is less difficult to move people than equipment, the OBC has called for "having in place the right mix of equipment and supplies our forces can fall in on quickly and reliably."[62] The NDS has also expressed the aim to ensure that the US' "pre-positioned equipment and stocks overseas will be better configured and positioned for global employment" and that "support material and combat capabilities should be positioned in critical regions and along key transportation routes to enable worldwide deployment."[63] The objective, states the 2004 National Military Strategy, is to provide "the right personnel, equipment, and

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- US Navy Rear Admiral Richard Hunt, Joint Staff deputy director for strategy and policy

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Local governments organize schoolchildren to welcome US troops in Sulu.

supplies in the right quantities and at the right place and time."[64]

In line with this, the US now categorizes its overseas structures according to the following:[65]
- **Main Operating Bases(MOB)** are those relatively larger installations and facilities located in the territory of reliable allies, with vast infrastructures and family support facilities that will serve as the hub of operations in support of smaller, more austere bases; examples are the Ramstein Air Base in Germany, the Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, and Camp Humphreys in Korea.
- **Forward Operating Sites (FOS)** are smaller, more spare bases that could be expanded and then scaled down as needed; they will store pre-positioned equipment but will normally host only a small number of troops on a rotational, as opposed to permanent, basis. While smaller, they must still be able to quickly support a range of operations with back-up from MOBs.
- **Cooperative Security Locations (CSL)** are facilities owned by host governments that would only be used by the US in case of actual operations; though they could be visited and inspected by the US, they would most likely be run and maintained by host-nation personnel or even private contractors. Useful for pre-positioning logistics support or as venues for joint operations with host militaries, they may also be expanded to become FOSs if necessary.

FOSs and CSLs are also called "lily pads" intended to allow the US to hop on from MOBs to their destinations rapidly when needed but without requiring a lot of resources to keep them running when not needed.[66] Referring to this kind of base, Marine Gen. James Jones says, "We could use it for

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six months, turn off the lights, and go to another base if we need to."[67]

To further maximize US forward-presence, however, the US is relying not only on these structures but is also expanding what analysts for a US Air Force-funded research call "mission presence" and "limited access." "Mission presence" is what the US has in countries where there are ongoing military missions which "lack the breadth and capability to qualify as true forward presence but nonetheless contribute to the overall US posture abroad." "Limited access" is the kind the US secures through exercises, visits, and other operations.[68]

In other words, the US' global posture now also increasingly relies not just on those that are "forward-based," or those units that are stationed in foreign countries on a long-term basis, but also those that are "forward-deployed," or those that are sent overseas to conduct exercises or operations.[69] In a US Army-funded study, deploying troops to potential areas of intervention are seen as offering advantages:

> "This would eliminate the need to rapidly deploy forces over long distances or the need for a robust forcible entry capability. Instead, forward-deployed forces would already be in place to respond to emerging crises and ensure access for later-arriving forces."[70]

Hence, in the minds of the US military, the training exercises and the various humanitarian or other kinds of operations it conducts overseas – as well as the arrangements and agreements that make them possible – form an indispensable part of the US "global defense posture."[71] Indeed, the Pentagon is now keen to "provide temporary access to facilities in foreign countries that enable US forces to conduct training and exercises in the absence of permanent ranges and bases."[72] This "temporary access" not only allows the US to station its troops closer to possible sites of intervention; they also do so in a way that allays domestic opposition to US presence. As the authors of a US Air Force research project explain:

"Our goal is to be positioned to deal with uncertainty, with the right forces, the right relationships, the right authority and the ability to execute our missions within and across regions."
- US Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith

> "On the one hand, the physical presence of US forces in place may make it easier for nations hosting ongoing US deployments to permit use of their bases for contingency operations. However, many countries may for internal political and cultural reasons be sensitive to the long-term presence of foreign troops on their soil and attempts to negotiate ongoing access with these partners may thus be counter-productive. On the other hand, levering limited-access arrangements with such countries can help secure additional access when needed."[73]

In the face of much uncertainty as to where the US military might see action, against whom, and with whom, a US Air Force-sponsored study, which has apparently influenced much of the ongoing posture changes, proposes thinking of the US posture as a portfolio – not as a problem to be solved but something to be managed.[74] The aim is to ensure that the range of options is as broad as possible; what should be avoided is a situation in which the US military is unable to do what it needs to do because it was denied access in particular locations.

To overcome restrictions imposed by its hosts on its actions, the US is aiming for "assured access" which is defined succinctly by the Air Force study authors as "the guaranteed ability for the United States to do what it wants when it wants, where it wants, from and via a foreign territory."[75] The US has therefore been working to secure agreements that lock-in this assurance. "Our planned posture changes," the Department of Defense announced, "will be built on a foundation of legal arrangements that enable the necessary flexibility and freedom of action to meet 21st century security challenges."[76]

To escape restrictions altogether, the US is expanding its posture in the "global commons" – referring to space, international waters, airspace, and cyberspace – in which no other sovereign government or international institution could as yet impose rules on the US military. For instance, the US is developing the possibility of "sea-basing" because, as one writer put it, "the [US] president does not need permission from a foreign power to launch strikes from US warships."[77] Apart from this, the US is continuing programs started as early as in the 1980s to develop cutting-edge military technologies that allow it to further push the constraints posed by geography, make it less dependent on other countries, and reduce its global footprint.[78] For example, the US is investing in faster ships that can carry more troops but which do not require deep harbors.[79]

In summary, the US is in the process of attempting to transform its posture to be more offensive, more expansive, and more flexible, but less bulky and with a smaller footprint. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith in a testimony explaining their actions, summarizes the thinking thus: "Our goal is to be positioned to deal with uncertainty, with the right forces, the right relationships, the right authority and the ability to execute our missions within and across regions."[80] Such, however, is but an intermediate aim; the US is interested in attaining its desired global posture to deter potential adversaries, and if need be, to inflict defeat. As set out by the 2006 QDR, the aim is "to possess sufficient capability to convince any potential adversary that it cannot prevail in a conflict and that engaging in conflict entails substantial strategic risks beyond military defeat."[81] The earlier QDR is more emphatic: "In combat, we do not want a fair fight – we want capabilities that will give us a decisive advantage."[82]

Preventing the Rise of a Rival

In 1992, when the ideas of permanent superiority were first raised, the state that in Pentagon-speak could "support a global challenge to the United States on the order of that posed by the former Soviet Union" had yet to be identified.[1] Because the dust from the Cold War had barely settled, it was still difficult to single out any specific country or combination of countries that would fall into the US' definition of a "strategic competitor" and, therefore, the object of its strategy of preventing the rise of rivals.

Since then, however, China, with the world's largest standing military, with an ideology officially antithetical to that of the United States, and a surging economy threatening to surpass that of the United States, has stood as a candidate. Ever since the 1949 revolution that brought the Chinese Communist Party to power, but more so since the 1980s when its economy began expanding dramatically, China has been viewed by the US with trepidation. When it was still allied with the Soviet Union, China was likewise to be contained. But when it split with the Soviet Union, President Richard Nixon took notice of the rift and began to forge rapprochement with China. Ronald Reagan's presidency, however, brought back to power those who had been advocating for a more confrontational stance.[2] When the Cold War ended, strategic rapprochement with China lost its value. And since then, the Chinese Communist Party consolidated its rule and its economy has grown dramatically. Apprehension has also correspondingly risen.

From 1980-2005, China's real gross domestic product has grown at an average of nearly ten per cent a year.[3] Depending on the measure used, China's economy is now among the largest in the world: comparing gross domestic product using exchange rates, China ranked fourth in 2006;[4] adjusting for price differences across countries using purchasing power parity, however, China ranks second, just behind the US.[5] And though its nominal gross domestic product was only about one-fifth that of the US in 2006,[6] China is expected to continue growing at a faster rate than the US for years to come and it is expected to surpass that of the US in twenty to thirty years – by 2020 according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, by 2039 according to Goldman Sachs.[7] In 2003, China had already overtaken the US for the first time as the world's top investment destination.[8] As a consumer,

China is estimated to have overtaken the US as the world's biggest buyer of four of the five basic commodities.[9] It is now the world's second largest importer of oil; it buys half of the world's cement production, one-third of its steel, a quarter of its copper, and one-fifth of its aluminum.[10] By 2025, China's energy consumption will surpass that of all other countries except the United States.[11]

China's economic growth has been good for the US economy: with its vast and relatively cheap labor pool, it has been a production platform that has allowed US firms to cut their costs and increase their profitability; with its increasing purchasing power, it has also become a growing market for US products and a destination of US investments.[12] In fact, as of June 2007, China has become the US' second largest market for its exports, the largest market for certain raw material products, and its second largest trading partner. From 1995 to 2004, US exports to China tripled; on top of exports from the US, US corporations and their affiliates producing inside China have also increased their sales within the country.[13] With more than 100 US-based multinational corporations establishing about 20,000 joint-ventures and wholly foreign-owned enterprises in China, the US has also become, by 2005, China's second largest investor. As the US Government Accountability Office has acknowledged, "China's vast consumer and labor markets present huge opportunities for US exporters and investors."[14]

Confounded by the economic benefits China's rise contributes to the US economy, on one hand, and by the possible threat its growing power poses, on the other, the US has been torn between those who want to seek accommodation with it and those who want to size it down before it grows even more powerful.

As China's economy grows, however, so could its strategic power. This, it is feared, could then be used against the US in the future, thereby imperiling its hold on its perpetual global superiority, if not its heretofore-unchallenged dominance in what it considers an important region. As of June 2007, the Pacific Rim countries are the US' second largest export destination after North America and its largest source of imports.[15] Aside from China, five of the US' top fifteen trading partners are from the region.[16] Southeast Asia, with over 570 million people and a combined nominal GDP of $880 billion, has outrun other traditional partners as one of the US' largest trading partners and investment destinations.[17] It also has the world's largest reserves of tin, copper, gold, and other resources such as rubber, hemp, and timber; new oil and gas reserves

MAP 3 **Strategic Straits and Sea-lanes in Southeast Asia**

Source: John H. Noer with David Gregory, Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia. Adapted in Bruce Vaugh and Wayne M. Morrison, "China Southeast Asia Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications for the United States," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, updated April 4, 2006.

are still being explored and their true potential is yet unknown.[18] Moreover, running through Southeast Asia are some of the most important sea-lanes in the world: about one-third of world trade and half of its oil pass through the Straits of Malacca alone.[19] (See Map 3). US forces themselves would have to go through them en route to the Middle East, so they are key to force projection.[20] To the west of China is India, another fast-rising power, and the oil and gas-rich regions of Central and West Asia.

The fear is that as China becomes more and more powerful, as the economy of its neighbors becomes more closely linked to it, and as it consequently becomes more influential over them, the US could be economically and militarily shut out from what it has always considered as an "American Lake" – the Asia-Pacific region.[21] Its need for markets and demand for resources growing, China is at the very center of a region in which the US has profound economic and strategic interests, a region from which the US – also needing markets, resources, labor for its economy and access for its military – would not want to be shut out.[22] As former US State Secretary Colin Power stressed, "the US is a Pacific Power and we will not yield our strategic position in Asia."[23]

Moreover, not only is China's rise seen as posing a geostrategic threat; it is also an ideological challenge. Though it has embraced market principles – or "socialism with Chinese characteristics" – China continues to be ruled by a Communist Party whose ideology differs from that espoused by the US, much of whose power derives from the appeal of the kind of liberal democracy it claims to stand for. "The US missionary impulse," notes Aileen Baviera, "is still to reject China as it stands and try to 'civilize' it."[24]

Confounded by the economic benefits China's rise contributes to the US economy, on one hand, and by the possible threat its growing power poses, on the other, the US has been torn between those who, roughly stated, want to seek accommodation with it and those who want to size it down before it grows even more powerful. The key question has been whether China's rise would be "peaceful" – at

least as defined by the US. That is, whether it would accept and submit to current US dominance, or whether it would use its fast-accumulating power to compete against the US for the same resources and interests and seek to shut it out from the region and beyond. Even those who are fearful of China's potential threat are divided between those who believe that China could be brought in line to accept US hegemony and be groomed to be its "strategic partner" through diplomatic and political means and those who believe that it is a "strategic competitor" to be confronted militarily. Since the end of the Cold War, indications have mounted that the latter has prevailed.

In 1997, the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) – the same one that even then had already called for "shaping" the environment to prevent the rise of rivals –identified China, along with Russia, as possible "global peer competitors."[25] In 1999, even before Bush assumed power, the Pentagon's low-profile yet highly influential think-tank, the Office of Net Assessment conducted a seminar with academics, former government officials, and military planners. Their goal was to lay down all the likely scenarios involving China – whether its economy would continue to grow, whether the ruling party would be able to stay in power, and so on. Its conclusion: no matter what happens and what scenario eventually unfolds, China's rise will not be "peaceful" for the US. The US should therefore assume the worst and prepare accordingly. Many of the specific recommendations put forth by this study had since been adopted.[26] The director of the think-tank, Andrew Marshall, was one of the people who contributed to the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) draft which first articulated the strategy of perpetual dominance through active prevention of rivals.[27]

In 2000, a US Air Force-funded study authored by, among others, Zalmay Khalilzad, the same person who drafted the 1992 DPG,[28] argued explicitly in favor of preventing China's rise. "Any potential Asian hegemon," the report argued, "would seek to undermine the US role in Asia and would be more likely to use force to assert its claims."[29] Also in the same year, Robert Kagan and William Kristol, two influential commentators whose ideas have evidently molded US policy, proposed that Beijing – along with Baghdad – should be targeted for "regime-change."[30] The Project for a New American Century (PNAC), a grouping whose members and proposals have since staffed and shaped the Bush administration and its policies, supported the same aims and made similar recommendations.

During the US presidential elections, George W. Bush distinguished himself from other candidates by singling out China as a "strategic competitor." His future National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice argued that China was a threat to US interests in the Asia-Pacific because it "would like to alter Asia's balance of power in its own favor."[31] By 2001, after Bush assumed power, the US' avowed strategy, while shaped by the gathering fear regarding China, initially took on a stance of studied ambiguity. The 2001 QDR stated that:

REM ZAMORA

Aside from military maneuvers, the US military has been expanding its participation in relief efforts as a way to deepen its overseas military presence. In February 2006, they took part in rescue operations after a landslide in Guinsaugon, Leyte.

> "Although the United States will not face a peer competitor in the near future, the potential exists for regional powers to develop sufficient capabilities to threaten stability in regions critical to US interests. In particular, Asia is gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition."

The US was, at that time, on the verge of invading Iraq and Afghanistan; tensions with North Korea and Iran were simmering. And with China not actively blocking its plans, the US refrained at first from naming and provoking China. As will be discussed more fully later, the US had by then began planning for and implementing the recommendations that Marshall, Khalilzad, and others had earlier advanced to surround, contain, and deter it.

"Although the United States will not face a peer competitor in the near future, the potential exists for regional powers to develop sufficient capabilities to threaten stability in regions critical to US interests. In particular, Asia is gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition."
- US Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review 2001

In the succeeding years, even as the US continued to wage its "global war on terror," invaded Afghanistan, toppled and then threatened two regional powers defying the US in the Middle East – Iraq and Iran respectively -- China would continue to preoccupy US officials. "While the war against terror has changed the dynamics of the relationship [between US and China]," pointed out one analyst, "it has not changed the underlying factors that led many in the United States to view China as a strategic competitor."[32] For though the threat posed by non-state actors like al-Qaeda has since figured prominently in US rhetoric and military planning, it has not changed the larger contours of the grand strategy nor has it revised the premises and objectives underlying the US' attempt to overhaul its military. Though it can inflict damage, so-called non-conventional enemies of the kind al-Qaeda represent do not have potential to dislodge the US from its sole superpower status. In fact, the Pentagon itself has stressed that 9-11 did not change the direction of the military transformation project:

> "The attacks of September 11 did not deflect the Department's efforts to chart this new course. In fact, the challenge of the war against terrorism confirmed many elements of the Department's analysis and created a new imperative to fight the war against terrorism while transforming the Armed Forces."[33]

For although the "war on terror" has provided in many settings the public justification for many of the changes, the vision that animates it is larger, the perceived threats to which the US is responding are more enduring than that posed by the targets of today's "war on terror" alone. In the long term, it is the more long-term challenge perceived by US officials that will continue to inform its moves. "As September 11 fades in memory, or as the threat of global Islamist terrorism recedes a bit," note Jeremy Shapiro and Lynn E. Davis in a US Army-sponsored study, "the chances that the old tensions between the United States and China will reassert themselves are high."[34]

The last few years confirm this. In 2003, for example, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Tenet warned that China's military modernization constitute a direct threat to the United States.[35] In 2004, the US' National Intelligence Council released a report entitled *Mapping the Global Future*, which predicts that China will be able to overtake the US as the second largest defense spender after the US in two decades, thereby becoming "a first-rate military power." According to the report, the emergence of China, along with India, "will transform the geopolitical landscape, with impacts potentially as dramatic as those in the previous two centuries."[36] In 2005, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld himself accused China of challenging US supremacy in Asia.[37] Shortly after, then Deputy State Secretary Robert Zoellick likewise cautioned China against "maneuver[ing] toward a predominance of power."[38]

The Pentagon's official 2006 report to Congress on China subsequently stated, "China's military expansion is already such as to alter regional military balances."[39] This is because, in the Pentagon's assessment, China has been acquiring military

capabilities not only to conduct offensives in the region, but also to deny the US the capacity to access the region in case it actually does.[40] Since the early 2000s, some US defense analysts and planners had been raising the possibility that China is gearing to employ what they call an "anti-access" strategy. In case of a war, such a strategy would, according to these analysts, seek to delay and impede the US from deploying its forces close to China by attacking US bases in the region or preventing countries that host them from allowing the US to use them, blockading sea lanes, hitting ports, etc. To avert this, these analysts have been discussing and exploring ways to enter what they call "the dragon's lair."[41]

Apart from those who "terrorize populations" and "destroy our way of life," the 2005 National Defense Strategy (NDS) categorized as enemies of the US those who try to "limit our global freedom to act," "dominate key regions" or "attempt to make prohibitive the costs of meeting various US international commitments" – in reference to actions which have previously been attributed to a rising China keen on domination and competing with the US.[42] The recently released 2006 US National Security Strategy (NSS), meanwhile, is even more pointed towards China:

> "It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world. In the world today, the fundamental character of regimes matters as much as the distribution of power among them."[43]

"Of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages absent US counter-strategies."
- US Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review 2006

Stressing the US' objective of promoting liberal democracy, the NSS implies that the US would consider as enemies those that "seek to separate economic liberty from political liberty"[44] – a direct allusion to China's capitalist drive combined with its authoritarian political system. "Effective democracies," according to the NSS, are those that "limit the reach of government, protecting the institutions of civil society including the family, religious communities, voluntary associations, private property, independent business, and a market economy"[45] – a definition that excludes China.

If in 2001 the QDR was still vaguely worded, by 2006, when the next QDR was released, the assessment has become more explicit:

> "Of the major and emerging powers, China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages absent US counter-strategies."[46]

As it is, such a view has already informed the planning of the US' military services. A 2006 US Congressional Budget Office study on how to modernize the US fleet, for instance, notes that:

> "Above all others, the specific potential threat that concerns much of the Navy's leadership and many Members of Congress is a new naval competition with the People's Republic of China."[47]

Drawing on developments since 2001, a 2007 Air Force-sponsored study notes that because projecting power to defeat China will be the most difficult challenge for the US in a conventional war, "the mission of deterring China and dissuading military competition in East Asia will serve as the *prime force* motivating the modernization of the Air Force and Navy."[48] [italics added]

This is not to say that China alone drives the US' global military strategy. As has been noted earlier, US officials may also earnestly believe in the threat posed by non-conventional actors or "terrorist" groups around the world; regional powers such as North Korea and Iran evidently remain on the radar of the US military. It is also conceivable that, with the whole world as its "area of responsibility," the US also seeks to counter various other country- or region-specific threats to its interests. But in the view of US planners and strategists, all these can – and should – be done simultaneously. All these goals, moreover, are not necessarily inconsistent with a grand strategy of preventing the rise of rivals. And with the US now having positively identified China as that rival and with the US government peopled by individuals committed to this strategy, the stage is being set for what Robert Kaplan, an American journalist specializing on the US military, believes may be "the defining military conflicts of the twenty-first century: if not a big war with China, then a series of Cold War-style standoffs that stretch out over years and decades."[49]

The Move to Southeast Asia

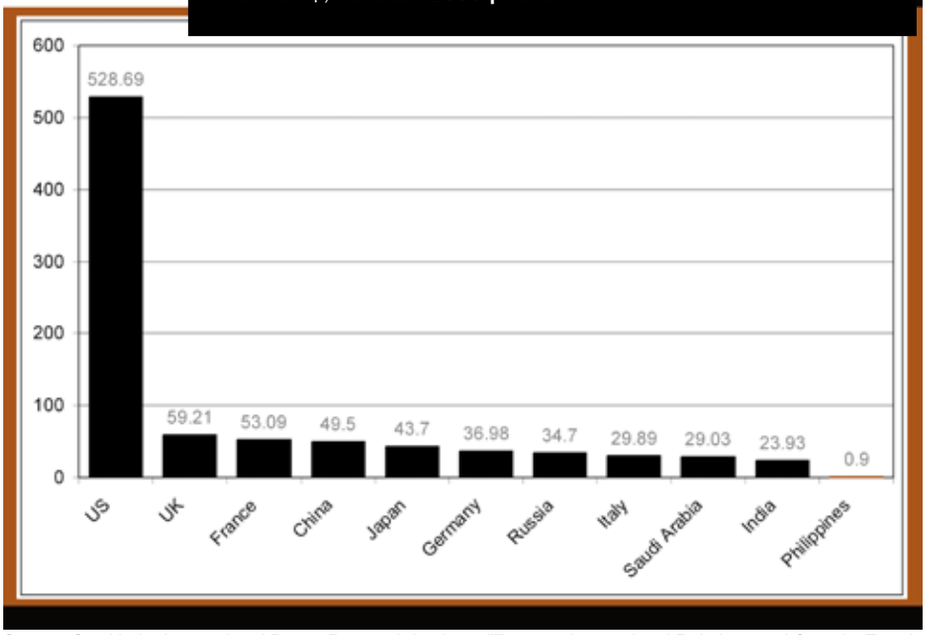
Whether China has in fact the "greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States" remains controversial – even within the US military. At $49 billion in 2006, China's military spending is equivalent to less than a tenth of the $529 billion spent by the US; its existing military capabilities are nowhere near that of the United States. (See Graph 1.) As the US Pacific Command (PACOM) chief Timothy Keating acknowledged in March 2007, "They are well behind us technologically."[1] While the US deploys 24 of the world's existing 34 aircraft carriers, for example, China has none. In the seas where the contest between the Pacific powers could potentially ensue, the battle is acutely lopsided: while the US Navy's warships account for 2.86 million tons out of the world total of 3 million tons, China has 0.26.[2] As the Pentagon had previously stated, China "lacks the technology and logistical support to project and sustain conventional forces much beyond its borders."[3] Disagreeing with the conclusions of the Marshall report mentioned earlier, former PACOM chief Dennis Blair had also concluded that China will be less, not more, of a threat.[4]

Aiming to provide a "non-partisan and pragmatic" assessment of China's military capacity, an exhaustive Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) study concluded that:

> "the Chinese military is at least two decades behind the United States in terms of military technology and capability... If the United States continues to dedicate significant resources to improving its military forces, as expected, the balance between the United States and China, both globally and in Asia, is likely to remain decisively in America's favor beyond the next twenty years."[5]

As to whether China is indeed aiming to use its growing military power to dislodge the United States from its position of preeminence – whether it is, in academic parlance, a "revisionist state" seeking to change the balance of powers, Alaistair Iain Johnston more or less summarizes the academic consensus:

GRAPH 2 **The Philippines and the World's Top Military Spenders In 2006**
In Billion $, constant 2005 prices



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Facts on International Relations and Security Trends database," http://first.sipri.org/ [Accessed September 19, 2006]. See website for explanation and description of data used.

> "[W]ith more rigorous criteria for determining whether a state's foreign policy is status quo or revisionist oriented than heretofore have been used in international relations theorizing, it is hard to conclude that China is a clearly revisionist state operating outside, or barely inside, the boundaries of a so-called international community… Moreover, the evidence that China's leaders are actively trying to balance against US power to undermine an American-dominated unipolar system and replace it with a multipolar system is murky."[6]

In other words, China lacks the military capacity to compete with the United States; neither does it appear to be seeking to.

This, however, is not the point. The US' strategy to prevent China's rise, as indicated by the pronouncement and actions of those who direct it, is not to wait until China develops the capacity and the intention to challenge the US but to act now to stop it from doing so. Now that China is still relatively weak compared to the US, the US' goal is to convince it that it would be better for it to submit to a US-dominated world order. The US will tolerate China's rise and allow it to pursue its own interests and needs, but only to the extent that it does not compete with the US and challenge the prerogatives it has reserved for itself. In Khalilzad's formulation, the goal is for Asia to "develop peacefully and in ways compatible with the US national interests."[7] For as long as China does not lock out the US from its access to the region – from markets and resources, from sea-lanes and overseas bases, it will be left alone in peace.

Rather than attempting to compete with the US, China is to be enticed to cooperate. Instead of modernizing its military capabilities in ways that would challenge the US, China is to be persuaded to submit to an effective power-sharing agreement with the US, but with the US as the more powerful partner. Hopefully, China will then calculate that it is better off agreeing to this arrangement and abandon any attempt to catch up with and overtake the US militarily. This would then serve the US' goal, as noted in a US Air Force study, "to prevent

a concentration of resources that could support a global challenge to the United States on the order of that posed by the former Soviet Union."[8] Otherwise, the alternative will be more costly and less beneficial: the US will seek to deprive China of its interests and, if necessary, wage war against it and defeat it.

