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THESIS

**AN ASSESSMENT OF PHILIPPINE COUNTERINSURGENCY
STRATEGIES: WHY HAS COMMUNIST INSURGENCY
CONTINUED TO EXIST IN THE PHILIPPINES?**

by

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June 2021

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WHY HAS COMMUNIST INSURGENCY CONTINUED
TO EXIST IN THE PHILIPPINES?**

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ABSTRACT

After more than five decades and despite several successes, the Philippines is still fighting a communist insurgency within its country. This study compared and analyzed four counterinsurgency campaign plans implemented by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) after the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution: Oplan Lambat Bitag during the Corazon Aquino and Ramos administrations, Oplan Bantay-Laya during the Arroyo administration, the Internal Peace and Security Plan Bayanihan during the Benigno Aquino III administration, and the current Development Support and Security Plan Kapayapaan led by the Duterte administration. This study found that inadequate sustainment capability, lack of support from government institutions, and challenges to political leadership constitute the primary factors that have hindered the AFP campaigns. The current government recognizes these problems and has instituted several initiatives to overcome them, including a Community Support Program implemented by the AFP that increases intra-governmental collaboration, an enhanced partnership with civil society, and the creation of a national task force to help consolidate the diverse efforts of multiple national agencies, local government units, and civil society to improve security, good governance, and economic conditions and opportunities. Building on these, this thesis recommends further improvements to strengthen support for the current campaign and areas for future study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	LITERATURE REVIEW	2
B.	RESEARCH DESIGN	6
C.	THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	7
II.	UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY THREAT	9
A.	<i>PARTIDO KOMUNISTA NG PILIPINAS</i> AND THE HUK REBELLION.....	10
B.	COMMUNIST RE-EMERGENCE.....	10
C.	CPP-NPA OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS.....	12
	1. Objectives.....	13
	2. Protracted People’s War: CPP-NPA’s Three-Stage Insurgency Strategy	13
	3. Three Main Weapons	14
D.	CPP-NPA STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, AND LEADERSHIP	16
	1. Structure and Organization	16
	2. Trends and Strength	21
	3. Leadership	23
III.	THE CAMPAIGNS AND THEIR RESULTS.....	27
A.	<i>OPLAN LAMBAT BITAG</i> (NET TRAP).....	28
	1. Campaign Objectives and Strategies	29
	2. Operational Accomplishments.....	29
	3. External Support.....	31
B.	<i>OPLAN BANTAY-LAYA</i> (GUARDING FREEDOM).....	32
	1. Campaign Objectives and Strategies	33
	2. Operational Accomplishments.....	33
	3. External Support.....	35
C.	INTERNAL PEACE AND SECURITY PLAN—IPSP <i>BAYANIHAN</i> (CIVIC UNITY).....	36
	1. Campaign Objectives and Strategies	38
	2. Operational Accomplishments.....	38
	3. External Support.....	39
D.	CONCLUSION	40

IV.	ANALYZING THE CAMPAIGNS: WHY THE CPP-NPA HAS NOT YET BEEN DEFEATED.....	43
A.	SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.....	43
	1. <i>Oplan Lambat Bitag</i> (Net Trap)	44
	2. <i>Oplan Bantay Laya</i> (Guarding Freedom).....	46
	3. Internal Peace and Security Plan—IPSP <i>Bayanihan</i> (Civic Unity)	49
B.	FACTORS THAT HINDERED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFP CAMPAIGNS.....	50
	1. Inadequate Sustainment Capability	51
	2. Lack of Support from Government Institutions	52
	3. Challenges to Political Leadership	54
C.	CONCLUSION	56
V.	DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AND SECURITY PLAN— DSSP KAPAYAPAAAN (PEACE).....	57
A.	OVERVIEW OF DSSP KAPAYAPAAAN	57
	Campaign Objectives and Strategies	58
B.	NEW AFP-LED INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN	61
	1. Community Support Program.....	61
	2. Enhanced Cooperation with Government Agencies and Civil Society	64
	3. National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.....	65
C.	CAMPAIGN COMPARISON	67
	1. Addressing Inadequate Sustainment Capability	67
	2. Lack of Support from Government Institutions	69
	3. Challenges to Political Leadership	70
D.	CONCLUSION	71
VI.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	73
A.	MAJOR FINDINGS	73
	1. Reasons for the Communist Insurgency’s Re-emergence and Sustainment.....	74
	2. Why the CPP-NPA Has Not Yet Been Defeated	74
B.	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	76
	1. Addressing the Inadequate Sustainment Capability	76
	2. Addressing Lack of Government Institution Support and Lack of Civil Society Support	78

3.	Addressing Challenges with Political and Military Leadership	79
C.	FUTURE STUDIES	79
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	81
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	89

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	CPP-NPA-NDF Organizational Structure.	18
Figure 2.	Typical Regional Party Committee Organizational Structure.	19
Figure 3.	Regional Operational Commands of the NPA.....	20
Figure 4.	NPA Resources from 1981 to 2019, Relative to Major Events.	22
Figure 5.	Trend in CPP-NPA Capabilities (1989–1998).....	30
Figure 6.	Trend in CPP-NPA Capabilities (2001–2010).....	34
Figure 7.	Trend in CPP-NPA Capabilities (2011–2016).....	39
Figure 8.	Development-Governance-Security Framework.	59
Figure 9.	Community Support Team (CST) Composition.	62

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defense Force
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
AFPSOCOM	Armed Forces of the Philippines Special Operations Command
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BIN	Barangay Intelligence Network
C-H-C-D	Clear-Hold-Consolidate-Develop
CMO	Civil-Military Operations
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CSP	Community Support Program
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CST	Community Support Teams
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
DND	Department of National Defense
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
DSSP	Development Support and Security Plan
EASTMINCOM	Eastern Mindanao Command
EDCA	Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement
EU	European Union
FC	[Communist] Front Committees
GF	Guerilla Fronts
GWOT	Global War on Terror
ID	[Communist] International Department
IFC	[Communist] International Finance Commission
IPSP	Internal Peace and Security Plan
ISO	Internal Security Operations
ITDS	Integrated Territorial Defense System
LGU	Local Government Unit
NDF	National Democratic Front
NED	[Communist] National Education Department
NFC	[Communist] National Finance Commission

NMC	[Communist] National Military Commission
NOD	[Communist] National Organizational Department
NPA	New People's Army
NTF-ELCAC	National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict
NUC	[Communist] National Unification Commission
NUFC	[Communist] National United Front Commission
PDT	Peace and Development Team
PO	People's Organization
POLITBORO	Political Bureau
PNP	Philippine National Police
PPW	Protracted People's War
PRWC	Philippine Revolution Web Central
RCSP	Retooled Community Support Program
ROC	Regional Operational Commands
RPC	Regional Party Committees
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOFA	Status-of-Forces Agreement
SOLCOM	Southern Luzon Command
SOT	Special Operation Team
SPSGs	Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups
UC	Unified Command
UGMO	Underground Mass Organization
VFA	Visiting Forces Agreement
WNA	Whole-of-Nation Approach

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis sheds light on why communist insurgency has continued to exist in the Philippines. The Philippines is not new to facing insurgency. Indeed, its people have been fighting and participating in insurgency since the Spanish colonization of the country. One of the most notable Philippine counterinsurgency successes occurred during the time of President Ramon Magsaysay when his administration defeated the *Hukbalahap* insurgents in 1955.¹ Nevertheless, communist insurgents reemerged in the late 1960s, and the Philippines has been fighting them ever since. Subsequent presidential administrations have implemented various counterinsurgency strategies to address this insurgency problem as well as the concurrent Moro-Muslim insurgencies. Although there have been notable successes, the problem of insurgencies remains.

Many counterinsurgency experts believe that to develop an effective counterinsurgency strategy, governments must first identify their own strengths and weaknesses in facing their adversaries. This study compares and analyzes four counterinsurgency campaign plans implemented by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) after the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution: *Oplan Lambat Bitag* (Net Trap) during the Corazon Aquino and Ramos administrations, *Oplan Bantay-Laya* (Guarding Freedom) during the Arroyo administration, the Internal Peace and Security Plan *Bayanihan* (Civic Unity) during the Benigno Aquino III administration, and the current Development Support and Security Plan *Kapayapaan* (Peace) led by the Duterte administration. This study found that inadequate sustainment capability, lack of support from government institutions, and challenges to political leadership constitute the primary factors that have hindered the AFP campaigns.

The results of this study help us understand the underlying reasons why the communist insurgency has continued to exist in the Philippines, despite the fall of the Soviet Union, China's move to a hybrid economy, and the demise of nearly all other

¹ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, ST-015 (Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City: Philippine Army, 2005), 2-2.

communist insurgencies around the world. Focusing on the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), this thesis also develops recommendations for improving and developing an effective and efficient implementation of the military's holistic counterinsurgency strategy.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Philippines has been fighting Communist insurgents since the 1950s. Although there have been several successes, the insurgency problem remains, fueled especially by the emergence of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in December 1968 and the formation of the New People's Army (NPA) in March 1969.² To come up with a sound and effective counterinsurgency strategy, one must understand the different dynamics of insurgency warfare, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of one's own government, military, and society. In the case of the Philippines, communist insurgents have capitalized on societal gaps, such as the stark divide between rich and poor, the power of some family clans at the expense of many, and the perceived government inactions on the delivery of basic social services to the populace. Effective counterinsurgency strategies integrate government actions to address these gaps while also mounting sound efforts in intelligence gathering and defeating militants.

There is a vast literature on insurgency, counterinsurgency, and communist insurgencies. These works present several arguments on the reasons why insurgency trends rise, decline, and then resurge over decades. Identifying the root causes of the problem, political leadership, and military actions are the common points of discussion in the different literature available.

In his book, *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice*, author David Galula seeks to provide a guide for counterinsurgents as useful as that which Mao Tse Tung provided for the revolutionary actor.³ Galula described four laws for counterinsurgency

² Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, PAM 2-00011 (Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City: Philippine Army, 2005), 2-8.

³ David Galula, *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: F.A. Praeger, 1964), xii.

and emphasized the importance of the popular support for an effective counterinsurgency strategy. The first law is that public support is paramount in any counterinsurgency campaign. Second, support of the masses can be obtained with the help of an active friendly minority. Third, popular support may be lost if not properly, humanely, and effectively protected. Fourth, right action, such as building infrastructure and establishing long-term relationships with the populace, and adequate resources are needed in key areas.⁴

Sir Robert Thompson, in his book *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*, discussed the basic principles of counterinsurgency and described how these principles were applied in Malaya and Vietnam.⁵ The first principle states that the government should have a clear political aim, not just a military aim. Second, the government should function within the law. Third, the government should have an overall plan with identified methods for carrying out that plan. Fourth, the government should prioritize defeating political subversion rather than the guerillas. Last, in the guerilla phase of a campaign, the government should secure its base area first. Thompson further argued the importance of seizing the initiative from the insurgents for a successful counterinsurgency strategy.

In his book, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, author Benedict Kerkylit offered several explanations as to how the Huk Rebellion emerged and grew.⁶ First is that the traditional patron-client relationship between the landlords and peasants had broken, with the landlords not sufficiently serving the well-being of their clients. Second, the neglect of basic political issues such as justice, human rights, and an acceptable level of distribution of wealth and resources contributed to the problem. Third, with the exception of the Ferdinand Marcos regime in the 1960s, government leaders did not cause the rebellion; they only shaped it. Last, class antagonism heightened and prolonged the struggle.

⁴ Galula, 55–59.

⁵ Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 1st ed. (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1966).

⁶ Benedict Kerkylit, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1977).

Unlike the works just described, *Counterinsurgency in Paradise: Seven Decades of Civil War in the Philippines*, by Aaron Morris, was the first to cover the military history of the Philippines and explore how the Armed Forces of the Philippines has had to adapt to different insurgency movements in the country.⁷ It takes a deeper look into how the AFP transformed from a conventional military fighting an external threat during World War II to develop elite forces and other means necessary to suppress revolts and address the evolving internal threats to the integrity of the state. Morris argued that political solutions are the only viable route to defeating the major separatist and insurgent groups because of the AFP's inability to break the back of insurgencies.

Taking a similar perspective, in his books *The Accidental Guerilla* and *Counterinsurgency*, David Kilcullen uses three 21st-century battles to explain why insurgency occurs. In *The Accidental Guerilla*, he argued that conventional warfare has repeatedly failed to produce constructive results in complex, multisided conflicts such as the war in Iraq.⁸ Kilcullen recommended five ideas that the United States should consider to adapt to the changing paradigm of conflict. First is the need for a new lexicon that will describe the new threats. Second is the need to have a grand strategy that can be sustained by the people, administration, and key allies and partners. Third, imbalance in government capability, heavily skewed toward military might at the expense of socio-economic and political approaches, must be remedied. Fourth, new strategic services are needed that would help identify and prioritize interagency efforts. Fifth is the need to develop a capacity for strategic information warfare that integrates interagency efforts and develops a national-level strategic information campaign.

In *Counterinsurgency*, Kilcullen asserted that every counterinsurgency operation should be tailored to the operational environment and the populace.⁹ He also argued for the importance of accounting for the cultural and governmental aspects that gave rise to

⁷ Aaron Morris, *Counterinsurgency in Paradise: Seven Decades of Civil War in the Philippines* (West Midlands, England: Helion & Company Limited, 2016).

⁸ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

insurgency, which he believes are unique to each situation. Authors Lawrence Cline and Paul Schemella, in *The Future of Counterinsurgency*, echo several of Kilcullen's points. They explain that insurgencies and other forms of internal security problems often become more complex and difficult to manage over time and that it is critical to understand the lessons from the different counterinsurgency strategies employed, both more broadly and in each particular case.¹⁰

Several books from the Philippines also provide insight for this study. Author Victor Corpus in his book, *Silent War*, presented an overview of the tactics of communist insurgents and recommended a holistic Philippine counterinsurgency strategy.¹¹ In fact, the ideas in his book influenced the reorientation of the Philippine counterinsurgency effort in the late 1980s and early 1990s, influencing efforts from 1989 to 1996. Both Corpus and Morris agree on the need for the AFP to develop and evolve to address the insurgents in the country. Morris, however, believes that a political solution is more viable than a military one while Corpus argues for the need to have a holistic counterinsurgency strategy that integrates government and military actions. Meanwhile, Soliman M. Santos Jr., Paz Verdades M. Santos et al., authors of the book *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Group and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, emphasized the importance of the domestic political context, which plays a significant role in an effective counterinsurgency strategy.¹²

Overall, the various literature available has emphasized the importance of integrating actions of the government, winning and maintaining popular support, and providing consistent and capable leadership to achieve a successful counterinsurgency strategy.

¹⁰ Lawrence Cline and Paul Schemella, *The Future of Counterinsurgency Contemporary Debates in Internal Security Strategy* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO LLC, 2015).

¹¹ Victor N. Corpus, *Silent War* (Quezon City, Philippines: VNC Enterprises, 1989).

¹² Soliman M. Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines* (Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2010).

B. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis uses the case study method to better understand the intransigence of the communist insurgency in the Philippines. It focuses on the strategies, tactics, and resources of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in combating the communist insurgency in the Philippines to assess the different factors that affect these strategies and recommend how the AFP can improve its strategies to defeat the communist insurgents.

Specifically, this study compares and analyzes four campaign plans that were implemented by the AFP after the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution: first, the *Oplan Lambat Bitag* (Net Trap) that was implemented by the AFP during the Corazon Aquino and Fidel V. Ramos administrations (1989–1996); second, *Oplan Bantay-Laya* (Guarding Freedom) during the Arroyo administration (2001–2010); third, the Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP) *Bayanihan* (Civic Unity) during the Benigno Aquino III administration (2010–2016); and fourth, the Development Support and Security Plan (DSSP) *Kapayapaan* (Peace) that is currently being implemented by the AFP under the Duterte administration. This study uses data available from the AFP, independent reports and assessments about the counterinsurgency operations in the Philippines from think tanks and nongovernmental organizations, books and theses related to the Philippine communist counterinsurgency, government reports from the Philippines and United States, and the author's experience as a military officer in the AFP.

