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The Philippines and A War for Oil

One of the main sources of international tension in the world today arises from the opposition of the U.S. corporate elite, the U.S. multi-nationals, to the effort of Third World peoples to gain control of Third World raw materials and natural resources.

An example of this is now to be seen in the Mideast. Here the United States is making massive preparations for military intervention, for war, to control the prime natural resource of the Mideast, its oil.

I have just come from the 1980 World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in Tokyo, Japan. I visited Hiroshima where in August 1945 the United States dropped an atom bomb killing some 140,000 people. I visited Nagasaki where the United States dropped an atom bomb killing some 70,000 people. In both cities I saw many victims of these bombings who now, thirty-five years later, suffer from cancer and other forms of radiation sickness.

That is why, for me, one of the most alarming features of the U.S. preparation for war in the Mideast is the threat that U.S. officials have made to use tactical nuclear weapons in such a war.[1] Tactical nuclear weapons are intended for use in battle with an opposing armed force and not for the wholesale destruction of civilian population. But there is the danger and the possibility that the U.S. use of tactical weapons in the Mideast would lead to a nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union. This might well mean the end of mankind.

We know that the Civil Liberties Union of the Philippines has warned that in case of an all-out nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States, the Philippines would stand a good chance of being annihilated.[2] This is because, as the Civil Liberties Union has good reason to believe, the United States stores nuclear weapons on U.S. bases in the Philippines, making the Philippines thereby the target for Soviet nuclear missiles should the U.S. and the Soviet Union engage in an all-out nuclear war.

Bearing all this in mind, is it not alarming that in February 1980, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the two greatest newspapers in the United States, reported that U.S. Defense officials had threatened to use tactical nuclear weapons in a war in the Mideast?

What are some of the other preparations for war in the Mideast the United States is making? They include:

- the registration of all 18 year old males.
- the establishment in the Indian Ocean-Arabian Sea area of a permanent naval force of 25 ships, 18 fighting vessels and 7 support vessels, including two air-craft carriers loaded with nuclear bombs.[3]
- the establishment of what is known as the Rapid Deployment Force of 100,000 men, designed to enable the U.S. to make lightning military strikes against Third World peoples in the Mideast and elsewhere. The U.S. will spend 5 billion dollars a year for the next 5 years on the Rapid Deployment Force according to Defense Secretary Brown.[4]
- the enlargement of the key U.S. base at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.
- the assignment of an amphibious force of 1,800 marines to the permanent naval fleet in the Indian Ocean, a first installment of the Rapid Deployment Force.[5]
- the prepositioning at Diego Garcia of several ships with enough supplies for immediate use by an amphibious force of 12,000 marines and several Air Force fighting squadrons.[6]
- negotiations for the use of new base facilities in Kenya, Oman, and Somalia, also for the pre-positioning of U.S. war supplies.
- expenditure by the Pentagon of $25 to $30 billion on the Mideast out of a total U.S. defense budget of $159 billion for 1981.[7]

Nor is U.S. military activity in the Mideast limited to preparations for U.S. intervention. The U.S. has already intervened. The abortive U.S. mission to rescue hostages in Iran was nothing less than this.

Moreover, Edith Villastrigo of Women Strike for Peace, a prominent leader of the U.S. anti-war movement, this June went on a delegation to the White House. She reported that White House officials on this occasion gave the distinct impression that if the hostages were not released by September, another U.S. intervention might well take place.[8] In the same vein, Jack Anderson, the well-known investigative columnist, recently charged that the Carter Administration planned a large-scale intervention in Iran in October to influence the presidential election.[9]*

Talk given at St. Joseph's College, Manila, Philippines, August 12, 1980, by D. Boone Schirmer, Standing Committee, Friends of the Filipino People, U.S.A. Substantially the same address was also made at the University of the Philippines a few days earlier.

* On August 21, the *Bulletin Today* of Manila reported that the 1,800 U.S. marine amphibious unit had been deployed in the Gulf of Oman off the Iranian coast. On September 1, 1980, a dispatch from Washington to the *New York Times* reported that "Republicans worry about an 'October surprise' in foreign policy."