The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) calls this "shaping the choices of countries at strategic crossroads."[9] It corresponds to what Khalilzad and his co-authors have earlier put forward as "congagement" – a strategy that combines elements of both containment and engagement in order to hedge both ways – to deter China by dissuading it from seeking to challenge the US, but if it can't be deterred, to make sure the US has what it takes to overpower it.[10] Before China poses a serious challenge to US preeminence and thereby constrains US actions to re-order the world, it must be persuaded to submit or else, to face certain defeat.

For such a threat to be credible, however, the US is moving to maximize its current military preponderance and deploy the full force of its military might against China. From Europe during the Cold War, Asia has now definitely prevailed in terms of the distribution of troops, resources, and attention the US is giving to the world's different regions. This follows the argument of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), subscribed to by others, that "Raising US military strength in East Asia is the key to coping with the rise of China to great-power status."[11] That the so-called "focus of strategic competition" has shifted to this region has been an argument of the PNAC and others and it has since gained traction.[12] According to Roger Cliff and Jeremy Shapiro in a US Army-sponsored study, "[A] bipartisan political consensus now holds that Asia has gained and will continue to gain in prominence and hence in the priority assigned to it in U.S. foreign policy."[13]Of all the previous administrations, Bush's defense policy is the first to move explicitly toward Asia since the end of the Cold War.[14]

Underscoring this are plans to move troops out from Europe so that, by the end of the ongoing global posture review, there will be around one-third more US troops stationed in Asia than in Europe, with 75,000 and 55,000 respectively.[15] Even now, believes Robert Kaplan, "the center of gravity of American strategic concern is already the Pacific, not the Middle East." Kaplan cites as proof the fact that the US Pacific Command, whose area of responsibility covers nearly 50% of the world's earth surface (See Map 4), encompassing East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, has far more warships, submarines, and troops than the US Central Command, which covers the Middle East, East Africa, and Central Asia. In fact, most of the troops fighting in the Middle East are borrowed from the Pacific Command.[16] To prove to China that it has what it takes to strike a blow at its ambitions, the US is seeking to surround it with the full range of its military infrastructure – bases, weapons, pre-positioned equipment, undersea warfare capabilities, persistent surveillance, training sites, and all other capacities that would allow the US to take control of the region and rapidly deploy in case the need arises.

But as those who have long been arguing for countering China had pointed out repeatedly, the problem for the US is that its "presence" in Asia has not been enough. Marshall's report on China,

The US' strategy to prevent China's rise, as indicated by the pronouncement and actions of those who direct it, is not to wait until China develops the capacity and the intention to challenge the US but to act now to stop it from doing so.

for example, emphasized how, in case of various face-offs, US actions could be constrained by this problem. It warned:

> "Lack of forward operating bases or cooperative allies greatly limits the range of US military responses to such contingencies. This conclusion is well known and can be arrived at without a futuristic scenario but deserves stating nonetheless."[17]

This assessment is widely shared. The US Air Force-funded study co-authored by Khalilzad, for instance, identifies Asia as a region in which the US "faces political and resource constraints in creating a regional infrastructure to support large-scale conventional military operations."[18] It is, according to another US Air Force-sponsored research, one of the two regions, along with the Persian Gulf, where "access is likely to prove most troublesome" and where access arrangements "may prove woefully inadequate for the kinds of contingencies that could develop."[19]

This perceived gap has been especially worrying for the US because, unlike a war in Europe, possible actions in Asia would have to contend with the vast oceanic distances between continental US and some of its existing allies in the region, on one hand, and China, on the other.[20] China, being a big country, would be harder to enter from its borders.[21] "Many potential contingencies in Asia," Roger Cliff and Jeremy Shapiro state in a US Army-sponsored study, "are far from the nearest US bases and could emerge rapidly with little warning."[22]

What the US does have in terms of presence is now believed to be concentrated in the wrong place. Since the 1950s, the bulk of the US forward-presence in Asia has been in South Korea and Japan, directed towards the Soviet Union and North Korea. If the US Pacific Command's "theater design" is to be improved, notes Robert James of the US Navy, this posture has to change:

> "The position of [US] forces in Northeast Asia is excellent for defending South Korea and Japan or responding to aggression against Taiwan, but poor for shaping or responding to a crisis in other portions of PACOM's theater, such as Southeast Asia or India. Maintaining a theater design with all forward deployed forces concentrated in Northeast Asia fails to prepare now for future contingencies."[23]

This assessment is shared by Marshall, Khalilzad, and the adherents of the PNAC. In their view, the US must expand southwards – to Southeast Asia.[24] According to Khalilzad and his co-authors, "[A] greater emphasis on Southeast Asia is required to enable the United States to respond to contingencies in that region and the South China Sea as well."[25]

The PNAC notes that since 1992, when the Philippine government shut down the US bases in the country, the US has had little presence in the region and this has to be reversed if the US is to successfully contain China. The PNAC argues that:

> "It is time to increase the presence of American forces in Southeast Asia…No US strategy can constrain a Chinese challenge

MAP 4 **Area of Responsibility of the US Pacific Command**

Source: US Pacific Command, "About US Pacific Command," http://www.pacom.mil/about/about.shtml [Accessed September 29, 2007]

> to American regional leadership if our security guarantees to Southeast Asia are intermittent and US military presence a periodic affair. For this reason, an increased naval presence in Southeast Asia, while necessary will not be sufficient… For operational as well as political reasons, stationing rapidly mobile US ground and air forces in the region will be required."[26]

Specifically, the PNAC recommends that the US should move the majority of its fleet to the Pacific and that a new permanent forward base for the Navy as well as for the Marines should be established in Southeast Asia.[27] Underscoring how this proposal is embraced across the political spectrum, the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), also concludes that:

> "Our routine presence [in Southeast Asia] does not adequately signal the degree of interest and importance we should attach to the area."[28]

Though China drives the proposed shift, building up US presence in Southeast Asia will also allow the US not only to support forces intended to operate within the region but also to facilitate the transit of ships, troops, and equipment to the Middle East and Central Asia through Southeast Asian sealanes connected to the Indian ocean.[29] While the CFR had

once complained about Southeast Asia being treated as a "backwater of US foreign policy," at no time since the end of the Cold War has the region been accorded as much strategic significance.[30]

Following all these proposals to expand US posture in Asia, the Pentagon announced in 2001 that, indeed, the ongoing realignment of its forward presence aims "to develop a basing system that provides greater flexibility for US forces in critical areas of the world, placing emphasis on additional bases and stations beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia."[31] The 2001 QDR announced that the Navy was going to increase the presence of its aircraft carrier battlegroups in the Western Pacific and that it will explore possibilities for "homeporting" ships and submarines in the region. The Air Force stated its intention to increase "contingency basing" in the Pacific and Indian oceans, ensuring that it has infrastructure and logistics on the way to the Arabian Gulf and the Western Pacific.[32] By early 2002, the US was reported to have begun negotiating with various governments in Southeast Asia for use of bases in the region.[33] In 2003, then US PACOM Commander Admiral Thomas B. Fargo told the US House Armed Services Committee that they seek to diversify their access throughout Asia.[34] In another House Committee hearing, portions of the transcript of which have been deleted and classified, Fargo elaborated on their plans for the region saying:

> "We endeavor to create a hub-and-spoke architecture to provide the prompt application of combat power and throughput in support of global action. This network will consist of Regional Hubs (HUBs), Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), Forward Operating Locations (FOLs), and Forward Support Locations (FSLs). Power projection and contingency response in Southeast Asia in the future will depend on this network of US access in areas with little or no permanent American basing structure. [DELETED – CLASSIFIED] Access in this region is also essential for the throughput of forces and sustainment to the CENTCOM [Central Command] theater."[35] [notes in brackets in original text]

In May 2005, the Overseas Basing Commission (OBC), an official body established by Congress to independently review the planned changes to the US' basing structure, agreed with the fundamental premises behind the changes, even as it expressed reservations with some of the changes being introduced or the manner by which they were being implemented. In fact, its main concern was that US basing strategy may be disproportionately focusing on current threats instead of on enduring ones. Its report states:

> "[L]ooking beyond today, we cannot rule out sometime in the next quarter of a century the emergence of a more traditional great power competitor, possibly in our zones of interest in Europe and East Asia. If that occurs, a force posture and base structure optimized for predominantly asymmetric threats emanating from the arc of instability may not be able to stay ahead of and ultimately contend with a global rival bent on direct confrontation with the United States."[36]

The OBC also lamented the lack of a "robust presence" in Southeast Asia and recommended continuing to deploy troops to the region.[37]

To achieve its goals in the region – to get permission for it to construct new bases or establish access but also to get political support for its actions – the US is reinvigorating its relations with its existing allies and exploring new ties with countries it has not traditionally had good relations with in the past. In the words of a US Air Force-funded study, the US should work "to expand [its] network of friends in region" by putting together "a coherent web of security arrangements among the United States and its core partners…that might expand to

"It is time to increase the presence of American forces in Southeast Asia...No US strategy can constrain a Chinese challenge to American regional leadership if our security guarantees to Southeast Asia are intermittent and US military presence a periodic affair. For this reason, an increased naval presence in Southeast Asia, while necessary will not be sufficient... For operational as well as political reasons, stationing rapidly mobile US ground and air forces in the region will be required.
- Project for the New American Century, Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces, and Resources for a New Century

Southeast Asia."[38] Thus, the US is bolstering its ties with its long-term treaty allies such as Japan, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia while at the same time moving to expand and deepen ties with countries with which it has lesser but existing cooperation such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia in Southeast Asia, and even Mongolia to the north.

Even more groundbreaking are US attempts to extend its hands to countries that it had not exactly had cordial relations with in the past: India, which was a pillar of the Non-aligned Movement during the Cold War and was seen as tilting towards the Soviet Union, and Vietnam, which just a little over thirty years ago the US had fought in war. Because India has had frictions with China in the past and is in itself a rising power rivaling China, and because Vietnam was occupied for centuries by China, the US hopes that they could be brought into the US' camp.

With this intention as the context, a US State Department official announced in March 2005 that the US would "help India become a major world power in the 21st century."[39] Towards this, the US has embarked on a long-term and wide-ranging effort to strengthen India's military, economic and technological capabilities, including a program of joint exercises and training, weapons trade and transfers and other forms of military cooperation. A controversial agreement between Washington and New Delhi on civilian nuclear cooperation, called the "Indo-US Nuke Deal," will not only improve India's nuclear power capacities, it will also shield its arsenal of nuclear weapons.[40] India now conducts an increasing number of port visits and

To achieve its goals in the region, the US is reinvigorating its relations with its existing allies and exploring new ties with countries it has not traditionally had good relations with in the past.

military exercises with the US since 2002 and is now identified as one of the countries in which the US is developing its military facilities.[41] A logistics and servicing agreement that would allow the US to use and access Indian bases and be provided basing services is also under negotiation. "India's well developed infrastructure," a senior officer quoted in a Pentagon-commissioned study said, "could be useful for power projection…"[42]

Hoping to build what the Pentagon calls "the right partnerships in the future,"[43] the US is attempting to assemble a de facto and informal anti-China coalition.[44] By building up the strength of its allies, and putting new stress on emerging powers such as India, Indonesia, and Vietnam as "multiple centers of power" that are naturally resistant to China, the goal, in the explanation of one analyst, is to maintain an "asymmetrically multipolar" Asian security order.[45] According to Kaplan, the model is a kind of Asian North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that would be to China what the NATO was to the Soviet Union. As Kaplan explains:

> "The point of this arrangement would be to dissuade China so subtly that over time the rising behemoth would be drawn into the PACOM alliance system without any large-scale conflagration—the way NATO was ultimately able to neutralize the Soviet Union."[46]

Along with the plans for East Asia and Southeast Asia, the US had also established bases to the west of China, in Central Asia, with new installations in Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan.[47] While it had none before the invasion of Afghanistan, by 2002 it had secured access to over a dozen bases in the region.[48] With the US' existing forward presence northeast of China, the deepening cooperation with Mongolia to China's north, and its intensifying alliance with India, to China's southwest, the US is slowly encircling China.

All these are part of the strategy to persuade China to rise "peacefully" by not competing with the US. "[M]aintaining favorable balances in critical geographic areas," the Pentagon believes:

> "can create high costs on a decision by potential adversaries to pursue dangerous forms of military competition. Finally, it may convince potential adversaries that the benefits of hostile acts against the interests of the United States are far outweighed by their costs and consequences."[49]

This strategy is more colorfully explained and summarized by Kagan and Kristol:

> "A strong America capable of projecting force quickly and with devastating effect to important regions of the world would make it less likely that challengers to regional stability will attempt to alter the status quo in their favor. It might even deter them from undertaking expensive efforts to arm themselves for such a challenge. An America whose willingness to project force is in doubt, on the other hand, can only encourage such challenges. In Europe, in Asia and in the Middle East, the message we should be sending to potential foes is: 'Don't even think about it."[50]

MAP 5 The Asia Pacific Region

‘The Finest Groups of Islands’

As the US moves to encircle China, the Philippines has become arguably even more important to fulfilling US military objectives.

For decades, the Philippines has played a critical role in US strategy. After World War II, the Philippines, along with Japan, was singled out by George Kennan, the architect of the US’ containment strategy, as “cornerstones of the Pacific security system.”[1] The bases in the Philippines were critical to the US’ power projection in the region, and were instrumental in waging war in Korea and Vietnam and conducting various other operations in the region. In 1992, the bases were shut down, and until now, some attribute the US’ supposed lack of interest in retaining the bases to a view of the Philippines that prevailed among American strategists with the end of the Cold War: it was no longer useful. It was argued that even without the bases, the US would be able to effectively project power in the western Pacific.[2]

While Asia was an important theater in the Cold War, the main arena was in Europe, where American troops stared face to face with the Soviet Union and its allies’ troops across the frontlines. The Philippines stood at the other end of the Soviet landmass, far away from these frontlines, and it became more marginal after the Soviet Union and China split and the US managed to form a de facto alliance with China. But now, with the US designating Asia as the focus of strategic competition and China as its target, the Philippines stands eye to eye, across the sea from China, part of the first line of offense in any future action against it. Gen. Arthur MacArthur’s oft-cited quote extolling the country’s location has, in light of the strategy towards China, regained currency:

> “The Philippines are the finest group of islands in the world. Its strategic position is unexceeded by that of any other position on the globe. The China Sea, which separates it by something like 750 miles from the continent is nothing more or less than a safety moat. It lies on the flank of what might be called a position of several thousand miles of coastline: it is in the center of that position. It is therefore relatively better placed than Japan, which is on a flank, and therefore remote from the other extremity; likewise India, on another flank. It affords a means of protecting

> American interests which with the very least output of physical power has the effect of a commanding position in itself to retard hostile action."[3]

This has not escaped American strategists. Indeed, as the United States moves to address the big gap in its forward presence around China, as it seeks to expand from beyond Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia, the Philippines, by virtue of its strategic location, has been specifically named and singled out in a number of proposals for realigning US posture in the region, particularly for the Navy and the Air Force, which, because of the physical realities, are expected to play a leading role in the region.

As the United States moves to address the big gap in its forward presence around China, as it seeks to expand from beyond Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia, the Philippines, by virtue of its strategic location, has been specifically named and singled out in a number of proposals for realigning US posture in the region.

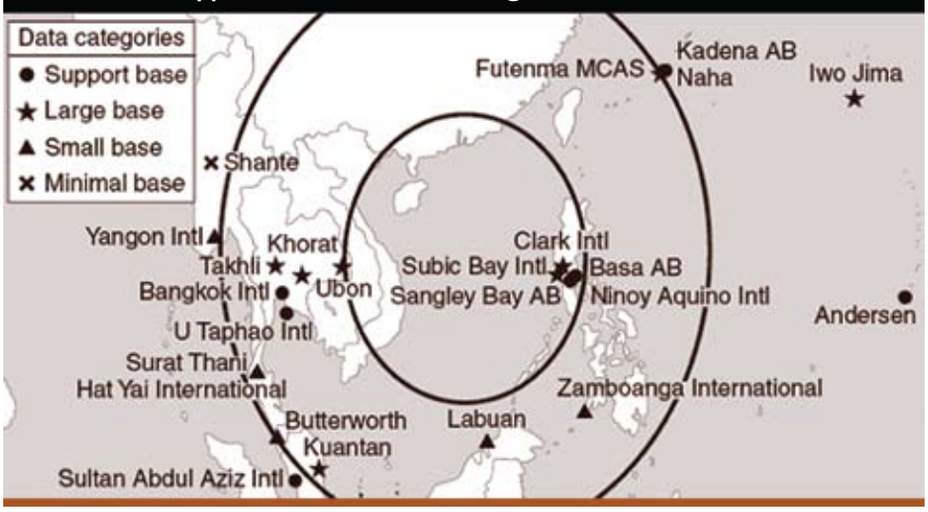
For example, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) had recommended that the US re-establish bases in the Philippines and/or Australia for the US Navy and the US Air Force. Stressing that the US should have a "more robust naval presence in Southeast Asia," the PNAC proposes that US naval presence in either the Philippines or Australia or both should match what the US currently has in Japan.[4] A second home-port for the US' carrier battle group should be constructed in either country. Meanwhile, the US Air Force, which is believed to be too concentrated in Northeast Asia, should double its forces in East Asia by possibly stationing a wing in the Philippines and Australia.[5]

Khalilzad and his co-authors had also looked approvingly at the Philippines' physical position, saying, "the Philippines' key location in the South China Sea could make it an attractive site for future USAF [US Air Force] expeditionary deployments."[6] Along with Vietnam, it could be critical for the USAF "to establish air superiority over the main shipping channels in the South China Sea."[7]

Foreseeing a possible US-China confrontation over Taiwan, among other scenarios, analysts examined

"[T]he only adequate airfields within the inner ring [of the South China Sea] are in the Philippines. Other airfields within 500 nautical miles exist in Vietnam but do not meet one or more of the criteria for supporting USAF combat operations."
- Zalmay Khalilzad, David T. Orletsky, Jonathan D. Pollack, Kevin L. Pollpeter, Angel Rabasa, David A. Shlapak, Abram N. Shulsky, Ashley J. Tellis, The United States and Asia: Toward a New US Strategy and Force Posture (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001) p. 78.

MAP6 The Philippines as One of the Basing Possibilities for the US Air Force



Source:
Zalmay Khalilzad, David T. Orletsky, Jonathan D. Pollack, Kevin L. Pollpeter, Angel Rabasa, David A. Shlapak, Abram N. Shulsky, Ashley J. Tellis, The United States and Asia: Toward a New US Strategy and Force Posture (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001) p. 78.

In a 2001 study for the US Air Force (USAF), the Philippines is shown to be the only country with adequate airfields within 500 nautical miles from the center of the South China Sea. The Philippines presents an "especially interesting opportunity to enhance USAF access in the Western Pacific."

the map, explored the possibilities, and came to the conclusion that:

> "[T]he only adequate airfields within the inner ring [of the South China Sea] are in the Philippines. Other airfields within 500 nautical miles exist in Vietnam but do not meet one or more of the criteria for supporting USAF combat operations."[8]

They note that Manila is about 650 nautical miles from the centerline of the Taiwan strait. A base in Northern Luzon would be even closer, at about 450 nautical miles making it nearer to the Taiwan strait than current US bases in Okinawa. Even nearer would be Batan island, north of Luzon, which would be only 300 nautical miles from that area.[9] (See Map 6). Access to these airfields, agrees another analyst, would be important so "large numbers of land-based airpower could surge into the region."[10] To establish a "more robust posture to support Taiwan," the authors suggest that one step would be to "expand cooperation" with the Philippines.[11]

Similarly, a 2004 study for the US Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations noted that a clash against China over Taiwan is "one of the most stressing" contingencies that the US might plausibly face.[12] The Philippines, among others, was cited as having "possible en route bases for US aircraft…. well suited as secondary operating locations" for US tactical fighters.[13] Echoing other analysts, the study also notes that the Philippines could help the US by providing access to bases in Luzon; Subic Bay could be used for its former function of providing rest and recreation for US troops.[14] "Continued expansion of cooperation with the Philippines," recommends the study, "could improve the chances that it would grant the US access to its bases during any China-Taiwan confrontation."[15]

In another study for the US Air Force, the Philippines is located firmly within the so-called "dragon's lair" or those areas in the Western Pacific where China could potentially seek to prevent the US from deploying its forces.[16] (See Map 7) Another US Air Force-funded study to develop a "global access strategy" for the US Air Force finds the USAF posture along the Pacific untenable for "high-

intensity combat operations" beyond the Korean peninsula and notes the lack of US bases around Taiwan as "especially problematic." To solve this, they propose renting an island in the Philippines for use as a military base.[17] A 2006 US Air Force-funded study evaluating basing options for storing and pre-positioning US' war material generated a list of 300 potential "forward support locations" or FSLs – now known as "cooperative security locations" or CSLs[18] – around the world for the US military; of the 50 that emerged as most desirable, the Clark Air Base is included.[19] (See Table 5)In Southeast Asia, the Philippines, along with Thailand and Singapore, was singled out as one of the "robust options" for "closer examination."[20]

Citing as an added advantage the Philippines not sharing borders with other countries, Thomas Garcia, in a thesis for the Naval Postgraduate School, also strongly urged the US Navy to consider returning to the Philippines, particularly to Subic Bay. "The Philippines," argues Garcia, "provides the best strategic location for US Naval facilities in the Asia-Pacific region that offer both access to the region as well as suitable force protection."[21] Subic Bay is, with all its special qualities,[22] "clearly the best option."[23] On this, Garcia reiterates the view of a US Marines major who concluded, in a paper in 1990, that, "[W]hen you look at the overall picture, our bases in the Philippines give the US the capacity and the best ability to project itself in the Pacific."[24]

If in the past, strategists have discounted the value of the Philippines after the bases were closed, now, there is a common agreement on its importance.

Apart from the Navy and the Air Force, the Army had also been advised to consider the Philippines as it studies options on how to more rapidly deploy its forces in the region. Exploring different alternatives, a US Army-sponsored research identified the Philippines as one of the suitable locations for establishing one of four Stryker Brigade Combat Teams in the world. The Stryker Brigade Combat Teams are light and mobile units relying on armored vehicles introduced by the US Army in an attempt to move infantry more quickly over long distances. In the study, the Philippines was cited as a location where "more 'areas of interest' can be reached in

MAP 7 **The Philippines in the 'Dragon's Lair'**

Source: Map in Roger Cliff, Mark Burles, Michael S. Chaise, Derek Eaton, Kevin L. Pollpeter, Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and their Implications for the United States, Sta Monica, CA: RAND Corporation Project Air Force, 2007, p. 112

The Philippines is shown in a 2007 study for the US Air Force to be within the so-called "dragon's lair" or those areas in the Western Pacific where China could pursue an "anti-access strategy" of preventing the US military from deploying in case of war. Unlike in Japan, which is also within the "dragon's lair," the US is shown as lacking bases in the Philippines.

96 hours; it is close to all parts of Indonesia and the Korean peninsula.[25] (See Map 8).

Although proposals made by military analysts do not necessarily translate into action, it is clear that a consensus has been building; that, in the words of one analyst, "[A]ccess to Philippine facilities is much more important than most judged 12 years ago."[26] If in the past, strategists have discounted the value of the Philippines after the bases were closed; now, there is a common agreement on its importance. Perceptions and strategies change; geography does not. And while the actual plans of the US with regard to the Philippines had largely been kept under wraps due primarily to sensitivities and legal restrictions in the Philippines,[27] US actions since the late 90s and especially since 2001 reveal its determination to re-establish its presence in the country and to use it, once again, as the cornerstone of its strategy in the region.

As discussed above, the US' goal is to maximize its ability and efficiency to operate given the limitations and constraints. Hence, the US' interest is not necessarily just to establish or re-establish permanent bases of the kind that it had in the Philippines in the past. Public discussion in the Philippines, as framed and encouraged by the Philippine and US governments and the press, tend to focus on this question when assessing US intentions in the country – whether the US wants to get back Subic and Clark or establish large permanent bases similar to them. In fact, US officials have at one point raised the idea with Philippine officials.[28]

But while this option cannot be ruled out altogether, US strategy to use the Philippines to bolster its global posture has for the meantime become more multi-faceted and more sophisticated. As Admiral Dennis Blair, former commander of the US Pacific Command, explained:

> "[W]e are adapting our plans and cooperation of the past to the future. Those plans do not include any request by the United States for bases in the Philippines *of the kind that we have had in the past*. We are not looking for reestablishment of permanently

TABLE 5:
Potential Forward Support Locations in US Air Force-commissioned Study

Bagram, Afghanistan	Tocument IAP, Panama
Darwin, Australia	Clark APT, Philippines
Baku, Azerbaijan	Okecie, Poland
Shaikh Isa, Bahrain	Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico
Burgas, Bulgaria	Constanta, Romania
Djibouti Ambouli, Djibouti	Al Udeid AB, Qatar
Cotipaxi, Ecuador	Sao Tome/Salazar, Sao Tome
Beni Suef, Egypt	Dakar, Senegal
Ramstein AB, Germany	Paya Lebar, Singapore
Souda Bay, Greece	Louis Botha, South Africa
Andersen AFB, Guam	Moron AB, Spain
Chennai, India	U-Tapao, Thailand
Chhatrapati Shivaji IAP, India	Incirlik AB, Turkey
Balad, Iraq	Diego Garcia, UK
Aviano AB, Italy	Mildenhall and Welford, UK
Signella and Camp Darby, Italy	Eielson AFB, Alaska, US
Kadena AB, Japan	Hickam AFB, Hawaii, US
Misawa AB, Japan	APS Munitions 1, Diego Garcia
Yokota AB, Japan	APS WRM 1, Diego Garcia
Bishkek-Manas, Kyrgyzstan	APS Munitions 2, Guam
Kaduna Airport, Nigeria	APS WRM2, Guam
Masirah Island, Oman	APS Munitions 3, Mediterranean
Seeb, Oman	APS WRM 3, Mediterranean
Thumrait, Oman	APS Munitions 4, Okinawa
Masroor, Pakistan	APS WRM 4, Okinawa

Note: IAP=International Airport; APT=Airport
Source: Mahyar A. Amouzegar, Ronald G. McGarvey, Robert S. Tripp, Louis Luangkesorn, Thomas Lang, Charles Robert Roll Jr., Evaluation of Options for Overseas Combat Support Basing (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006) p. 50.