In analyzing the four AFP campaign plans, this thesis explores the different factors that affect their implementation and effectiveness. First, it examines the socio-political situations at the time of the implementation of the campaign. Second, it analyzes and compares the different operational accomplishments in terms of enemy neutralized, firearms recovered, areas recovered, and underground mass organizations co-opted. Third, this study examines external involvement in terms of support given to the AFP in the implementation of the campaign. Lastly, this thesis compares and analyzes leadership factors in terms of the political and military leaders who were setting and implementing the campaigns. While this may not cover all the factors affecting the counterinsurgency strategy in the Philippines, better understanding these factors can help us know why the

communist insurgency continues to exist in the Philippines and develop recommendations as to how the AFP can improve its counterinsurgency strategy.

C. THESIS OVERVIEW AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study is organized into six chapters to provide readers with a clear understanding of the communist insurgency and the efforts of the AFP to defeat it. Chapter I offers a brief background of the study and the main research question it endeavors to answer. It also explains why this question is significant and discusses the relevant literature available and the research methodology used in the study. Chapter II provides the reader with a brief history of the communist insurgency, including its organization, strength, leadership, and strategies used against the Philippine government. This study then focuses on four campaigns implemented by the AFP. Chapter III analyzes and compares the first three campaign plans by looking at each campaign's objectives and strategies, its operational accomplishments, and the external support that each campaign received. Chapter IV focuses on the various factors that hampered the implementation of the AFP's campaigns. In turn, Chapter V compares the three previous campaigns to the current campaign, the DSSP *Kapayapaan*. Finally, Chapter VI brings these analyses together, presents conclusions, and provides recommendations for policy and further research.

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II. UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY THREAT

The Philippine government has been fighting two long-running insurgencies: a Moro-Muslim conflict since the early 1970s and a communist struggle since the 1950s. The Philippine communist insurgency is the longest-running communist insurgency in Asia.¹³ Communist ideology was first introduced to the Philippines in the 1930s, drawing support from farmers in Central Luzon and workers and disgruntled elites in Manila.¹⁴ Since then, two communist parties have organized in the country. First came the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP), founded by Crisanto Evangelista in the 1930s, which was heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology; it and the associated Huks were defeated in the 1950s.¹⁵ The second, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), led by Jose Maria Sison, broke away from the PKP, looked to Maoist ideology, and formally reestablished a communist insurgency in the late 1960s.

This chapter focuses on the CPP and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), by first tracing their roots and the causes of their emergence. Political and economic inequality and abuses by government security forces and the elites represent the main reasons why the communist insurgency re-emerged in the country.¹⁶ Second, this chapter describes the CPP-NPA's objectives, which were to replace the Philippines' political and socio-economic systems with those based on communist principles and structures, along with their protracted people's-war strategy. Lastly, the chapter discusses the CPP-NPA's organization, structure, and leadership, which have been important for its continued existence.

¹³ "Philippines' Communist Rebellion Is Asia's Longest-Running Insurgency," *South China Morning Post*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3027414/explained-philippines-communist-rebellion-asias-longest-running>.

¹⁴ Ricardo C. Morales, "Perpetual War: The Philippine Insurgencies" (Master's thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2003), 19.

¹⁵ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, 2-2 and 2-4.

¹⁶ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, ST-015 (Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City: Philippine Army, 2005), 2-5.

A. ***PARTIDO KOMUNISTA NG PILIPINAS AND THE HUK REBELLION***

The first Philippine communist insurgency traces its roots to an affinity with communist Russia. Crisanto Evangelista, a labor leader and former member of the Nacionalista Party [Nationalist Party], led the establishment of the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) [Communist Party of the Philippines] on November 7, 1930.¹⁷ As part of their activities, the PKP conducted labor organizing and boycotted the electoral process.¹⁸ Since its founding, the group also organized a guerilla force against U.S. colonialism (until independence in 1946), Japanese colonialism (1941–1945), and the Filipino elites.¹⁹ During the Japanese invasion, the PKP merged with the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon*, or People’s Army, more popularly known as the *Hukbalahap*, or Huks, against the Japanese. After World War II, still well-equipped and organized, the PKP and the Huks continued to fight, this time against the Philippine government.

The Huk Rebellion was considered the first organized rebellion against the newly established Philippine government and lasted from 1946 to the mid-1950s.²⁰ To quell the rebellion, the government first launched a series of counterinsurgency campaigns that emphasized military campaigns to destroy the armed insurgents. By the 1950s, the government, then under President Ramon Magsaysay, implemented the strategic concept “all out friendship-all out force” to arrest the growing revolutionary threat.²¹ One of its key features was mass resettlement of landless tenant farmers to Mindanao. With the United States’ help, Magsaysay’s campaign broke the backbone of the PKP and its armed wing.

B. **COMMUNIST RE-EMERGENCE**

In his book, *The Red Revolution*, author Gregg Jones described the Philippine communist insurgency as a result of “classical third-world fusion of peasant unrest and

¹⁷ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–4.

¹⁸ Philippine Army, 2–5.

¹⁹ Philippine Army, 2–5.

²⁰ Morales, “Perpetual War: The Philippine Insurgencies,” 19.

²¹ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–7.

nationalism.”²² Jones primarily attributed the communist insurgency’s re-emergence in the Philippines to the different global forces that were at work during the 1960s, including the war in Vietnam, the political radicalism that was sweeping college campuses in different parts of the world, and the cultural revolution in China. He further mentioned corruption in the government, abuses by state forces, and increasing poverty as among the primary contributors to the spread of communist insurgency in the country.

The communist insurgency in the Philippines formally re-emerged in the late 1960s as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) under the leadership of Jose Maria Sison. The reestablishment of the CPP took place in the second week of January 1968, when the party congress was convened, but the founding members decided to mark its organization as December 26, 1968, to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Mao Zedong’s birthday.²³ The 15 founding members were from lower- and middle-class society: seven were students, three were workers/laborers, and five were professionals.²⁴ Indicative of their weak start, only 12 members actually showed up to formally establish the CPP.²⁵

Realizing the need to create a people’s army to launch an armed struggle, and believing armed struggle was necessary to realize the transformation of Philippine society, Sison met with Bernabe Buscayno, who commanded some of the remnants of the Huks operating in Central Luzon.²⁶ The meeting resulted in the establishment of the NPA, the CPP’s armed wing, on March 29, 1969, with Bernabe Buscayno as its founding leader.²⁷ With only 60 combatants and 35 rifles, the CPP-NPA was first organized and based in the

²² Gregg Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press Inc., 1989), 5.

²³ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–8; Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement*, 17.

²⁴ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–8.

²⁵ Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement*, 18–19.

²⁶ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–9.

²⁷ Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 261.

small city of Capas on the Philippines' largest island, Luzon.²⁸ While engagement with government forces was unavoidable, the CPP-NPA avoided unnecessary engagement with government forces; they instead focused on conducting propaganda campaigns and organizing work to strengthen the support of the masses and the group's growth.²⁹ This newer manifestation of Philippine communist insurgents proudly waged an indigenous revolution without international aid. Although China gave a token amount of aid in the early stages, it was quickly cut off, because China wanted improved relations with the Philippines, thus leaving the communist insurgents to fend for themselves.³⁰

C. CPP-NPA OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND TACTICS

Unlike its predecessor, the PKP, which used the Russian model for its revolutionary struggle, the CPP followed Mao Zedong's model for armed revolution. The lessons learned from the failures and shortcomings of the PKP have greatly influenced the CPP-NPA, particularly its leader, Jose Maria Sison, and compelled him to further study Philippine society.³¹ He identified three conditions within the Philippine society that could be exploited to further the revolutionary situation in the country: "the contradiction between the Filipino nation and imperialism, contradiction between the great masses of the people and feudalism, and the contradiction between the people's interest and the present government acting on behalf of U.S. imperialism and the feudal landlords."³² These conditions reflected the CPP's ongoing grievances. Their primary grievances are economic exploitation by international business interests, economic exploitation by landed elite families, and political exploitation by the same elite families.

This analysis led the CPP to adopt three basic concepts in carrying out the revolution: first to launch a protracted people's war, second to establish guerilla bases in

²⁸ Mapping Militant Organizations, "MMP: Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army," Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, accessed April 29, 2021, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/communist-party-philippines-new-peoples-army>.

²⁹ Mapping Militant Organizations.

³⁰ Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement*, 8–9.

³¹ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 3–15.

³² Philippine Army, 3–16.

the countryside, and lastly to establish a united front.³³ The United Front, as conceived by Mao Zedong, would utilize organizing and propaganda efforts to mobilize the masses against the government.³⁴

1. Objectives

The CPP-NPA has two primary objectives: to seize political power through armed and legal struggle and to supplant the “country’s democratic form of government with communist-party rule.”³⁵ To achieve this, the CPP-NPA has divided its strategies into two categories: first, a general strategy that pertains to war as a whole; and second, a specific strategy that focuses on counter-campaigns within a specific guerilla front or base area.³⁶

2. Protracted People’s War: CPP-NPA’s Three-Stage Insurgency Strategy

The lessons learned from the premature shift to conventional operations by the Huks, led the CPP-NPA to realize the importance of the protracted nature of their struggle.³⁷ When the CPP-NPA started the insurgency in 1969, the balance of forces was heavily against its favor and, as such, for the CPP-NPA, the most important factor to measure insurgency success was to view the revolution as a stage-by-stage process.³⁸ The CPP has looked upon Mao Zedong’s three-stage strategy of protracted war as their path to victory and adopted it meticulously. In his book, *Silent War*, Victor Corpus discussed the Strategy of Protracted People’s War (PPW) being divided into three major stages: Strategic Defensive, Strategic Stalemate, and Strategic Offensive.³⁹ For the CPP-NPA, the Strategic Defensive stage is their initial stage of the protracted war and is a critical period for “party

³³ Philippine Army, 3–18.

³⁴ Philippine Army, 3–19.

³⁵ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, 3–7.

³⁶ Corpus, *Silent War*, 25.

³⁷ Alvin H. Bernstein and Armando B. Heredia, “Communist Insurgency in the Philippines,” *Comparative Strategy* 8, no. 3 (January 1, 1989): 281, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495938908402784>.

³⁸ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, 3–9.

³⁹ Corpus, *Silent War*, 27.

building, army building, base building, and the organization of the united front.”⁴⁰ According to Corpus, during this stage, the CPP-NPA believes that they are on the defensive since their strength is small while the government forces are relatively big. They see their forces and base areas as vulnerable against government forces, which they believe are on the offensive against them.

Strategic Stalemate is the second stage of PPW as described by Corpus. This stage is achieved when CPP-NPA forces are able to gather and organize forces that are able to achieve relative parity with government forces, at least in areas they seek to hold.⁴¹ According to Corpus, this stage does not mean that insurgent forces should be at par or equal with that of the government forces. Instead, the insurgents believe that only a portion of the government forces are actually engaged in counterinsurgency operations.⁴² Corpus further explained that for this stage to be attained, more and more government forces are tied down to defend towns, vital government functions, and private installations.

According to Victor Corpus, the last stage of the protracted war is the Strategic Offensive. He stated that this is achieved when the balance of forces reverses.⁴³ The CPP-NPA forces are capable of launching offensive campaigns against government forces, while the government forces are forced to defend key areas and facilities such as towns, cities, and military installations. At this stage, Corpus further explained, the insurgents believe that it is just a matter of time before the regime falls.

3. Three Main Weapons

To attain their objectives, the CPP uses three main weapons, which is in line with Mao Zedong’s principles: the party, which provides the brains and leadership for the struggle; an army, which provides a military force to implement the party’s plans; and a united front, acting as a shield to defend the party against its adversaries.⁴⁴ The CPP acts

⁴⁰ Corpus, 27.

⁴¹ Corpus, 29.

⁴² Corpus, 29.

⁴³ Corpus, 30.

⁴⁴ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 3–20.

as the party, the force that advances the communist cause.⁴⁵ It should comprise a “highly disciplined group of professional revolutionaries dedicated to the overthrow of government and the existing social system.”⁴⁶ The CPP provides the necessary leadership and guidance to direct the actions of the NPA in the countryside and the United Front in urban areas.

The New People’s Army, known as the NPA, acts as the principal military force of the party and is tasked with waging and eventually winning armed struggle against government forces, which it primarily defines as military forces. To achieve its task, the NPA needs to be both an ideological force engaged in political struggle under the CPP and a peasant-based guerilla army.⁴⁷ As an ideological force, the NPA acts as the private army of the CPP, providing the party with the necessary political support, such as propaganda and organizing work in the countryside.⁴⁸

As a guerilla army, the NPA is organized and trained to confront a larger and better-equipped counterinsurgency force.⁴⁹ It utilizes four echelons of fighting units to implement PPW.⁵⁰ First is the Regular Mobile Force, which has the primary function of defending its guerilla bases and launching relatively large tactical offensives against government forces. Second is the Guerilla Forces, which are tasked to defend the broader guerilla zones and act as an advance party of the regular mobile force in targeted areas. The third echelon consists of the Militia and Self-defense Corps, which are mostly composed of able-bodied men from the local *barrios* or villages. Their primary function is to be the eyes and ears of the regular mobile force against government forces and informants. These *barrio* members also act as guides to the regular mobile force.

Following Mao’s concept, the United Front is conceived as a social movement which uses the masses to unleash its energy against the government. The United Front is

⁴⁵ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, 3–6.

⁴⁶ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 3–20.

⁴⁷ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, 6–2.

⁴⁸ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 3–21.

⁴⁹ Philippine Army, 3–21.

⁵⁰ Philippine Army, *Aspect of Insurgency*, 6–2.

the CPP's organizational effort to mobilize, unite, and restructure the basic social classes in Philippine society against the government.⁵¹ The United Front, led by political cadres of the CPP, is tasked with organizing the different sectors of society, such as farmers, workers, women, youth, and labor, into a well-structured mass organization to create a multiplier effect in urban areas.

These mass organizations are used by the CPP-NPA to achieve four objectives: first, the CPP-NPA creates organizations that seek to neutralize organizations and institutions that support the government; second, it legitimizes the insurgent causes by demonstrating popular support and claiming to fight for members' interests; third, it facilitates information and intelligence gathering in urban areas that is then used for propaganda campaigns; and fourth, it generates mass support for anti-government protests and provides a pool of recruits for the CPP and the NPA.⁵² The CPP's National United Front has a formal structure called the National Democratic Front (NDF). It is comparable to the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam, which led the insurgency during the Vietnam War.⁵³

D. CPP-NPA STRUCTURE, ORGANIZATION, AND LEADERSHIP

Although the CPP-NPA started as a small and ill-equipped organization, it gradually evolved into a complex and well-organized anti-government force. The CPP-NPA has been able to adapt to the changing situation in the country and to use this situation to its own advantage. The CPP-NPA has been effective in implementing its policy of centralized leadership and de-centralized operations.

1. Structure and Organization

Since its reestablishment in 1968, the CPP has implemented several major organizational changes in response to the changing socio-political-economic situation in

⁵¹ Philippine Army, 4-1.

⁵² Philippine Army, 4-2.

⁵³ Philippine Army, 4-4.

the country and to ensure that the revolutionary struggle continues to advance.⁵⁴ The CPP-NPA is composed of distinct organs that have different tasks to support the party. At the national level, the CPP-NPA has an organizational set-up that is streamlined to steer the party administration and operation from the national point of view.⁵⁵ The first of these institutions is the National Congress, which acts as the supreme leadership of the party and is normally convened by the Central Committee every five years to discuss, review, and ratify the CPP's constitution and plan of action and to decide the political approach of the party.⁵⁶ The second is the Central Committee, which is the highest-ranking CPP committee in the country. Its chairman serves as the principal ideological and political leader of the party.⁵⁷ The General Secretariat is the administrative body that takes charge of the management and day-to-day activities of the party at the national level. It is under the leadership of the Political Bureau (POLITBORO) and Executive Committee.⁵⁸

Directly under the POLITBORO, several functional commissions perform distinct tasks to support the party and exemplify the extensive, complex nature of the CPP-NPA. The National Military Commission (NMC) is in charge of formulating and issuing the party's policy on military affairs.⁵⁹ The National United Front Commission (NUFC) is primarily tasked to formulate programs of action to attract the middle class and independent political groups to support the party's cause in urban areas supported by National Organizational Department (NOD), which organizes and develops open mass movements.⁶⁰ The National Finance Commission (NFC) is in charge of formulating plans and policies to generate funds for the party, while the International Finance Commission (IFC) focuses on all financial dealings of the party, including those involving foreign

⁵⁴ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 4-1.

⁵⁵ Philippine Army, 4-2.

⁵⁶ Philippine Army, 4-2.

⁵⁷ Philippine Army, 4-3.

⁵⁸ Philippine Army, 4-4.

⁵⁹ Philippine Army, 4-4.

