

Juan Ponce Enrile Saw Influence Wane

By Washington Post Foreign Service

February 23, 1986

Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, 62, once one of President Marcos' closest aides, has seen his influence erode in recent years.

Enrile, who has been defense minister since 1970, was apparently a victim, in part, of increasing military factionalism and a system that favors loyalty and patronage as criteria for promotion.

Under that system, Gen. Fabian Ver rose to become chief of staff of the armed forces and became one of Marcos' most trusted confidants, pushing Enrile aside and centralizing military matters under his control, according to western diplomats.

Last November, shortly after Marcos called for a special presidential election, Enrile warned of political repercussions for the voting if Ver, who was on a leave of absence because of his alleged involvement in the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino Jr., returned to the military. Ver was acquitted and, although Marcos announced his retirement, Ver continued to issue orders last week.

A Harvard-educated attorney, he is also known for his ambitions for the presidency. He has warned several times in the past two years about the increasing strength of the Communist insurgency and has made gloomy assessments of the armed forces' efforts to control the struggle.

Enrile has also been a consistent and vocal critic over the past few years of

changes in the combination of U.S. military and economic aid to the Philippines.

Last summer, after the House of Representatives voted to shift some aid from the military to the economic category, Enrile charged that changing the aid package would be a violation of the agreement between the United States and the Philippines on two major military bases.

In response to the reaction by Enrile and other members of Marcos' ruling party, Marcos called for a commission to study whether to terminate the bases agreement.

During the martial law period of 1972 to 1981, Enrile was one of the most influential figures in the government. Before he became defense minister in the early 1970s, he had served as justice minister and finance minister.

Enrile, who is from Cagayan Province in northeast Luzon island, graduated from the University of the Philippines and earned a master's degree from Harvard Law School in 1955.

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