"[W]e are adapting our plans and cooperation of the past to the future. Those plans do not include any request by the United States for bases in the Philippines of the kind that we have had in the past.
- Admiral Dennis Blair (Commander in Chief of US Pacific Command)

> based forces in the Philippines for US forces. What we are looking for are flexible arrangements so that we can work together on the challenges of the future, and these have to do with primarily the ability to operate together logistically, to be able to react quickly, to be able to share intelligence so that we have the same picture of what's required in the operation, and also for a realistic exercise program so that we can practice doing it together." [italics added][29]

What the US wants, simply stated, is access. As US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said: "Our basic interest is to have the ability to go into a country and have a relationship and have understandings about our ability to land or overfly and to do things that are of mutual benefit to each of us. But we don't have any particular plans for permanent bases if that's the kind of thing you mean…"[30]

To gain this ability, the US recognizes that it faces one formidable constraint: public opposition to

In a 2003 study for the US Army, the Philippines was cited as a possible base of the US Army's Stryker Brigade Combat Team. From the Philippines, all of China can be reached by the SBCT within 96 hours.

MAP 8 **The Philippines as Possible Base of Army Stryker Brigade Combat Team**

Source: John Gordon and David Orletsky, "Moving Rapidly to the Fight," in The US Army and the New National Security Strategy, Lynn E. Davis and Jeremy Shapiro, eds. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2003), p. 203.

US military presence in the country. After all, it was mass and sustained public mobilizations that contributed to the confluence of events that led to the insertion of a provision in the 1987 Constitution that conditionally bars the presence of foreign troops in its territory and to the subsequent closure of US bases in the country in 1992. This opposition remains. Though portrayed as limited to the left and to nationalists, Bayani Dilag, in a paper written for the US Naval Postgraduate School, believes that opposition to US bases cuts across the marked political divisions in the Philippines.[31] Even within the Philippine military, which has been a bulwark of pro-US opinion, issues on sovereignty have found resonance. As the US Air Force-funded study on US military access in Asia acknowledges:

> "On the matter of US access to military facilities in the Philippines, the general view of Philippine security experts is that for domestic political reasons it would be difficult to give the appearance that the United States is reestablishing its bases in the Philippines."[32]

Hence, Dilag advises the US military to adjust to the prevailing political and diplomatic climate in the Philippines by pursuing a combination of strategies. "Pure basing" – or the maintenance of large permanent infrastructure – is not advised; instead, a combination of different kinds of basing strategies must be adopted.[33]

Recognizing constraints posed by political realities, the US has since been seeking access in ways that would be able to overcome domestic opposition by taking gradual and tentative but incremental steps, publicly justifying them in ways that are more acceptable to the public – i.e. as part of the "war on terror", to help modernize the Philippine military, etc. At the same time, even as it tailors its presence to the circumstances, it still seeks to ensure that each step conforms with the current transformation of the overseas basing infrastructure, as discussed below, and contributes to strengthening the US global posture in support of its strategy.

It is in light of these considerations – the ongoing effort to better position, streamline, and free US forward presence from restrictions while countering domestic opposition – that the US has undertaken the following concrete steps to achieve its objectives as regards the Philippines:

- **missions and deployments for access and infrastructure**

First, the US has stepped up deploying troops, ships, and equipment to the country ostensibly for training exercises, humanitarian and engineering projects, and other missions.

Since 1998, a steady stream of US troops have been arriving in the country for regular military exercises involving up to 5,000 troops, depending on the exercise, in various locations throughout the country. (See Map 9.) Though the Visiting Forces Agreement, which was required by the US to conduct the exercises, was approved in 1998, it was only beginning in 2001 that the number and the size of troops involved jumped significantly. In 2006, up to 37 exercises were scheduled, up from 17 to 24 in the preceding years.[34] (See Table 6.) In any given year since then, few are the days or weeks when there would be no US troops somewhere in the country giving lectures to Philippine troops, participating in large-scale maneuvers, joining command exercises, simulating war games, or taking part in other related activities. Compared to any other Southeast Asian country, the Philippines hosts the most number of such exercises and activities. As a result of these continuing deployments, former US Ambassador to the Philippines Francis Ricciardone has described the US presence in the country as "semi-continuous."[35]

Largely presented as efforts to modernize the Philippine armed forces, the objectives behind the exercises are manifold and overlapping. First, the exercises allow the US military to be more familiar with the capabilities, organization, doctrines, and other characteristics of military forces that are typically inferior to that of the US but which they

MAP 9 **Locations of US Military Exercises in the Philippines**

TABLE 6
US Military Exercises in the Philippines

US troops have been regularly deploying to the Philippines to take part in joint exercises with Filipino troops. The frequency of these exercises increased significantly after the 1998 signing of the Visiting Forces Agreement. Since 2002, around 17 to 24 exercises were held annually. In 2006, the US and Philippine governments announced that a total of 37 joint exercises will be held throughout the year. They last between a few days to as long as six months. The table below lists only those known exercises based on available newspaper clippings and military websites. Where different information from various clippings on one exercise are found, the ones with the most details are used. The number of troops involved is not constant throughout the duration of each exercise.

CODENAME	DURATION	NUMBER OF US TROOPS INVOLVED	LOCATION OF EXERCISES	NOTES
BALIKATAN '92	19 to 30 October 1992	600 US soldiers	Nueva Ecija, Cavite	[1]
BALIKATAN '93	18 October 1992 (end date not stated)	1,300 US soldiers	Not stated	[2]
PALAH '95 - 02	18 or 19 July 1995 (end date not stated)	2 US Navy Officers, 13 US Marines	Palawan	[3]
CARAT '98	5 August 1998 (end date not stated)	Not stated	Zambales	[4]
CARAT '99	3 May to 1 June 1999	Not stated	Not stated	[5]
PALAH '99 - 01	3 to 21 May 1999	Unspecified number from the US Navy	Not stated	[6]
MARSURVEX	1 June 1999 (end date not stated)	Not stated	Not stated	[7]
BALIKATAN 2000	28 January to 3 March 2000	Around 2,500 US soldiers	Zambales, Pampanga, Palawan, Cavite, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija	[8]
CARAT 2000	13 to 27 June 2000	2,000 US soldiers	Cavite, Zambales, Nueva Ecija, Manila	[9]
MARSURVEX	25 to 29 September 2000			[10]
FLASH PISTON 007	4 to 25 August, 2000	17 to 20 US Navy Seals	Cebu	[11]
TEAK PISTON	6 November 2001 (for two weeks)	90 US soldiers	Cebu	[12]
BALIKATAN 02-01 (*)	31 January to 31 July 2002	Between 660 to 1,300 US troops, including 160-250 from the Special Forces, 340 US and Navy engineers	Basilan	[13]
BALIKATAN 02-02 (**)	22 April to 6 May 2002	2, 600 US soldiers	Various parts of Luzon	[14]
BALIKATAN 03-01 (***)	Announced February 2003 but was postponed; this was supposed to go on "until both sides agree it is finished"	1,700 to 3,000 US troops, including 350 Special Operations forces in Sulu	Sulu and Zamboanga City	[15]
PIX 03	3 February 2003 (for three weeks)	700 US Marines	Cavite	[16]
BALIKATAN 2004	23 February to 7 March 2004	700 to 2,500 US troops	Palawan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Aurora, and Batanes	[17]
BALANCE PISTON 04 - 3	26 July to 13 August 2004	Unspecified number from US Marine Battalion Landing Team 6 and US Special Forces group	North Cotabato	[18]
PALAH 04-01	5 August to December 31 2004	Unspecified number from US Navy Seals	Not specified	[19]

DATA COMPILED BY MAE ANN SAGUANO AND JOY MANAHAN

CODENAME	DURATION	NUMBER OF US TROOPS INVOLVED	LOCATION OF EXERCISES	NOTES
MASURVEX 04-04	Lined up for fourth quarter of 2004	Not specified	Not specified	[20]
BALANCE PISTON 05-01	31 January to 18 February 2005	7 US Special Forces Units	Nueva Ecija	[21]
BALIKATAN 2005	21 February 2005 (end date not specified)	300 US troops	Not specified	[22]
BALANCE PISTON OS-6	11 April to 5 May 2005	28 US troops	Basilan	[23]
BALIKATAN	21 April to 5 May 2005	Not specified	Not specified	[24]
CARAT	16 to 23 August 2005	Around 1,200 US sailors	Manila, Zambales, and Palawan	[25]
PHIBLEX	16 October 2005 (for two weeks)	500 US Marines (will also participate in Talon Vision)	Pampanga, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Cavite	[26]
TALON VISION and AMPHIBIOUS LANDING EXERCISE	16 to 26 October 2005	4,500 US Marines and sailors (including US Navy Task Force 76 and Amphibious Squadron 11)	Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Zambales, Cavite, Tarlac	[27]
PHIBLEX '06	22 to 26 October 2005	3,300 Marines from 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit	Zambales	[28]
BALANCE PISTON 06-01	3 November to 2 December 2005	Not specified	Zamboanga del Sur	[29]
BALANCE PISTON 06-02	17 January to 17 February 2006	30 US soldiers	North Cotabato	[30]
BALIKATAN 2006	20 February to 5 March 2006	5,500 US soldiers	Cavite, Pampanga, Neva Ecija, Sulu	[31]
CARAT 2006	15 August 2006 (one week)	2,000 US soldiers from US Navy	Zambales, La Union	[32]
PHIBLEX	October 2006 (two weeks, exact dates not specified)	not less 2,000 from US Marines	Cavite, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac	[33]
TALON VISION and AMPHIBIOUS LANDING EXERCISE	16 to 31 October 2006	5,700 US Marines from 3rd Marine Expeditionary Unit, the Essex Expeditionary Strike Group, Marines	Tarlac, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Zambales, Palawan	34
KAPIT BISIG	Mentioned September 2006	Not specified	Not specified	[35]
Not stated	September 2006 (not specified)	US Special Forces	Basilan, Tawi-Tawi	[36]
BALIKATAN 2007	19 February to 4 March 07 (inclusive dates from 1 Jan 07 to 31 Mar 07)	300 American servicemen	Sulu, Zamboanga City, Lanao del Norte, Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato	[37]
CARAT '07	31 May to 8 June 2007	1,400 US troops	Basilan, Zamboanga City, Isabela City	[38]
TALON VISION and AMPHIBIOUS LANDING EXERCISES	15 October 2007 (for two weeks)	3,000 US Marines from 3rd Marine Expeditionary Unit based in Okinawa, Japan; US Sailors from the Essex Expeditionary Strike Group under Task Force 76 based in Sasebo, Japan	Clark, Subic, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija	[39]

ACRONYMS: PALAH- "Exercise Pandagat, Lupa, at Himpapawid"; CARAT: Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training; MARSURVEX- Maritime Survey Exercise; PIX- Philippine Interoperability Exchange; PHIBLEX- Philippine Bilateral Exercise

* It is not clear from press reports what the difference is between Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines and Balikatan 02-1 because different officials say different things and use the names interchangeably. Those who were deployed as part of Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines were originally reported to also be taking part in Balikatan 02-01. According to a US Army historian, planners at the US Pacific Command thought of Balikatan 02-1 as a "joint combined exercise," not a separate campaign of Operation Enduring Freedom. (C.H. Briscoe, "Reflections and observations on ARSOF operations during Balikatan 02-1" Special Warfare, September 2004). Also, the 250 Special Forces reported to be going to Sulu in early 2006 were reported to be part of Balikatan 2006

** According to journalist Manny Mogato, this is different from Balikatan 02-01; Balikatan 02-01, according to GlobalSecurity.org, was a "purely training exercise" as compared to Balikatan 02-2.

*** Announced February 2003 but was postponed; this was supposed to go on "until both sides agree it is finished"

"The habitual relationships built through exercises and training and a coherent view of regional security with regional partners is our biggest guarantor of access in time of need... Access over time can develop into habitual use of certain facilities by deployed US forces with the eventual goal of being guaranteed use in a crisis, or permission to preposition logistics stocks and other critical material in strategic forward locations."

- Admiral Thomas Fargo, Transcript of Hearing of US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, June 26, 2003.

may have to fight against or fight alongside with in the future. As Roger Cliff and Jeremy Shapiro, advising the US Army on how to improve its capacities in light of the new strategy and the shift to Asia, state, "[G]iven that these low-tech militaries may well be U.S. partners or adversaries in future contingencies, becoming familiar with their capabilities and operating style and learning to operate with them are important."[36]

Through the exercises and similar "security cooperation" activities, the US hopes to convince the militaries to be their partners rather than their adversaries. As the US' National Military Strategy (NMS) of 2004 states:

> "Military forces engage in security cooperation (SC) activities to establish important military interactions, building trust and confidence between the United States and its multinational partners. These relatively small investments often produce results that far exceed their cost."[37]

Apart from the exercises conducted in Philippine territory, the US also brings Filipino soldiers, especially higher-ranking officers, to train or further their military education overseas. Between 2001 and 2005, a total of 846 Filipinos were trained under this program – the largest contingent from Southeast Asia.[38] (See Graph 3) The goal is made clear by the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR):

> "Foreign leaders who receive US education and training help their governments understand US values and interests, fostering willingness to unite in a common cause."[39]

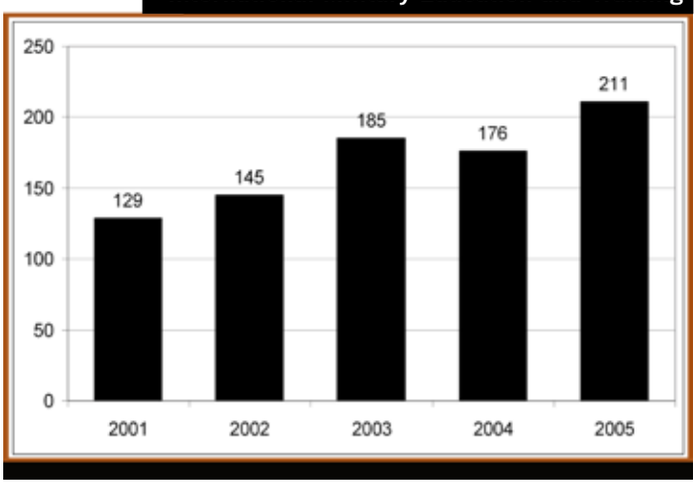
Such willingness is seen as key to eventually achieving political support for US aims in general and to providing the US with the access they need, in particular. From out of the formal and informal relationships that are made possible by the trainings, exercises, and deployments are ties that can prove useful when the time comes.[40] As David Shlapak explains in a US Air Force-funded research:

> "Maintaining an active program of military-to-military contacts…to help shape the perception of partner countries and other aspects of engagement may be the best assurance that, when the need arises, US military forces can find adequate access to perform their missions both quickly and safely."[41]

Continuing a practice that dates back to the Nixon administration,[42] the US is training local and often low-tech militaries in the hope that doing so would make them stronger and better able to wage wars together with the United States or, in some cases, alone at the frontlines in US-supported missions. As the 2001 QDR states:

> "The need to strengthen alliances and partnerships has specific military implications. It requires that US forces train and operate with allies and friends in

GRAPH 3 **Number of Filipinos Trained Under International Military Education and Training**



Source:
Department of State, Congressional Budget Justification for Operations, 2003-2007

> peacetime as they would operate in war. This includes enhancing inter-operability and peacetime preparations for coalition operations, as well as increasing allied participation in activities such as joint and combined training and experimentation."[43]

The catch-phrase is "inter-operability" or the ability to fight wars together efficiently and seamlessly by following common doctrines among counterparts, facilitating intelligence-sharing, and enhancing communication.[44] By planning and preparing for various scenarios through war games, simulations, and other exercises, the US hopes to complicate the planning of potential enemies.[45] In the process of building the capacity of its allies' militaries, the US also seeks to ensure that the competencies that they acquire fit into the over-all needs of the US military; they must have "niche capabilities" so their skills are not redundant.[46]

Implicit in the relationship – as has been the case in previous US-led wars – is that the US will retain over-all command of any coalition in war. Hence, the goal behind the efforts to build ties with, train, strengthen, and develop the capabilities of local militaries is actually to de facto subsume and subordinate them under the US military organization. In the words of the 2006 QDR:

> "the United States will work to achieve greater integration of defensive systems among its international partners in ways that would complicate any adversary's efforts to decouple them."[47]

Underlying this aim is the awareness that the US, with its limited number of troops, cannot respond to all contingencies by itself without counting on allies for help. The goal behind this, says Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Andrew Hoehn, is to "alleviate operations tempo"[48] – or the rate of military missions that US troops have to conduct or perform – by passing on the missions to allies, thereby minimizing possible casualties.[49]

Apart from grooming others to fight its wars and shaping their perceptions in the hope that they will support US goals, the holding of joint exercises and activities also allows the US to gain temporary – but repeated and regular – access to the territories of countries in which the exercises are held. As Hoehn

As US troops come and go in rotation for frequent, regular exercises, their presence – when taken together – makes up a formidable forward-presence that brings them closer to areas of possible action without need for huge infrastructure to support them and without inciting a lot of public attention and opposition.

himself said, the point of "security cooperation activities" is not just to develop inter-operability with allies in preparation for war but to "provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access."[50] With its goal of being able to operate anywhere in the world, the US needs to be able to train not just inside the bases where they are stationed but also in actual terrains similar to those in which they are likely to operate. What the Philippines has to offer in terms of jungle warfare training, for example, cannot be replicated in Japan, Korea, or Germany.[51] Even in Thailand, where the terrain is similar to the Philippines, the US is only allowed to conduct a limited number of exercises and in a limited range of locations.[52] As training areas for US forces become unavailable or restricted in other places, US PACOM head Admiral Thomas Fargo noted in March 2003, the Philippines still provides "excellent training opportunities" in a way that also "exercises contingency access."[53]

It is not just for the training that the exercises prove useful. As Fargo himself has pointed out:

> "The habitual relationships built through exercises and training and a coherent view of regional security with regional partners is our biggest guarantor of access in time of need… Access over time can develop into habitual use of certain facilities by deployed US forces with the eventual goal of being guaranteed use in a crisis, or permission to pre-position logistics stocks and other critical material in strategic forward locations."[54]

As US troops come and go in rotation for frequent, regular exercises, their presence – when taken together – makes up a formidable forward-presence that brings them closer to areas of possible action without need for huge infrastructure to support them and without inciting a lot of public attention and opposition. US troops will be able to deploy faster to the South China Sea if they are holding exercises off Palawan or in Zambales than if they were in Hawaii. In the face of domestic sensitivities regarding permanent US presence, they would also be able to tell the public that they are only in the country temporarily and that they will be leaving soon. What is left unsaid, however, is that they are also always arriving.

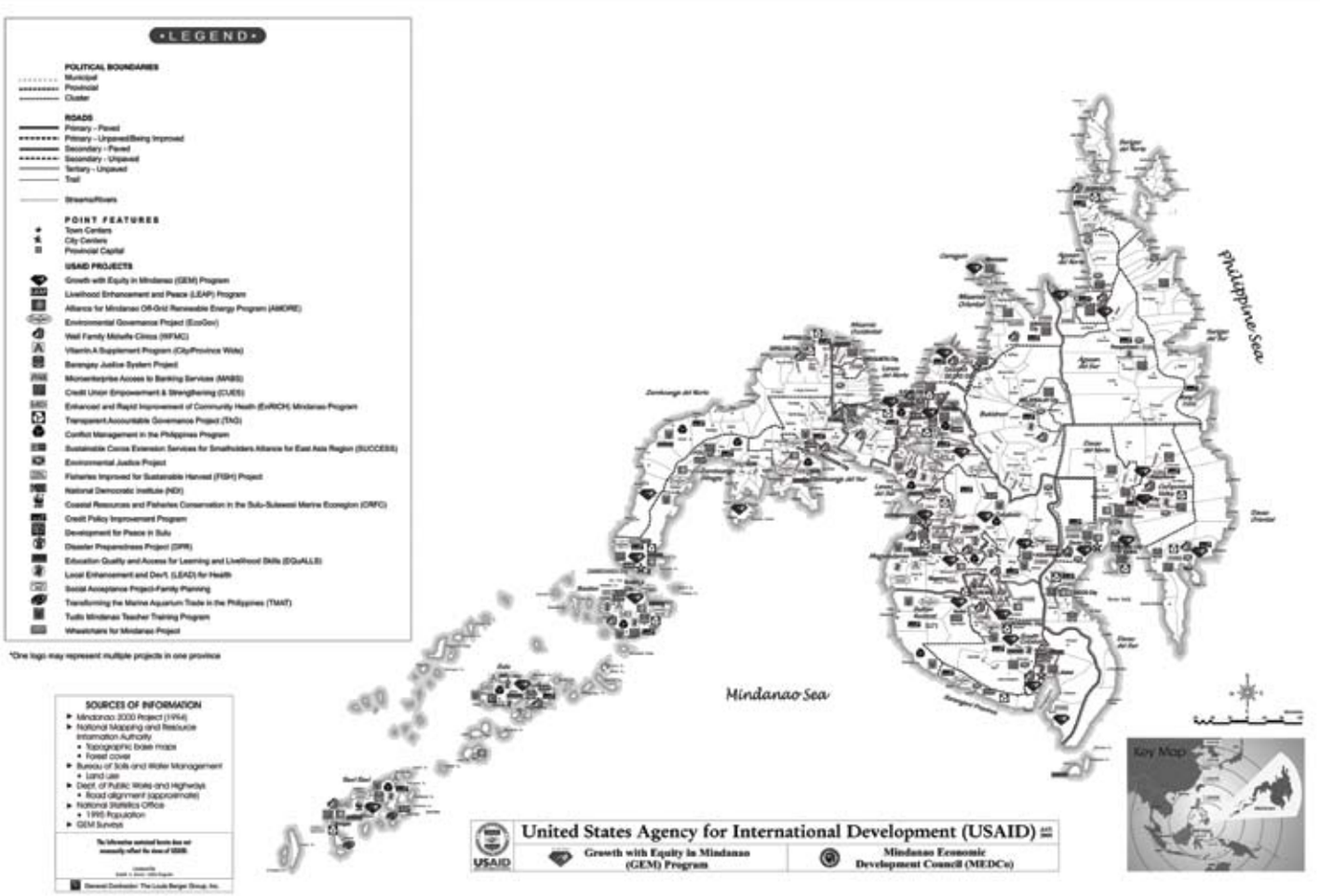
And as US troops depart then come back again, they leave behind the infrastructure that they had built and used ostensibly for the exercises and which could still be of use to the US military in the future for missions different from those for which they were initially built. In General Santos City, for example, the US constructed a deepwater port and one of the most modern domestic airports in the country, connected to each other by one of the country's best roads. In Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija, where US troops routinely go for exercises, the airport has been renovated, its runway strengthened to carry the weight of C-130 planes.[55] In Basilan and Sulu, venues of Balikatan exercises, the US, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), has also built roads and ports that can berth huge ships.[56] (See Map 10.)

Along with troops, an increasing number of ships have also been entering the country with increasing

The modern airport and fishport in General Santos City are just two of the USAID's many infrastructure projects in Mindanao.