⁶⁰ Philippine Army, 4-4, 4-5.

supporters and resources.⁶¹ The International Department (ID) carries out an international propaganda campaign and maintains ties with communist parties abroad.⁶² Meanwhile, the National Education Department (NED) is tasked with ensuring that the political and ideological consciousness of cadres is maintained.⁶³ Figure 1 illustrates the CPP-NPA organizational structure.

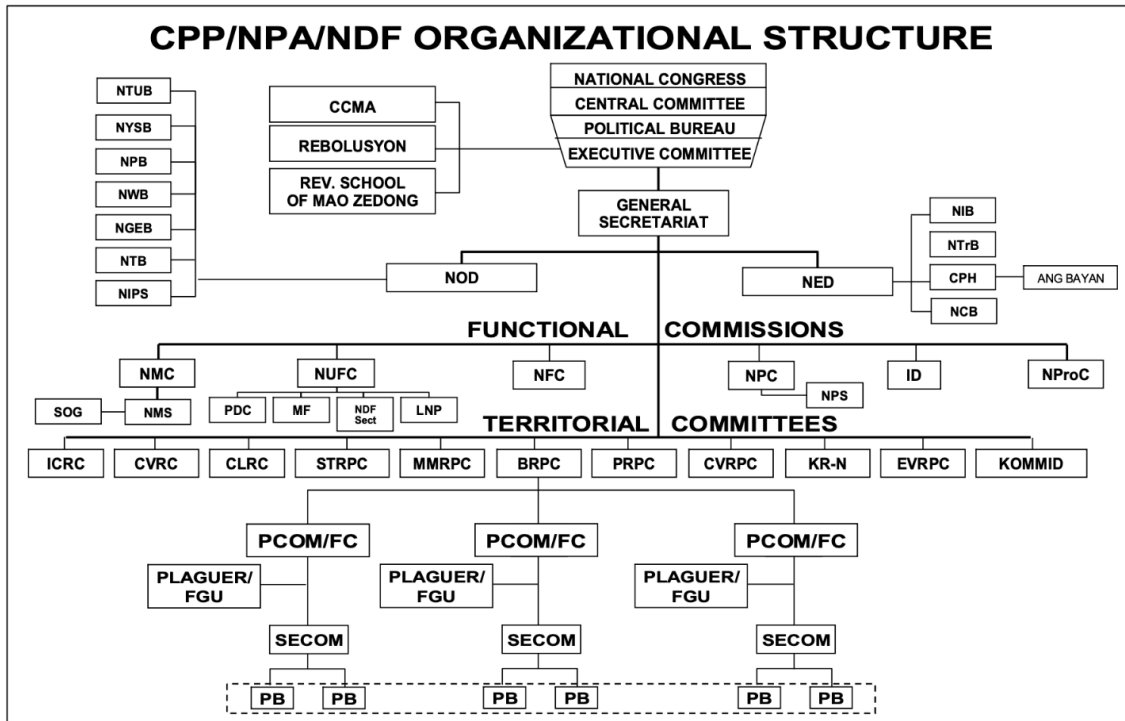


Figure 1. CPP-NPA-NDF Organizational Structure.⁶⁴

To implement the policy of centralized leadership and de-centralized operations, the CPP created territorial committees that oversee the party's activities and expansion nationwide. Territorial committees or Regional Party Committees (RPC) are the highest

⁶¹ Philippine Army, 4-4.

⁶² Philippine Army, 4-5.

⁶³ Philippine Army, 4-5.

⁶⁴ Source: Philippine Army, 4-3.

organ of the party in their area of jurisdiction.⁶⁵ Similar to the national organ, the RPCs also maintain their respective functional staffs with tasks similar to those of their national counterparts, differing only by the jurisdiction that they cover. Each RPC exercises control and supervision over the different Front Committees (FC) and Guerilla Fronts (GF) operating under its jurisdiction. A typical RPC exercises control and supervision of three or four Front Committees/Guerilla Fronts with each FC consisting of at least two platoons.⁶⁶ A GF is the politico-military geographical unit of the CPP-NPA that carries out party building and armed struggle in the countryside.⁶⁷ Figure 2 illustrates the typical organizational structure of an RPC.

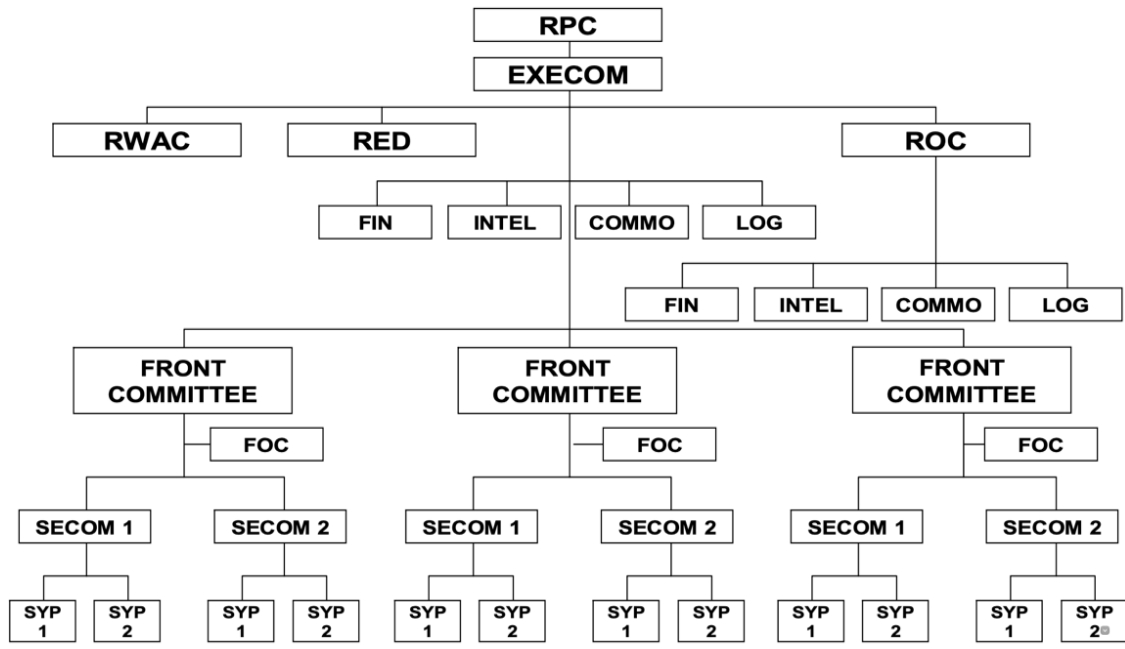


Figure 2. Typical Regional Party Committee Organizational Structure.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Philippine Army, 4-5.

⁶⁶ Philippine Army, 5-18.

⁶⁷ Philippine Army, 5-19.

⁶⁸ Source: Philippine Army, 4-7.

In the CPP-NPA's effort to use the island environment of the country to its advantage, the CPP-NPA has established bases in remote mountain areas found throughout the country to force government forces to engage them on multiple fronts.⁶⁹ According to Philippine Revolution Web Central (PRWC), the official internet portal of the CPP-NPA, by the mid-1990s, the NPA was able to establish 14 Regional Operational Commands (ROC): five are operating in each of Luzon and Mindanao, while four operate in the Visayas (see Figure 3). Together, these give the CPP/NPA both broad reach and protection. Each ROC is composed of five to seven guerilla fronts, with each GF having two platoons, which, in turn, has three squads of five to seven personnel.⁷⁰



Figure 3. Regional Operational Commands of the NPA.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Bernstein and Heredia, "Communist Insurgency in the Philippines," 284.

⁷⁰ Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation, J3, *AFP Campaign Assessment* (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, Philippines: Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation, J3, 2020).

⁷¹ Source: "PRWC on Twitter," Twitter, accessed January 21, 2021, https://twitter.com/prwc_info/status/1310774806846025728.

2. Trends and Strength

As already noted, the communist insurgents have used the geographical situation of the country to their advantage. The geographical make-up of the country naturally favors the PPW principle of encircling the cities from the countryside. The numerous mountain ranges and dense forests are well suited to provide the insurgents with stable guerilla bases in the countryside that help them to gradually advance to urban centers.⁷²

Further, the communist insurgents in the three main island groups of the Philippines have different tasks. Those in Luzon serve as the link of the CPP-NPA to other provinces and regions throughout the country. Luzon also houses the national organizations of the insurgents. Visayas facilitates the movement of CPP-NPA cadres from Luzon to Mindanao and vice versa, by providing sanctuaries for the insurgents. While Mindanao draws the attention of counterinsurgent forces from Luzon, this region also provides material resources, such as money from the revolutionary taxation to support the communist insurgency in the different parts of the country.

Figure 4 illustrates trends in NPA strength from 1981 to 2019, as measured by the number of NPA members, firearms, and captured *barangays* (villages). From the NPA's initial strength of 60 members in 1968, the organization has steadily grown to approximately 6,000 key personnel and 3,000 arms, and it controlled approximately 1,000 *barangays* by 1981. The NPA reached its peak of approximately 25,000 members in 1987. This drastic rise is attributed to abuses during martial law in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s, worsening poverty, and deepening corruption in the country.⁷³

Although the NPA's growth through the 1980s resulted in greater military and political success for the insurgents, their rapid expansion also spawned new problems for the communist insurgents, such as logistics and communication. Their larger formations also made it more difficult for them to move undetected. Moreover, difficulty in hiding their forces made them vulnerable to intensified offensive campaigns by the government

⁷² Emmanuel L. Navarrete, "An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Campaign," Maxwell Air Force Base: U.S. Air War College, 1990. 25.

⁷³ Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation, J3, *AFP Campaign Assessment*.

forces in the late 1980s. At the same time, an internal rift within the CPP-NPA organization posed a significant problem, with some Central Committee members in the northern part of the country advocating for an intensified offensive against the government forces. But perhaps a lack of foreign support constitutes one of the most conspicuous weakness of the CPP-NPA, and it has hindered their expansion and provided an opportunity for the government forces to exploit.⁷⁴

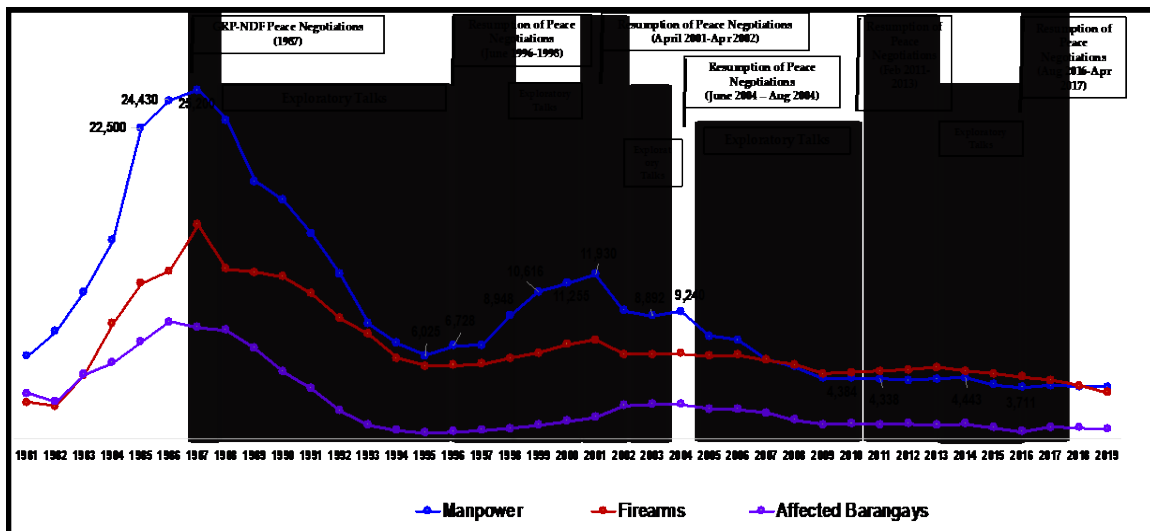


Figure 4. NPA Resources from 1981 to 2019, Relative to Major Events.⁷⁵

A steep decline in CPP-NPA membership between 1989 and 1995 saw its numbers significantly reduced to around 6,000. The NPA’s decline continued in the 1990s due to various setbacks, which were attributed to several factors, including sustained government military operations, internal rifts within the organization, the arrest of key leaders, financial constraints, negotiations with the government, and the fall of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which reduced their legitimacy.⁷⁶ These setbacks forced the CPP-NPA leadership to study and reconsider their approach.

⁷⁴ Bernstein and Heredia, “Communist Insurgency in the Philippines,” 283.

⁷⁵ Source: Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation, J3, *AFP Campaign Assessment*.

⁷⁶ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–25.

In December 1991, the CPP Central Committee issued a directive from its Chairman Jose Maria Sison entitled “Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify the Errors.”⁷⁷ The document clarified several basic principles that the party needed to adhere to in order to regain ground. Foremost is upholding the Marxist-Leninist and Mao Zedong ideologies and the continued reliance on the strategy of PPW.⁷⁸

By the late 1990s to early 2000s, a rise occurred in the number of communist insurgents in the country. The Ramos administration deemed it necessary to transfer the primary responsibility of internal security operations to the Philippine National Police (PNP) to allow the AFP to focus on external defense.⁷⁹ These actions proved to be a mistake, since the PNP was unsuccessful in accomplishing their task. The resurgence of the NPA was observed by the AFP in 1995, with the CPP stating in 1997 that it was able to recover its 1983 mass base level.⁸⁰ According to Santos et al., this resurgence was attributed to CPP’s reaffirmation of the PPW and the NPA’s focus on conducting mass efforts in the countryside. By 2001, the CPP-NPA membership had grown to around 12,000, which Santos et al. attributed to the shift in the focus of the government forces from the communist insurgency to terrorism and the Muslim insurgency in the southern part of the country. By 2009, the government and AFP had reduced the number of CPP-NPA members to around 4,000, a level that held steady for the next decade.

3. Leadership

Jose Maria Sison, the founding leader of the CPP-NPA, was born to an affluent landowner in the province of Ilocos Sur in the northwestern part of Luzon.⁸¹ He studied

⁷⁷ Philippine Army, 2–26.

⁷⁸ Philippine Army, 2–27.

⁷⁹ Ryan Nebres Severo, “Philippine Counterinsurgency during the Presidencies of Magsaysay, Marcos, and Ramos: Challenges and Opportunities,” (Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2016 90; Leonardo I Peña, “Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2007), 12–13, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/3393>.

⁸⁰ Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 23.

⁸¹ Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement*, 20.

the works of nationalist writers, such as Teodoro Agoncillo and Claro Recto, and the works of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin. Nonetheless, Sison was most heavily influenced by Mao's teachings.⁸²

After several years of insurgent activities, 1976 was a challenging year for the CPP, with several of its top leaders arrested. Among those were Central Committee members Juanito Canlas, Cesario Diego, Saturnino Ocampo, Victor Corpus, Bernabe Buscayno, and Renato Casipe.⁸³ In November the following year, CPP Chairman Jose Maria Sison was also captured.⁸⁴ Despite these setbacks in leadership, the CPP-NPA continued in its armed struggle as new leaders emerged. After Sison's capture, Rodolfo Salas assumed leadership of the CPP.⁸⁵ Under Salas' leadership, the CPP decided to strengthen its United Front machinery as it formally introduced the National Democratic Front to the public.⁸⁶ Subsequently, Sison was reelected to Executive Committee of the CPP after his release from prison in 1986.⁸⁷ The CPP's POLITBORO, however, did not allow Sison to assume the chairmanship of the party since he had relocated to the Netherlands.⁸⁸

During the 10th CPP plenum in October 1992, Sison was again re-elected as chairman of the CPP with Benito Tiamzon as vice-chairman and Wilma Austria-Tiamzon as secretary general.⁸⁹ Their election started an internal rift within the organization, with several high-ranking CPP-NPA leaders opposing Sison's leadership and his rectification campaign. Among them were Romulo Kintanar, Ricardo Reyes, and Benjamin De Vera.⁹⁰ The rift resulted in a split of the party into two factions, the "reaffirmist" faction under

⁸² Jones, 22–24.

⁸³ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–12.

⁸⁴ Philippine Army, 2–12.

⁸⁵ Philippine Army, 2–12.

⁸⁶ Philippine Army, 2–12.

⁸⁷ Francis Domingo, "The Leadership Crisis in the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army," *Small Wars Journal*, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-leadership-crisis-in-the-communist-party-of-the-philippines-new-people%E2%80%99s-army>.

⁸⁸ Domingo.