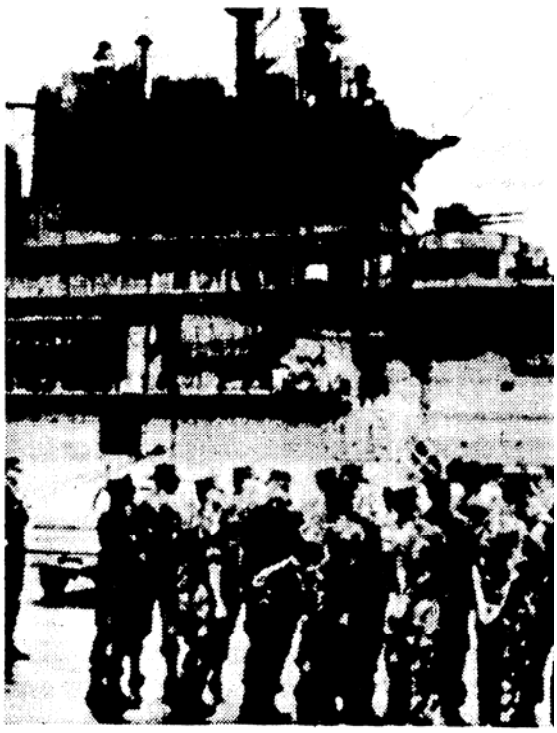
Some in this audience might be inclined to say, "Very well, granted that there are these war preparations and threats of intervention, granted that in the case of a future nuclear holocaust arising in the Mideast, the Philippines would not be spared, what then? Does the Philippines have some direct and immediate connection with the Carter war preparations?" The answer must be an emphatic "Yes." Because of the presence of U.S. bases, the Philippines is intimately and decisively connected to these war preparations right now. Do you realize that at this very moment Subic Naval Base is the main source of supply for the U.S. naval force in the Indian Ocean?[10] Without Subic, it would be very difficult for the Pentagon to maintain the U.S. naval force in the Indian Ocean. Or take the Rapid Deployment Force that is now being put together. Do you know that Philippine bases would be important launching pads for the Rapid Deployment Force in any strike at the Mideast from Asia?[11]

What is the point of all these war preparations, this intervention and threat of intervention and nuclear war, all this that threatens to drag the Philippine people into troubles not their own? The Carter Administration would have the public believe that the preparations for war in the Mideast are in response to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, an effort to save the Mideast from Soviet domination. This is what is known as the Carter Doctrine. But it is advisable to take the claims of the Carter Doctrine with a grain of salt.

U.S. plans for intervention in the Mideast pre-date the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The U.S. Marine Corps began preparations for seaborne landings in the Middle East as long ago as 1973 after the Arab oil boycott.[12] The reliable *Defense Monitor* of Rear Admiral La Rocque (retired) points out that since the Arab oil embargo of 1973-74 there have been numerous official statements pointing to the use of the military to protect America's vital interests in the Mideast, meaning, of course, the oil. The *Monitor* cites statements of Kissinger, Schlesinger, Ford, and Elliot Richardson in 1974, 1975, and 1976 threatening U.S. military intervention in the Mideast over the question of oil.[13] More recently, in May 1979, but still before the Soviet Afghan intervention, Speaker of the House O'Neill said, "I can view and I hope wrongly, that Israel and Egypt and the United States some day in the not too far distant future may be fighting to save Saudi Arabia for the free world, for Western Europe and for the needs of energy..."[14]

Evidently few Administration officials believe the possibility of further Soviet intervention to be the main reason for the U.S. military build-up in the Mideast. The day after Mr. Carter announced his Doctrine, the *New York Times* carried a piece describing its motivation and said, "While the situation in Afghanistan has forced the Administration to consider the possibility of further Soviet thrusts into Iran or Pakistan, few officials believe that this is the most likely source of future instability." On the other hand a senior Administration official "made it clear that involvement in future disputes to shore-up pro-Western factions in Saudi Arabia and other oil producing nations...had not been ruled out" as a possible cause for intervention by Mr. Carter.[15]

This motivation is particularly clear in the case of Iran. There, after the nationalist forces removed the Shah, the Khomeini government took all control of Iranian oil out of the hands of the U.S. multi-nationals. This may well be the root cause of the hostility of the U.S. establishment towards Iran.



Part of battalion of 1,800 U.S. marines bound for the Indian Ocean arriving at

All these factors suggest that it is an awakened Arab nationalism that bellicose members of the U.S. establishment oppose in the Mideast; that it is a status quo favorable to "Western," that is, U.S. corporate control of Mideast oil that they wish to defend. These seem to be the real reasons for the Carter Administration's current war preparations and its threat of nuclear war in the Mideast.