PHOTOS by CASCO

MAP 10 **USAID Infrastructure Projects in Mindanao**



SOURCE: United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Growth with Equity in Mindanao project website, http://www.mindanao.org/components/infra.htm [Accessed 14 August 200]

TABLE 7
US Warship Entries to the Philippines

NAME OF VESSEL	DATE OF REPORTED ENTRY	LOCATION	NOTES
USS Frederick (LST 1184)	April 30, 2001	Subic, Cavite	1
USS Curts (FFG 38)	May 31, 2001	Subic	2
USS Rushmore (LSD 47)	May 31, 2001	Subic	3
USS Wadsworth (FFG 9)	May 31, 2001	Subic	4
USS Germantown (LSD 42)	November 10, 2001	Subic	5
USS Vandergrift (FFG 48)	December 1, 2001	Subic	6
USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43)	April 23, 2002	Manila	7
USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43)	May 6, 2002	Subic	8
USCGC Morgenthau (WHEC 722)	July 17, 2002	Subic	9
USS Anchorage (LSD 36)	July 17, 2002	Subic	10
USS George Philip (FFG 12)	July 17, 2002	Subic	11
USS Vincennes (CG 49)	July 17, 2002	Subic	12
USS Salvor (ARS 52)	July 17, 2002	Subic	13
USS Chancellorsville (CG 62)	August 25, 2002	Subic	14
USS Essex (LHD 2)	November 3, 2003	Clark	15
USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19)	March 3, 2004	Luzon	16
USS Coronado (AGF 11)	April 23, 2004	Subic	17
USCGC Mellon (WHEC 717)	July 28, 2004	Subic	18
USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43)	July 28, 2004	Subic	19
USS McCampbell (DDG 85)	July 28, 2004	Subic	20
USS Russell (DDG 59)	July 28, 2004	Subic	21
USS Salvor (ARS 52)	July 28, 2004	Subic	22
USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19)	March 16, 2005	Manila	23
USS Paul Hamilton (DDG 60)	August 17, 2005	Subic	24
USS Safeguard (ARS 59)	August 17, 2005	Subic	25
USS Stethem (DDG 63)	October 25, 2005	Subic	26
USS Essex (LHD 2)	October 26, 2005	Subic	27
USS Juneau (LPD 10)	October 26, 2005	Subic	28
USS Essex (LHD 2)	February 6, 2006	Leyte	29
USS Juneau (LPD 10)	February 6, 2006	Subic	30
USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG 54)	February 19, 2006	Leyte	31
USS Juneau (LPD 10)	March 6, 2006	Subic	32
USCGC Sherman (WHEC 720)	August 15, 2006	Subic	33
USS Crommelin (FFG 37)	August 15, 2006	Subic	34
USS Hopper (DDG 70)	August 15, 2006	Subic	35
USS Salvor (ARS 52)	August 15, 2006	Subic	36
USS Tortuga (LSD 46)	August 15, 2006	Subic	37
USNS Mercy (T-AH 19)	June 11, 2006	Tawi-Tawi	38

DATA COMPILED BY JOY MANAHAN

TABLE 7
US Warship Entries to the Philippines

NAME OF VESSEL	DATE OF REPORTED ENTRY	LOCATION	NOTES
USS Essex (LHD 2)	October 18, 2006	Subic	[39]
USS Harpers Ferry (LSD 49)	October 18, 2006	Subic, Leyte	[40]
USS Stethem (DDG 63)	October 18, 2006	Subic	[41]
USS Juneau (LPD 10)	February 3, 2007	Subic	[42]
USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19)	February 8, 2007	Subic	[43]
USS Comstock (LSD 45)	March 13, 2007	Legazpi	[44]
USS Ford (FFG 54)	May 30, 2007	Zamboanga	[45]
USS Harpers Ferry (LSD 49)	May 30, 2007	Zamboanga City	[46]
USS Jarrett (FFG 33)	May 30, 2007	Zamboanga City	[47]
USS Guardian (MCM5)	June 3, 2007	Puerto Princesa	[48]
USS Patriot (MCM 7)	June 3, 2007	Puerto Princesa	[49]
USS Peleliu (LHA 5)	June 18, 2007	Manila	[50]
USS Chung-Hoon (DDG-93)	September 12, 2007	Manila	[51]
USS Milius (DDG-69)	September 12, 2007	Manila	[52]
USS Chosin (CG-65)	September 13, 2007	Cebu	[53]
USS Essex (LHD 2)	October 15, 2007	Subic	[54]
USS Fort McHenry (LSD 43)	October 15, 2007	Subic	[55]
USS Juneau (LPD 10)	October 15, 2007	Subic	[56]
USS Tortuga (LSD 46)	October 15, 2007	Subic	[57]

ACRONYMS:
USCGC- "United States Coast Guard Cutter"; USNS- "United States Naval Ship"; USS- "United States Ship"

MAP 11

LOCATIONS WHERE US WARSHIPS DOCKED (2001-2007)

frequency ostensibly for exercises and humanitarian missions. (See Table 7.) On at least one occasion, it appeared that they even came unannounced and unexpected.[57] According to the US Congressional Budget Office "[T]he Navy counts those ships as providing overseas presence full time, even when they are training or simply tied up at the pier."[58]

All these follow a long-standing US military strategy of developing infrastructure and facilities for joint use by the US and the host country.[59] Khalilzad and his co-authors in the US Air Force-funded study had recommended having more of these deployments to have more infrastructure:

> "In the near term, access strategy for Asia should center on increasing opportunities for deployments and exercises and on the development of contingency agreements with a number of potential security partners in the area. Depending on the closeness of the resulting relationship, this could include measures to tailor local infrastructure to USAF operations by extending runways, improving air traffic control facilities, repairing parking aprons and the like."[60]

Because training exercises are always accompanied by engineering projects, Shlapak believes that they enhance not only relationships, but also infrastructure needed by the US military.[61] With the frequent rotational deployments, facilities could be kept "warm" enough for rapidly launching operations.[62] Together with the putative benefits derived by the Philippine military from the training it gets, the infrastructure projects build local support from the communities in favor of US presence, thereby undermining opposition.

Recognizing its advantages in terms of bolstering US forward presence, the Council for Foreign Relations (CFR) had earlier recommended that the budget allocation for the Pacific Command be increased to allow for more joint and combined exercises, because holding these help in "increasing our access to and recurring engagement with a large number of nations in the region."[63] Likewise, the US Air Force study has recommended that, in the short-term, the US' strategy to increase access to Asia should center

"Our posture also includes the many military activities in which we engage around the world. This means not only our physical presence in key regions, but also our training, exercises, and operations."
- **US National Defense Strategy**

Through the MLSA, the US has secured for itself the services that it would normally be able to provide itself inside large permanent bases but without constructing and retaining large permanent bases – and without incurring the costs and the political problems that such bases pose.

on "increasing opportunities for deployments."[64] Since it is not possible, and not necessarily desirable, to have large permanent bases, it is these deployments that can "provide the groundwork for joint action when necessary."[65] As analyst Eric Peltz has told the House Armed Services:

> "Other methods of positioning, such as training rotations, can provide a temporary 'forward position' or sustain a long-term position without permanent forward unit basing."[66]

Indeed, as has been discussed earlier, the US sees regular and frequent "temporary" deployments as part of its global "posture." As the 2005 National Defense Strategy (NDS) states:

> "Our posture also includes the many military activities in which we engage around the world. This means not only our physical presence in key regions, but also our training, exercises, and operations. They involve small units working together in a wide range of capacities, major formations conducting elaborate exercises to achieve proficiency in joint and combined operations, and the 'nuts and bolts' of providing support to ongoing operations. They also involve the force protection that we and our allies provide to each other."[67]

- **logistics services, pre-positioned equipment, and infrastructure support**

Second, the US has been securing arrangements and building infrastructure that would allow it to use ports and airfields, to pre-position equipment, secure logistics support, and engage a broad range of locally-provided services that would enable it to launch and sustain operations from the Philippines when necessary.

In September 2001, President Arroyo granted the US free access to Philippine ports and offered it overflight rights to the country's airspace.[68] In November 2002, the US and Philippine governments signed the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) which has been described

in August 2005, the Overseas Basing Commission, the official commission tasked to review US basing, identified the Philippines as one of the countries – along with Thailand, India, and Australia – in which the so-called "Cooperative Security Locations" (CSLs) are being developed by the United States in the region.

by researchers at the US Congressional Research Service as "allowing the United States to use the Philippines as a supply base for military operations throughout the region."[69] The MLSA obliges the Philippine government to exert "best efforts" to provide the US with logistics supplies, support and services during exercises, training, operations, and other US military deployments. The agreement defines these to include food, water, petroleum, oil, clothing, ammunition, spare parts and components, billeting, transportation, communication, medical services, operation support, training services, repair and maintenance, storage services, and port services. "Construction and use of temporary structures" is also covered.[70]

In other words, the MLSA gives the US access to the full range of services that the US military would require to operate in and from the country. Through the MLSA, the US has secured for itself the services that it would normally be able to provide itself inside a large permanent base but without constructing and retaining a large permanent base – and without incurring the costs and the political problems that such bases pose. US PACOM commander Admiral Timothy Keating said that "we have made extensive use of the current agreement [MLSA]…to support the Armed Forces of the Philippines operations against terrorist cells in that country."[71]

In 2003, an analyst reported that, among all Southeast Asian countries, only the Philippines has provided a "forward positioning site" for storing equipment to be used for regional operations.[72] Then, in August 2005, the Overseas Basing Commission (OBC), the official commission tasked to review US basing, identified the Philippines as one of the countries – along with Thailand, India, and Australia – in which the so-called "Cooperative Security Locations" (CSLs) are being developed by the United States in the region.[73] As discussed earlier, CSLs are a new category of bases that are either private or technically owned by host-governments but are to be made available for use by the US military as needed and defined by the US as included among its military installations.

The Philippine government, however, has not disclosed the locations and other details about these CSLs. The airport in Mactan, which now hosts a fleet of US Orion reconnaissance planes,[74] is reported to be one site where Pentagon officials intended to establish such a facility,[75] but this has not been officially acknowledged. The description by Robert Kaplan, a journalist who claims to have visited such facilities, is quoted here in full because of the dearth of information about them and because of the way it seems to fit the Philippines:

> "A cooperative security location can be a tucked-away corner of a host country's civilian airport, or a dirt runway somewhere with fuel and mechanical help nearby, or a military airport in a friendly country with which we have no formal basing agreement but, rather, an informal arrangement with private contractors acting as go-betweens… The United States provides aid to upgrade maintenance facilities, thereby helping the host country to better project its own air and naval power in the region. At the same time, we hold periodic exercises with the host country's military, in which the base is a focus. We also offer humanitarian help to the surrounding area. Such civil-affairs projects garner positive publicity for our military in the local media…The result is a positive diplomatic context for getting the host country's approval for use of the base when and if we need it."[76]

In US military publications, US troops belonging to the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines have characterized their mission as ''unconventional warfare,'' ''foreign internal defense,'' and ''counter-insurgency.''

Incidentally, President Arroyo herself had earlier in July 2001 raised the idea of renting out the naval facilities in Subic Bay, an oft-used venue for joint exercises, to the US military. Lockheed Martin, a company often contracted by the US military, was reported to have been waiting for approval to establish a regional aircraft maintenance facility in Clark.[77] Halliburton KBR, another US corporation that has secured US military contracts, was reported as having been granted in November 2001 a $100 million contract to convert Subic Bay into a modern commercial port.[78] The company had earlier announced that it was exploring redeveloping the former US Navy Ship Repair Facility in Subic Bay for maritime logistics and ship support services.[79]

Such arrangements that combine commercial with military activities, noted then US PACOM Admiral Dennis Blair, "opens up possibilities for the sorts of things that we can work together on in the future."[80] Indeed, in a thesis for the US Naval Postgraduate School, these arrangements are precisely what has been recommended by Thomas Garcia: "not a return to the grand infrastructure of the past" but "the use of only a small logistical facility currently utilized by the commercial ship industry, and the port infrastructure of berths and airfield already in place."[81]

Another option suggested by Garcia is to locate the Philippine Navy in Subic and then allow the US to come in and position its ships inside the nominally Philippine-owned base.[82] Former US PACOM chief Admiral Thomas Fargo had in fact announced plans to use Subic and Clark for transiting of personnel and transshipment of equipment, as well as a refueling post for US ships from Honolulu, Guam, or the US West Coast bound for the US base in Diego Garcia.[83] Though nothing has since been

While initially presented as being part of on-again off-again temporary training exercises, it has since been revealed that the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines has continuously maintained its presence in the country for the last six years.

heard of the plans, the reports do indicate that such options are on the table. Given the government's policy of partial disclosure, it is also possible that such plans have gone ahead unannounced, possibly in other places, in the manner that Kaplan had described above.

The terms of the MLSA and the establishment of CSLs reflect the US' increasing emphasis on just-in-time logistics support and pre-positioning of equipment to ensure that US forces – dispersed as they are around the world, often far away from main bases where they store equipment and use all kinds of services – are always ready and on the go. Therefore, it is not so much the size of the base that matters but whether it can provide the US military with what it needs, when it's needed. As the CFR points out:

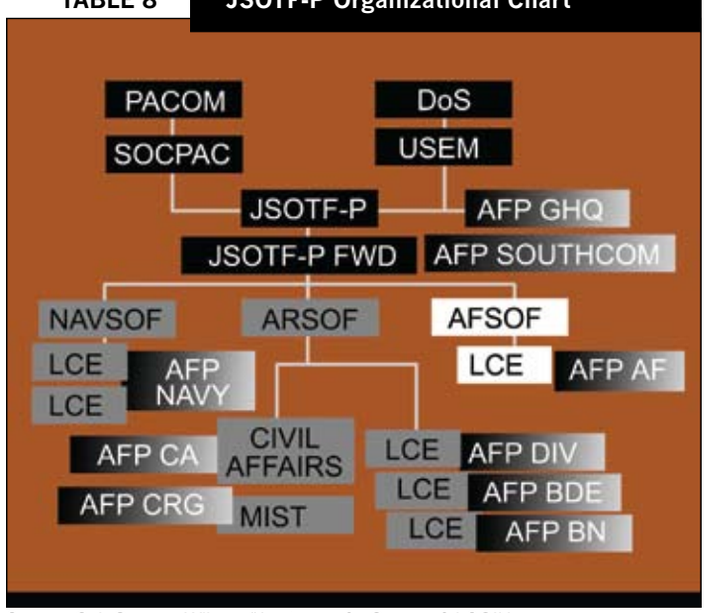
> "While host nation support often carries the connotation of basing, its role of staging and access is perhaps more critical. Support for port visits, ship repairs, overflight rights, training areas and opportunities, and areas to marshal, stage, repair, and resupply are no less important for both daily US presence in the region and for rapid and flexible crisis response."[84]

- **forward operating base**

Third, the US has succeeded in stationing a US military unit in the country indefinitely.

Since 2002, a unit now called the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) has been deployed to and based in Zamboanga, Basilan, Sulu and other areas in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. (SeeTable 8) While initially presented as being part of on-again off-again temporary training

TABLE 8 **JSOTF-P Organizational Chart**



Source: Col. Gregory Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation: OEF-Philippines and the Indirect Approach," Military Review, November to December 2006

exercises, it has since been revealed that this unit has continuously maintained its presence in the country for the last six years. With the Philippine government not giving a definite exit date, and with US officials stating that this unit will stay on as long as they are allowed by the government, it is presumed that it will continue to be based in the Philippines for the long haul.

In an apparent effort not to draw attention to the unit, the US and Philippine governments have publicly revealed little about the real nature and mission of the JSOTF-P, except to project it as part of the "war on terror" and to highlight the humanitarian and civil engineering projects that it undertakes. The media, for the most part, has through the years uncovered little about the unit and has reported it following the description of the US and Philippine governments. Most of what has since been gathered about the unit have come from US military publications and sources not intended for general public consumption.

Headquartered in the Philippine military's Camp Navarro in Zamboanga City[85] but with its personnel sent to various locations, the JSOTF-P has effectively established a new form of US military presence and basing in the country. When it was publicly revealed in August 2007 that the US Department of Defense, via a US military construction unit, had granted a contract to a company providing "base operations support" for the JSOTF-P,[86] the US embassy admitted that the US was setting up allegedly "temporary" structures for "medical, logistical, administrative services" and facilities for "for them to eat, sleep and work" even as it denied that the US is constructing bases.[87] The Philippines' own Visiting Forces Commission also confirmed that the US maintains "living quarters" and stocks supplies inside Philippine military camps.[88] Robert Kaplan, who re-visited the JSOTF-P inside Camp Navarro in 2006, described these structures as signifying a "more hardened, permanent arrangement."[89]

According to a US military publication, the JSOTF-P's area of operations covers 8,000 square miles or about 20,000 square kilometers, covering the entire island of Mindanao and its surrounding islands and

"We're very much in a war out here... We'll spill American blood on Jolo. It's only by luck, skill, and the grace of God we haven't yet."
- Col. Jim Linder, former head of JSOTF-P

MAP 12 **JSOTF-P Area of Operations**

Source: Col. Gregory Wilson, "Anatomy of a Successful COIN Operation: OEF-Philippines and the Indirect Approach," Military Review, November to December 2006

seas.[90] (See Map 12) According to various media reports, the number of troops belonging to the unit has ranged between 100 and 450, but it is not clear what the actual total number is for a specific period.[91] US Lt. Col. Mark Zimmer, JSOTF-P public affairs officer, said it varies "depending on the season and the mission."[92]

US officials have consistently maintained that US troops belonging to the unit "train, advise, and assist" the Philippine military in their war against alleged terrorists in the country. Though denying that they are involved in "actual combat," US officials also repeatedly assert that they have the right to shoot back when fired at. In US military publications, US troops belonging to the unit have characterized their mission as "unconventional warfare," "foreign internal defense," and "counter-insurgency."[93] In fact, they have been reported to have exchanged gunfire with and to have been attacked by alleged insurgents.[94] There have also been numerous sightings of US troops in the vicinity of active military operations, some of which have been confirmed by Philippine military officials.[95] At the height of Philippine military offensives against targets in August 2007, US soldiers were photographed by a press wire agency leading a military convoy in Sulu.[96] All of this has served to challenge Philippine government claims that the US troops are not involved in the fighting. As Col. Jim Linder, former head of JSOTF-P, has stated, "We're very much in a war out here… We'll spill American blood on Jolo. It's only by luck, skill, and the grace of God we haven't yet."[97]

Referring to their bases in the southern Philippines as "forward operating base-11" and "advanced operating base-921,"[98] the JSOTF-P corresponds to the new kind of forward-deployment that the US has introduced as part of its ongoing effort to realign its global posture and overhaul its offensive capabilities. The PNAC had earlier recommended supplementing US troops permanently stationed abroad with a network of "deployment bases" or "forward operating bases" so as to "help circumvent the political, practical, and financial constraints on expanding the network of American bases overseas."[99] Bruce Nardulli, in a US Army-sponsored study, had likewise recommended establishing arrangements that include "long-term support and

With the availability of local logistics and other services assured, the free entry of ships and planes and the pre-positioning of equipment allowed, and with the expanded airport, roads, wharves, and other infrastructure the US has been building or is planning to build in the area, the US Special Forces will be ready and able at a moment's notice to launch and sustain its operations in the region.

staging of SOF [Special Operations Forces] required to dwell in remote and austere environments for extended periods"[100] – exactly what the JSOTF-P has put in place in the southern Philippines. The JSOTF-P is a concrete manifestation of what US analysts for a US Air Force-sponsored study describe as the ongoing "redefinition of what *forward presence* means":

> "In addition to the familiar mechanized brigades and fighter wings deployed at well-developed bases in allied countries, US forces now will be scattered around the world, usually in smaller deployments, working to train and advise their host-country counterparts."[101]

In terms of profile and mission, the JSOTF-P is similar to the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-Horn of Africa) which was established in Djibouti in eastern Africa in 2003, also composed mostly of Special Forces. Like the JSOTF-P, the CJTF-Horn of Africa has also been conducting "humanitarian" missions and projects. Similar to the Philippines, Djibouti has also seen a dramatic increase in the amount of military aid it receives from the US.[102] As a sample of the US austere basing template, the CJTF-Horn of Africa has been described as the "model for future US military operations."[103] Indeed, more deployments similar to that of the JSOTF-P and CJTF-Horn of Africa are planned in other locations around the world in the future.[104] In 2004, Former PACOM commander Thomas Fargo talked about expanding Special Operations Forces in the Pacific.[105] Apparently referring to the JSOTF-P, Rumsfeld had also announced that the Pentagon would establish more

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The JSOTF-P's headquarters are in Camp Navarro, Zamboanga City but its members are scattered around Mindanao.

"nodes for special operations forces."[106] In his 2005 Annual Defense Report, he said that the US military:

> "will improve its global force posture to increase strategic responsiveness while decreasing its overseas footprint and exposure. In place of traditional overseas bases with extensive infrastructure, we intend to use smaller forward operating bases with prepositioned equipment and rotational presence of personnel… We will maintain a smaller forward-presence force in the Pacific while also stationing agile, expeditionary forces capable of rapid responses at our power projection bases."[107]

The JSOTF-P's characteristics fit this description. Modest and austere, the JSOTF-P has none of the extensive infrastructure and facilities of the former US bases in Subic and Clark. But with the availability of local logistics and other services assured, the free entry of ships and planes and the pre-positioning of equipment allowed, and with the expanded airport, roads, wharves, and other infrastructure the US has been building or is planning to build in the area, the US Special Forces will be ready and able at a moment's notice to launch and sustain its operations in the region.[108] Light and swift, with its troops coming in rotation, but with an elite set of unique war-fighting skills, the Special Forces are not only expected to be able to respond more rapidly but to wage war more effectively.

The involvement of US Special Forces reflects the increased role this elite unit is playing in evolving US military strategy. Compared to previous administrations, Bush's defense team has placed more emphasis on the Special Forces units over what are seen as large, bulky conventional divisions. Special Forces, so the thinking goes, offer myriad advantages. As Robert Kaplan, a journalist who visited the JSOTF-P in the Philippines as part of his research on US units around the world, explains:

> "Small light and lethal units of soldiers and marines, skilled in guerilla warfare and attuned to the local environment in the way of the nineteenth-century Apaches, could accomplish more than dinosauric, industrial age infantry divisions."[109]

"The JSOTF had succeeded as a political mechanism for getting an American base-of-sorts up and running..."
- Robert Kaplan, American journalist

"After more than 10 years, PACOM has reestablished an acceptable presence in the Philippines..."
C.H. Briscoe, command historian of the US Army Special Operations Command

The NDS states that in order "to surge military forces rapidly from strategic distances to deny adversaries sanctuary," Special Forces will in some cases be required for precision attacks inside enemy territory.[110] US Army Col. Gregory Wilson notes that with the US military overstretched, the character of US Special Forces, as exemplified by the JSOTF-P mission, will make it even more attractive in the future for many reasons:

> "Economy-of-force operations by nature, they [Special Forces] are characterized by a small footprint, low resource requirements, and limited visibility. This makes them ideal to use in politically sensitive areas where a large foreign military presence would undermine the host-nation government's legitimacy and serve to rally opposition extremist elements. Additionally, with their low profiles, SF advisory operations can usually be sustained for a long time, a distinct benefit during protracted struggles. Operations in the Southern Philippines have been ongoing since 2002, and so far they have received very little attention from the US media and public."[111]

Embedded inside a Philippine military base, with US troops mixing with and mentoring Filipino troops, the JSOTF-P has indeed managed to stay almost invisible – except when it is out performing goodwill missions such as providing dental services or building schools. This follows US strategists' recommendations to remain as low-profile as possible. "Because a large or highly visible presence can undermine the credibility of the government the United States seeks to support," point out analysts in a US Air Force-funded report, "direct support must have minimal footprint."[112] Publicly, the JSOTF-P's actions are consistently presented as joint efforts with the Philippine government and military, thereby building constituencies supporting their presence and allaying nationalist concerns.

As evidenced by the fact that most Filipinos are not even aware of their presence and their actions, the JSOTF-P has managed to circumvent public opposition to the presence of foreign troops in the country. Hence, as Kaplan had noted, "the JSOTF had succeeded as a political mechanism for getting an American base-of-sorts up and running..."[113]

MAP 13 JSOTF-P location relative to China, Indonesia, and Malaysia

C.H. Briscoe, command historian of the US Army Special Operations Command, under which the units of the JSOTF-P belong, concurs: "After more than 10 years, PACOM has reestablished an *acceptable* presence in the Philippines…"[114] [italics added]

Though the Abu Sayyaf and other "terrorists" are the self-avowed targets of the JSOTF-P, its location and capabilities allow it to aim farther. In fact, the JSOTF-P's "area of operations" covers places in Mindanao in which the New People's Army (NPA) is also active. The US had also tagged the NPA as a "foreign terrorist organization" and therefore, as the target of the "war on terror." Ineed, the US has also directly offered to more actively help in fighting the NPA.[115] As it is, US military assistance and training are directly contributing to the Philippine military's war against them.

Strategically positioned between two routes at the entrance of a major sea-lane, the Makassar strait, at the southwestern rim of the South China Sea, closer to Malaysia and Indonesia than most of the rest of the Philippines, the JSOTF-P, according to C.H. Briscoe, the unit's official historian, is "now better able to monitor the pulse of the region."[116] Indeed, Maj. Gen David Fridovich, commander of the US Special Operations Forces-Pacific, has stated that the area including the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia is the "key region where we presently focus our indirect efforts."[117] Rommel Banlaoi, an analyst with the National Defense College of the Philippines, finds that "The American war on terrorism has provided the US an excellent justification to hasten its reestablishment of strategic presence in Southeast Asia."[118]

Having secured this presence, the US has become closer to that country with "the greatest potential to compete militarily" with it.(See Map 13) By getting the US "semi-permanently" based south of Luzon for the first time since World War II, Kaplan notes that "the larger-than-necessary base complex" in Zamboanga has delivered more than tactical benefits.[119] In the minds of the US Army strategists, Kaplan notes:

> "Combating Islamic terrorism in this region [Southeast Asia] carried a secondary benefit for the United States: it positioned the US for the future containment of nearby China."[120]

For now, the JSOTF-P's "forward operating base", in terms of the number of troops stationed and in terms of infrastructure, may still be relatively small. But, if the PNAC's recommendations are to be followed, that could still change:

> "While it should be a clear US policy that such bases are intended as a supplement to the current overseas base structure, they could also be seen as a precursor to an expanded structure. This might be attractive to skittish allies --- for whom close ties with America provokes domestic political controversy. It would also increase the effectiveness of current US forces in a huge region like Southeast Asia, supplementing naval operations in the region."[121]

And if experience is to be a guide, many temporary bases go on to become permanent.[122] As a US Senate Committee concluded as early as 1970: "Once an American overseas base is established, it takes on a life of its own. Original missions may become outdated but new missions are developed, not only with the intention of keeping the facility going, but often to actually enlarge it."[123]

- **Legal guarantees and arrangements**

Fourth, the US has secured legal agreements that remove obstacles to their deployment and expand their roles in the country.