⁸⁹ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 2–27.

⁹⁰ Philippine Army, 2–25.

Sison and the “rejectionist” faction under the three opposition leaders. This internal split greatly affected not only the party but also the NPA and the NDF.⁹¹ Sison’s group eventually emerged successful. Since the launching of the rectification campaign, the CPP-NPA gradually recovered and expanded its influence in the countryside.⁹²

This chapter has discussed the origins and the reemergence of communism in the Philippines, both of which were driven by deeply rooted inequities in land ownership, labor rights, and access to political and social power. Since the reestablishment of communist insurgency in the Philippines in 1969, the CPP-NPA has gradually evolved into a more potent threat against the Philippine government. From a small town in Capas, Tarlac, in the northern Philippines, the CPP-NPA was able to expand its influence in the country, stretching as far as Mindanao in the South. Although its numbers have been significantly reduced, its continued existence is attributed to its ability to adapt to the changing situation in the country, tap into the fundamental grievances of society, and establish a highly structured and disciplined organization. The CPP-NPA’s ability to mobilize the masses through agitation and propaganda activities, hit and run tactics against government security forces, and its well-established organizational structure represent the primary reasons why the CPP-NPA remains a potent security threat in the Philippines.

⁹¹ Philippine Army, 2–29.

⁹² Philippine Army, 2–32.

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III. THE CAMPAIGNS AND THEIR RESULTS

The Philippine government has adopted various counterinsurgency strategies to defeat the communist insurgency in the country. After the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, the Corazon Aquino and Ramos administrations adopted a strategy that they called “national reconciliation with justice” in dealing with the communist insurgents.⁹³ The Gloria Macapagal Arroyo administration implemented a holistic approach, while President Benigno Aquino III, the son of the former president, adopted a people-centered, multi-stakeholder approach in dealing with the communist insurgents. To support the different administrations’ counterinsurgency strategies, the AFP implemented several campaign plans.

This chapter examines the campaigns implemented after the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, specifically the AFP’s *Oplan Lambat Bitag* (Net Trap), *Oplan Bantay-Laya* (Guarding Freedom) and Internal Peace and Security Plan (IPSP) *Bayanihan* (Civic Unity). It first describes the campaigns’ geographic presence, objectives, strategies, targeted concerns and resources. *Oplan’s Lambat-Bitag* and *Bantay-Laya* primarily focused on military actions to destroy the armed group and the political structures of the communist insurgents in the *barangays* using the Clear-Hold-Develop-Consolidate (C-H-D-C) model. IPSP *Bayanihan* introduced a paradigm shift from the military-centric to a people-centered security approach. The chapter then examines the different operational accomplishments of each of the campaigns, concluding that the three campaigns were successful in reducing the CPP-NPA’s military capabilities; however, the AFP failed to completely defeat the insurgents because of shifts in the AFP’s and government’s priorities. Lastly, it lays out the external support that the Philippine government received during the implementation of each campaign, finding that the international security partnerships that the Philippine government entered into focused on maritime security and counterterrorism operations, not counterinsurgency operations. Thus, such security partnerships did little to help the AFP defeat the communist insurgency in the country.

⁹³ Morales, “Perpetual War: The Philippine Insurgencies,” 29–30.

A. ***OPLAN LAMBAT BITAG (NET TRAP)***

Oplan Lambat Bitag (Net Trap) was first implemented from 1989 to 1992 as part of the counterinsurgency efforts of the Aquino administration and continued under the Ramos administration from 1992 to 1996. At the beginning, most activities were carried out in Luzon where the CPP-NPA had established strong guerilla fronts, which eventually spread to Mindanao.⁹⁴ The campaign was primarily led by the Philippine Army and, to a lesser degree, involved the government and private sector, putting an emphasis on the “right” mix of civil-military operations, intelligence, and combat operations against the insurgents. Combining these coercive and persuasive strategies, the “Clear-Hold-Consolidate-Develop (C-H-C-D)” concept was also first introduced as a means to counter the insurgents’ strategy in the countryside.⁹⁵

As described by Stephen Watts et al., under C-H-D-C operational methodology, during the Clear Stage, the AFP employed its mobile forces to destroy armed groups and dismantle the insurgents’ politico-military structures in insurgency-affected areas. The authors explained that the Hold stage used territorial forces to secure cleared areas and facilitate the reestablishment of government control by elected and appointed officials.⁹⁶ In the Develop stage, government agencies conducted activities to pursue progressive activities such as infrastructure development.⁹⁷ Finally, Watts et al. summarized the Consolidate stage as involving the collaboration of several national and local government agencies to strengthen government. The Development and Consolidation Stages were designed to begin addressing the socio-economic and political grievances of those targeted by the CPP-NPA. At the time of the campaign’s implementation, the AFP also initiated reforms as part of an effective counterinsurgency operation to reeducate soldiers on the

⁹⁴ Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 22.

⁹⁵ Roy Devesa, “An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology” (master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2005), 40.

⁹⁶ Stephen Watts et al., “Counterinsurgency in the Philippines,” in *Countering Others’ Insurgencies, Understanding U.S. Small-Footprint Interventions in Local Context* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt5vjvnm.12>.

⁹⁷ Watts et al., 84.

importance of adhering to the principles of human rights and winning population support for an effective counterinsurgency operation.⁹⁸

1. Campaign Objectives and Strategies

Under *Oplan Lambat Bitag*, the AFP's strategy was focused on dismantling the communist insurgency's political and military structures in *barangays*.⁹⁹ The campaign was to be implemented by the different Area Commands combining combat operations, intelligence operations, and civil-military operations (CMO). To most effectively utilize its forces, the AFP tasked specific units to perform specific functions. Combat operations were primarily conducted by infantry battalions to target selected strategic guerilla fronts and aimed at inflicting heavy casualties among the armed insurgents.¹⁰⁰ The infantry battalions of the Philippine Army were deployed to target the armed groups in the countryside with the support of the different intelligence units under the Intelligence Service of the AFP.¹⁰¹ In doing so, intelligence officers concentrated efforts at recruiting informants to track the insurgents' movements and discover their plans. CMO were focused on targeting insurgents and their supporters through psychological warfare to break their will to fight, induce mass surrender, and eventually provide an avenue for peace and reconciliation.¹⁰² To effectively utilize its forces, the AFP tasked specific units to perform specific functions. CMO units utilized the media—print, radio, and television—to address and cover a wide area of audiences, emphasizing the gains of the government's initiatives.

2. Operational Accomplishments

Of the three campaigns, *Oplan Lambat Bitag* seemed to be the most effective in terms of achieving military objectives, since it was successful in reducing the number of

⁹⁸ Peña, "Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy," 44.

⁹⁹ Morales, "Perpetual War: The Philippine Insurgencies," 29.

¹⁰⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Lambat Bitag)*, Letter of Instructions 23–88 (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 1988), 6.

¹⁰¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

¹⁰² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

CPP-NPA combatants from about 25,200 in 1987 to 14,800 in 1991.¹⁰³ This plan was initially successful because it focused on addressing the different tactics being implemented by the NPA fighters in the countryside.¹⁰⁴ Figure 5 shows the trend in CPP-NPA capabilities from 1989 to 1998, the periods when the AFP implemented *Oplan Lambert Bitag*. The figure shows the trend in the number of communist insurgents neutralized, which include those who were killed, apprehended, or surrendered, and the number of firearms gained, which included those that were captured or recovered by the government forces.¹⁰⁵

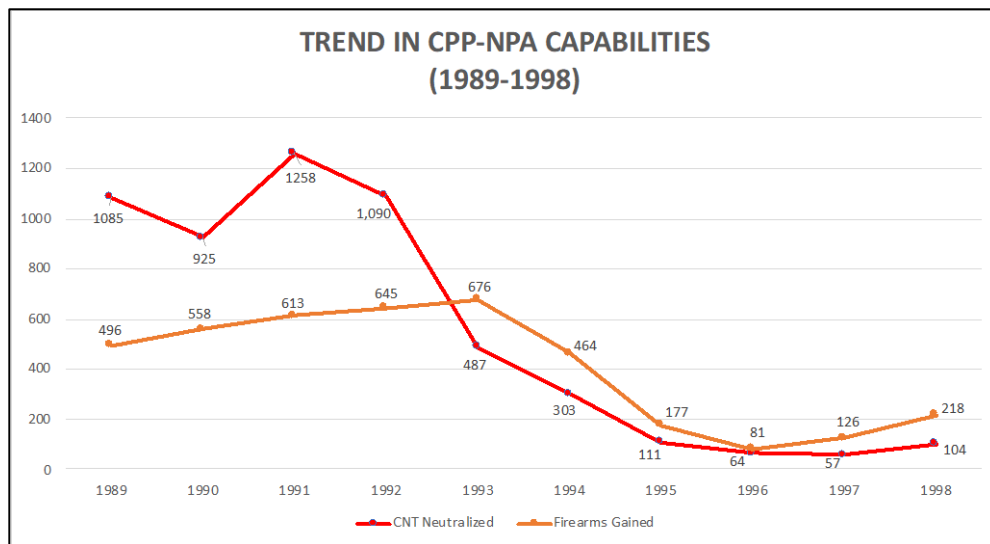


Figure 5. Trend in CPP-NPA Capabilities (1989–1998).¹⁰⁶

In terms of enemy neutralized, 1991 proved the most productive year for the AFP, as it neutralized 36 percent more communist insurgents (1,258 total) that year than it did in 1990. In terms of firearms gained by the government, 1989–1993 reflected the greatest

¹⁰³ Severo, “Philippine Counterinsurgency during the Presidencies of Magsaysay, Marcos, and Ramos: Challenges and Opportunities,” 89.

¹⁰⁴ Corpus, *Silent War*, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Philippine Army, “Philippine Army Counterinsurgency by the Numbers” (Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City: Philippine Army, 2013), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Adapted from Philippine Army, 45, 47, 49, 51.

government gains with a steady increase of recovered firearms by government forces, starting at 496 and peaking at 676. Beginning in 1993, however, there was a decline in terms of reduction of CPP-NPA military capabilities, the lowest being observed in 1996 when the number of combatants neutralized totaled 81 and arms obtained totaled 64. This low point is attributed not to a severely neutralized opponent but to the transfer of Internal Security Operation (ISO) responsibility from the AFP to the PNP during the Ramos administration.¹⁰⁷

After the transfer of ISO responsibility to PNP in 1996, a gradual increase in terms of CPP-NPA military capabilities was observed. This trend began in 1997 and extended to the early 2000s. According to Roy Devesa, this gradual increase was attributed to the lack of preparedness on the part of the PNP to take over the ISO responsibilities, because the PNP was preoccupied with anti-criminality operations, which is detached from the counterinsurgency efforts of the government.¹⁰⁸ Author Soliman Santos also attributes the CPP-NPA's resurgence in 1997 to the groups' reaffirmation of the protracted nature of the war and the NPA's renewed focus on organizing work.¹⁰⁹ The rectification that the CPP-NPA members had made within their organization allowed them to reorganize and consolidate support in their base areas.

3. External Support

During *Oplan Lambert-Bitag*, President Corazon Aquino's administration primarily received military support from the United States in its counterinsurgency operations. In 1988, when the CPP-NPA was at its peak strength, the United States advised the administration to launch a total war against the CPP-NPA.¹¹⁰ Acting on this advice, the Aquino administration intensified its counterinsurgency strategy, and the AFP for its part implemented *Oplan Lambert-Bitag*, primarily the Clear stage and first half of the Hold

¹⁰⁷ Roy Devesa, "An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology" (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2005), 36.

¹⁰⁸ Devesa, 37.

¹⁰⁹ Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 23.

¹¹⁰ Santos et al., 21.

stage. This resulted in the drastic reduction in CPP-NPA capabilities, particularly in manpower and firearms.

The 1991 country-study report about the Philippines for the U.S. Library of Congress indicated that in 1990 U.S. foreign aid to the Philippines reached nearly US\$500 million.¹¹¹ It further revealed that, during the 1990s, the United States and Japan were key donors to the Philippine Assistance Plan, which was a multilateral aid initiative that included debt relief and new credit. This foreign aid, however, focused on aiding the Philippines in its structural reforms and not particularly to aid the AFP in the implementation of its counterinsurgency campaign.

B. *OPLAN BANTAY-LAYA (GUARDING FREEDOM)*

The *Oplan Bantay Laya* (Guarding Freedom) campaign was adopted by the Arroyo administration and executed in two iterations: *Oplan Bantay-Laya I* (2002–2006) and *Oplan Banta-Laya II* (2007–2010), the latter of which was intended to provide the AFP and its subordinate units strategic guidance for ISO.¹¹² The plans represented the AFP’s strategic orientation that links to national plans and strategy.¹¹³ Under the campaign, the AFP’s mission was to “conduct ISO nationwide to destroy Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) soonest, decisively defeat the armed group of the Local Communist Movement and contain Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups (SPSGs) in order to establish a physically and psychologically secured environment conducive to national development.”¹¹⁴ As this mission statement suggests, defeating the communist insurgents was not the government’s highest priority, but a valiant effort was made against this ongoing threat.

¹¹¹ Ronald E. Dolan, *Philippines: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1991), <http://countrystudies.us/philippines/>.

¹¹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Bantay Laya)*, AFP ISO Plan 02–01 (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2002), 1.

¹¹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 1.

¹¹⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 3.

1. Campaign Objectives and Strategies

The overall objective of *Oplan Bantay Laya* was to neutralize and dismantle the political and militant machinery of the communist insurgency in the countryside.¹¹⁵ As with its predecessor, *Oplan Lambat-Bitag*, the main implementors of the campaign were the different Area Commands. *Oplan Bantay Laya* also added the Clear-Hold-Support (C-H-S) methodology in consonance with the C-H-D-C method to neutralize the insurgents in key areas and allow for the transfer of security responsibility from the AFP to the local government units. In C-H-S operational methodology, during the Clear Stage, the AFP used its mobile forces to destroy the armed component of the insurgents.¹¹⁶ The AFP further explained that in the Hold Stage it uses the different territorial forces to secure the cleared areas and facilitate the entry of other government agencies for consolidation and development activities. The AFP described the Support stage as involving the AFP and other national and local government agencies collaborating to implement developmental activities that would address the root causes of conflict.¹¹⁷

2. Operational Accomplishments

Under *Oplan Bantay-Laya*, the AFP further intensified its operations against the CPP-NPA to defeat the communist insurgents by 2010. The premature transfer of ISO responsibility to the PNP during the Ramos administration resulted in the CPP-NPA recovering its lost grounds both in terms of number of combatants and territory. Consequently, the ISO responsibility reverted to the AFP. Figure 6 shows the trend in AFP's effort to reduce CPP-NPA military capabilities during the implementation of *Oplan Bantay-Laya I* and *II*. Whereas the AFP neutralized 104 communist combatants at the end of *Oplan Lambat-Bitag* in 1998, by 2002 it had removed 889 combatants from the theater. At the end of *Oplan Lambat-Bitag* in 1998, 218 weapons had changed hands, as compared to 476 weapons in 2002 at the start of *Oplan Bantay-Laya I*.

¹¹⁵ Angel Rabasa et al., *From Insurgency to Stability: Volume II: Insights from Selected Case Studies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 38, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=777017>.

¹¹⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Bantay Laya)*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

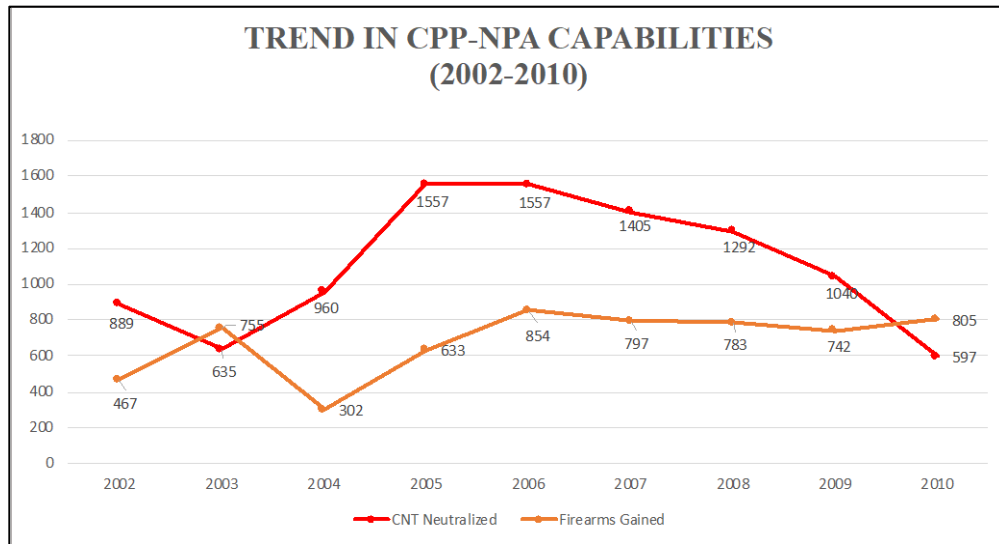


Figure 6. Trend in CPP-NPA Capabilities (2001–2010).¹¹⁸

During the early implementation of the campaign there was a decline in the neutralization of CPP-NPA combatants. According to an AFP campaign assessment in 2003, this was attributed to the AFP’s and government’s focus being on Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and separatists in the southern part of the country.¹¹⁹ The number of weapons seized also experienced an early retrenchment after initial success. Yet, the campaign gained ground to have its most significant military successes from 2005 to 2007, removing in these three years a total of 4,519 NPA combatants and 2,284 firearms.¹²⁰ The AFP attributed this progress to more effective utilization of combat, intelligence, and psychological operations.