This truth seems to be widely recognized in the Mideast if a report from William Drodziak of Time-Life News Service in Cairo is to be believed. In January Drodziak wrote that U.S. relations with the Gulf states were complicated by "the lingering fear that the United States might ultimately be tempted to seize the oil fields as a last-gasp solution to the energy crisis—and in a way that would masquerade as a rescue from Soviet encroachment."[16] Even those states favorably inclined to Washington like Saudi Arabia adopt an attitude of reluctance and reserve in relation to U.S. military intervention. An editorial in the Kuwaiti paper *al-Anab* expresses the attitude of those states openly opposed: "We would like to tell Mr. Carter and everyone else that the last thing we want is protection and the last

base at Subic Bay, the Philippines.

thing we are asking for is his nuclear umbrella."[17]

The states of Western Europe are also unenthusiastic about a U.S. military adventure in the Mideast. It has recently been reported that West Germany has lifted some self-imposed limits on its Navy's area of operation, thus allowing U.S. naval strength to be shifted to the Indian Ocean.[18] On the whole, however, the nations of Western Europe, heavily dependent on Mideast oil supplies and engaged in profitable trade with the Soviet Union, display considerable lack of support for the Carter Doctrine.

The U.S. base at Tarregon in Spain has heretofore been the main launching pad for the U.S. Air Force in its flights to the Mideast. In the case of a U.S. military intervention in that area it is considered likely that Spain would deny the U.S. the use of this base. And the same seems to hold true for U.S. bases in Turkey.[19]

Given this situation in the Mideast and Europe the U.S. places great reliance on certain Asian nations. Those in the U.S. who would gamble on a war in the Mideast put great hope in what they call their "China card" and their "Japan card." The recent trip of Secretary of Defense Brown to Peking for consultations and the support of the Chinese government for the Carter Doctrine are matters of public record. While I was in Japan the conservative government of that country succumbed to heavy pressure from the Pentagon for an increase in armaments and a more active military role in the Pacific. The *Washington Post* in February described both the conservative governments of Australia and New Zealand as "strong supporters" of the Carter Doctrine.[20]

As you may note, there is one Asian state I have so far not mentioned. That is the Philippines. The attitude of the present Philippine government towards Mideast war preparations and the Carter Doctrine is positive, clear, and unequivocal. While in Hawaii in April of this year President Marcos promised "to fight on the side of the Americans" and chided the nations of Western Europe for their lack of support of Carter's Mideast policies.[21] The *Far Eastern Economic Review* of April 25 said that Mr. Marcos displayed these attitudes in order to present himself as the United States' most reliable ally in Asia.

The political support of Asian states for the Carter Doctrine finds expression on a military level in most important ways. I have already drawn attention to the fact that U.S. bases in the Philippines, with Mr. Marcos' full agreement, play an important role in supplying the U.S. naval armada in the Indian Ocean, and that U.S. bases in the Philippines would be Asian launching pads for a Rapid Deployment Force strike at the Mideast. In fact the 1,800 marine amphibious force first assigned to the fleet in the Indian Ocean used Subic Naval Base as a staging area. There they practised amphibious landing exercises for two weeks before going to the Indian Ocean in February of this year.[22]

It must be understood that U.S. bases in Japan are now also involved in supplying the U.S. fleet in the Indian Ocean. U.S. bases in Japan would also serve as Asian launching pads for a Rapid Deployment Force strike at the Mideast.

At the moment, aside from planes aboard the two U.S. carriers in the Indian Ocean, the B52 bombers that could be flown from Clark Field in the Philippines are the only U.S. air resource in the area.[23] To supplement this the Pentagon in July sent a team to Australia to negotiate for air fields in that country from which B52s could be flown to the Mideast.[24] And both Australian and New Zealand governments have promised military support for the U.S. naval force in the Indian Ocean, the Australian aircraft carrier *Melbourne* already having been dispatched to join it.[25]

It is obvious that the Pentagon is attempting to use certain Asian nations as support points or stepping stones to military intervention in the Mideast. It is attempting to prepare an Asian road for a U.S. war in the Mideast. This would tend to embroil Asian peoples in conflict with the peoples of the Mideast, would tend to drag Asia into what could become a nuclear war—all to further U.S. corporate control of oil supplies.

As the election campaign draws to a climax, the pressures upon Carter from the ultra-right, the ultra-bellicose forces behind the Reagan candidacy will increase. Moreover these bellicose circles have their spokesperson in the Carter camp in the person of National Security Advisor Brzezinski, whose power and influence have recently been on the upswing. In these circumstances, and unless checked by public opinion in the U.S., the possibilities of some form of Mideastern military intervention by Carter to insure his re-election might well grow.