As the US has made clear, these kinds of legal arrangements are considered part of the US global posture because without the assurances and protections they give, the US is constrained from deploying to or stationing forces in a country. In 1998, after long negotiations and heated public debates, the US and Philippine governments signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), paving the way for the resumption of US military deployments to the country after being largely suspended since the closure of US bases in 1992. Contrary to most

accounts, the VFA does not just cover US troops participating in temporary joint military exercises but all US military and civilian personnel who enter the country, regardless of their purpose or mission, so long as they come with the approval of the Philippine government. Apart from personnel, the VFA also governs the entry of US military aircraft, vessel, and vehicles.[124]

In essence, the VFA, like other "status-of-forces" agreements (SOFAs) that the US has with other governments around the world, seek, to the extent possible, to apply US jurisdiction to its troops and civilian employees even when they are in other countries. In other words, they seek to exempt US personnel from being covered by the laws of the countries where they are stationed in or deployed to. As Frank Stone of the US' Military Foreign Affairs office explains, SOFAs seek to implement the concept of the "Law of the Flag" or the idea that a country deploying military forces abroad should apply its own laws to its soldiers - and not that of the country where they are to be deployed.[125] US military policy, according to the US Army Judge Advocate General Operational Law Handbook, is "to maximize the exercise of jurisdiction over US personnel by US authorities."[126]

SOFAs vary from country to country because while the party deploying forces will seek to secure the maximum level of legal privileges for its troops in the host country, it is not always assured of getting everything it wants because host countries can, and do, balk at some demands. While the US, for example, has proposed complete jurisdiction over its troops, other governments have only been willing or are able to give only limited rights. Ultimately, though, the objective is to maximize legal protection for US military troops abroad. As Kurt Campbell and Celeste Johnson Ward point out, SOFAs "provide extraordinary legal guarantees to US soldiers, essentially giving them local 'get out of jail free' cards."[127]

In the case of the VFA, the Philippine government agreed to share concurrent jurisdiction with the US over offenses covered by both Philippine and US laws. The Philippines can have exclusive jurisdiction over US personnel *only* when they are charged with offenses that are exclusively punishable under

Even in cases where both the US and the Philippines have concurrent jurisdiction, the agreement stipulates that the Philippines will have to waive its right to exercise jurisdiction when requested by the US – except "in cases of particular importance to the Philippines." Even if jurisdiction were concurrent, the US' right to exercise jurisdiction prevails over that of the Philippines whenever the US decides that the offense was committed "in performance of official duty."

Philippine laws but not under US laws. For offenses punishable under US laws but not Philippine laws, the Philippines agreed to hand over exclusive jurisdiction to the US. But even in cases where both the US and the Philippines have concurrent jurisdiction, the agreement stipulates that the Philippines will have to waive its right to exercise jurisdiction when requested by the US – except "in cases of particular importance to the Philippines."[128]

Moreover, even if jurisdiction were concurrent, the US' right to exercise jurisdiction prevails over that of the Philippines whenever the US decides that the offense was committed "in performance of official duty."[129] In other words, the agreement can be construed as giving the US the final say as to what cases and in what conditions the Philippines can apply its laws to US personnel in the country. Regardless of who exercises jurisdiction, the agreement states that it is the US – and not the Philippines – which will have custody over the concerned party. Only in "extraordinary cases" can the Philippines request for custody and even then, it will be entirely at the discretion of the US.[130]

Indeed, in a case that was seen as the first real test of the VFA, US Marines accused of raping a Filipina in November 2005 were taken under US government custody during the entire duration of the trial. When one of them was eventually convicted in December 2006, the convicted Marine was first imprisoned in a Philippine jail upon a Filipino judge's order but was subsequently released and transferred by the Philippine governments to US custody in the US embassy in the Philippines.[131]

On top of the VFA, the US had also forged a Bilateral Immunity Agreement (BIA) with the Philippines in May 2003.[132] Barring the Philippines from surrendering US nationals and US government employees to any international tribunal without the consent of the US, the BIA is one of the ways by which the US has been seeking to undermine the International Criminal Court (ICC). Denounced and opposed by the Bush administration, the ICC is the first permanent international court in history created to prosecute and render judgment on individuals accused of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The Philippines had signed the Rome Statute creating the court in 2000 but President Arroyo has so far refused to ratify it. Given that many other US allies and other countries have joined the court, the US strategy has been to forge BIAs with as many countries as it could to ensure that its nationals are exempted from the ICC's jurisdiction and remain out of its reach wherever they are stationed. Invoking a new law passed in 2003 that ties US aid to recipients' stance on the ICC, the US has threatened to cut off military assistance to those who refuse to sign a BIA with it. As of 2006, over one hundred countries had complied with the US demand.

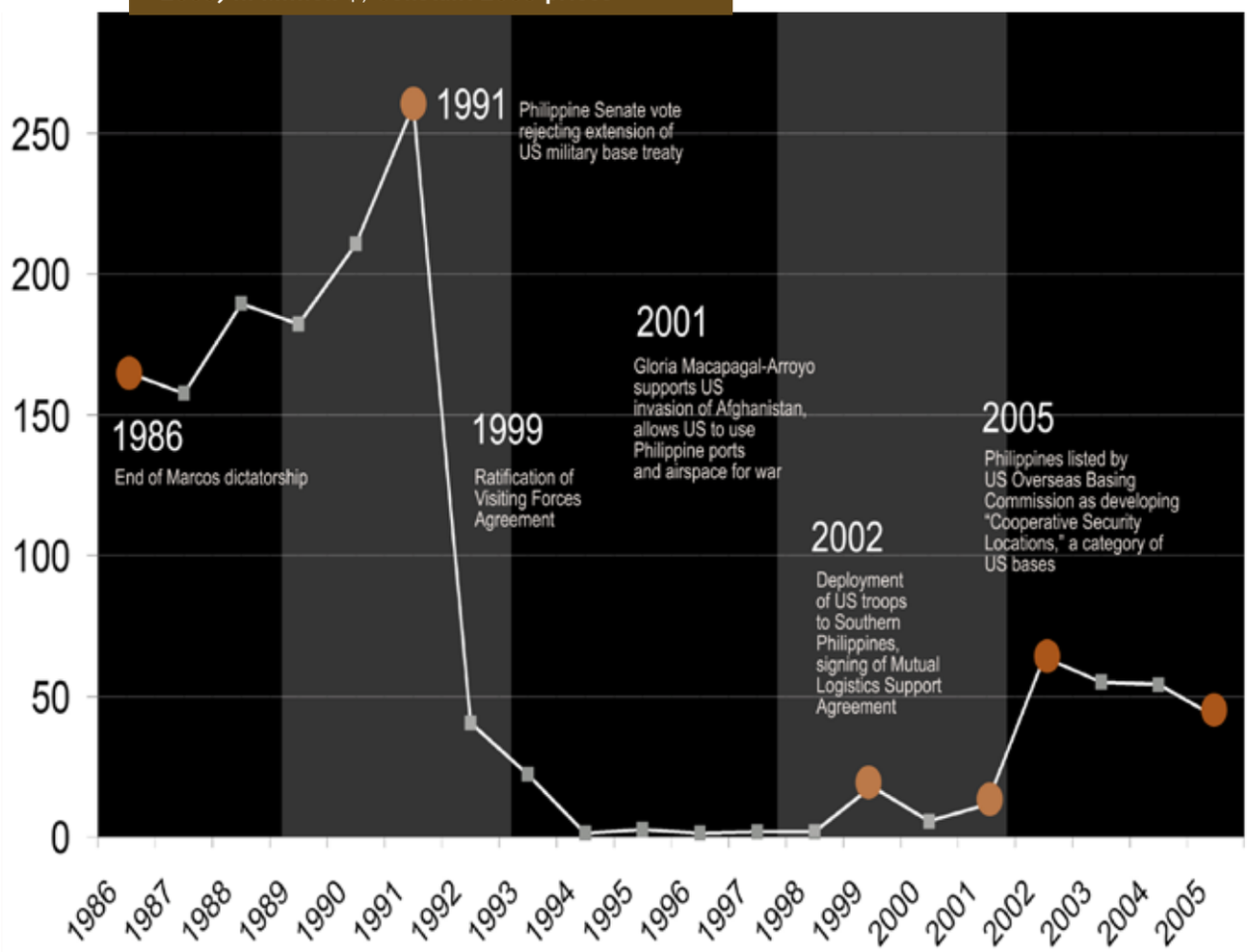
In June 2007, Arroyo also signed a Status of Visiting Forces (SOVFA) with Australia, another staunch US ally that has fought side-by-side with the US in all its major wars in the past century. Considered as one of the pillars of the US alliance system in the Asia-Pacific, along with Japan and Korea, Australia is host to important US military bases and installations and large-scale joint military exercises and a potential site for the US' planned anti-ballistic missile defense system in the region. In recent years, Australia has

asserted what it calls its right to militarily intervene in Southeast Asia as part of the US-led "global war on terror." For its unflinching support for US foreign policy, President Bush had called Australia America's "sheriff" in the region.[133]

It is in the context of this relationship that Australia has increased its military operations in the Philippines. In July and August 2004, Australian special forces and sailors trooped to the Philippines to hold joint training exercises with their Filipino counterparts.[134] Then, in October, 2005, a few months after it was reported that the Australian police were involved in "covert operations" in the country, the Australian press carried reports - subsequently denied by the government - that elite Australian troops had joined their US and Filipino counterparts in operations against alleged terrorists in the southern Philippines.[135] As with the Philippines' only other such agreement – the VFA with the US, the SOVFA accords Australian troops a different "status" by extending legal guarantees when they are in the Philippines for their operations.

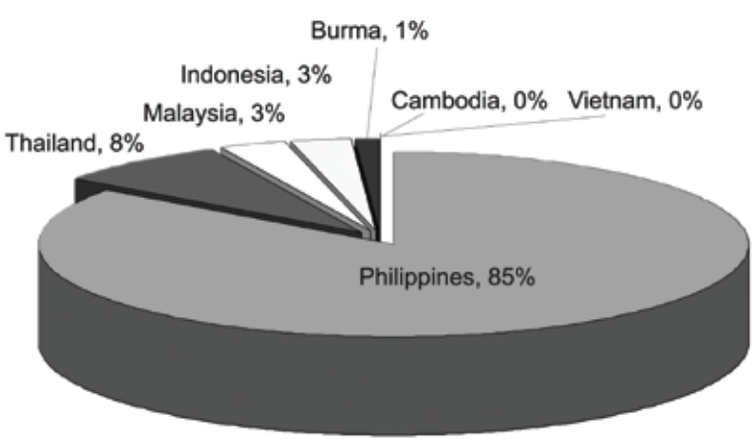
While the VFA defines the legal status of troops in the country, the establishment of the Security Engagement Board (SEB) in June 2006 expanded the roles that they are allowed to assume in the country. A step forward from the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) of 1951 which only sanctions US-Philippine cooperation against traditional or conventional *external* attacks, the creation of the SEB was established as a mechanism for the US military to respond to internal "non-traditional security threats" such as terrorism, piracy, transnational crime, drug trafficking, disease outbreaks, and

GRAPH 4 **US Military Assistance to the Philippines (1986-2005) in Million $, Constant 2005 prices**



Source: USAID, "US Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations", http://qesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/index.html [Accessed 14 August 2007]

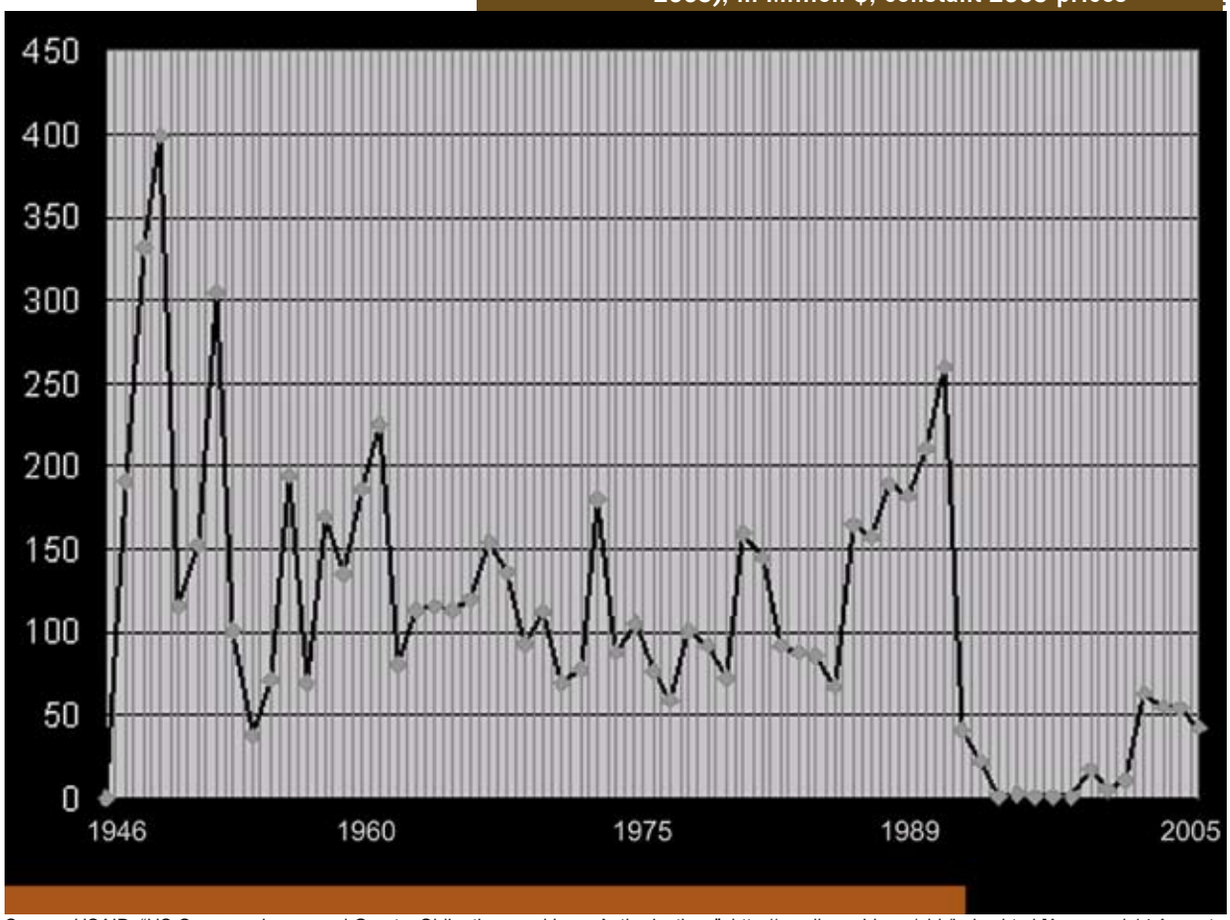
GRAPH 5 **US Military Assistance to Southeast Asian Countries (1986-2005)**



Source: USAID, "US Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations", http://qesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/index.html [Accessed 14 August 2007]

The Philippines has been by far the largest recipient of US military assistance in all of East Asia.

GRAPH 6 **US Military Assistance to the Philippines (1946-2005), in Million $, constant 2005 prices**



Source: USAID, "US Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations", http://qesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/index.html [Accessed 14 August 2007]

natural disasters.[136] As with the Mutual Defense Board that was created through the MDT, the SEB will be the body of US and Philippine officials that will recommend plans and activities involving US military participation in training, exercises, and other operations dealing with non-traditional threats.[137] In expanding the allowable scope of US actions in the Philippines, the SEB sets the stage for even more US military deployments in the country.

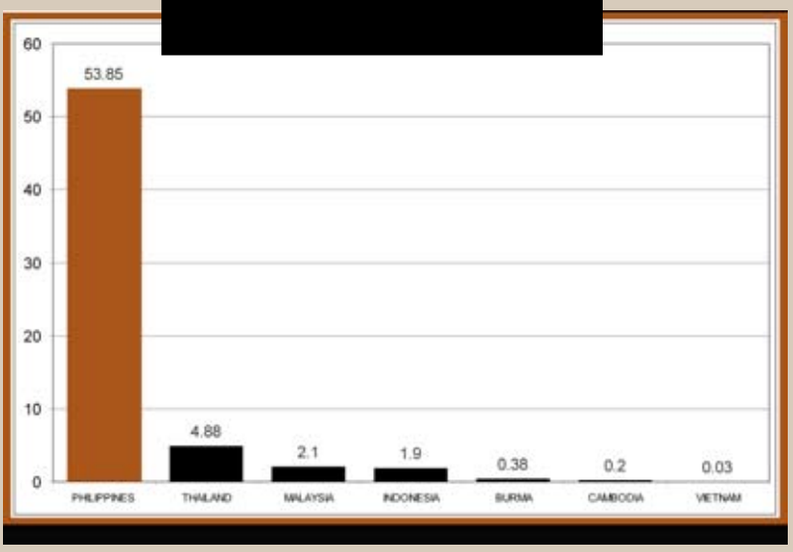
Military aid

Fifth, the US has significantly increased its military aid or military assistance to the country.[138]

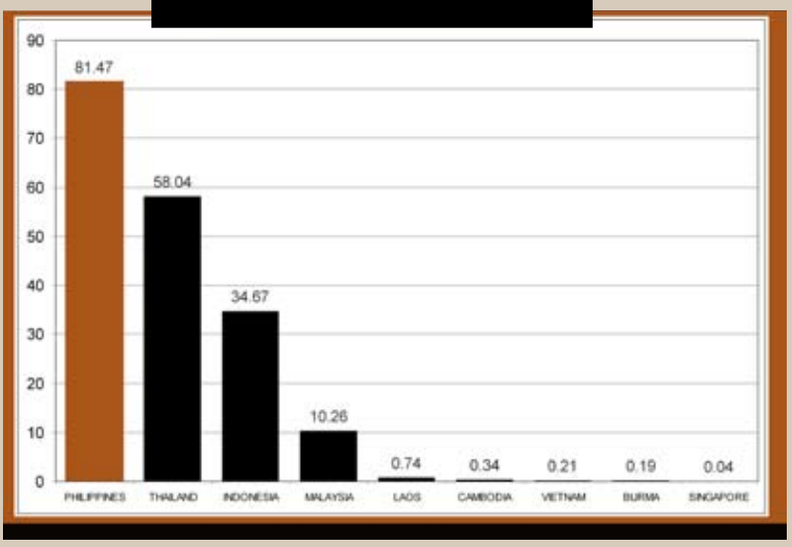
Before the bases were closed, the US gave the Philippines an average of $137 million a year (in constant 2005 dollars) in military assistance from 1946 to 1991.When the bases were closed, that amount fell steeply from $260 million in 1991 to $40 million – a reduction by 85%. Between 1994 to 1998, the years before the signing of the VFA, the average annual US military assistance to the Philippines was a paltry $1.6 million a year, the smallest in Philippine history. In 1999, the year the VFA was signed, that increased over ten-fold to $18 million but fell again to $5 million in 2000 and then rose to $11 million the following year. In 2002, however, the year after the Philippines granted access and over-flight rights to the US and the year when the MLSA was signed, US military assistance increased six-fold to $64 million. It averaged $54 million annually for the next four years. This is half of what the Philippines used to get annually when the US bases were still open, but five times more than the pre-9-11 average.(See Graphs 4,6)

Adding in US economic assistance (which, while technically allocated for non-military purposes, also allows recipients to free up resources for military uses) does not alter the historical trend. Prior to the base closure, total military and economic assistance

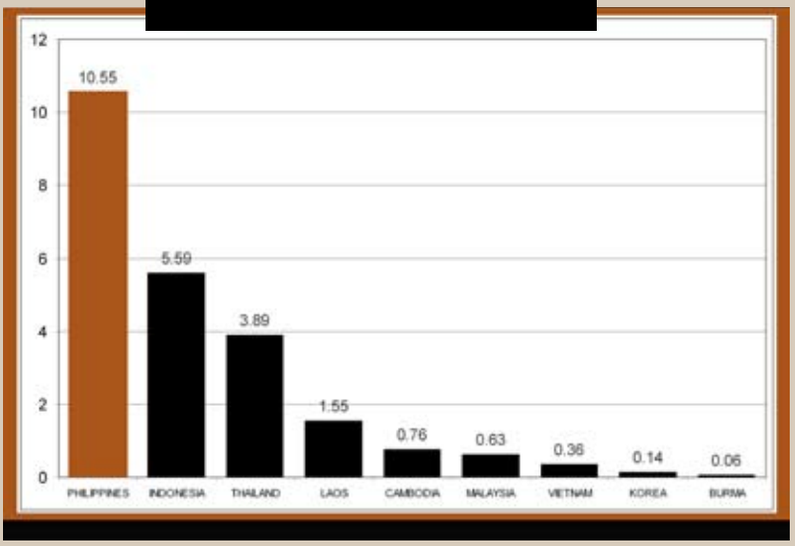
GRAPH 7 **Average Annual US Military Assistance since 9-11 (2002-2005)**



GRAPH 8 **Average Annual US Military Assistance Post-Vietnam War (1976-2005)**

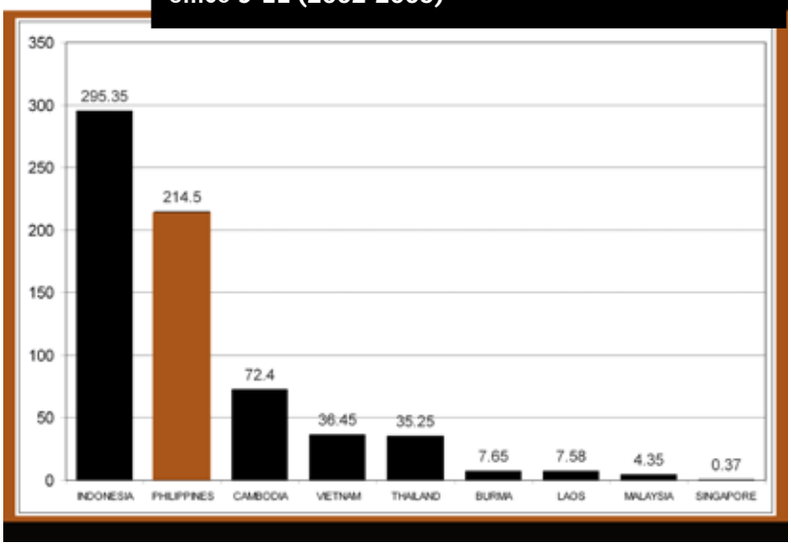


GRAPH 9 **Average Annual US Military Assistance Post-Bases Closure/ Pre-9-11 (1992-2001)**



* All amounts in these graphs are in Million $, constant 2005 prices. Source: USAID, "US Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations", http://qesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/index.html [Accessed 14 August 2007];]; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Military Expenditure Database," http://www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_database1.html [Accessed 14 August 2007]

GRAPH 10 **Average Annual US Military & Economic Assistance since 9-11 (2002-2005)**



amounted to an average of $454 million a year. This fell to less than a third of that, at $127 million annually, during the post-bases period before 9-11, and then almost doubled again from 2002-2005.