These operational successes, however, were short lived as the Arroyo administration faced several challenges that involved the military, drawing the attention of both the administration and the AFP away from the campaign. As illustrated in Figure 6, in the last years of the campaign, the number of neutralized combatants fell from 1,296 in

¹¹⁸ Adapted from Philippine Army, “Philippine Army Counterinsurgency by the Numbers,” 45, 47, 49, 51.

¹¹⁹ Philippine Army, 47.

¹²⁰ Philippine Army, 45, 47, 49, 51.

2008 to 597 in 2010, while the number of weapons seized or turned over to the government held steady for the campaign's final four years, ranging between 747 and 805 each year.

In 2006, a coup plot was discovered and forced President Arroyo to declare a state of emergency on February 24, 2006.¹²¹ This was followed by the Manila Peninsula Rebellion in which detained *Magdalo* mutineers from the 2003 Oakwood Mutiny seized the hotel for which the event is named.¹²² Another factor that contributed to the decline in accomplishment is the frequent change in AFP leadership. Jaemark Tordecilla, in his report for the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, indicated that during the nine-year tenure of President Arroyo, she appointed a total of 12 generals as AFP Chief of Staff, seven of whom only held the position for less than a year, with one general serving for just 69 days.¹²³ Tordecilla further argues that this frequent change in leadership hindered the AFP from pursuing needed reforms within the organization.

3. External Support

The Arroyo administration continued to work with the United States and other regional security partners to pursue the administration's national security agenda. In 2001, the Philippines was among the first countries in Southeast Asia to support the George W. Bush administration's global war on terror (GWOT). For example, the Philippines allowed the use of its airspace and seaports in the efforts to support the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.¹²⁴ In 2007, the government signed the Philippine-Australia Status-of-Forces Agreement (SOFA), which was similar to the Philippine-U.S. Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA).¹²⁵ Under the agreement, the Philippine government provided legal assurances in

¹²¹ Inquirer Research, "What Went Before: Oakwood Mutiny and Trillanes' 2nd Try to Oust Arroyo," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 4, 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1028406/what-went-before-the-oakwood-mutiny>.

¹²² Inquirer Research.

¹²³ Jaemark Tordecilla, "A Politicized Military," *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, February 23, 2011, <https://pcij.org/article/2785/a-politicized-military>.

¹²⁴ John Roberts and Peter Symonds, "Political Turmoil Surrounds Philippines President Arroyo," *World Socialist website*, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2005/06/phil-j22.html>.

¹²⁵ Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Role of Middle Powers in the Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): The Case of the Special Japan–Australia Strategic Partnership and the Philippines," *The Korean Journal of Defense* 31, no. 1 (March 2019): 151.

the conduct of joint-counterterrorism exercises between the AFP and the Australian Defense Force (ADF). It also gave the ADF the opportunity to advise on the logistics and acquisition policy of the AFP.¹²⁶

While the Arroyo administration received a boost in its campaign against communist insurgents in 2004, when the CPP-NPA was blacklisted for its terrorist activities by several countries—notably, the United States, Australia, Britain, and the European Union (EU)—most military partnerships that the Arroyo government entered into did not focus on the communist insurgency and instead compelled an AFP shift in forces to other areas. The U.S.-Philippines partnership in 2001, for instance, focused on defeating terrorist groups in the southern Philippines while the Philippines-Australia SOFA also focused on counterterrorism primarily in Mindanao and development of maritime security capabilities. The United States in particular has directly supported the Philippine military and police in their counterterrorism efforts, deploying 1,200 advisors as early as 2001, most of them in the southern Philippines.¹²⁷ In line with this effort, a U.S. Joint Special Operations Forces (SOF) Task Force was deployed in Mindanao purposely to provide antiterrorism training, assist in intelligence gathering using state-of-the-art equipment, and provide advice to AFP forces deployed in the area.¹²⁸ The equipment and expertise shared by the Task Force had significantly contributed to the AFP’s capability in pursuing terrorist threats in Mindanao.

C. INTERNAL PEACE AND SECURITY PLAN—IPSP *BAYANIHAN* (CIVIC UNITY)

From 2011 to 2016, the AFP implemented IPSP *Bayanihan* (a Tagalog word that translates roughly as “civic unity”) as part of the security agenda of the Benigno Aquino administration, which was said to be a paradigm shift on how the AFP viewed its role and

¹²⁶ Castro, 151.

¹²⁷ Fran Beaudette, *Philippine Counterinsurgency Success: Implications for the Human Domain of Warfare* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2013), 23–24.

¹²⁸ Mely Caballero-Anthony, “The Winds of Change in the Philippines: Whither the Strong Republic?,” *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2003, 219.

performed its functions.¹²⁹ The plan was crafted to guide the AFP in performing its functions of protecting the people and the state, which represented a major shift for the AFP from a primarily militaristic mindset to “a people-centered security strategy.”¹³⁰ It required the AFP to set up a stronger mechanism for transparency and accountability and to provide a venue for security convergence at the tactical level.¹³¹

The AFP did not craft the IPSP *Bayanihan* alone; instead, it involved the academe, other government agencies and civil society organizations, in the development of IPSP *Bayanihan*. Under the campaign, the AFP’s mission was to “conduct support operations to win the peace in order to help the Filipino nation create an environment conducive for sustainable development and a just and lasting peace.”¹³² It was prescribed to be not only “whole of government” but “whole of nation,” unlike the *Oplan Bantay-Laya*, which had a stronger focus on combat and eventually was diverted primarily to counter threats in the southern Philippines.

The six-year time frame of IPSP *Bayanihan* was divided into two phases. In the first phase (2011–2013), the AFP was focused on addressing the armed threat groups, particularly the CPP-NPA.¹³³ This early focus on military action was not much different from the two previously described campaigns. However, in the second phase (2014–2016), the AFP was to devote its efforts and resources to handing over responsibilities to concerned local government units, which were to play a principal role in ensuring the internal peace and security, as well as provision of government services. This deliberate focus on empowering locals represented a significant shift.

¹²⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Bayanihan)* (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2011), 24.

¹³⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 24.

¹³¹ National Economic and Development Authority, *Philippine Development Plan 2011–2016 Midterm Update with Revalidated Results Matrices* (Ortigas Center, Pasig City, Philippines: National Economic and Development Authority, 2014), 186.

¹³² Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Bayanihan)*, 22.

¹³³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 23.

1. Campaign Objectives and Strategies

Rather than the traditional defeat of the enemy's armed group, IPSP *Bayanihan*'s primary objective was winning the peace by engaging the different stakeholders in the government's peace and security efforts.¹³⁴ The published IPSP *Bayanihan* document states that to accomplish this, the campaign was anchored on two strategic approaches: "the whole-of-nation approach (WNA) and the people-centered security approach." The document further described the WNA as based on the concept that security is not just the responsibility of security forces and government institutions. Rather, it is a shared responsibility that also involves the community and civil society.¹³⁵ The people-centered security approach focuses on the people, putting primacy on human rights and exploring different ways to promote security and safety locally, based on specific needs and realities on the ground.¹³⁶ The implementation of the campaign does not only involve external application of engaging the different stakeholders. Internally, the AFP as an institution has also implemented measures to ensure that soldiers understand and appreciate the strategic concept of the campaign. IPSP *Bayanihan* became part of the modules being taught to soldiers in their units and individual trainings.

2. Operational Accomplishments

From 2011 to 2016, IPSP *Bayanihan* was successful in reducing CPP-NPA capabilities, as signified by the number of active combatants and firearms and the affected *barangays* freed. Figure 7 shows that in terms of the number of personnel neutralized, which includes those who were apprehended, killed, and surrendered, the AFP was successful in reducing the NPA's strength. For the entire period, a total of 4,722 CPP-NPA, averaging 787 per year, were neutralized, which was attributed to the increased operational tempo in the conduct of combat operations by the various Area Commands.¹³⁷ In terms of firearms gained, the AFP was able to capture a total of 2,750 weapons, an average of 458

¹³⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2–3.

¹³⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 25.

¹³⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 26.

¹³⁷ Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation, J3, *AFP Campaign Assessment*.

per year. The campaign, however, lagged in terms of reducing the number of affected *barangays*, with 579 barangays declared as cleared with local control in place, which is an average of 97 per year. Although 167 barangays were cleared in 2011, just 71 were rehabilitated in 2016. The AFP attributed the decline in reduction of CPP-NPA capabilities from 2014 to 2015 to the shift in focus in the AFP from internal defense to external defense in a dispute in the South China Sea.¹³⁸

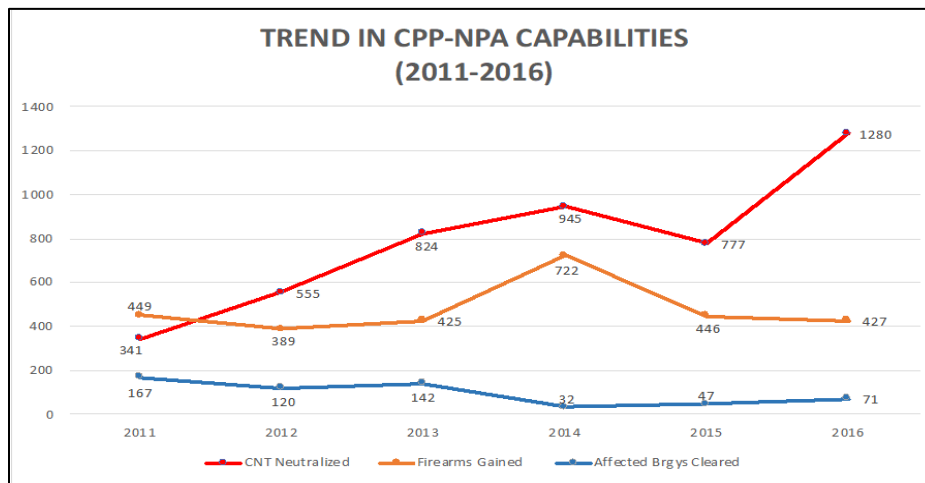


Figure 7. Trend in CPP-NPA Capabilities (2011–2016).¹³⁹

3. External Support

As with the previous administrations, the Aquino administration continued to develop and enhance its security partnership with the United States and its regional security allies, Australia and Japan. As with previous administrations, these international agreements focused on counterterrorism operations—not counterinsurgency operations—and maritime security but did little to support the AFP’s efforts against the communist insurgency.

¹³⁸ Renato Cruz De Castro, “Developing a Credible Defense Posture for the Philippines: From the Aquino to the Duterte Administrations,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 9, no. 4 (2017): 546, <https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12353>.

¹³⁹ Source: Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operation, J3, *AFP Campaign Assessment*.

In 2014, the Philippines and United States signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) to further deepen the defense cooperation between the two countries.¹⁴⁰ The agreement allows the U.S. military rotational access to Philippine bases. After the agreement was signed, it was reported that the United States allocated US\$50 million and US\$40 million in military aid to the Philippines for 2014 and 2015, respectively.¹⁴¹ In addition to this military aid, the U.S. government also provided the Philippines another US\$50 million for the AFP's military training and intelligence operations to support its counterterrorism operations.¹⁴²

In 2016, the Philippines and Japan signed a new defense pact to further bolster the defense and security cooperation between the two countries.¹⁴³ According to Renato Cruz De Castro, the agreement established the “legal parameters that allows the transfer of defense equipment and technology from Japan to the Philippines.” De Castro further argues that this agreement is mutually beneficial for the two countries: for the Philippines, it will facilitate the “transfer of defense equipment and technology” from Japan; for Japan, it will “advance the development and establishment of technological bases of Japan’s growing defense industry.”¹⁴⁴

D. CONCLUSION

AFP's *Oplan Lambat Bitag* and *Oplan Bantay-Laya* campaigns had focused on defeating and destroying the armed group and the political structures of the communist insurgents in the *barangays*, using the C-H-D-C model. IPSP *Bayanihan*, on the other hand, introduced a paradigm shift that implemented a WNA and people-centered security strategy. During this time, Philippine government received significant support from its

¹⁴⁰ Carl Thayer, “Analyzing the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement,” *Diplomat*, accessed April 10, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/analyzing-the-us-philippines-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/>.

¹⁴¹ Siddhartha Mahanta, “The Philippines to the United States: We Want You Back,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed April 10, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/01/philippines-china-military-carter/>.

¹⁴² Mahanta.

¹⁴³ Castro, “The Role of Middle Powers in the Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): The Case of the Special Japan–Australia Strategic Partnership and the Philippines,” 151.

¹⁴⁴ Castro, 151.

allies and security partners, particularly the United States, Australia, and Japan. This support, however, was not focused on defeating communist insurgents but instead on counterterrorism, maritime security operations, and developing defense industry. All three campaigns had positive results in terms of reducing the CPP-NPA capabilities. Despite this, they fell short in accomplishing their objectives of defeating the communist insurgents. The next chapter analyzes the factors that contributed to the shortcomings of these three AFP campaigns.

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IV. ANALYZING THE CAMPAIGNS: WHY THE CPP-NPA HAS NOT YET BEEN DEFEATED

Unresolved social, political, and economic conditions in the country provided the CPP-NPA with grievances to exploit and to rally the masses to their cause. Widespread poverty and corruption, ignorance, and injustices—including neglect and coercion—by the government brought increased suffering and dissatisfaction among the people, making them vulnerable to CPP-NPA’s agitation and propaganda.¹⁴⁵ To address these issues, the Philippine government launched several whole-of-government counterinsurgency strategies, which were only partially implemented and thus only partially successful. The AFP, for its part, implemented several campaign plans to support the different administrations’ national security agendas, with three of the most significant efforts being the campaigns studied in this thesis.

This chapter examines the factors that hampered the implementation of AFP’s *Oplan Lambat Bitag*, *Oplan Bantay-Laya*, and IPSP *Bayanihan*. This chapter argues that inadequate sustainment capability, lack of support from government institutions, and the challenges to political leadership are the primary factors that hindered the AFP campaigns and their overriding objective of defeating the CPP-NPA. The chapter begins by describing the socio-economic conditions during the implementation of each campaign. It then discusses and analyzes the different factors that hindered the implementation of the three broadly scoped AFP campaigns.

A. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The campaigns being implemented as part of the government’s overall counterinsurgency strategy encountered similar socio-political and economic problems that hindered their implementation. *Oplan Lambat-Bitag* (Net Trap), was implemented during the Aquino (1986–1992) and Ramos (1992–1998) administrations, *Oplan Bantay Laya* (Guarding Freedom) during the Arroyo administration (2001–2010), and IPSP *Bayanihan*

¹⁴⁵ Navarrete, “An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Campaign,” 34.

(Civic Unity) during the Benigno Aquino (2011–2016) administration. This section analyzes the different socio-political and economic factors that each administration faced and how they affected the implementation of the campaigns.

