

Strong NPA shows scale of Philippines political, military woes

by Linda de Hoyos

The insurgent New People's Army in the Philippines commands a hard-core membership of 25,000, up 9,000 from last year, report well-informed sources from Manila. A full 20% of the countryside of the Philippines is now under NPA control, with the NPA directing local administration and collecting "taxes." The NPA has moved en masse with armed cadre into the barrios of Manila. More important, 6-7 million Filipinos support the NPA—an estimated 25% of the adult population.

The strength of the NPA and its increasing popular support define the magnitude of both the military and political problem facing the Republic of the Philippines. Despite the overwhelming mandate given to President Corazon Aquino, in the Feb. 2 referendum vote for the new draft constitution, the momentum in the Philippines is with the NPA. With the collapse of the 60-day ceasefire agreement on Feb. 10, the NPA has launched military attacks throughout the country. The daily death rate is now as high as it was during the height of violence in 1985, reported Armed Forces Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos.

Over the past year, and especially since the removal of Juan Ponce Enrile as defense minister in late November, the armed forces have been put on the defensive by the Aquino government and the "human rights" mafia ensconced in Malacanang Palace. Under the constitution, the Police Constabulary, comprising 25% of the armed forces, will be disbanded. On Feb. 12, in an effort to undercut the influence of Marcos loyalists in the armed forces, Aquino announced that 462 colonels who had been promoted to that rank during the Marcos administration, would be demoted.

The armed forces are under investigation for the massacre at Mendiola Bridge Jan. 22, when Marines fired into a crowd of protesting farmers, killing 15, and for the attempted coup of Jan. 26. Current military handling of the insurgency, given the popular support for the NPA, will only exacerbate the problem. In mid-February, using Vietnam War-style tactics, troops killed 17 civilians in an NPA-dominated village in the Nueva Ezija region, only 90 miles north of Manila. The soldiers carried out the massacre in retaliation for the NPA's murder of an officer in the area. In Manila, the army was put on red alert, as the NPA threatened to blow up government installations and private homes in retaliation.

A Vietnam War-style counterinsurgency program is being put into place by Gen. Jack Singlaub (ret.), of the World Anti-Communist League, who has been in Manila continuously since September. Singlaub's attempt to set up death squad operations against the NPA was brought to a halt Feb. 21, when he was asked to leave the country.

A counterinsurgency program based on tactics similar to those carried out under the Operation Phoenix program in Vietnam, is guaranteed to backfire. The 6-7 million people supporting the NPA are those whose livelihood has been destroyed by four years of International Monetary Fund destruction of the Filipino economy, and for whom there is now "nothing to lose" by supporting the NPA.

Under conditions of economic collapse and near starvation in many areas of the country, the NPA recruits its popular support through a combination of terror and through the active encouragement of the Theology of Liberation clergy within the Philippines Catholic Church. On Feb. 19, the bodies of 46 people believed to have been executed by the NPA were uncovered in three mass graves and two septic tanks in the southern port city of Davao. Those murdered, believed to be as many as 68 people, were "uncooperative" with the NPA.

This level of violence has not cooled the Filipino clergy's sustenance of the NPA. That relationship between the NPA and the Theology of Liberation was the focus of attention for the first time in Manila, in a speech given Feb. 11 to the Makati Rotary Club by leading Manila businessman-political figure Vicente Puyat. "Church, Reds in Alliance against Republic of Philippines" was the front-page banner headline in the Feb. 11 *Manila Evening Post*, reporting on charges leveled by banker Vicente Puyat against the NPA and its protectors.

Puyat, son of one of the Philippines' most highly respected statesman, Gil Puyat, declared in a speech before the Makati businessman's Rotary's Club Feb. 10 that that section of the Catholic Church adhering to the Theology of Liberation was in an open alliance with the NPA and disaffected youth to destroy the Philippines as a republic and a nation. The Church protection of the NPA, Puyat noted, continues in the Philippines, despite the denunciation of the Theology of Liberation issued by Pope John Paul II in 1985.

A full 10% of the Catholic clergy in the Philippines has joined the NPA directly. Other priests and nuns are active in its numerous political fronts, including the National Democratic Front and the Bayan Party.

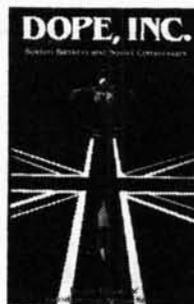
The NPA's representative in Europe, for example, Luis Jalandoni who is currently in Manila, is a priest who headed up the National Secretariat for Social Action of the Philippine Catholic Church, through which monies were funneled into radical operations. Jalandoni, like Communist Party founder José Ma Sison, is a member of a leading oligarchical family in the Philippines. In 1972, Jalandoni was a leading figure in the "National Convention of Philippine Priests, Inc." which announced its intention to "mobilize and organize our people in a well-planned program of protracted and disciplined struggle for liberation." In late 1972, Jalandoni and his clerical associates declared the formation of Christians for National Liberation and forged an open alliance with the Communist Party and its armed NPA. In the late 1970s, Jalandoni joined the NPA. From his post in Western Europe, Jalandoni has funneled money into the NPA from the World Council of Churches and the Social Democratic Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

These priests' clerical garb has not detracted from their ability to carry out violent action. According to confirmed reports from the Philippines, the godfather of the NPA's "Sparrow Unit"—its assassination squad—in Davao is Father Orlando B. Quintana.

Although the NPA was born out of the Theology of Liberation, Puyat pointed out, it is now controlled by foreign powers, and its leadership is under foreign control. Vietnamese special forces began training the NPA in Mindanao beginning in the spring of 1983, Puyat pointed out. Shortly thereafter, the Vietnamese distributed a 300-page terrorist handbook, printed in the Filipino language Tagalog, complete with illustrations. In December 1986, the Vietnamese also sent personnel to train the Manchakas tribe in Davao, which has been a key element of the NPA since 1968.

Weapons are being funneled into the NPA via Vietnam and the Japanese Communist Party. Aside from Jalandoni's exploits in Europe, Jose Ma Sison has been overseas for the last six months—on a fundraising tour taking him to Thailand, Australia, Japan, China and Iran.

The growth of the NPA in the last year indicates that the Aquino government as currently constituted is not prepared to deal with the insurgency. At best, the Aquino government is paralyzed by the pressures of the continuing oligarchical control over the economy and the preponderance of pro-NPA advisers around the President. NPA rehabilitation programs have come to nought, as monies have been allocated for the program but not disbursed. The campaign for the election for the congress, to take place in May, could become the arena in which new economic and counterinsurgency policies are debated. Until new policies come to the fore, the NPA will continue to hold the momentum of events on its side.



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