Since 9-11, the Philippines has been by far the largest recipient of US military assistance in all of East Asia.[139] In fact, between 2002-2005, the country obtained approximately 85% of the total allocated to Southeast Asia. Its $54 million annual average is over ten times more than the next biggest recipient, Thailand, which got an average of $4 million annually during that period. (See Graph 5) This pattern has held true for most of the post-Vietnam War period, with the Philippines overtaken only for a time by Korea, but surpassing it after 1986. (See Graphs 8) In 2005, the Philippines ranked tenth worldwide among recipients of US military assistance, ahead of all others in the region, though its share was still just about 2% that of Israel, long the top recipient of US assistance in the world. Between 2008 and 2017, the US is expected to provide $30 billion more in military assistance to Israel.[140] Counting US economic assistance as well, the Philippines is far and away the largest recipient of US funds in the region since 1975 up to the present. Only in the last four years has it been topped by Indonesia which, since 1998, has been receiving large amounts of US economic – but not military – assistance.(See Graphs 10, 11)

At the same time, the Philippines has one of the lowest military budgets in the region (See Graph 12). In absolute terms, the Philippines tops only Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in average annual military spending from 1988 to 2005. At $814 million a year (in constant 2005 prices and exchange rates), the Philippines is just a little over one-fifth of top spender Singapore and one-third of Indonesia and Thailand. As a percentage of annual economic output, the Philippines' average annual military spending is the lowest in the region. (See Graphs 13)

Taking into account the share of US military aid as a proportion of the total military budget, the Philippines is relatively the most dependent on US military assistance among countries in the region, if such can be gauged by comparing how much a country gets from the US and how much it is spending. By this measure, from 1988 to 2005, US military assistance was equivalent to over 8% of the Philippines' average annual military expenditure. This is far larger than any other country in the region, much more than that of another close US ally, Thailand, for which US military assistance is

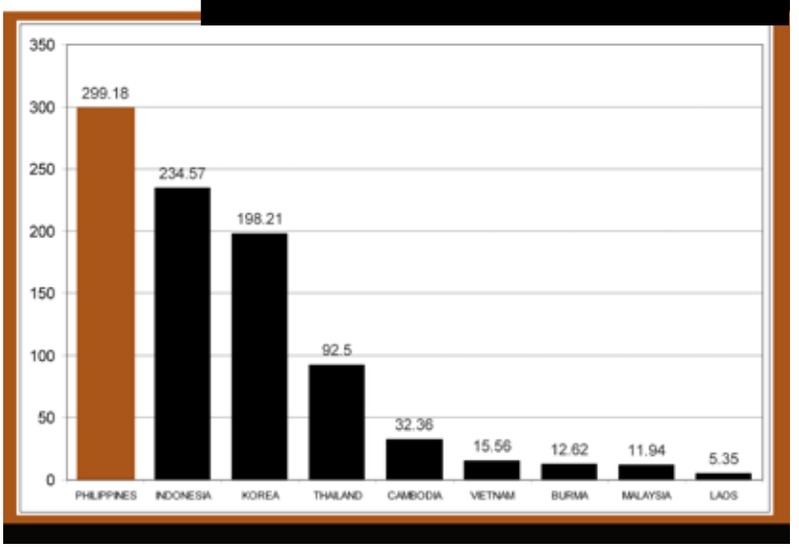
Taking into account the share of US military aid as a proportion of the total military budget, the Philippines is relatively the most dependent on US military assistance among countries in the region

only 0.4% of its annual military expenditure. (See Graphs 15)

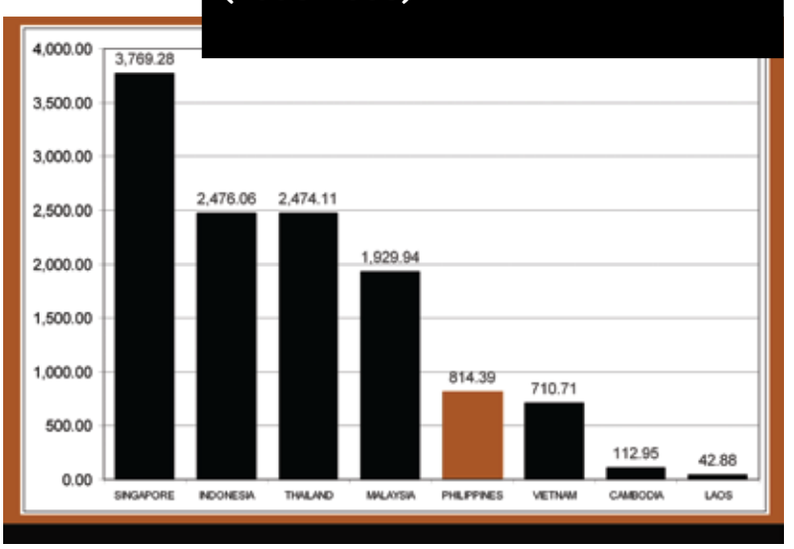
Military assistance from the United States takes many forms: It can be given as Foreign Military Financing (FMF) or as grants to buy US-made weapons, services, and training. In recent years, about 70% of US military assistance to the Philippines has come in this form. US counterpart contributions to the Philippine Defense Reform (PDR), the masterplan for restructuring Philippine military operations as designed jointly by the US and the Philippine governments, is being financed out of this program. In 2003, the Philippines, along with Thailand, was conferred "Major Non-NATO Ally" status, a designation that gives the Philippines access to US technology and weapons systems reserved exclusively for NATO and other closer allies. Apart from FMF, the Philippines has also received funds from the US' Peacekeeping, Military Assistance Program, International Military Education and Training, and Excess Defense Article portfolios. (See Graph 17)

But it is not just military assistance per se that has military dimensions. Economic aid, development projects, or other forms of indirect compensation – such as offers to open US domestic markets for Philippine products – may also be given with military considerations in mind. For example, for the past few years USAID has been constructing dozens of roads, piers, wharfs, bridges, and other infrastructure projects in the very areas where US troops have been deployed. As of 2006, USAID had finished 558 small infrastructure projects and 20 larger ones in Mindanao.[141] As previously mentioned, many of these infrastructure projects support US military mobility; at the same time, they have also proven very useful in gaining local public acceptance for US military presence. For the Special Forces, especially, the infrastructure and humanitarian projects are seen as instrumental in "winning hearts and minds" in the aim of getting what they call "actionable" intelligence.[142] As Army Captain Steve Battle of the JSOTF-P admitted, "I have a military objective behind my projects."[143] Former JSOTF-P commander Col. Jim Linder said, "To do my job right, I am embedded inside USAID."[144]

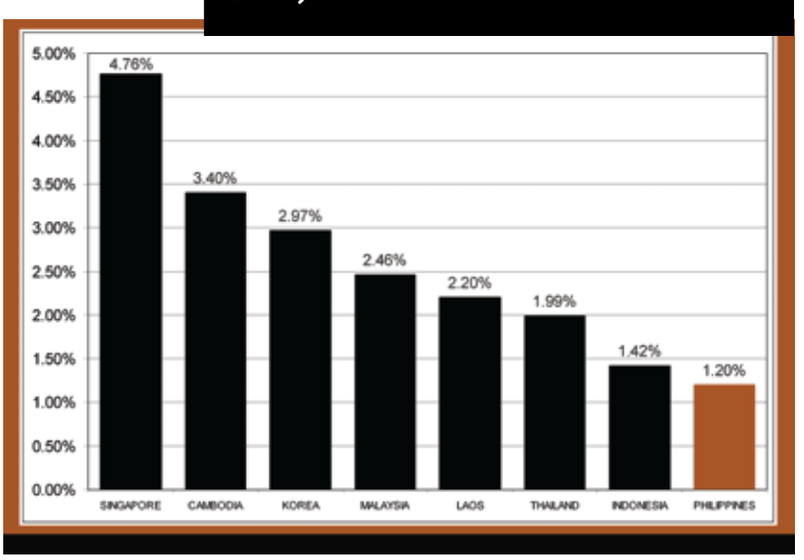
GRAPH 11 **Average Annual US Military and Economic Assistance Post-Vietnam War (1976-2005)**



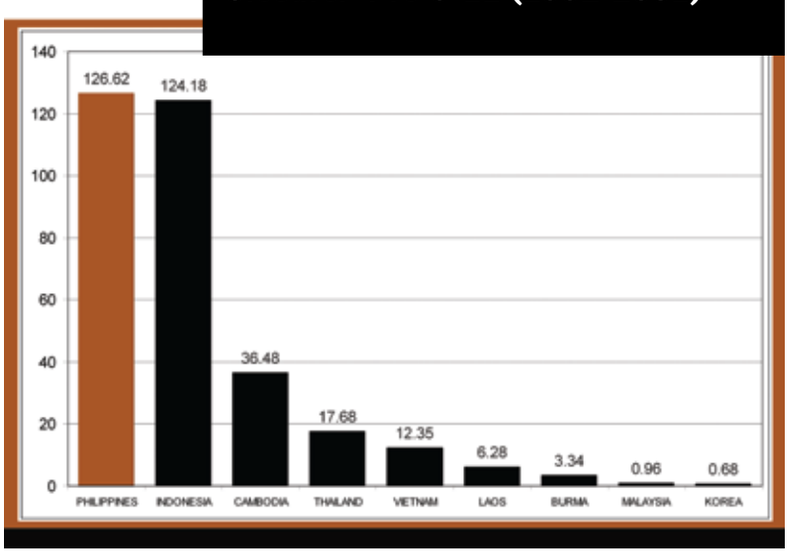
GRAPH 12 **Average Annual Military Expenditure (1998-2005)**



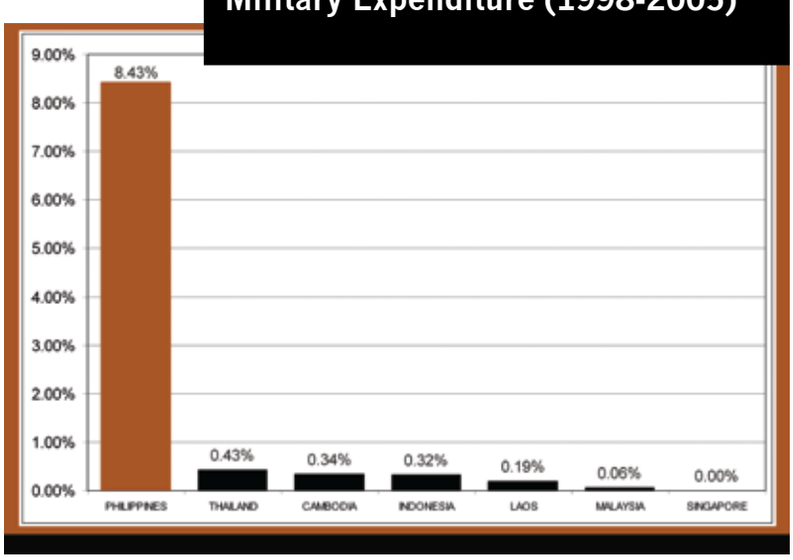
GRAPH 13 **Average Annual Military Expenditure as a Percentage of Annual GDP (1998-2005)**



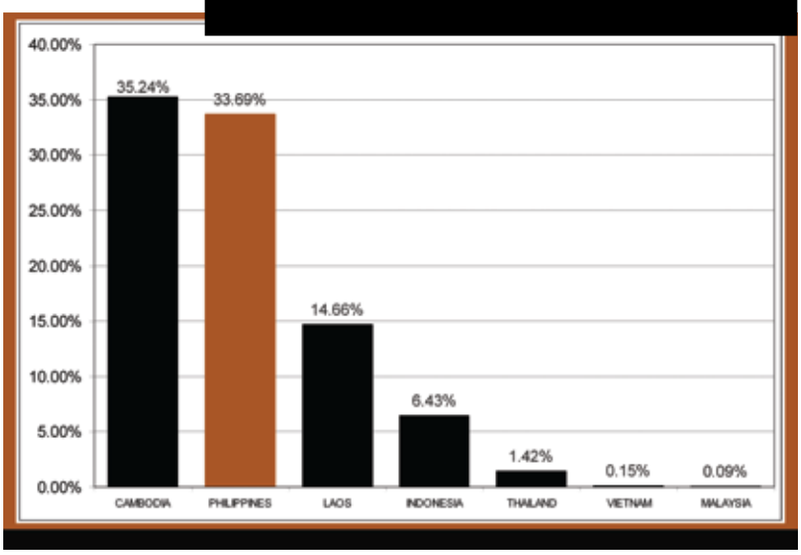
GRAPH 14 **Average Annual US Military and Economic Assistance Post-Bases Closure/ Pre-9-11 (1992-2001)**



GRAPH 15 **Average Annual US Military Assistance as Percentage of Annual Military Expenditure (1998-2005)**



GRAPH 16 **Average Annual Military and Economic Assistance as Percentage of Annual Military Expenditure (1998-2005)**



1992 has US military presence been more entrenched. At the same time, this presence is no longer the same; it has been qualitatively transformed.

Needless to say, military and economic assistance is extended by the US in the hope of achieving overlapping US military, strategic, and other objectives. As the Bush administration's Budget Request for 2008 put it, foreign assistance programs are the "foundational pillars of [the US'] new national security architecture."[145] Curt Tarnoff and Larry Nowels of the Congressional Research Service point out that, among the tools of US foreign policy, foreign aid is the most flexible because "it can act as both carrot and stick, and is a means of influencing events, solving specific problems, and projecting US values."[146]

FMF, for instance, is described by the US Department of State's Bureau of Political Military Affairs as a "critical foreign policy tool for promoting US interests around the world by ensuring that coalition partners and friendly foreign governments are equipped and trained to work toward common security goals and share burdens in joint missions." By increasing demand for US military products, FMF is also viewed as useful for strengthening the US' "defense industrial base."[147] IMET, for its part, is seen as providing opportunities for military-to-military interaction, information sharing, joint planning, and exercises – all crucial for inter-operability between allies.[148]

While it is difficult to un-bundle and quantify the various overlapping objectives that are intended to be achieved by foreign aid, in the minds of both the giver and the receiver, it serves as a material incentive for foreign governments to accept US demands. In the case of the Philippines, for instance, it is known that the vast amounts of US economic and military assistance that was given to the Philippine government was a form of rent for the bases. Between 1983 to 1989, the US is said to have paid the Philippine government $180 million annually as compensation for the bases; during the negotiations to extend the bases agreement, the US offered to raise this to $480 million annually.[149] This compensation dominated the debates on whether the agreement should be renewed or terminated. It is no coincidence that the fluctuations in US military and economic assistance are directly related to the closure of the bases and the subsequent resumption of access provided by the Philippine government. In 2003, government officials were quoted as saying that the US had tied up to $30 million in military assistance to the government's signing of the Bilateral Immunity Agreement which took US troops out of the reach of the ICC.[150]

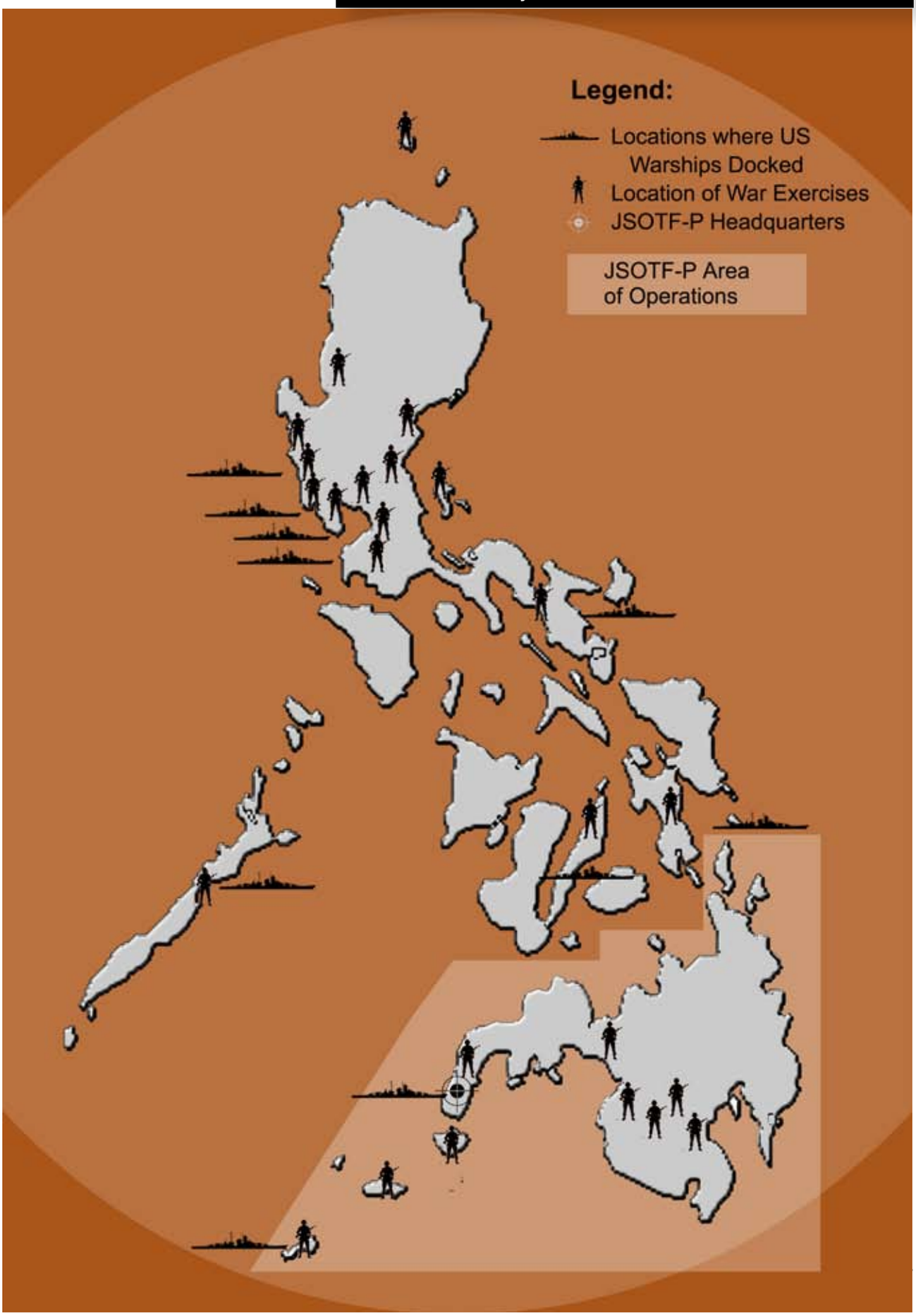
GRAPH 17 **Components of US Military Assistance to the Philippines (2002-2005)**

Demonstrating how important the financial dimension is in the calculations of Philippine government officials, former President Joseph Estrada justified his support for the VFA, saying, "We should be able to use our alliance to assist the urgent task of modernizing our armed forces."[151] If the Filipino soldiers who staged a failed coup in July 2003 are to be believed, it was in the hope of getting more military aid that the Arroyo administration allegedly perpetrated the bombings in Mindanao that were blamed on "terrorists."[152] As regards the Philippine Defense Reform (PDR) plan, the US has been projecting it as a Philippine-led initiative and has been stressing that it is co-funded by the Philippine government.[153] In contrast, the Philippines' own Department of Foreign Affairs sees it in terms of its relations with the US, describing the program as "central to defense cooperation with the US" and as "a key bilateral instrument for keeping Washington engaged." After all, the US is to partly finance the PDR's weapons and equipment acquisition plans and a resident team of American of "experts" will be involved in carrying out the program.[154]

In 2007, when calls for the repeal of the VFA snowballed as a result of the rape case involving US Marines, the Philippine government defended the VFA by citing the supposed advantages that the exercises conducted under the agreement brought to the country. VFA Commissioner Zosimo Paredes said, "[T]here are more benefits in having the [military] exercises because we get the training, military equipment they donate, and the modern technology."[155] After the US cancelled scheduled exercises to protest against a Philippine court's decision to lock up the convicted rapist in a Manila jail, the government moved to override the court's decision and provoked widespread public criticism by fetching the Marine from the jail and transferring him to the US embassy, as demanded by the US. "The government had to take this action," President Arroyo said, "in order to forestall the further deterioration in our strategic relationship with the United States."[156]

On the part of the provider, foreign aid is clearly seen as a way to achieve US military objectives for access and alliance-building. As Admiral William Pendley, former Director for Strategic Plans and

MAP 14 **Map of the Philippines with Various Forms of US Military Presence**



"Access agreements are not gifts and there will be costs in the form of military assistance, improvements in infrastructure, regional exercises, and political engagement. These costs will be insignificant, however, when measured against the flexibility and necessary capability to protect US forces..."
-Admiral William Pendley, US Pacific Command Director for Srategic Plans and Policy

Policy of the US Pacific Command, acknowledged, getting the permission to deploy and station troops in a country does not come free:

> "Access agreements are not gifts and there will be costs in the form of military assistance, improvements in infrastructure, regional exercises, and political engagement. These costs will be insignificant, however, when measured against the flexibility and necessary capability to protect US forces throughout the Asia-Pacific region and in to the Persian Gulf."[157]

In this light, the reason cited by RAND analyst Angel Rabasa in his testimony to Congress points back to China:

> "[T]he United States needs to restore a robust security assistance to allies in the region, especially the Philippines, a front-line state in the war on terrorism. Beyond counter-terrorism assistance, the United States should provide urgently needed air defense and naval patrol assets to the Philippines to help Manila reestablish deterrence vis-à-vis China and give a further impetus to the revitalization of the United States-Philippines defense relationship."[158]

* * *

All of the steps discussed above have paved the way for the gradual and incremental re-entry of the US military to the Philippines; at no time since 1992 has US military presence been more entrenched. At the

same time, this presence is no longer the same; it has been qualitatively transformed. (See Map 14).

No longer are US troops permanently stationed and confined inside large bases in two locations in the country; instead, they are drawn from rotational forces and are deployed in various places all over the country for exercises and other missions. Rather than being massed inside huge fortifications flying the US flag, they are in the hundreds housed inside bases that technically belong to the Philippine military or in the thousands participating in recurring exercises in various venues throughout the country. In the past, US troops could, despite the occasional deployment, expect to stay for long periods of time, stationed in the same base for years; now, they are to be always ready and on the move, prepared to take part in shorter but more frequent deployments overseas. Before, they used to go on deployments by themselves, in wars and operations in which the Philippine military contingents also took part in; but now, they are always accompanied by Filipino troops – training with them, patrolling with them, or giving out medicines with them – in an apparent attempt to spread both the benefits as well as the burden and the risks. Before, they stored their equipment, weapons, and supplies in huge storerooms and warehouses inside their base complex at all times, ready to lift and carry them wherever they were deploying; now, they are scattering and storing their equipment and supplies in various locations, guarded and maintained by host-nation governments or private companies, and ready to be picked up on the way to the fighting.

All these changes in the Philippines – the shift away from large garrison-like self-contained bases to smaller, sparer formations, the move away from standing, permanent stationing of forces to shorter but more frequent 'temporary' deployments, the increase in roles and in stakes assumed by the Philippine government – are driven by the overlapping goals of building up support for and countering domestic opposition to US presence while improving the agility and efficiency of a military that is shifting from static defense to active offense, struggling to make limited means achieve virtually unlimited goals.

"To do my job right, I am embedded inside USAID."
- Col. Jim Linder, former JSOTF-P Commander

This is not to say that the US would refuse Subic and Clark – once described as "undisputably the most valuable US military facilities available to the United States west of Hawaii"[159] – if offered, or that they will never attempt to construct large permanent bases. What matters is what is needed and what is available. For the moment, the US seems to have reconciled itself to the reality that building more large bases will not be advisable, politically and financially. At the same time, the US has, because of its strategy, decided that they want to move away from large bases.

But this too could change: for while large permanent bases have their disadvantages, they also provide the guaranteed access, capacities, and other advantages that smaller, more austere bases cannot. Thomas Garcia warned that access agreements could make the US hostage to changes in governments and to shifting decisions. "By continuing to rely solely on port access agreements," warns Garcia, "the United States is vulnerable to countries that may deny the US Navy access to, and utilization of, its ports in times of crisis."[160] As proven in the Philippines, it would take more than momentary shifts to close down a base; it took decades.

Also, while the kind of basing that the US is developing now can be useful for certain scenarios, they may not be appropriate and sufficient for others. In case of a long-drawn-out stand-off, for instance, it would take more than 500 Special Forces stationed in relatively more austere bases to sustain US military operations. Moreover, it is not clear if the facilities can support a strategic nuclear war or other contingencies. As Khalilzad has pointed out, "A key question is whether this diversification strategy is compatible with a viable operational concept for supporting expeditionary operations if the latter required a greater concentration of assets and infrastructure."[161] The answer may not be straightforward. If intimidation is the goal, large garrison-like bases – while attracting attention and opposition – do more to project power than hidden, tucked-away facilities that, while able to placate local communities, can only support limited undertakings.

Hence, given the right moment and given the need, if plans are not in fact afoot, the US may still want to re-establish large permanent bases in the Philippines. Given the Philippines' location, this cannot simply be ruled out. Indeed, the frequent reports that the US is trying to re-establish bases in the country have been characterized by an analyst with the Brookings Institute as "trial balloons" to test the atmosphere.[162] The US' strategy to gain access is to keep pushing, to build on what has been acquired, to keep trying. Indeed, the US has been repeatedly advised to go slow.[163] Nonetheless, compared to the situation after the closure of the bases, the US has gained ground, and although it does not yet have large permanent bases in the Philippines, the US is slowly but surely securing its military objectives in the country.