1. *Oplan Lambat Bitag (Net Trap)*

The deep and systemic problems that paved the way for the reemergence of the CPP-NPA in the late 1960s were still present during the 1980s. Poverty, corruption, and inequality were among the problematic socio-economic conditions when the AFP's *Oplan Lambat Bitag* was first implemented in 1989, and little progress was made in overcoming them.¹⁴⁶ When Corazon Aquino came into power after the People Power Revolution, which overthrew Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship, she inherited a bankrupt economy and debt-ridden country.¹⁴⁷

The Philippines was among the poorest countries in the region, and the country's per capita GDP growth averaged close to zero during the Aquino administration.¹⁴⁸ Ronald Dolan, in his country report about the Philippines for the U.S. Library of Congress, indicated that the countryside had the highest concentration of the poor, with more than 80 percent of the poorest families living in rural areas.¹⁴⁹ The majority of them were landless farmers, fishermen, and manual laborers. He further indicated that during martial law under Marcos, from 1971 to 1985, urban poverty had increased by 13 percent, with a majority of the urban poor living in crowded slums.¹⁵⁰ Capitalizing on the perceived government neglect, CPP-NPA agitation and propaganda efforts targeted the rural and urban poor. The poverty incidence rate in the Philippines was 44 percent in 1986 when Aquino became president and 32 percent in 1997 before the end of the Ramos administration.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Rabasa et al., *From Insurgency to Stability*, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Human Development Sector Unit East Asia and Pacific Region, "Philippines Fostering More Inclusive Growth," World Bank Open Knowledge Repository, 2011, 1.

¹⁴⁹ Dolan, "Philippines: A Country Study."

¹⁵⁰ Dolan.

¹⁵¹ Karin Schelzig, *Poverty in the Philippines: Income, Assets, and Access* (Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2005), 17.

Initially, after the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship, the Philippines entered a new and successful phase of counterinsurgency, as measured by the steep drop in CPP-NPA capabilities between 1991 and 1995 and which were held at low levels throughout the Ramos administration (see Figure 7).¹⁵² The Aquino administration promoted “national reconciliation with justice,” which increased focus on diplomatic solutions.¹⁵³ The AFP’s new counterinsurgency strategy continued its offensive operations against combatants, while the concept of civilian protection was incorporated into government action, although not well implemented.¹⁵⁴ President Aquino tried to pursue reconciliation with communist insurgents by engaging in peace negotiations as part of her administration’s broader internal stability strategy. To demonstrate the government’s sincerity, she ordered the release of all political prisoners who were imprisoned during the Marcos administration, including the top two leaders of the CPP, Jose Maria Sison and Bernabe Buscayno.¹⁵⁵ Increased involvement by civilian government agencies and non-governmental organizations was part of the Aquino administration’s plan to defeat the insurgents and attain socio-economic development.¹⁵⁶

When President Ramos was elected in 1992, he continued the AFP’s “Clear-Hold-Consolidate-Develop (C-H-C-D)” activities as well as expanded the government’s political policies of peace and national reconciliation.¹⁵⁷ He created and organized the National Unification Commission (NUC), which had helped in reducing the high numbers of political prisoners, including those allegedly linked to the CPP.¹⁵⁸ The NUC is composed of diverse members coming from the legislative and executive branches of the government and the private sector. NUC’s primary purpose is to investigate and recommend solutions

¹⁵² Mike Fowler, “Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now,” *Small Wars Journal*, January 18, 2011, 15.

¹⁵³ Watts et al., “Counterinsurgency in the Philippines,” 87.

¹⁵⁴ Fowler, “Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now,” 12.

¹⁵⁵ Peña, “Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy,” 44.

¹⁵⁶ Peña, 44.

¹⁵⁷ Watts et al., “Counterinsurgency in the Philippines,” 2014.

¹⁵⁸ Gary J. Morea, “From Enduring Strife to Enduring Peace in the Philippines,” *Military Review* 88, no. 3 (June 2008): 40.

to address the root causes of armed conflicts and social unrest.¹⁵⁹ The commission became the primary government unit responsible for overseeing the execution of the National Program for Unification and Development (NPUD), which ran the amnesty program for secessionists, coup plotters, and insurgents willing to surrender.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, as part of the government efforts to show sincerity toward reconciliation, the Ramos administration repealed the Republic Act 1700, also known as the Anti-Subversion Law.¹⁶¹ As a result, the Communist Party became a legal political party and was allowed to participate in the government to express its social and political goals.

Although the Aquino and Ramos administrations implemented several changes to fight corruption, the government, society, and politics were still perceived as highly corrupt. In the first corruption index published by Transparency International in 1995, the Philippines ranked 36 out of 41 countries, with a score of 2.77 in the corruption perception index, where a score of 10 reflected the least-corrupt countries.¹⁶² Transparency International's corruption perception index "measures the levels public sector corruption" as perceived by international business people and financial journalists.¹⁶³ By the end of the Ramos administration in 1998, the Philippines ranked 55 out of 85 countries with a score of 3.3, which was slightly higher than the 2.7 in 1995.¹⁶⁴ Since then, the succeeding administrations have made several efforts to curb corruption, but little progress has been made.

2. *Oplan Bantay Laya (Guarding Freedom)*

When Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became the president in January 2001, poverty and social inequality persisted in the country. According to a 2009 poverty statistics report

¹⁵⁹ Severo, "Philippine Counterinsurgency during the Presidencies of Magsaysay, Marcos, and Ramos: Challenges and Opportunities," 79.

¹⁶⁰ Severo, 80–81.

¹⁶¹ Severo, 82.

¹⁶² Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 1995 for the Philippines," accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/1995>.

¹⁶³ Transparency International.

¹⁶⁴ Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 1998 for the Philippines," accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/1998>.

published by the Philippine Statistics Authority, the poverty rate had increased to 26 percent, compared to 22 percent in 2003.¹⁶⁵ As was the case under the Aquino administration, which dealt with multiple coup attempts and ongoing civil unrest, political instability was also rampant during the Arroyo administration.¹⁶⁶ Several impeachment cases were hurled at the president, and several mass, predominantly nonviolent protest actions were launched by left-leaning and other civil-society organizations during her nine-year term.

Upon assuming the presidency, Arroyo envisioned establishing a strong republic to restore the nation's credibility and stability in the eyes of its citizens and the world.¹⁶⁷ Her administration recognized that insurgency still “posed a serious threat to national security” and that a need existed to institutionalize a government response to address it.¹⁶⁸ The administration implemented what it called a Strategy of Holistic Approach, with Arroyo proclaiming Executive Order Number 21 in June 2001. Otherwise known as the “National Internal Security Plan,” this approach was “to integrate the political, economic, security and psycho-social response of the government in addressing the insurgency threats and root causes of conflict.”¹⁶⁹ The Arroyo administration set three political objectives for its counterinsurgency strategy:

First to enhance good governance by fighting corruption and promoting transparency and accountability. Second, accelerate programs to reduce poverty and promote respect for human rights and right to development. Third is to implement the left-hand and right-hand efforts which combines military operations and government agencies focused on socio-economic and psycho-social developments.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ National Statistical Coordination Board. *2009 Official Poverty Statistics of Philippines* (Makati City, Philippines: National Statistical Coordination Board, 2010), v, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2009%20Poverty%20Statistics.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶ Roberts and Symonds, “Political Turmoil Surrounds Philippines President Arroyo.”

¹⁶⁷ Peña, “Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy,” 61.

¹⁶⁸ “Executive Order No. 21, s. 2001,” accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2001/06/19/executive-order-no-21-s-2001/>.

¹⁶⁹ “Executive Order No. 21, s. 2001.”

¹⁷⁰ Peña, “Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy,” 23–24.

Despite these stated political objectives, the Arroyo administration focused on military objectives to defeat the communist insurgents, unlike the Aquino and Ramos administrations which focused on “national reconciliation with justice.”

Political scientists John Roberts and Peter Symonds emphasized that the corruption problem continued to persist in the Arroyo Administration, which was hounded by several corruption scandals of its own.¹⁷¹ The first corruption scandal centered around the claims that several of Arroyo’s relatives, specifically her husband, son, and brother-in-law, received *jueteng* (illegal numbers game) money. The second involved claims of fraud in the election in 2004, where it was alleged that Arroyo used her position to bolster her campaign and rig the election. The third involved the national broadband project known as the NBN-ZTE deal, which again involved her husband, who allegedly received kickbacks from the deal.¹⁷²

In the corruption index published by Transparency International, the Philippines ranked 65 out of 91 countries in 2001, with a score of 2.9, which was lower than the Ramos Administration’s 3.3 score in 1998.¹⁷³ The Philippines continued to slip in global rankings during the Arroyo Administration, with the Philippines being ranked 146 out of 178 countries, with a score of 2.4 by the end of her term.¹⁷⁴ This was the lowest relative score that the Philippines received since Transparency International started publishing its global corruption perception index in 1995.

¹⁷¹ Roberts and Symonds, “Political Turmoil Surrounds Philippines President Arroyo.”

¹⁷² Jun Ledesma, “Letters from Davao: The National Broadband Network,” Philippine News Agency, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/opinion/pieces/123-the-national-broadband-network>.

¹⁷³ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2001 for the Philippines,” accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2001>.

¹⁷⁴ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2010 for the Philippines,” accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2010>.

3. Internal Peace and Security Plan—IPSP *Bayanihan* (Civic Unity)

When Benigno Aquino III assumed office in 2011, a perception of poor governance and massive corruption existed in the country.¹⁷⁵ The national security agenda of President Aquino’s administration focused on the people and took a multi-stakeholder approach in addressing the peace and security concerns of the country. It emphasized four specific elements, namely “good governance, delivery of basic services, economic and sustainable development and security sector reform.”¹⁷⁶

Aquino instituted several reforms in the government to restore the public trust in the government and its institutions. For instance, the administration made significant gains in its fight against corruption. In the corruption perception index published by Transparency International, the Philippines ranked an average of 115 out of 178 countries during the B. Aquino III administration, compared to 146 in 2010 at the end of the Arroyo administration.¹⁷⁷ By the end of the Aquino administration, the Philippines was ranked 101. This gradual climb in the global rankings is attributed to the positive effects of several anti-corruption policies that the administration had implemented.

IPSP *Bayanihan* acknowledged the large effect of the social and economic conditions on peace and security in the country. At the time the campaign was implemented, the country remained marred by unequal distribution of wealth and economic opportunities, which resulted in a wide income gap between social classes.¹⁷⁸ The Philippine economy grew stronger before and after Aquino took power, with the national poverty rate declining from 26.6 percent in 2006 to 21.6 percent in 2015, despite the global economic recession of 2008–2009.¹⁷⁹ From 2011 to 2016, the Aquino administration

¹⁷⁵ Maria Fe Villamejor-Mendoza et al., “The Performance of the Aquino Administration (2010-2016): An Assessment,” National College of Public Administration and Governance, 2018, 6. <https://ncpag.upd.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PerformanceOfAquinoAdmin.pdf>

¹⁷⁶ General Headquarters, Army of the Philippines, *International Peace and Security Plan “Bayanihan,”* accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.army.mil.ph/home/images/bayanihan.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷ Transparency International. “Corruption Perceptions Index 2016 for the Philippines,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2016>.

¹⁷⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Bayanihan)*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Making Growth Work for the Poor: A Poverty Assessment for the Philippines* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2018), 17.

continued to implement actions to reduce poverty and improve the living conditions of the people.

The Aquino administration also faced several political challenges. The first was the Manila Hostage crisis in 2010, where eight Hong Kong tourists were killed by a lone gunman.¹⁸⁰ The second was the Scarborough Shoal incident with China in 2012, a military stand-off that forced the Aquino administration to realize the need to fast track the AFP's territorial defense capability build-up.¹⁸¹ These two incidents resulted in a shift in focus of the AFP from internal security to territorial defense. Lastly, the Mamasapano clash in January 2015, which was a botched Philippine National Police (PNP) operation against the foreign terrorist Marwan in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, that led to 67 deaths, 44 of them among the security forces.¹⁸² Aquino suffered a severe backlash because of this incident, with his approval rating crashing from 59 percent to 38 percent favorability, according to a Pulse Asia survey conducted after the incident.¹⁸³ A Philippine Senate inquiry was conducted to investigate the incident, which included in its report that President Aquino committed an unlawful act for bypassing the chain of command when he allowed the suspended chief of the PNP to manage the operation.¹⁸⁴

B. FACTORS THAT HINDERED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AFP CAMPAIGNS

Although the three AFP campaigns studied here made significant gains in reducing the CPP-NPA capabilities, they still fell short of achieving their objectives of defeating the communist insurgency. This section analyzes how inadequate sustainment capability, lack

¹⁸⁰ "Hong Kong Hostages Killed in Manila Bus Siege," BBC News, August 23, 2010, sec. Asia-Pacific, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11055015>.

¹⁸¹ Castro, "The Role of Middle Powers in the Modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): The Case of the Special Japan–Australia Strategic Partnership and the Philippines," 150.

¹⁸² Rigoberto Tiglao, "The Mamasapano Massacre: The Worst Crime Ever Committed by a Philippine President," *The Manila Times*, November 10, 2017, sec. Opinion on Page One, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2017/11/10/opinion/columnists/topanalysis/mamasapano-massacre-worst-crime-ever-committed-philippine-president/361800/>.

¹⁸³ Trefor Moss, "Philippine President Aquino Attempts to Quell Criticism Over Botched Raid; The Philippine President's Approval Ratings Have Plunged since the Debacle," *Wall Street Journal (Online)*, March 26, 2015, sec. World.

¹⁸⁴ Moss.

of support from government institutions, and challenges to political leadership hindered the implementation of all three AFP campaigns.

1. Inadequate Sustainment Capability

In the three campaigns implemented after 1986, the AFP fell short in its objective of defeating the communist insurgents, in part, because of the lack of sustainment capability. In the three campaigns reviewed, it should be noted that the AFP had been implementing the government's counterinsurgency efforts alone. An International Crisis Group (ICG) report published in February 2011 indicated that senior AFP commanders attributed the failure of the AFP to defeat the CPP-NPA to the lack of sufficient resources, specifically in terms of personnel and equipment.¹⁸⁵ The report further stated that to cope with the demands for the sustainment of the campaign, the AFP had to rely on "tribal militias and paramilitary forces."¹⁸⁶ Many of these groups were not properly trained and were poorly supervised, which made them susceptible to commit abuses damaging to the campaign.

In his thesis, Col. Ricardo C. Morales argued that the weakness of *Oplan Lambat-Bitag* was its inability to provide a suitable force/entity to sustain the gains in the *barangays*.¹⁸⁷ Once the soldiers transferred to the next village, the *barangay* relapsed back under NPA control, since there was little to no effort from various government agencies to sustain the gains made by the AFP. This was also true for *Oplan Bantay-Laya* and IPSP *Bayanihan* where both campaigns also failed to capitalize on the gains made in cleared areas.

Further aggravating these inadequate resources was the constant shifting of focus in the AFP. In his thesis, Lt. Col. Roy T. Devesa argued that the initial gains of *Oplan Lambat Bitag* had shifted the focus of the AFP to external and Moro-Muslim threats when

¹⁸⁵ International Crisis Group, *The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks*, Asia Report N202 (New York: International Crisis Group, February 2011), i.

¹⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, i.

¹⁸⁷ Morales, "Perpetual War: The Philippine Insurgencies," 29.

it prematurely transferred the ISO responsibility to the PNP.¹⁸⁸ He further identified that the PNP was not prepared to handle ISO responsibility, because it was more preoccupied with criminality, drugs, and kidnappings that were also hounding the country. As a result of this decision, the last two stages of *Oplan Lambat-Bitag* were not fully implemented and gave the insurgents the opportunity to reorganize. Devesa also argued that the shift in focus of the AFP and the government toward external threats, the Moro-Muslim secessionists, and Muslim terrorists have placed the communist insurgents as a secondary or even tertiary priority.¹⁸⁹ Fighting violent internal unrest on two different fronts had spread the AFP's forces too thinly, especially after 9/11. Meager AFP resources were reallocated to the fight against Moro-Muslim secessionists, ASG, and other terrorist groups in the south. The vacuum left by the pull-back in government forces represented the primary reason why communist insurgents were able to return, because there was no effective security presence to hold cleared areas once the soldiers transferred to another area.¹⁹⁰

2. Lack of Support from Government Institutions

In the three campaigns implemented since 1992, the AFP has been implementing the government's counterinsurgency efforts with inadequate support from the rest of the government. In *Oplan Lambat Bitag*, for instance, the consolidate and develop aspects of the campaign relied heavily on the ability of the different government agencies to perform their community development tasks.¹⁹¹ The persistent shortcomings of the different government agencies to deliver the necessary development activities for the community after the AFP soldiers had left an area hindered the implementation of the campaign.¹⁹² In his thesis, Lt. Col. Pena argued that the civilian agencies' lack of understanding and

¹⁸⁸ Devesa, "An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology," 36.

