

# New People's Army takes offensive against Philippines government

by Linda de Hoyos

“The Reagan administration’s year-old gamble that Corazon Aquino could rally the Philippines against a growing communist-led insurgency better than Ferdinand Marcos appears to be paying off. President Aquino has not quelled the revolt, which a year ago was an urgent foreign policy problem for Washington. . . . But Mrs. Aquino has succeeded in throwing the guerrillas off balance, establishing herself in public opinion as a moderate interested in social justice. This has significantly slowed the momentum the rebels had been building up against the enfeebled, corrupt Marcos regime.”

This is the word from *Washington Post* correspondent in Manila Jim Hoagland, writing March 16. But to many it will be no surprise, that every proposition stated in the above paragraph is false. Within the last year, even through the 60-day cease-fire period of December-January, the New People’s Army, the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, has taken the offensive.

At the same point that Hoagland was writing, Max V. Soliven filed this story in the *Philippine Star* Feb. 27, under the headline “The Coming Fall of Bicol to the NPA.”

Soliven reported: “While our officials were celebrating on EDSA [the anniversary of the February Revolution] this week, events were taking place in southern Luzon. . . . A stark development unknown to Manilans, and unreported here, is that the Communist New People’s Army has seized virtual control of the Bicol provinces outside its major cities. The government and the military are simply helpless and ineffective. On the main highways, buses and other public transport are halted by NPA bands and any soldiers or military men aboard are dragged off—never to be seen again. The other passengers are so terrified, they never bother to make a ‘report’ about this at the next stop or at their final destination.

“A few days ago, a town in Sorsogon was raided by the NPA in broad daylight—at 2 o’clock in the afternoon. The police station and the municipal building were ransacked—with firearms, ammunition, and office equipment carted away. There were no casualties on the rebel side. The military arrived only after the rebels had left.

“What is chilling is that this exercise was repeated, with brazen impunity in a town barely 15 kilometers away from the capital city of Legaspi. . . . The town of Sto. Domingo is located on the main road along Legaspi Bay, sandwiched between two major population centers . . . where there are big military encampments.

“The boldness of the NPA marauders was highlighted by the fact that if the army of PC [Police Constabulary] had counterattacked in force, the guerrillas would have had no place to run. Their only point of withdrawal would have been up the bare and denuded slopes of Mayon Volcano. Yet, when the military got there belatedly, the NPA raiders had blended into the local population, as if they had vanished into thin air.

“The intrusion into Sto. Domingo, previously regarded as ‘impregnable,’ has sent a wave of panic through the Bicol region. It is now undisputed that the NPA ‘rule’ the countryside there. Candidates of all political persuasions have been rushing to make contact with the NPA regional command, attempting to cut a deal with them. Even a former senator has been seen going on his hands and knees to the Reds.”

## Civil war conditions

The official statistics of the civil war in the Philippines back up Soliven’s report. The current level of violence in the Philippines exceeds the levels of 1985, the last year of Fer-

dinand Marcos's rule, when the insurgency was at its highest peak. In 1985, there was an average of 11 incidents a day; in 1986, the level dropped down to an average of 8 incidents per day. In 1987, in the seven weeks since the end of the cease-fire, the number of incidents per day has climbed to 12.2. During the cease-fire itself, the rate was 2 incidents per day. By the end of February, there were 8 incidents a day, with 12.2 incidents a day registered now. There is no indication that the level of violence will subside.

A total of 389 Filipinos has been reported slain since the end of the cease-fire on Feb. 10. This includes 79 soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), 23 police, 26 paramilitary, 10 government officials, and 100 civilians. A total of 151 NPA rebels have been reported killed. Out of the total of 389 incidents, the NPA initiated 150.

The level of fighting has now created floods of "refugees" in the Philippines. In late February, some 20,000 people in the three provinces of Maguindano, Sultan Kudarat, and Cotabato in Mindanao have fled their homes and evacuated to different urban centers, to escape the fighting. Thousands have fled into Davao City. Evacuees said they feared the NPA would use them as human "shields" against the government troops. In mid-March, another 30 families left their homes in Burawan, Leyte, after the NPA enforced "kangaroo courts" in their areas. The refugees reported that the NPA concocted criminal charges against those who opposed it, with the sentence of summary execution by the underground. In Camarines Sur, the military reports that every barangay (district) is either influenced or infiltrated by the NPA. An "influenced" barangay, explained a military spokesman, is

## The career of 'Kumander S.'

*Our special correspondent in Manila last month had the opportunity to travel to Mindanao, where he interviewed "Kumander S.," formerly of the New People's Army. As our correspondent tells his story:*

Kumander S. was born in 1960. He attended the Harvardian Colleges in the city of Davao. In 1977 (when he was 17 years old and in his fourth year of high school), he was recruited to the NPA. By and large his teachers were graduates of the University of the Philippines. Most prominent among them was Leo Garcia (alias "Kumander Pikot"), who conducted pro-leftist "teach-ins" right in the classroom. Teach-ins were based on articles promoting the Theology of Liberation, which had been xeroxed and passed out to the students. The teach-ins also featured the "basic party course"—an eclectic menage of Maoist ideology, economics, and guerrilla warfare.

Once recruited to the NPA, Kumander S. was assigned to FGU (Front Guerrilla Unit), Davao Province. FGU Davao was originally organized in Tagum, capital of Davao, by parish priest Father Birondo. Father Birondo has two brothers. The elder, Alex, was appointed in 1986 by Aquino's presidential secretary Joker Arroyo to a top post in the labor ministry; the younger to a top post in the successor organization to Imelda Marcos's Ministry of Human Settlements.