Diversification

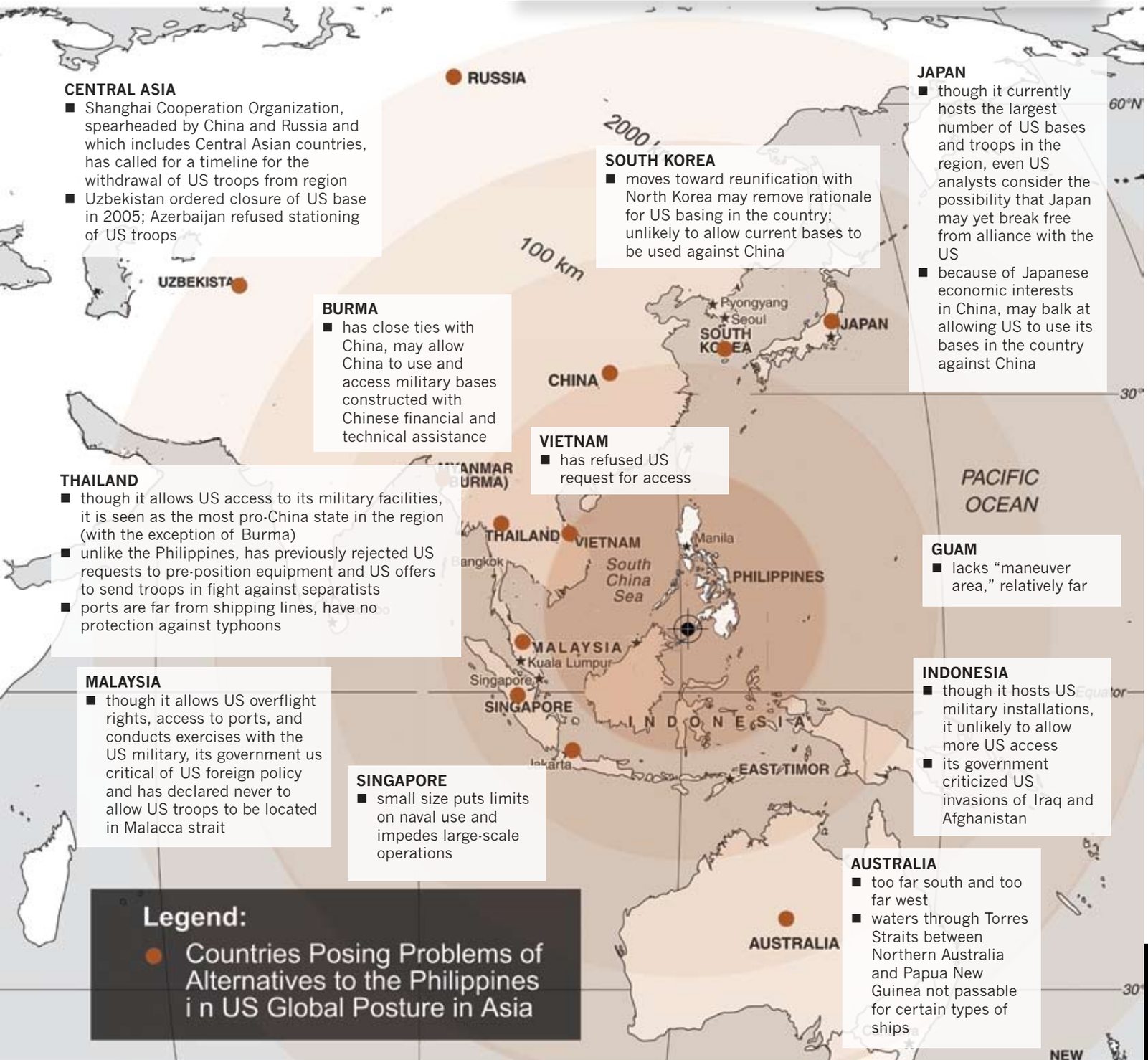
For the US' strategy to deter and contain China to work, securing access to the Philippines alone will not be enough. Indeed, as American analysts have pointed out, the US must have access to all regions where likely contingencies could arise. Barring this, the aim would be to station forces – or have assurances to do so – in as many locations as possible, with priority given to those places which are relatively more strategic as judged from a set of possible scenarios. Doing this would not only maximize the probability that the US will have the capacity to respond to whatever scenario unfolds but also minimize the US' dependence on a few countries. US strategists appear to be aware that some of their Chinese counterparts have pointed to the US' evident dependence on allies for its forward deployment as a vulnerability which could be exploited.[1] So as with managing an investment portfolio, the goal is to lessen risks and to be ready to deal with the consequences.[2] As Shlapak and his co-authors conclude:

> "The only viable solution appears to be to diversify and hedge, maintaining as wide a network of ties as possible so as to increase the odds of access and thus facilitate whatever operations may be necessary in the future."[3]

To achieve "diversification," planners and strategists are looking beyond the Philippines for access. Kaplan explains the motivation plainly:

> "The more access to bases we have, the more flexibility we'll have—to support unmanned flights, to allow aerial refueling, and perhaps most important, to force the Chinese military to concentrate on a host of problems rather than just a few. Never provide your adversary with only a few problems to solve (finding and hitting a

MAP 15 **Problems of Alternatives to the Philippines in US Global Posture in Asia**



CENTRAL ASIA
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization, spearheaded by China and Russia and which includes Central Asian countries, has called for a timeline for the withdrawal of US troops from region
- Uzbekistan ordered closure of US base in 2005; Azerbaijan refused stationing of US troops

BURMA
- has close ties with China, may allow China to use and access military bases constructed with Chinese financial and technical assistance

THAILAND
- though it allows US access to its military facilities, it is seen as the most pro-China state in the region (with the exception of Burma)
- unlike the Philippines, has previously rejected US requests to pre-position equipment and US offers to send troops in fight against separatists
- ports are far from shipping lines, have no protection against typhoons

MALAYSIA
- though it allows US overflight rights, access to ports, and conducts exercises with the US military, its government us critical of US foreign policy and has declared never to allow US troops to be located in Malacca strait

SINGAPORE
- small size puts limits on naval use and impedes large-scale operations

SOUTH KOREA
- moves toward reunification with North Korea may remove rationale for US basing in the country; unlikely to allow current bases to be used against China

VIETNAM
- has refused US request for access

JAPAN
- though it currently hosts the largest number of US bases and troops in the region, even US analysts consider the possibility that Japan may yet break free from alliance with the US
- because of Japanese economic interests in China, may balk at allowing US to use its bases in the country against China

GUAM
- lacks "maneuver area," relatively far

INDONESIA
- though it hosts US military installations, it unlikely to allow more US access
- its government criticized US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan

AUSTRALIA
- too far south and too far west
- waters through Torres Straits between Northern Australia and Papua New Guinea not passable for certain types of ships

carrier, for example), because if you do, he'll solve them."[4]

But it is here that the weakness of the US position and strategy in Southeast Asia and beyond lies: the US does not have many options. As analysts for a US Air Force-sponsored study have conceded, "There appears to be little appetite, either in the United States or in the region, for the construction of additional American military installations in Asia."[5] Two factors limit the US' choices: geographic and political. (See Map 15)

First, apart from the Philippines, the other options are geographically less attractive. They are either too far, too small, or inappropriate for meeting the US' structural requirements. Singapore, for example, is often named, along with the Philippines, as the most likely place where the US could get its preferred access. Described by one analyst as the "most vociferously pro-American state in the region,"[6] Singapore is said to be closer to the US than any other Southeast Asian country except possibly the Philippines, which, unlike Singapore, is a formal treaty partner.[7] Since 1990, Singapore has allowed US aircraft carriers to use its naval base and has also opened up it airbase to the US.[8] It is officially listed in a Pentagon document as hosting small US military installations and has agreed to provide the US long-term access to its logistics and repair facilities.[9] The problem, however, is despite its welcoming attitude, its size puts limits on naval use and impedes large-scale operations.[10] Being a useful entry point, the US could maintain its presence and access there but it has been advised to look elsewhere as well.[11]

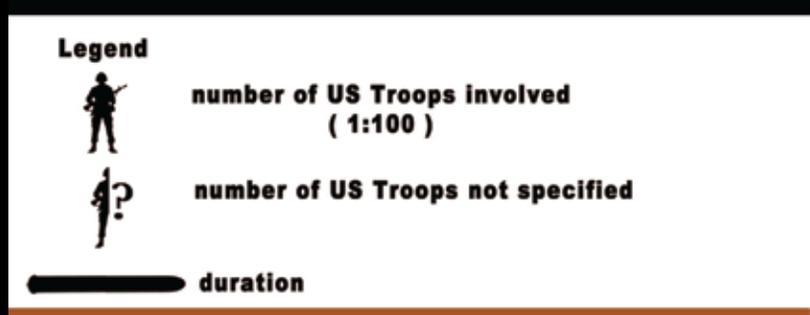
Australia, which has also been recommended as the site of additional bases, is just too far south and too far west; for the Navy, the waters through Torres Straits between Northern Australia and Papua New Guinea are not passable for certain types of ships.[12] As one study for the Air Force notes: "its remoteness to most potential conflicts makes it a relatively poor choice."[13] Some 10,000 Marines are being transferred to new bases in Guam but the island, technically a US territory, is still relatively far and supposedly lacks "maneuver area."[14] As a US official at an airbase in Okinawa remarked, "It may be easier for us to be there, as far as the diplomatic issue is concerned…but if we're in Guam, we're out of the fight."[15]

Even Thailand, which has long been a close US partner and has been nominated for expanded access, is hobbled by geographical constraints. The ports normally used by the US Navy apparently do not have the right berthing facilities; Pattaya is far from the shipping lines in the regions, and large aircraft carriers cannot dock in Phuket because it has no protection against typhoons.[16]

Complicating matters further, those that are geographically ideal are the ones that are politically problematic.

Sharing a long border with China, Burma is the most extreme case: Since gaining independence in 1947, Burma had sought to uphold its position of "neutrality" towards the United States.[17] Sanctioned and punished by the US and the West after the 1988 military coup and the suppression of democracy

Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (1992-2007)
See Table 6 on Pages 54-55 for more details



activists, the ruling junta has instead relied on Beijing for over a billion dollars worth of military equipment. There have been various reports through the years of China building military bases and installations in Burma.[18] While the actual existence of Chinese-owned bases is not certain, Burma's deepening military ties with China is undisputed. China is known to have provided the junta with the financial and technical assistance for building Burmese bases and facilities that could, with Burmese permission, provide China with military intelligence as well as a route through the Indian Ocean without going through the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca.[19]

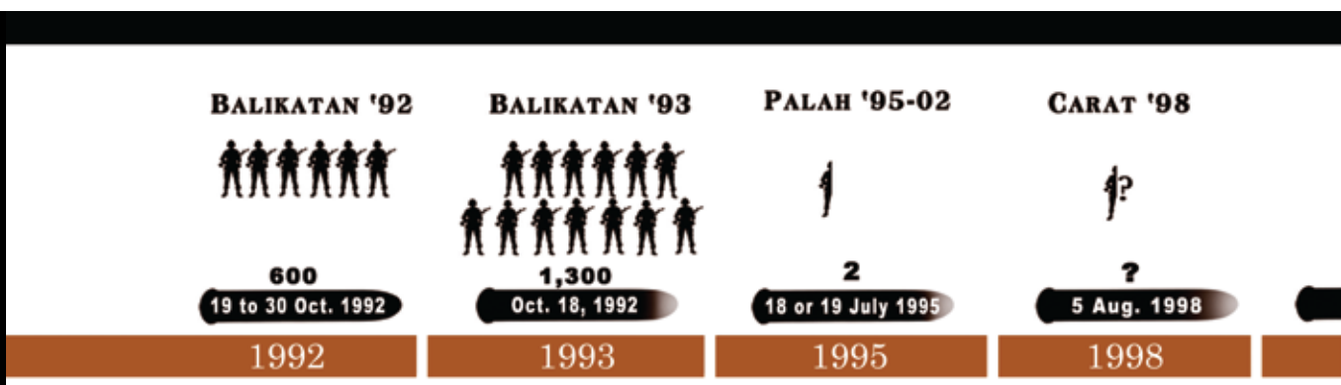
Conversely, for the US, using Burma for a possible "double-envelopment operation" against China – as was planned during the Korean War[20] – is out of the question. For the moment, Burma appears to be outside the realm of possible options for US strategies to enter "the dragon's lair" and the goal of toppling a regime tilted towards China could partly explain the US' pressure for "democratic" reforms that could potentially pave the way for the installation of a new government more receptive to US' interests.

Though not as extreme as Burma, Indonesia also illustrates the US' limited options. With its long coastline bordering the world's most important sea-lanes and with its gas and mineral resources among the world's most abundant, Indonesia could play a key role in scenarios involving blockades or protracted scrambles for resources. From the fall of Sukarno until 1999, when the US Congress moved to downgrade military ties with the country over the atrocities committed by the Indonesian military in East Timor, Indonesia had always maintained close and dependable, if not well-advertised, ties with the United States. The US openly trained and armed the Indonesian military. Indonesia hosts small US military installations, participates in military exercises, and gives the US access to military facilities, ports, ship repair facilities, bombing range, and aerial training site in the country.[21] With analysts predicting its rise as an economic and strategic power in the future, Indonesia has been cited, along with Vietnam, as possibly even more important than the Philippines and Thailand to US interests in Asia because of its relative putative animosity towards China. It is perhaps with this assessment in mind that the Bush administration has lifted the ban on military assistance to the country.[22]

Whether Indonesia will side with the US, however, is more in doubt than ever. Publicly, the Indonesian government has distanced itself from the US, expressly denouncing the war on Iraq as "an act of aggression,"[23] with Indonesian vice president Hamzah Haz even calling President Bush the "king of terrorists."[24] When then US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited Jakarta in June 2006, his host, Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono Sudarsono, used the occasion to criticize the US' "war on terror."[25]

In contrast to this less-than-cordial relationship, Indonesia has warmed to Russia. In 2007, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin to Jakarta and signed a $6 billion military and economic deal.[26] It is possible that Indonesia's leaders, being in the world's most populous Muslim country, has publicly taken a

Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (cont.)

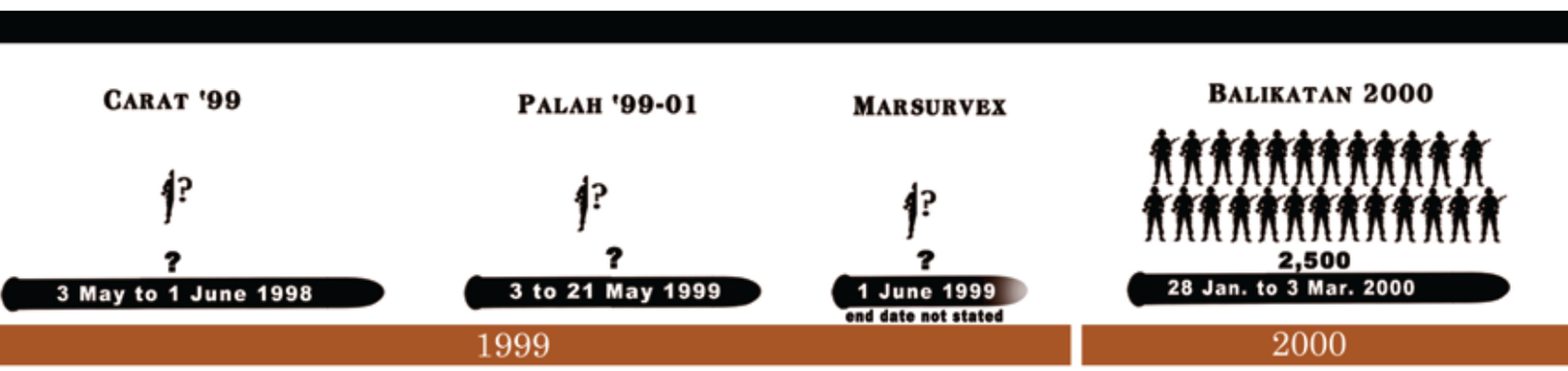


THERENCE KOH

US troops aboard a warship off Jolo, Sulu.

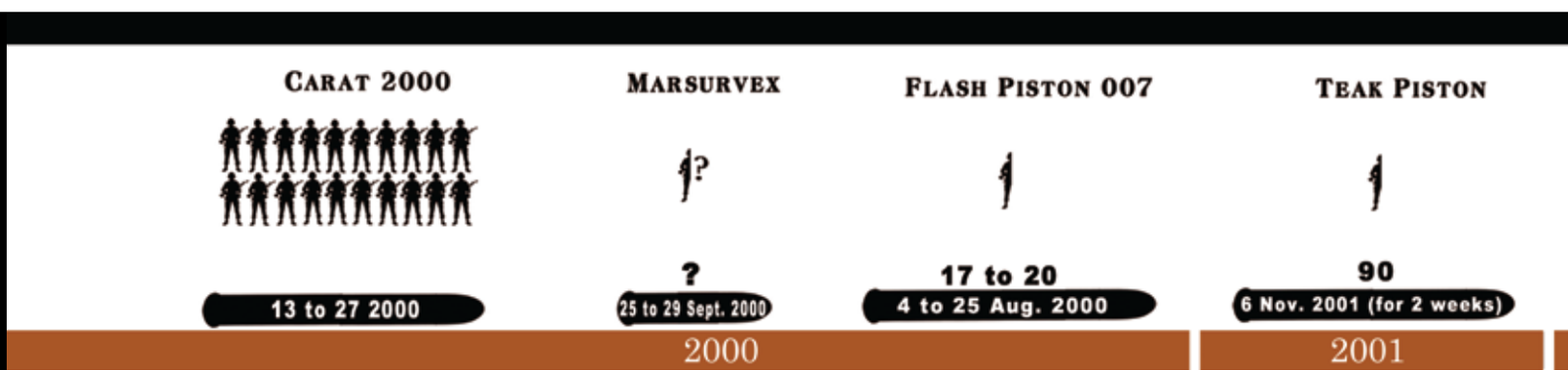
critical stance vis-a-vis the US in an effort to court domestic support as well as to gain international legitimacy among Muslims in other countries, while privately acceding to US requests. Indeed, Indonesia has not shut down the US military installations it is hosting and there are reports that the US is exploring or even developing basing facilities in Sulawesi near Mindanao.[27]

But that Indonesia has sought to play down or cover up its relations with the US, even as it has not hesitated to condemn the latter's actions publicly, just serves to underscore how difficult any attempt by the US to secure further access, much less open basing, in the country will be. As it is, what the US has obtained in terms of access has already been



the result of years of patient diplomacy;[28] there is no assurance that more could be attained with more effort. But this has not stopped the US from trying. In fact, even the relief operation conducted by the US military in Indonesia, as well as in Thailand and Sri Lanka, in the aftermath of the tsunami in December 2004 is believed to have been an attempt to build public support for basing rights and to overcome restrictions on military assistance to the Indonesian military.[29] Catharin Dalpino, a specialist on Asia at the Brookings Institute, summed up the prospects when she wrote, "[I]t is doubtful that a muscular American presence would be welcomed even in any quarter of the Indonesian policy community."[30]

The same, more or less, goes for Malaysia. Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has probably been the most vocal of all the Southeast Asian leaders against the war on Iraq. Though his successor has been less expressive, the Malaysian government's position has been to publicly oppose US wars in the Middle East and to actively promote low-key, diplomatic efforts against them. It has even questioned the Philippines' decision to allow US military involvement in the conflict in the south.[31] However, like Indonesia, Malaysia has accommodated US requests for access to its ports and repair facilities, granted the US military more than 1,000 overflights through Malaysian airspace annually, and has had its armed forces trained by the US military.[32] Publicly, though, Malaysia has

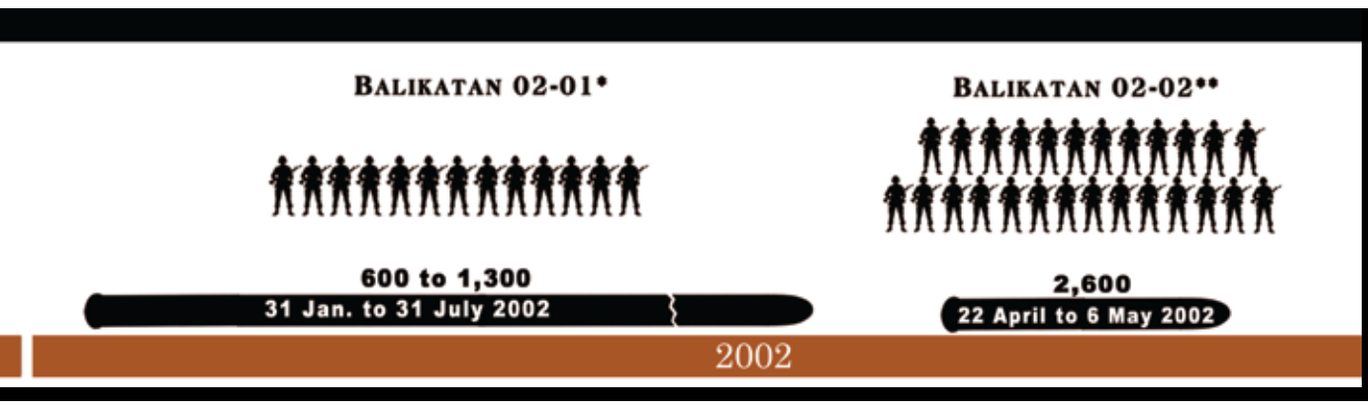


declared that it will never allow US troops or assets to be located in the Malacca Strait, the world's busiest sea-lane.[33] Along with Indonesia, Malaysia has rejected the US' offers to patrol the strait.[34] Despite these contradictions, US analysts themselves are pessimistic about getting expanded basing rights in the country because of the "serious political constraints" caused by "nationalist sentiment and lingering anti-colonialist feelings."[35] The prospects of the US getting permission to use Malaysian facilities for operations in the region is believed to be dim.[36]

More than Indonesia and Malaysia, which had always attempted to publicly stand at arm's length from the US for years, it is the case of Thailand which shows just how difficult it will be for the US to achieve its strategic objectives in the region. Though arguably less ideally positioned than others in case of a stand-off or a shooting war with China, Thailand's location in the Asian mainland could be of use for a continental advance into China. While Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia could also support such an undertaking, Thailand has had the longest and deepest ties with the United States.[37] Long a close ally of the US, Thailand, through its US-supported military regimes, had for years served as a bulwark of US military strategy in the region. Seven major bases in the country were critical staging grounds for the US war in Vietnam.[38] Following the American withdrawal from Vietnam, the bases were closed and subsequent Thai governments have sought a less US-centric approach to their foreign policy and cultivated ties with other major powers. By 1979, Thailand had established a de facto strategic partnership with China.[39] Even then, however, it sought to maintain its alliance with the US, providing it access to the U-tapao Naval Air Station and other facilities, hosting the largest multinational military exercises in Asia, and having its troops trained by the US military.[40] U-tapao Naval Air Station and Sattahip Naval Base are reported to be "cooperative security locations" of the US.[41]

Despite its close alignment with the United States, however, through the years Thailand has repeatedly rejected US requests to stations ships, pre-position supplies, and deploy troops in the country.[42] Though the government of Thaksin Shinawatra cooperated with the "war on terror," allowing CIA operatives to arrest and interrogate alleged al-Qaeda suspects,[43] permitting the US Air Force to use Thai bases for operations against Afghanistan and Iraq, sending a Thai military contingent to join the US-led war on Iraq, and permitting the US military to use the U-tapao military base for the tsunami operations, it did so with much prevarication.[44] That it often confirmed, and subsequently denied, cooperating with the US showed the level of dissatisfaction with which such actions were received and through which further cooperation was restrained. Ever since the Thai government's war with separatists in the southern provinces started to escalate in 2004, the US had repeatedly offered to intervene.

Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (cont.)



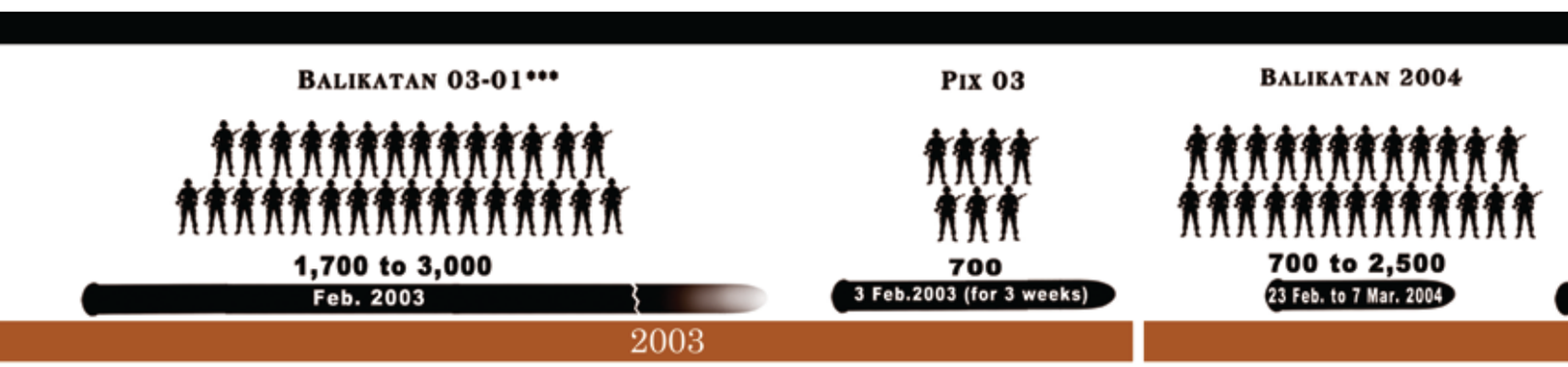
The US even offered to deploy troops to train the Thai military fighting rebels in the region, just as they were deployed in Mindanao in the southern Philippines, another separatist heartland. In a move that demonstrated how far apart Manila is from Bangkok when it comes to accommodating the US, the military junta that overthrew Thaksin flatly refused.[45] If a close ally such as Thailand can say "no" to the US, what are the chances others would say "yes"?

While countries remain cautious of China's intentions and acknowledge the possibility that China could yet turn out to be an aggressive hegemon, it appears that they have decided that the best way to check its potentially aggressive ambitions is not to antagonize, isolate, and force China into a corner – in other words, not to pursue the US' self-declared strategy of containing China by threat of force.

In Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, domestic political realities – the need to bolster nationalist credentials or to court certain constituencies – constrain governments from acceding fully to US requests or demands for access and basing. In Asia, as in most of the world, the growing unpopularity of US foreign policy has raised the political costs of supporting the US to the extent that governments feel that they have to publicly condemn the US even as they cooperate behind closed doors; or sometimes even refuse to cooperate on pragmatic grounds or out of principle.

But domestic political dynamics are only part of the explanation. Thailand, which has actually rejected US requests and offers, is also arguably the most closely aligned with China among all the countries in the region, save for Burma. Like many countries in Asia, Thailand has moved closer politically and economically to the one country that the US sees as its main rival and potential threat.