¹⁸⁹ Devesa, 37.

¹⁹⁰ Rabasa et al., *From Insurgency to Stability*, 44.

¹⁹¹ Watts et al., "Counterinsurgency in the Philippines," 2014, 86.

¹⁹² Watts et al., 85.

appreciation of AFP efforts have contributed to their failure to perform their tasks in the consolidate and develop stages of the campaign.¹⁹³

The various national and local government agencies needed to deliver basic goods and services in conflict-affected areas to ensure that operational gains are sustained, that the community is insulated from communist insurgents, and that grievances are being addressed. A 2011 RAND report covering several case studies of insurgency found that the inability of successive administrations to deliver a competent and honest government has been a primary contributing factor to the persistent communist insurgency in the Philippines.¹⁹⁴ According to Santos et al., in the three AFP campaigns, the government attributed the ongoing problem to the communists, because they exploit the social and political conditions in the countryside.¹⁹⁵ Santos et al. also observed that, while this may be true, it is actually more complex, since the CPP-NPA cannot exist without the support of the people, particularly in the countryside, and underlying grievances have been strong motivating factors for alignment with the insurgents.

A lack of understanding of the nature of the communist insurgency has contributed to the lack of government-agency support. Despite the whole-of-government approach laid out by multiple administrations, the insurgency has been viewed by many officials as a problem for the military.¹⁹⁶ During the C. Aquino administration (1986–1992), the house of representatives had differing opinions about the insurgency problem. Some believed that it was a “purely local phenomena,” while others believed that it was solely a problem for the military to solve.¹⁹⁷ The Ramos administration (1992–1998), which continued *Oplan Lambat Bitag*, faced the same problem as the previous administration: government agencies remained “poorly coordinated, under-sourced, and lacking in the training and

¹⁹³ Peña, “Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy,” 52–53.

¹⁹⁴ Rabasa et al., *From Insurgency to Stability*, 33.

¹⁹⁵ Santos et al., *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippines*, 20.

¹⁹⁶ Watts et al., “Counterinsurgency in the Philippines,” 2014, 86.

¹⁹⁷ Watts et al., 86.

doctrine for counterinsurgency.”¹⁹⁸ As a result, the government failed to deliver the necessary support in the consolidation and development stages of *Oplan Lambat Bitag*, which was quickly exploited by the CPP-NPA to recover and regain lost mass base.¹⁹⁹

The Arroyo administration (2001–2010) had a promising start as it implemented the Strategy of Holistic Approach (SHA) in implementing the revitalized campaign against communist insurgents. Devesa has argued that the SHA strategy addressed the government inactions that were being exploited by the CPP-NPA, since it recognized the need for an “unconventional and multi-dimensional response.”²⁰⁰ This strategy included four major components: “political-legal-diplomatic; socio-economic-psychosocial; peace and order-security; and information with specific government agencies leading each component.”²⁰¹ Yet, the stated strategy was not necessarily reflected in the views of politicians and government officials, and other government agencies may not have been resourced to deliver. The main problem during the Arroyo administration, however, was that it focused government counterinsurgency efforts at the ASG, Moro-Muslim secessionists, and terrorist groups that rendered the communist insurgency as a lower priority. In fact, this concentration on counterterrorism and Mindanao was driven by the funding and priorities of the United States, on which the Philippines was partially dependent.²⁰²

3. Challenges to Political Leadership

Different political challenges in the government further hindered the implementation of the AFP campaigns and the whole-of-government response. The effectiveness of the counterinsurgency effort by the government relies on the commitment of the political leadership at the national and local levels.²⁰³ This section discusses failed

¹⁹⁸ Watts et al., 88.

¹⁹⁹ Watts et al., 89.

²⁰⁰ Devesa, “An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology,” 40.

²⁰¹ Devesa, 39.

²⁰² Rommel C. Banlaoi, *Philippine Security in the Age of Terror* (New York: CRC Press, 2010), 62, 107.

²⁰³ Robert B. Stephan, *Counterinsurgency in the Philippines. Problems and Prospects* (Langley AFB, VA: Army-Air Force Center for Low-Intensity Conflict, October 1989), 9.

peace negotiations with the communists, bureaucratic inefficiency, and political instability as among the political leadership challenges faced by the different administrations.

Each administration studied here tried to negotiate with the communist insurgents but ultimately failed because of the insurgents' unrealistic demands and insincerity.²⁰⁴ It is important to note that the goal of the CPP is to replace the democratic government with a communist government. The CPP used peace negotiations as a means to reorganize and strengthen its ranks and gain political concessions from the government, which was manifested at the time of President C. Aquino when she ordered the release of all political prisoners, Jose Maria Sison and Bernabe Buscayno included.²⁰⁵ Several administrations followed this strategy. For example, President Ramos repealed the anti-subversion law, granted amnesty, and implemented the party-list voting system, which gave the CPP an opportunity to participate in the political affairs of the country.²⁰⁶ As a result, the CPP now had representation in the Philippine Congress, giving them the opportunity to destroy the government from within or, if they chose, fight for gains within the system. President B. Aquino also started his administration trying to negotiate peace with the communist insurgents.

Bureaucratic inefficiency further contributed to the failure of the counterinsurgency strategies. All four administrations were hindered in fully implementing their counterinsurgency strategy because of the fragmented government structure and corrupt leaders. At the time of Presidents C. Aquino and Ramos, the "Philippine bureaucracy was perceived as generally weak, uncommitted to reform, uncoordinated, corrupt, financially burdened and incapable of coping with the needs of development and reform."²⁰⁷ The inefficiency, inability, and unwillingness of the government to provide basic services to the people, particularly the impoverished masses in the countryside, provided the

²⁰⁴ Watts et al., "Counterinsurgency in the Philippines," 2014.

²⁰⁵ Peña, "Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy," 94.

²⁰⁶ Severo, "Philippine Counterinsurgency during the Presidencies of Magsaysay, Marcos, and Ramos: Challenges and Opportunities," 117.

²⁰⁷ Peña, "Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy," 60.

communist insurgents with narratives to agitate, arouse, organize, and mobilize masses against the government.

Political instability also proved a significant factor that affected the implementation of counterinsurgency strategy. Emmanuel Navarrete has argued that President C. Aquino's peace and reconciliation policy was never fully realized because her administration faced several attempted coups.²⁰⁸ According to Navarrete, political survival became a central concern, one furthered by building alliances with various factions within the military, regardless of their effectiveness in the field or in carrying out the administration's strategy. President Arroyo's administration was also hounded by political instability, having faced several impeachment attempts and politically motivated rallies against her administration. Although President B. Aquino's administration did not face any coup or impeachment attempts, his administration faced several destabilizing events—the Manila Hostage crisis, Scarborough Shoal incident, and Mamasapano clash—where their occurrence and the government response were heavily criticized by political opposition and the public.²⁰⁹

C. CONCLUSION

This chapter has compared the three primary AFP campaigns implemented after the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution. This examination has found that the inadequate sustainment capability by AFP and follow-on security forces, lack of support from government institutions, and centralized challenges to political leadership are the three common factors that negatively affected the AFP's implementation of the campaign and accomplishment of its objectives. These, in turn, were caused by inadequate resources, lack of systemic reform, lack of a unified force within the government, instability, and other internal and external threats.

²⁰⁸ Navarrete, "An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Campaign," 55.

²⁰⁹ Nile Villa, "10 of Aquino's Biggest Hits and Misses, as Seen through Social Media," Rappler, June 18, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/technology/social-media/president-aquino-term-social-media-reactions>.

V. DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AND SECURITY PLAN— DSSP *KAPAYAPAAN* (PEACE)

The various communist counterinsurgency campaigns launched by the AFP have gained significant headway over the years; however, they still fell short of accomplishing their objectives of defeating the communist insurgents. Using the lessons learned in the past campaigns, the AFP has implemented a new campaign, the Development Support and Security Plan (DSSP) *Kapayapaan* (Peace). This chapter describes the DSSP *Kapayapaan* campaign’s objectives, strategy, and new initiatives. It then argues that three new initiatives—creation of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), the Community Support Program (CSP), and the enhanced civil society partnership—are the primary factors contributing to recent gains made by the AFP and the Philippine government. In comparing the current campaign to previous AFP campaigns, the chapter finds that elements of DSSP *Kapayapaan* have made significant strides and have continuing potential to overcome two of three major shortcomings identified in the earlier campaigns. The chapter also finds that the creation of the NTF-ELCAC is providing the necessary structure to direct national and local government agencies to collaborate and converge counterinsurgency efforts with the AFP.

A. OVERVIEW OF DSSP *KAPAYAPAAN*

The DSSP *Kapayapaan* campaign is currently being implemented by the AFP against the CPP-NPA and other internal security threats. It is anchored in the President Rodrigo Duterte administration’s focus on “compassion and radical change encompassing the institutionalization of peace and order, ensuring inclusive socio-economic growth and development, streamlining bureaucracy, and pursuing an independent foreign policy.”²¹⁰ DSSP *Kapayapaan* started in January 2017 and is expected to culminate in June 2022, after the term of President Duterte has ended. As with the previous campaign, IPSP *Bayanihan*, DSSP *Kapayapaan* is a result of collaboration of the AFP with other government agencies

²¹⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Development Support and Security Plan Kapayapaan* (Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City: Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2017), 5, <https://mronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/AFP-Development-Support-and-Security-Plan-Kapayapaan-2017-2022.pdf>.

and civil society. Under the plan, the AFP puts emphasis on the possible areas of collaboration and convergence of the different local government units (LGUs) and other stakeholders. It also recognizes the importance of collaboration and convergence of different national government agencies and LGUs for realizing development, governance, and security.²¹¹ Like the previous AFP campaigns, DSSP *Kapayapaan* is intended to guide the AFP in performing its functions to support the overall national security and development initiatives of the government.²¹²

Campaign Objectives and Strategies

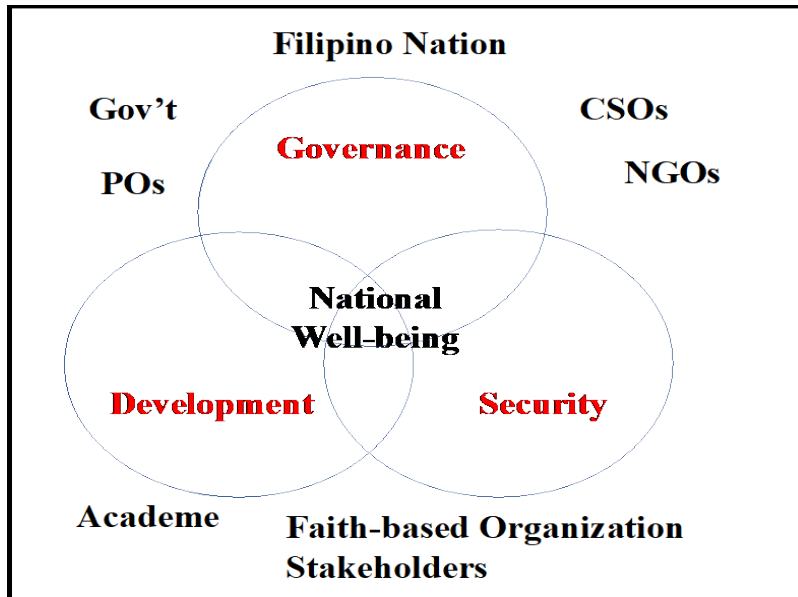
The campaign adopted the Development-Governance-Security Framework (see Figure 8), which places national well-being at the center, recognizing the importance of having “a shared understanding of concept development, good governance, and security with all communities and all stakeholders.”²¹³ The framework emphasizes sustainable development, human security, and good governance as a means of ending the communist insurgency. It also recognizes that “security should be an integral part of national development and good governance in order help foster the foundation for inclusive economic and human development.”²¹⁴

²¹¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 6.

²¹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.

²¹³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 31.

²¹⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 10.



LEGEND:

CSO – Civil Society Organization
 NGO – Non-government organization
 PO – People’s Organization

Figure 8. Development-Governance-Security Framework.²¹⁵

Under the plan, the government includes the national government agencies which emphasize the importance of each agency being able to fulfill its mandate and responsibility to the people. It also includes the local government units, which tend to be the principal advocates of good governance and are considered the most essential links in the development and security of communities in their respective localities.²¹⁶ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and peoples’ organizations (POs) are also considered “vital partners as they bridge the service-delivery gaps in providing the basic needs of the people.”²¹⁷ Academe includes those who are in the education community, who play a major role in development and security through their contributions in the fields of “technology research, conflict resolution, information

²¹⁵ Adapted from Armed Forces of the Philippines, 30.

²¹⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 20–21.

²¹⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 21.

campaign, and values education.”²¹⁸ The religious sector includes the various religious groups in the country, which are also considered vital to development and security because of their legitimacy, reach, and capacity to mobilize and facilitate support for peace and reconciliation.²¹⁹

Under the DSSP *Kapayapaan* campaign, the AFP’s mission is as follows:

Conduct “development support operations” to sustain the peace, ensure security, and help maintain public order in order to foster the foundation for inclusive economic and human development of the Filipino people.²²⁰

The published DSSP *Kapayapaan* document defines development support operations broadly as “AFP operations and activities conducted in support of civil authorities and other stakeholders.”²²¹ It has placed emphasis on the AFP being in a support role as opposed to a leadership role in the development aspect; however, it remains the lead in terms of security.

The campaign features four strategic concepts with a broad mandate for the AFP: “sustained military operations to defeat terrorist groups and deter armed peace spoilers; promotion of peace; active support to law enforcement; and contribution to nation-building.”²²² Under the plan, sustained military operations focus on the deliberate employment of forces and capabilities of the AFP to defeat all the armed groups in the country.²²³ In contributing to the promotion of peace, the AFP is to support and actively participate in the government’s peace negotiation efforts.²²⁴ Active support to law enforcement means that the AFP will also support the PNP and other law enforcement agencies in their campaign against illegal drugs and the dismantling of organized crime

²¹⁸ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 22.

²¹⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 22.

²²⁰ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 28.

²²¹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 28.

²²² Armed Forces of the Philippines, 7.

²²³ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 33.

²²⁴ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 35.

groups and private armed groups.²²⁵ In contributing to nation building, the AFP is to perform tasks in collaboration with civil authorities to help address socio-economic issues.²²⁶ These activities include protection of the environment, climate change adaptation, and delivery of basic services.

B. NEW AFP-LED INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN

The DSSP *Kapayapaan* document published by the AFP states that the government and the AFP recognize that the effective delivery of basic services and governance to the communities is hampered by continued structural problems, despite the government's efforts.²²⁷ Among these structural problems are the lack of a national body to integrate the efforts of the various national and local government agencies and the lack of government collaboration with civil society organizations that are also implementing CSPs in the *barangays*.

With the recognition of these structural problems, the government and the AFP have instituted several initiatives that will help support the implementation of the campaign: first, the CSP, which is being implemented by the AFP as part of its counterinsurgency operations; second, an enhanced partnership with civil society; and third, the creation of a national task force that will help consolidate all the different national agencies' and LGUs' efforts against communist insurgency.

1. Community Support Program

The CSP is a “community- and issues-oriented operational concept employed in conflict areas” that was first implemented mid-2016 in the AFP's Eastern Mindanao Command.²²⁸ It is a “multi-stakeholder, community-based, and people-oriented peace and development effort aimed to establish and develop disaster and conflict resilient

²²⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 38.

²²⁶ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 38–39.

²²⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, 5.

²²⁸ OU3, Eastern Mindanao Command, “Primer on Community Support Program” (Eastern Mindanao Command, AFP, 2017), 3.

communities.”²²⁹ The CSP primer published by the Eastern Mindanao Command states that CSP places a premium on engagement with LGUs to identify, examine, and address primary issues being exploited by the CPP-NPA to fuel their ideological, political, and organizational efforts.²³⁰ The primer further states that community support is implemented by Community Support Teams (CSTs) organized at the battalion level (see Figure 9). A CST is composed of one infantry rifle squad (nine soldiers) that is trained to conduct community immersions, such as dialogue with *barangay* residents, livelihood trainings, and community support activities in collaboration with LGUs. Team leaders are selected based on their leadership capabilities and their ability to ensure that the CSP objectives in the communities are timely achieved.²³¹ CSTs have their own respective cells, such as operations, intelligence, and CMO to ensure that each team can perform its tasks and individuals are supported in their specialty areas.