According to Kumander S., Davao City was also the point of origin of the "Sparrow units"—NPA assassina-

tion squads. These units were organized by Rolando Birondo Quintara, first cousin of Father Birondo.

In March-April 1986, NPA rebels in Mindanao received a letter from Alex Birondo of the Labor Ministry, instructing them that this was the right time to come to Manila, but specifying that only those organized into Sparrow units were wanted.

Northern Mindanao is the center of the Philippine wood and mining industries. The logging and mining are done in areas largely controlled by the NPA, who are financing their operations from taxation of logging and mining companies. Any company that does not do business with the NPA must retain a sizable private security force to protect its facilities and personnel.

Since the spring of 1983, the NPA in Mindanao has been receiving training and weapons from three trainers who are either Vietnamese or channeled through Vietnam. These trainers speak Tagalog and brought with them Tagalog manuals. This, however, caused some difficulties because of the pronounced southern Visayan dialect.

In December 1986, 10 more trainers arrived, specifically to give instruction to hard-core NPA units recruited from among the Manchacas mountain tribe. The Manchacas were the first NPA hard-core fighters, trained since 1968 by NPA founder Jose Maria Sison and Rodolfo Salas ("Kumander Bilog"), the latter now in jail in Manila.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the National Democratic Front (NDF) with many members from the Catholic clergy, and the New People's Army, the Kumander reports, operate as three parallel organizations. They do not interact directly, but all three are controlled and deployed by the CPP Central Committee. The CPP's open arm, now certified from the May-August national elections, is the Partido ng Bayan.

already under the shadow of the NPA government, which includes the forced collection of "taxes" which are then used to fund NPA operations.

According to the Center for Strategic Studies in Manila, the NPA is supported by 6.7 million out of the 54 million Filipinos—or 25% of the voting-age population. It controls 20% of the territory of the Philippines. Although this control is exerted most strongly in areas of the countryside, in Metro-Manila, the NPA has substantial infiltration in some 159 labor unions, 107 schools, and 98 squatter areas.

Many of the NPA's inroads into the cities took place during the cease-fire, when unarmed NPA cadre were permitted into urban areas. During the cease-fire period in Cebu City, for example, the NPA collected 4 million pesos (U.S.\$200,000) in taxes from local businessmen. Simultaneously, the NPA prepared for its armed offensive upon the cessation of the cease-fire, which is not confined to certain areas, but is being waged in every region. When the cease-fire ended, the NPA withdrew its regular cadre from the cities, leaving behind armed "Sparrow Units"—assassination squads.

### **NPA strategy**

The NPA's nationwide armed offensive emerged immediately upon the end of the 60-day cease-fire Feb. 10. According to documents captured by the Armed Forces, the NPA is operating under a nine-month plan, called Operation Jupiter, which orders NPA cadre to carry out raids on military installations, assassinations, and forced recruitment and collection of taxes in areas penetrated by the guerrillas.

On March 6, Carolina Malay Ocampo, chief of staff of the National Democratic Front "peace panel," told Kyodo news that the NPA was in the process of setting up provisional governments on the islands of Luzon, Cebu, Negros, Panay, and Mindanao, in preparation for the establishment of a national NPA provisional government. This decision, she said, had been made in the first quarter of 1986—before talks for a cease-fire ever began. "We have never concentrated on just one option," Ocampo, wife of the NDF negotiator, explained. "You have to develop several options at a time and your . . . choice is that one where you exercise the most initiative."

Writing in the Feb. 22 *Malaya*, Ocampo indicated that conditions of dual power already exist in certain areas of the Philippines: "Out here in the areas where the NDF exercises political authority in various degrees, the future has already begun to take shape. . . . The NDF councils and committees are fast being set up at the regional, municipal, and community levels. There is a provisional national council, headed by Andres Macias, where 12 member organizations are represented. Decisions are reached by consensus. . . ." Ocampo claimed that, in areas under NDF control, "Land rent has been reduced to affordable levels, farm wages have been raised . . . local money lenders have been obliged to charge lower interest rates."

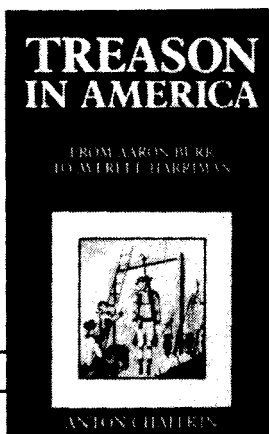
Ocampo asserted in her press conference that the NPA would not engage in regional negotiations, viewing this as divide and conquer tactics, and that the NPA would not (officially at least) participate in May congressional elections. Ocampo also confirmed the presence of armed "partisans" in Metro-Manila. These "Sparrow unit" cadre operate under a plan called "Scorpio Force," whose objective is to kill political targets, create chaos, and discredit the AFP and police through the use of political terror. Since the cease-fire, 20 police or military officers have been murdered on the streets of Manila.

Hoagland's "assessment" of Aquino's achievements *vis-à-vis* the NPA over the last year ignores the reality and the information that has surely been at his disposal. Even Armed Forces Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos, who played a key role in bringing Aquino to power and is known for his close links to the U.S. embassy, has issued dire warnings of the growing threat. On the anniversary of the "February Revolution," Ramos warned against belief in the idea that "people power will solve the insurgency problem" and that the "communists will eventually and voluntarily lay down their arms and participate with the people in the task of nation-building. This is a dangerous half-truth believed by many people, including some government authorities who do not really understand the insurgency problem. It is a dangerous half-truth, an illusion in fact, that carries seeds of destruction."

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