Written by Administrator
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On September 16, the anti-US military bases movement in the Philippines, together with eight of the so-called Magnificent 12 senators, commemorated the 20th anniversary of the rejection of the 1947 RP-US Military Bases Agreement in 1991. The eight who made it to the event, which the Jose W. Diokno, Lorenzo Tañada and Renato Constantino Foundations organized, were former Senators Wigberto Tañada, Victor Ziga, Orlando Mercado, Ernesto Maceda Jr., Butz Aquino, Rene Saguisag, former Senator and Vice-president Teofisto Guingona Jr., former President Joseph Estrada and current Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile. The son of deceased Senator Sotero Laurel also came to represent his father. Special guest speaker was Vice-president Jejomar Binay. The senators were honored with plaques of appreciation by the organizers. Even as the event was held in a celebratory mood, it also served as an opportunity for the members of the anti-bases movement to renew its call for a sovereign, independent and free Philippines amid continuing evidence of US infringement of this sovereignty through the presence of its soldiers, particularly in Mindanao.

Days before the commemorative event, WikiLeaks accounts have confirmed US military involvement in local defense and security actions. (See reports on Wikileaks accounts: http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/-depth/09/14/11/wikileaks-cables-us-forces-directly-involved-mindanao-terror-hunt)

The Wikileaks accounts confirm too the reports that Focus on the Global South issued in 2007, "Unconventional Warfare," which documented US military involvement in direct combat in the Philippines—a violation of the Philippine constitution. (www.focusweb.org/pdf/unconventionalwarfare.pdf and www.focusweb.org/node/1293)

Piecing together documentary evidence from the US military as well as from eyewitness accounts, these reports were among the first to expose the presence of a special US unit called the Joint Special Operations Task Force which has been continuously deployed in Mindanao for the past 10 years, contrary to US and Philippine governments' denials running back to 2001. In 2008, Citizens' Peace Watch conducted a Fact Finding Mission that yielded similar evidence of US military structures in Zamboanga and the sighting of American soldiers in actual combat. The Task Force's presence in Mindanao has also recently been confirmed in an article in the *Washington Post*
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(ttp://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-secret-america-a-look-at-the-military-s-joint-special-operations-command/2011/08/30/gIQAvYuAxJ_story.html)

The Wikileaks accounts validate Focus' contention that the US and the Philippine governments have been engaged in an effort to cover up the nature of the deployment. According to the Wikileaks cables, US officials were instructed to deny involvement in combat when asked by the media.

In a press statement issued on September 16, Focus on the Global South said "Now that the

Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) is under review in the Philippine Senate, it is critical for us in the people's movement that advocated and struggled against the US bases not only to pursue the implications of the Wikileaks reports but to elevate our struggle towards revising our foreign policy and put in place one that is principled, and that truly honors and promotes our independence and sovereignty as a people and nation.

The Philippine government, now under President Noynoy Aquino, cannot just have business-as-usual relations and engagement with the United States, enticing US economic investments while ignoring the implications of continued US military presence for our sovereignty and even our own security. The blatant disregard by the US government of Philippine law during the trial of the rape case filed by a Filipina against its soldiers in 2006 should remain a grim reminder of what the US can do to advance its interests."

Earlier that week, the Stop the War Coalition! Philippines, of which Focus is a member, held the forum “Partnership or Subservience? Reassessing Philippine-U.S. Military Relations,” where recent developments related to the ongoing review of the Visiting Forces Agreement under the P-Noy government was the main topic. The forum wanted to to generate public discussion on the 13-year old agreement and push for more immediate action on the part of the governments.