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behind the headlines

RP: Letting go the apron strings US 'interference' charges spur soul-searching in Manila

By Chaitanya Kalbag

MANILA — The recall of a US military diplomat from the Philippines underlines the love-hate ties between the two countries but also points to a new direction in Manila's foreign policy, analysts said Wednesday.

The US Embassy's announcement that assistant army attache Lt Col Victor Raphael would depart this week capped a chorus of charges of US interference that began soon after a failed coup attempt by rebel Philippine troops on August 28.

The uprising nearly toppled President Corazon Aquino.

"It (the uprising) has also triggered an unusual amount of soul-searching among Filipinos," a Western diplomat said.

He noted that the first-ever recall of a US diplomat from the Philippines had taken place with no formal protest filed and an apparent anxiety on both sides to downplay the rancour.

Raphael was accused by a Philippine Army colonel of trying to persuade government troops not to use artillery against rebels holed up at military headquarters during the coup.

Resentment grew after it was revealed that Raphael was the godfather of the daughter of rebel Colonel Gregorio Honasan who led the coup attempt and has since been in hiding.

Passions have also been stoked by congressional debate over the future of the two US military bases in the Philippines, the largest of Washington's military installations overseas.

A 25-year treaty covering the bases expires in 1991. Negotiations on the agreement are due to start in early 1988.

Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus signalled a gradual shift in attitude towards the US, which ruled the Philippines between 1898 and 1946, when he told a newspaper earlier this week that Manila needed to "slay the American father image".

"I think it is time to review this attitude and to recognize that we do have also special relationships with Asia, then Europe, and then the



AP PHOTO

'Slaying the American father image': American troops in joint exercise northeast of Manila

United States," Manglapus told a press conference after Raphael's withdrawal was announced.

Asked if this meant a move away from Manila's traditional dependence on the US, he said: "It would mean broadening the horizons of our foreign policy."

The ambiguity of feeling towards Washington is reflected on several fronts.

Citizens' groups and left-wing politicians regularly call for the removal of the bases. Two congresswomen recently urged an investigation of government officials who held "green cards" or permanent resident status in the United States.

At the same time, a maverick statehood movement works from offices in downtown Manila to back its dream that the Philippines should become the 51st US state.

Filipino-Americans constitute the

second-largest Asian community in the United States.

Commentator Amando Doronila wrote in the respected *Manila Chronicle* newspaper on Wednesday that: "There is the danger that in blowing up these incidents, the issue of nationalism will be distorted."

He likened US diplomats like Raphael to rogue elephants straying from the herd and added: "Their aberrant behaviour is certainly not the (US) policy at least there is no evidence that the deviation has official support."

A Western diplomat said Raphael's recall was a face-saving device. "The matter was making it difficult for the two allies to get on with business and had reduced Raphael's ability to function," he added.

But the Philippine daily *Inquirer* summed up popular feeling when it

asked in an editorial: "How old are we as a nation anyway? ... We have in our hands a perfect occasion for asserting, for once, our sovereignty and affirming our resolve to do things our way."

Meanwhile, Washington has moved to assuage hurt feelings.

Undersecretary of State Michael Armacost, in Manila on a four-day visit, stressed "unwavering" US support for Aquino and handed over \$75 million in aid.

And Armed Forces Chief Gen Fidel Ramos said Manila, which looks to the US for substantial military aid, valued its friendship with Washington.

"We would not want any individual or group action that may not be in line with the policies of the government to disrupt these friendly relations," he said. —
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