Of course there are those in positions of influence in the U.S. who have doubts about such a harebrained scheme. Ex-Secretary of State Vance has been explicit in his warnings. Questions are raised by the oil expert Walter J. Levy in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the foreign policy journal of the U.S. establishment. Mr. Levy doubts the anti-Soviet relevance of the Carter Doctrine in the Mideast and points to the political instability of the various states of the region and the prevalence of antagonisms between them. He concludes:

> In actual practice the Carter Doctrine may thus more likely than not involve us in an attempt to protect the status quo against internal upheavals or intra-regional attacks. This would be a most difficult if not impossible assignment for U.S. military forces.[26]

"A most difficult if not impossible assignment for U.S. military forces." Just let the full weight of those words sink in. Then remember that this is being prepared while the memory of the Vietnam defeat and humiliation is still fresh.

This point requires more emphasis. A war in the Mideast would be a war 7,000 miles away from the U.S., more difficult even than the war in Vietnam. It is the very grave if not insuperable difficulty for the U.S. military of a war in the Mideast that would make a resort to tactical nuclear weapons an attractive possibility for some. Here the neutron bomb that kills people but leaves property unharmed might have a special appeal—removing the Arab nationalists and keeping the oil fields intact. Indeed the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons may have been prepared for. The Japanese peace movement has for some years offered proofs that U.S. bases in Japan store nuclear weapons and that U.S. marines on those bases have been trained in the handling of such weapons.[27] A Rapid Deployment Force strike at the Mideast coming from Asia would be launched from Japanese bases and U.S. marines there would play a part.

But in today's world, preparations for war and intervention do not have to lead to war and intervention. The projection of the use of tactical nuclear weapons does not have to lead to the use of such weapons. Public opinion has a great influence.

Certainly the mobilization of such an effective body of public opinion is only in its first stages. In the U.S. for example there has been a campaign against the registration of young men for the draft. Before I left the country some two weeks ago it was estimated by peace activists in the city of Boston that over 30% of the young men of draft age in that city had refused to register.* While in Japan I witnessed a demonstration by some 500 Japanese against a U.S. military base at Iwakuni near Tokyo. We know there are those in the Philippines who have spoken out against U.S. bases in this country, warning of Philippine involvement in any future nuclear holocaust. Only recently thousands of anti-war anti-nuclear activists marched through the streets of Sydney, Australia commemorating the anniversary of Hiroshima.

We may remember the jingle about the King of France who marched his troops up the hill, then marched them down again. Submitting to pressure from Reagan and the ultra-right Mr. Carter is marching his troops up the hill. Perhaps the international peace movement will march them down again. It is in the interests of the peoples of the Philippines and the United States that this should be the case.

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* *The Boston Globe* of August 27, 1980 reported a survey conducted by that paper indicated that approximately 25% of the eligible males nationwide had defied or ignored the registration order.

For more information about U.S. bases in the Philippines and U.S.-Philippine relations, write:

Friends of the Filipino People
110 Maryland Ave., N.E.
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Footnotes

1. *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, February 2, 1980.
2. "The Lessons and Relevance of the U.S.-Iran Conflict," Civil Liberties Union of the Philippines, December, 1979.
3. *New York Times*, January 25, 1980, July 17, 1980.
4. *International Herald Tribune*, August 14, 1980.
5. *New York Times*, July 17, 1980.
6. *Washington Star*, March 5, 1980.
7. Earl C. Ravenal, "Doing Nothing," *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1980, p. 38.
8. *Washington Star*, June 30, 1980.
9. *Bulletin Today*, Manila, August 18, 1980.
10. *Washington Star*, January 9, 1980.
11. *New York Times*, January 25, 1980.
12. Jack Anderson, *Washington Post*, August 10, 1980.
13. *Defense Monitor*, December 1979.
14. *Guardian*, May 30, 1979.
15. *New York Times*, January 25, 1980.
16. *Washington Star*, January 25, 1980.
17. *Washington Star*, January 25, 1980.
18. *New York Times*, July 18, 1980.
19. *In These Times*, December 12, 1979; *Washington Post*, March 30, 1980.
20. *Washington Post*, February 28, 1980.
21. *Times Journal*, Manila, April 23, 1980; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 29, 1980.
22. *New York Times*, February 19, 1980.
23. *New York Times*, January 25, 1980.
24. *Boston Sunday Globe*, July 20, 1980.
25. *Washington Post*, February 28, 1980.
26. Walter J. Levy, "Oil and the Decline of the West," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1980, p. 1010.
27. Documents in possession of author.