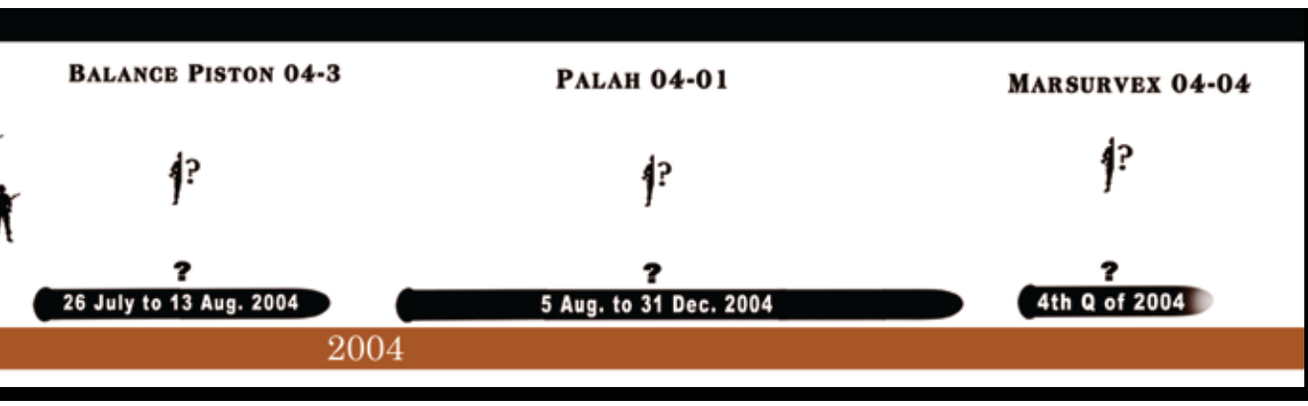
This, in turn, points to the larger complication that could frustrate US strategy in Asia in general and in Southeast Asia in particular: Countries in the region



A US soldier giving out comic books to children in the southern Philippines. THERENCE KOH

do not necessarily see China as the threat that the US has identified it to be.

Up until around a decade ago, many countries in the region were inclined to look towards China with anxiety and apprehension. China's ideological orientation, its history of supporting communist movements in the region , and its actions over disputed territories all served to reinforce their suspicion. Over the last few years, however, as China accelerated its diplomatic offensive and intensified its trade with and investments in other countries, perceptions have changed profoundly.[46] To cite just one indicator: While US exports and imports to Southeast Asia grew by 5% and 13% respectively between 2000 and 2005, China's exports and imports soared by 220% and 240% respectively.[47] As Evelyn Goh puts it, "Beijing appears to have enjoyed relative success over the last decade in assuaging the worst fears of its Southeast Asian neighbors."[48] For now, trust appears to have overtaken suspicion. David Shambaugh captures the prevailing mood



Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (cont.)

when he states: "[M]ost nations in the region [Asia] now see China as a good neighbor, a constructive partner, a careful listener, and a non-threatening regional power."[49]

The change in perception has paved the way for a change in relations. Contrary to the theoretical prediction that countries in Southeast Asia, threatened by China's rise and wary of its capacity to dominate the region, would line up to counter and contain it, most have instead sought to engage it. Indeed, the emerging consensus among academics and analysts who have been studying the regional dynamics involving the US, China, and the region is that Southeast Asia is – in their terms – neither "balancing" against nor "bandwagoning" behind China; that is, they are not joining ranks to oppose China, nor are they siding with it.[50]

This is not to say that they have completely set aside their fears. While countries remain cautious of China's intentions and acknowledge the possibility that China could yet turn out to be an aggressive hegemon, it appears that they have decided that the best way to check its potentially aggressive ambitions is not to antagonize, isolate, and force China into a corner – in other words, not to pursue the US' self-declared strategy of containing China by threat of force. Among US allies in the region, notes Aileen Baviera, "Not one…considers China a threat, but all acknowledge its potential to be one down the line. All are convinced of the necessity as well as desirability of engaging China."[51]

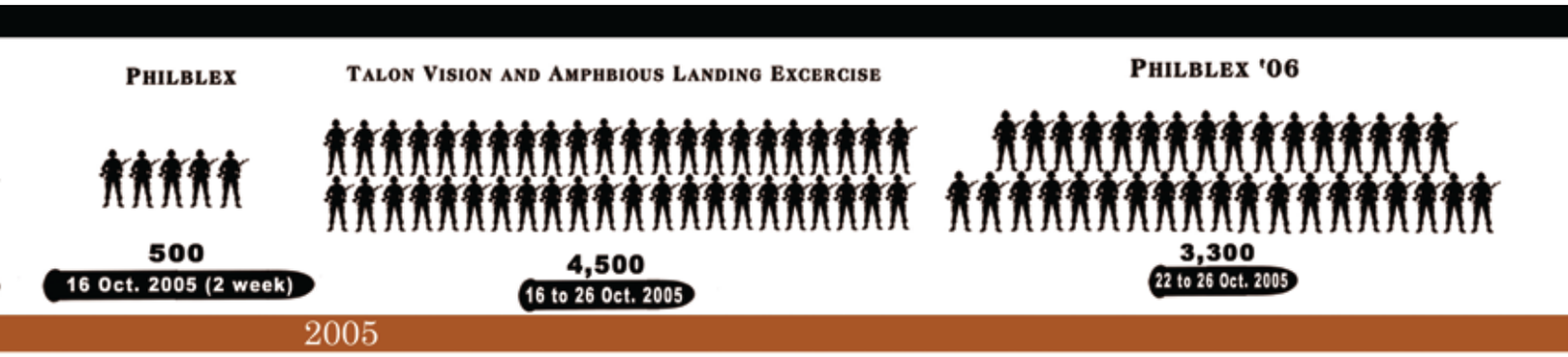
Instead of balancing against China, Southeast Asian states are seeking, in a way, to tame it. As Goh explains, "Southeast Asian states are not looking so much to contain China as to socialize it while

Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (cont.)

hedging against the possibility of aggression or domination by it."[52] In a strategy that echoes similar propositions inside the US, the underlying aim seems to be to manage China's rise, to ensure that its transition to great-power status is peaceful and not destabilizing.[53] This, she believes, involves what she calls pursuing "multi-pronged hedging strategies" in which Southeast Asian states also protect against potential Chinese aggression by modernizing their own militaries and continuing to rely on the United States as a counterweight.[54]

This could explain why Southeast Asian states are not completely inclined to shut the US out of the region. But neither are they predisposed to completely fall behind the US and give it all it requires to contain China by force. For while Southeast Asian states may not have bandwagoned behind China, neither have they bandwagoned behind the US.[55] Whether by the US or by China, Dick K. Nanto, in briefing the US Congress, observed that countries in the region "appear to be growing wary of being dominated by outside powers."[56] Insofar as the US has gained access and basing rights in the region, they fall short of what the US military had been aiming for: they have not been to able find more training locations, bases for tactical aircraft, and other infrastructure. Moreover, the kind of access arrangements they secured, with few exceptions, are too uncertain and unpredictable to be useful for planning and preparations.[57]

More importantly, they are not assured of "freedom of action" or the guarantee that they would be allowed to access the facilities the way they want to and for purposes they themselves decide on. Even US analysts have acknowledged that while Thailand, along with other allies, may have given the US access



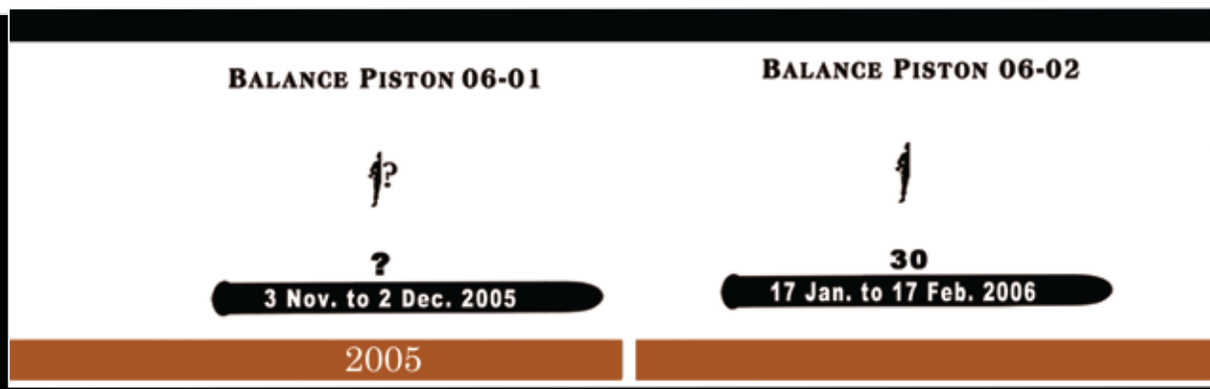
The absence of a common perception of threat now – much less, a common strategy to confront it – has served to narrow down the US' range of options and actions.

to its facilities, there is simply no assurance that they will be allowed to use them if the target is China.[58] In fact, so pessimistic are they about Thailand's loyalties, for example, that they have listed it – along with Russia and South Korea – as China's likely allies in case the lines are drawn.[59] While most of those involved in the territorial dispute over the Spratlys [60] agree that the US could deter Chinese aggression over the issue, not all claimants necessarily want to bring the US in, and there is no consensus within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that they should seek its help.[61] Moreover, in a landmark deal in 2005, Vietnam and the Philippines signed an agreement with China to jointly explore the Spratlys area for energy resources, thereby easing tensions and rendering US military deterrence unnecessary for the moment. Singapore, though perhaps the strongest supporter of US presence in the region, has declined to elevate its relations with the US to alliance status for fear of damaging its ties with China.[62] Even those who harbor more deeply-rooted suspicions towards China – such as Vietnam and, to an extent, Indonesia – have moved cautiously in responding to US overtures for closer interaction. Vietnam, located at the doorstep of China, has also been tagged as a potential future base host,[63] and the US has moved to initiate military interactions with its former adversary.[64] Vietnam, however, has been unwilling to provide access.[65]

What the ASEAN countries are seeking to do, argues Amitav Acharya, is to moderate China while at the same time dissuading the United States from containing it because ASEAN finds such a strategy to be "dangerous and counterproductive."[66] In 2002, ASEAN managed to get China to accede to the ASEAN code of conduct on disputes in the South China Sea. The following year China signed the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity, which calls for coordination between ASEAN and China of their foreign and security policies, as well as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation.[67] Meanwhile, they have rebuffed US proposals for creating "security communities" and enhanced regional cooperation. These developments have in fact reinforced fears about the US' diminishing role in, if not exclusion from, the region.[68]

Much has changed since the Vietnam War and the Cold War when anti-communist states in the region lined up behind the United States against a perceived common threat.[69] The absence of a common perception of threat now – much less, a common strategy to confront it – has served to

Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (cont.)



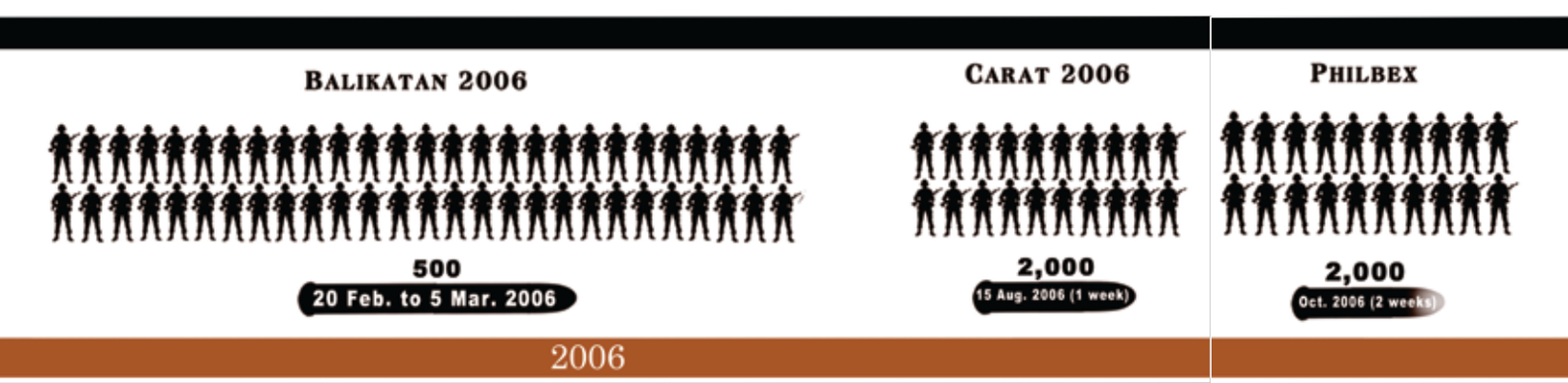
narrow down the US' range of options and actions. As David C. Kang notes, "Although the United States still retains overwhelming power in the region, its scope is considerably smaller than it was at its height a quarter-century ago."[70] Moreover, in seeking to engage with China, Southeast Asian countries' strategy conflicts with and limits the scope of US strategy toward China.

The US' problems goes beyond Southeast Asia, however. Even in Northwest Asia, where their forces are believed by US analysts to be too concentrated, the US' perception of and strategy towards China is not shared. In the last few years, South Korea has pursued a much more complex foreign policy that has increasingly diverged from that of the US. Unlike the US, which has favored a more confrontational approach towards North Korea, South Korea has pursued a conciliatory path.[71] Whether South Korea, regardless of which party is in power, would allow US bases in their country to be used for attacks on China, has been questioned.[72] What's more, steps toward reunification with North Korea have moved forward, however tentatively, and if it succeeds in the future, the reason for US basing in the country would disappear and there will be more public support for their closure.[73]

In the last few years, Japan, which hosts the largest number of US troops in the region, has stepped up its unprecedented efforts to re-militarize, sending troops to wars abroad for the first time, expanding its military budget, and seeking to revise its pacifist constitution.[74] While the US, which has encouraged and promoted such militarization in the hope that a stronger, better-armed, more militaristic ally could be very useful against common enemies, there are, as US planners themselves note, no guarantees. "The key question," notes Khalilzad and his co-authors, "is whether Japan's military buildup and increased willingness to contemplate the use of military forces are occurring within the context of the US-Japan alliance or as a step toward breaking free of that alliance."[75]

But even if Japan chooses to remain in the alliance, it may not necessarily support US strategy towards China. At one point, for example, Japan stressed that it would not want to be dragged into a conflict with China over the status of Taiwan.[76] That could be interpreted to mean that Japan may not allow US bases in its territory to be used in that eventuality for fear of being targeted by China. Moreover, a rapprochement between North and South Korea would also undermine the rationale for US basing in Japan. Though the rivalry runs deep, a Japan-China clash is not predestined, especially with the Japanese economy heavily reliant on China. If the opposite happens and Japan allies with China (inconceivable as it may now be) -- that, notes RAND, would "deal a fatal blow to US political and military influence in East Asia."[77]

Demonstrating just how seriously the US considers the possibility of being shut out from its bases in Korea and Japan, the US military has actually conducted secret war games simulating and preparing for a scenario in which the two countries



actually prevent the US from using airfields in their territories for fear of Chinese retaliation.[78] The Overseas Basing Commission has likewise come to terms with the prospect that, even with its bases there, "the United States is unlikely to achieve unlimited access for contingency basing for other than humanitarian or collective self-defense purposes."[79]

And the problems don't end there. In Central Asia, were the US had succeeded in establishing bases, the US military presence is being challenged by the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a grouping initiated by China and Russia in 2001 and which now includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, along with Mongolia, Pakistan, India, and Iran as observers. Dubbed the "NATO of the East" by some analysts, the SCO is emerging as a military counter-balance to the US in the region.[80] In keeping with its thinly veiled criticism of US unilateralism and its self-promotion as a mechanism for achieving a "multi-polar world," the SCO has formally called for a timeline for the withdrawal of US troops from the region.[81] Subsequently, in July 2005, Uzbekistan ordered US troops to leave and to close their base.[82] Kyrgyzstan has since called for a review of the basing agreement with the US and now charges "market rent" for the US' continued use of the base, up from $3 million to $200 million a year. Azerbaijan refused to station US troops.[83] Indicating its move to being a full-fledged military alliance, the SCO conducted for the first time large-scale joint military exercises in August 2007.[84]

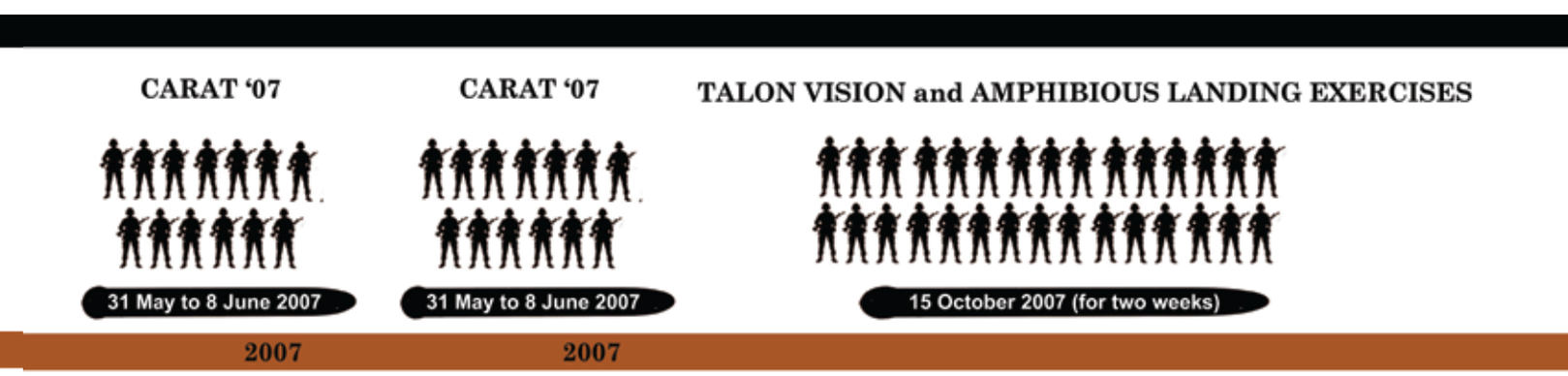
As it tries to compensate for its lack of presence and basing in the region, the US can be expected to press for more training exercises, more deployments, more missions, perhaps even a permanent base, depending on the need of the moment as well as on the political situation.

Timeline of US Military Exercises in the Philippines (cont.)

There are question marks about Australia, which, as dependable as it has been, may find that its interests diverge from that of the US and whose public are deemed likely to oppose even deeper military ties with the US.[85]

All of the foregoing drive home an inescapable conclusion: the US' overseas basing strategy is in peril, and with it, the strategy to deter China. In fact, US military strategists have pointed out that their Chinese counterparts have taken note of the US' "heavy reliance" on host-countries for its forward deployment in the region as a vulnerability. This weakness could then be used by employing "anti-access" strategies, or moves to prevent the US from deploying its forces to the region, in case of war. Part of this strategy is to warn those that would allow the US to move through their territories that they too will be considered military targets. A US Air Force-sponsored study quotes Chinese People's Liberation Army authors as stating that China would have the right to attack targets in countries hosting enemy bases. One Chinese writer states: "[A] country subject to aggression or armed intervention not only has the right to attack the enemy's combat forces and arms deployed on the enemy's territory and the high seas but also has a totally legitimate reason to attack the enemy targets on the third country's territory."[86]

If they succeed in stopping the US from deploying or deploying quickly enough, US strategists concede that the US "would actually be defeated in a conflict with China – not in the sense that the US



US troops training Filipino soldiers. THERENCE KOH

military would be destroyed but in the sense that China would accomplish its military and political objectives while preventing the United States from accomplishing some or all of its political and military objectives."[87]

Unable to secure the bases and access it seeks, the US cannot achieve its goal of expanding, realigning, and diversifying its presence if there are few places to choose from. Instead of maximizing its capacity to rapidly respond and minimizing its dependence on a few countries, the US is finding itself in a situation in which its capacity is minimized and its dependence on a few countries is maximized. As it turns out, one of these countries is the Philippines. As alternatives elsewhere in the region are crossed out one-by-one for various reasons, the Philippines – with its ideal location and its geopolitical disposition – stands out. Having examined the other options, Shlapak, for instance, concludes that the Philippines meets the three factors likely to favor cooperation with the United States: "close alignment and sustained military connections, shared interests and objectives, and hopes for closer ties with the United States."[88]

While the Philippines is increasingly being courted by China economically, politically, and also militarily,[89] it still remains firmly on the side of the United States. Even as other countries have rejected US requests, the Philippines has repeatedly complied. While others have condemned US actions and policies, even as they proceeded to implicitly support it, the Philippines has explicitly endorsed and even actively supported them. Furthermore, although domestic opposition to US presence remains strong, the political forces that favor the US continue to dominate the country's political system.

Conclusion

With unlimited aims and limited means, the United States finds itself ever more dependent on the Philippines to purse its military objectives. Having set out to prevent China's rise, but finding its options constrained, the US can be expected to attempt to further deepen its military presence in the Philippines and seek to integrate it more fully within its global military strategy. As it tries to compensate for its lack of presence and basing in the region, the US can be expected to press for more training exercises, more deployments, more missions, perhaps even a permanent base, depending on the need of the moment as well as on the political situation. To achieve its goals, the US can be expected to try to draw the Philippines away from China and to ensure that the domestic political forces that support its agenda will remain in power.

The US, however, may still change course. Overstretched by the war on Iraq, Afghanistan, and the global "war on terror," hobbled by its weakening economic standing, and with its legitimacy eroding, the US may yet find its grand strategy untenable and retreat. As they have in the past, more pragmatic leaders with a keener appreciation of the limits of American power may take over and seek to align ends with limited means. As it is, the current confrontational approach towards China continues to be challenged and criticized by sections in the American establishment, even from within the US military. The ambitious transformation of the military and its global posture has, as mentioned earlier, been tried before but ran aground due to internal differences, bureaucratic opposition, and inter-service rivalries; there is no assurance that it will finally take off this time.[1]

Having said that, the consensus within the American establishment on the usefulness of military power runs deep; the belief that the US is a force for good cuts across partisan and ideological lines and the conviction that such force must be used to remake the world remains unshaken.[2] It was under a Democratic leadership, for instance, that the decision to retain the US' Cold War military capabilities and overseas bases was made. The top Democratic challengers to Bush have themselves maintained the US' right to use military force abroad. It is unlikely that a Democratic leadership will give up the US'

US troops in a relief mission in Leyte in February 2006. REM ZAMORA

network of bases overseas and abandon the military objectives driving US interests in the Philippines.

If not by its own volition, structural constraints beyond its control may yet force the US away from its current trajectory. Over the last few years, the assessment that the US is weakening has been gaining ground across political lines.[4] Though differing in their cited symptoms, their underlying diagnosis, and their prescriptions, these assessments converge on one point: the United States' power is on the decline. Rather than assertions of might, the recent wars are seen as a sign of panic. That it can only take on militarily insignificant adversaries such as Iraq is seen as a measure of its military strength, or the lack of it. That it has suffered an erosion in its stature and prestige, as indicated by recent global surveys,[5] points to the erosion of its capacity to use its so-called "soft power" to convince the world to accept its role as the "indispensable" nation. That its economy, by some measure, now lags behind that of other countries – and has in fact become increasingly dependent on them -- poses limits to what it can achieve. If these assessments prove to be valid, a grand strategy founded on the assumption of enduring and overwhelming economic and military prowess cannot hold.

Though it has proven itself to be more reliable and more willing than other countries, the Philippines' continuing support for US military objectives is also by no means predestined. As attested to by the historical record, the Philippines will continue to accede to US goals only to the extent that doing so benefits the particular interests of the political factions and institutions in power, gives them advantage over other competing factions, and buttresses the capacity of the state to counter internal enemies. Securing these objectives are not wedded to the US. As reinforced by recent trends, the Philippines may yet find, as other countries seem to increasingly do, that its interests lie more with China instead of the US. Else, it may find that it has nothing to gain by being caught on one side in the crossfire between the two, much less by being the target of Chinese retaliatory attacks on US facilities in the Philippines in case of hostilities. The Philippines may yet conclude that it has no interest in being at the receiving end of China's missiles.

Though possibly far-fetched, the Philippines may even conclude that its interests lie with neither, but with a post-hegemonic international order dominated neither by Beijing nor Washington. It is also possible, though remote, that political forces opposed to US interests and actions may succeed in taking power. All these remain to be seen.

What is sure, at this stage, is that the Philippines has become even more crucial to US military strategy than ever. Whether US military strategy is critical to the Philippines, however, is the more fundamental question. Framed as it has been on the usefulness of US military assistance in countering "terrorists" or in modernizing the Philippine military, the domestic debates in the Philippines have failed to ask the broader questions. As this report has tried to show, the Philippines plays a key role in underpinning the US' larger goal of containing China and assuring its own pre-eminence. The question, therefore, is whether the Philippines should continue to support the US strategy of permanent dominance and whether a world ordered by one permanent superpower is the kind of world that best serves the interest of the Philippines. Because of the critical role it could potentially play in contributing to sustaining or thwarting US military ambitions, the answer will have global implications.■

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Acknowledgment

Staff of Focus on the Global South, Joy Manahan, Maureen dela Cruz, Corazon Fabros, Juan V. Sarmiento Jr., Roland Simbulan, Ynor Castillo, DJ Janier, Octavio Dinampo, Ulka Ulama, Abdurahman Amin, Julkipli Wadi, Max Jundam, Al Senturias, Stop the War Coalition, Raffy Simbol, Wilbert van der Zeijden, John Lindsay Poland, Brian McAdoo, Sarah Irving, Oscar Reyes, Joseph Gerson, Frida Berrigan, Pratap Chatterjee, John Feffer, Alecks Pabico, Cecilia Balgos, Carol Arguillas, Oliver Teves, Al Jacinto, Shawn Crispin, Abduhum Jaujali, Cocoy Tulawie, Teresa Encarnacion-Tadem, Trina Joyce Sajo, Bienvenida Laxamana, Tin de Villa, Ana Isabelle Matutina, Adrian Ayalin, Forsyth Cordero, Norman Baguisa, Transnational Institute, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Center for Advancement and Strengthening of Community Property Rights, International Network for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases (No Bases!), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Mindanao People's Peace Movement, Mindanao Peaceweavers, Gaston Z. Ortigas Peace Institute, Initiatives for International Dialogues, Balay Rehabilitation Center, UP Third World Studies Center, Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Mindanews, Mindanao Examiner, Asia Times Online, Sulu State College Hostel

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ISBN 978-971-92886-8-8