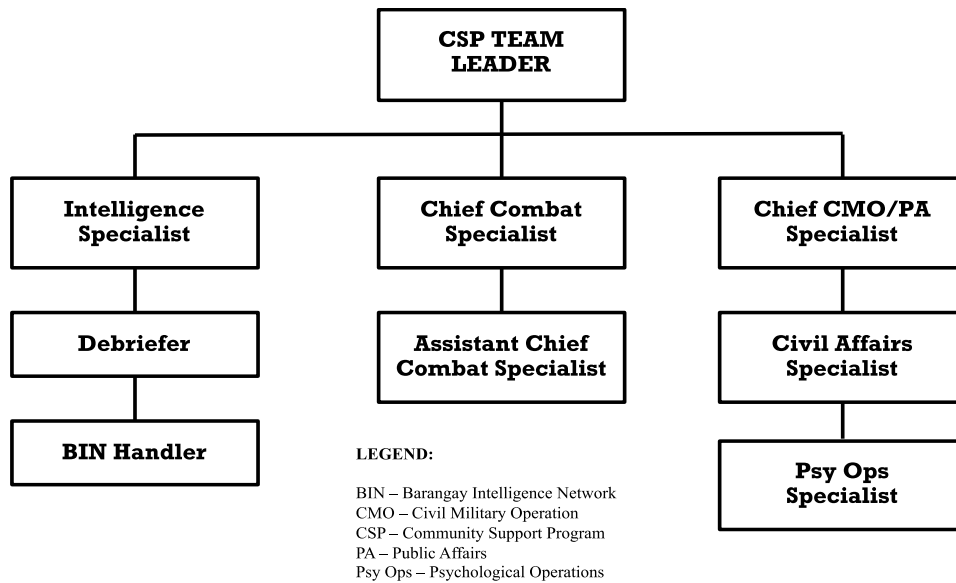


Figure 9. Community Support Team (CST) Composition.²³²

²²⁹ OU3, Eastern Mindanao Command, 4.

²³⁰ OU3, Eastern Mindanao Command, 5–7.

²³¹ OU3, Eastern Mindanao Command, 24.

²³² Adapted from OU3, Eastern Mindanao Command, 23.

The Doctrine and Capability Integration Center of the Training and Doctrine Command of the Philippine Army highlights some of the best practices for implementing CSP in eastern Mindanao, and it is expected that these lessons will effectively transfer to the rest of the CSP teams deployed in communist insurgent-affected communities.²³³ The Center states that CSP operations in the 4th and 10th Infantry Divisions have been successful because they have been able to peacefully engage the communities and work with locals from multiple sectors to identify the key issues in the community that need to be addressed.

Although the Mindanao-based CSP operations have been successful, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) identified that a lack of resources and low or nonexistent participation by national government agencies have limited the positive effects and sustainability of its operations.²³⁴ In October 2019, the DILG published Memorandum Circular No: 2019–169, *Guidelines on the Implementation of the Retooled Community Support Program (RCSP)*, which aimed to strengthen the CSP initiatives of the AFP.²³⁵ RCSP, according to the memorandum, is an inclusive program aimed at addressing the governance and development gaps in the community by ensuring that local chief executives implement “programs, projects, and activities that are geared towards institutionalizing sustainable peace and development” in their respective localities.²³⁶ The memorandum further directs all LGUs to implement and support RCSP in their respective localities.

²³³ Doctrine and Capabilities Integration Center, “Community-Support-Program-Best-Practices-in-Eastern-Mindanao-Command-AOR,” Training and Doctrine Command, Philippine Army, accessed April 13, 2021, <http://doctrinecenterpa.com/posts/Community-Support-Program-Best-Practices-in-Eastern-Mindanao-Command-AOR>.

²³⁴ Department of the Interior and Local Government, “Guidelines on the Implementation of the Retooled Community Support Program (RCSP),” Department of the Interior and Local Government, Republic of the Philippines, October 11, 2019, 2, https://dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/issuances/memo_circulars/dilg-memocircular-20191011_08564fdfd5.pdf.

²³⁵ Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2.

²³⁶ Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2.

2. Enhanced Cooperation with Government Agencies and Civil Society

In the previous AFP campaigns, particularly *Oplan Lambat-Bitag* (Net Trap) and *Oplan Bantay-Laya* (Guarding Freedom), there was little to no civil society involvement and government-agency cooperation in the implementation of the campaign. To eliminate public support for the communist insurgency, one of the key purposes of DSSP *Kapayapaan* is to harness nationalist sentiment and rally the support of civil society.²³⁷

Since the implementation of the campaign, the AFP and its subordinate units have initiated and conducted various stakeholder-engagement activities, mainly with civil society, NGOs, and the religious sector but also with the various people's organizations that are present in the communities. In her article, "The Security Reform Agenda for the AFP and PNP in 2018," political scientist Jennifer Santiago Oreta noted a shift in the AFP and civil society organization (CSO) collaboration.²³⁸ She stated that, although avoided and distrusted at first, more and more CSOs are now involved and collaborating with the AFP. Oreta noted, in particular, the *Bantay Bayanihan* (BB) network, which started with seven organizations in 2010 and now has 250 member organizations representing various CSOs, religious, academe, and people's organizations. BB started during the implementation of the AFP's IPSP *Bayanihan* with a primary focus on having a "critical but constructive engagement with the AFP."²³⁹

Another important aspect of AFP collaboration with civil society that Oreta noted is the establishment of the Multi-Sectoral Governance Council (MSGC), whose primary purpose is to guide the AFP in its professionalization and modernization agenda.²⁴⁰ MSGC is composed of various respected stakeholders from different sectors of society. The General Headquarters, Major Services, Unified Commands, and other major units of the AFP now have their respective MSGC that helps them to professionalize and improve their

²³⁷ The Center for International Human Rights, *The Closing of Civic Space in the Philippines* (New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, January 2020), 5.

²³⁸ Jennifer Santiago Oreta, "The Security Reform Agenda for the AFP and PNP in 2018," *BusinessWorld*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.bworldonline.com/security-reform-agenda-afp-pnp-2018/>.

²³⁹ Oreta.

²⁴⁰ Oreta.

collaboration with the diverse sectors of society. They have worked on issues such as human rights violation, community engagements, and strategic communications with other stakeholders.

3. National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict

On December 4, 2018, as part of the nation’s counterinsurgency strategy, President Duterte signed Executive Order No. 70, s.2018 “institutionalizing the Whole of Nation approach in attaining inclusive and sustainable peace, creating a national task force to end local communist armed conflict and directing the adoption of a national peace framework.”²⁴¹ Through this executive order, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) was created to orchestrate and ensure that the whole-of-nation approach is effectively implemented. It is composed of representatives from various national government agencies, such as the DILG and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and two representatives from the private sector who are appointed by the president for a one-year term.²⁴² The President of the Philippines serves as Chairman while the National Security Adviser serves as Vice-Chairman.²⁴³ Such high-level involvement bodes well for government engagement.

The NTF-ELCAC, as stated in Section 4 of the executive order, has the following powers and functions:

- a. Within six (6) months from the issuance of this Order, formulate and start to implement in coordination with relevant national government agencies, LGUs, the civil society and other stakeholders, a Whole-of-Nation approach-driven National Peace Framework;
- b. Ensure inter-agency convergence in the implementation of the Framework in conflict-affected and vulnerable communities;

²⁴¹ Official Gazette, “Executive Order No. 70, s. 2018,” Government of the Philippines, accessed May 3, 2020, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2018/12/04/executive-order-no-70-s-2018/>.

²⁴² Official Gazette, 3.

²⁴³ Official Gazette, 2.

- c. Enlist the assistance of any department, bureau, office, agency or instrumentality of the government in accordance with their respective mandates;
- d. Evaluate, define, modify or integrate policies, programs and activities contained in the Framework;
- e. Organize *ad hoc* inter-agency and multi-sectoral clusters, councils, committees and groups in national, regional and local levels, or modify existing ones, whenever necessary to fulfill its mandates;
- f. Develop strategic communication, advocacy, and peace constituency plans in case of ceasefire, as well as capacity-building measures, to enable local chief executives and local peace bodies to engage and facilitate local peace engagements or negotiations and interventions;
- g. Review the mandates and functions of offices undertaking peace efforts to avoid duplication of function and programs, and submit its recommendation/s to the President for approval;
- h. As may be necessary, issue supplemental guidelines, protocols or policies in furtherance of this Order;
- i. Recommend to the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process projects and conflict-affected areas where the *PAYAPA at MASAGANAN and PAMAYANAN* (PAMANA) Program may be implemented, subject to the provisions of the General Appropriations Act; and
- j. Perform such other duties and functions as the President may direct.²⁴⁴

The powers and functions of the task force highlight the government's commitment in providing a national structure to ensure that collaboration and convergence of the different national government agencies, LGUs, AFP, and other stakeholders is achieved. It also emphasizes the whole-of-nation approach in resolving the communist insurgency.

²⁴⁴ Official Gazette, 3-4.

Since its activation, the task force has been committed in its campaign against the communist insurgency. Journalist J.C. Gotinga found that AFP senior military officers believe that NTF-ELCAC is the government’s response to the “socio-politico-economic dimension of the counterinsurgency campaign.”²⁴⁵ Gotinga explained that the NTF-ELCAC is intended to integrate the government’s efforts to address the varied strategies being used by the communist insurgents. Journalist Marita Moaje reported that NTF-ELCAC has received positive feedback from the Senate Committee on National Defense and Security, Peace, Unification and Reconciliation.²⁴⁶ Quoting from the committee’s report, she argued that “the whole-of-nation approach by NTF-ELCAC could be the most effective anti-insurgency program as evidenced by the continuous and consistent reduction of the influence and strength of the CPP-NPA.”²⁴⁷ The activation of NTF-ELCAC was a welcome development for the AFP, since an organization could now lead the coordination of governance, security, and development initiatives in the community.

C. CAMPAIGN COMPARISON

DSSP *Kapayapaan* builds on the gains that were made in the previous AFP campaigns, particularly IPSP *Bayanihan*. It recognizes the need for the AFP to conduct development, governance, and security operations that support civil authorities in their initiatives in the communities. This section outlines how DSSP *Kapayapaan* attempts to address the three shortcomings of the three campaigns discussed in Chapter IV, namely inadequate sustainment capability, lack of support from government and civil society, and challenges of political leadership.

1. Addressing Inadequate Sustainment Capability

Because of a lack of personnel and equipment in the previous campaigns, inadequate sustainment has been one of the AFP’s key challenges to achieving its

²⁴⁵ J.C. Gotinga, “Duterte’s Final Gambit to End Insurgency: Task Force vs Communists,” Rappler, May 14, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-final-gambit-task-force-against-communists>.

²⁴⁶ Marita Moaje, “NTF-ELCAC Whole-of-Nation Approach vs Reds Most Effective: Senate,” Philippine News Agency, February 26, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1131914>.

²⁴⁷ Moaje.

counterinsurgency objectives. The Duterte administration has made several attempts to increase the strength and improve the capabilities of the AFP. In August 2017, Duterte asked Philippine lawmakers to approve the recruitment of an additional 20,000 soldiers to address the security threats within the country.²⁴⁸ In 2018, the AFP activated the Armed Forces of the Philippines Special Operations Command (AFPSOCOM), which took control of all the special operations units of the Philippine Army, Air Force, and Navy.²⁴⁹ Later that year, the Philippine Army activated the 11th Infantry Division to address the terrorism threats in the southern part of the country.²⁵⁰ This activation meant that the AFP was no longer required to shift its forces from Luzon to address the threats in the south. In 2019, Duterte ordered the recruitment of an additional 25,000 soldiers who will be tasked to address the communist insurgency and terrorism.²⁵¹ As of 2020, the AFP was estimated to have 151,400 active duty personnel and about 62,300 paramilitary forces.²⁵²

In terms of capability development, the AFP has continued to pursue its modernization program to augment its existing capabilities. The 2019 Department of National Defense (DND) report revealed that a total of PhP 16.8 billion (US\$336 million) was allocated for capability, material, and technology development projects in the AFP.²⁵³ Most of this equipment was intended to bolster the AFP's internal security operations capabilities. Equipment was paired with dedicated time for training and maintenance to bolster impact and sustainability.

²⁴⁸ Guillaume Lavallee, "Duterte: AFP Needs 20,000 More Troops Due to Greater Threats," Rappler, August 6, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-afp-20000-troops-greater-threats>.

²⁴⁹ Nikko Dizon, "AFP Puts Special Ops under One Command," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 9, 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/981029/afp-puts-special-ops-under-one-command>.

²⁵⁰ Priam Nepomuceno, "Army Formally Activates 11th Infantry Division," Philippine News Agency, December 19, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1057022>.

²⁵¹ Frances Mangosing, "PH Military Needs 25,000 New Soldiers Mostly to Fight Insurgency, Terrorism," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 4, 2019, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1173635/ph-military-needs-25000-new-soldiers-mostly-to-fight-insurgency-terrorism>.

²⁵² International Institute of Strategic Studies, "Chapter Six: Asia," *The Military Balance* 121, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 294, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2021.1868795>.

²⁵³ Department of National Defense, *Department of National Defense Accomplishment Report CY 2019* (Quezon City, Philippines: Department of National Defense, 2019), 62, https://www.dnd.gov.ph/FilesUploaded/Ckeditor/file/AR_2019-2.pdf.

2. Lack of Support from Government Institutions

Unlike predecessor campaigns that lacked sustained support from government institutions, DSSP *Kapayapaan* has enjoyed full, ongoing backing from the administration. Duterte signed Executive Order (EO) No. 70 in 2018 to institutionalize a whole-of-nation approach within the government's counterinsurgency strategy. A key effect of this executive order is that national government agencies and LGUs are actively collaborating to support the AFP in its campaign. A senior AFP official has acknowledged that "good governance practices and efficient delivery of basic services for their constituents create resilient communities that thwart the return of the communist terrorist groups,"²⁵⁴ which is the dynamic that the executive order aimed to facilitate. The AFP official further added that with such developments, the AFP could now focus on those who continued to persist with armed struggle.

Although there were similar attempts made in previous administrations, like the Ramos administration's National Reunification Policy and Arroyo's Strategy of Holistic Approach, they ultimately fell short without a comprehensive, government-wide plan to support the campaign.²⁵⁵ Unlike the previous campaigns in which the AFP was the frontline in the government's counterinsurgency strategy, EO 70 puts the local governments in the frontlines.²⁵⁶ Reporter Marit Cabugon has observed that "EO 70 strikes a balance between the two extremes: concessions—through peace talks and ceasefire—to the Communist Party of the Philippines, and a purely military option."²⁵⁷ Cabugon has also reported that lack of support from civilian government was a primary source of major frustration for the military in insurgency-infested areas. Unlike previous administrations, which designated a Cabinet Secretary, EO Nr. 70 places the President as the Chairman of the National Task Force, which represents the full commitment of the administration to the counterinsurgency strategy.

²⁵⁴ Marit Stinus-Cabugon, "EO 70: A Good Move," *The Manila Times*, December 17, 2018, sec. Op-Ed Columns, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/12/17/opinion/columnists/eo-70-a-good-move/483800/>.

²⁵⁵ Devesa, "An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology," 66.

²⁵⁶ Gotinga, "Duterte's Final Gambit to End Insurgency."

²⁵⁷ Stinus-Cabugon, "EO 70."

3. Challenges to Political Leadership

Unlike previous administrations, Duterte's has not experienced political instability and challenge from a strong, well-organized opposition. The president's popularity with the general public has remained high.²⁵⁸ However, like the previous administrations, the Duterte administration has been challenged by corruption, criminality and drugs, insurgency, and terrorism. Duterte was catapulted into the presidency based on campaign promises to overcome these issues. Despite the administration's effort to curb corruption in the country, the Philippines was ranked 115 out of 180 countries by Transparency International in 2020, which was nearly identical to the country's ranking when the Duterte administration began in 2016.²⁵⁹

Like his predecessors, Duterte put peace negotiations with insurgents at the top of his agenda. His administration entered into peace negotiations with the CPP-NPA and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), with the latter in the final stages of cementing a plan for implementation of a peace agreement.²⁶⁰ To demonstrate his sincerity, Duterte offered four cabinet positions to the leftist organization and guaranteed the safety of CPP founder Jose Maria Sison and Luis Jalandoni if they choose to return to the Philippines.²⁶¹ He also approved the conditional release of communist leaders who would be part of the CPP's negotiating team. The initial peace stance of the government, however, changed when the NPA persistently launched attacks against unwary police and military personnel in the countryside.²⁶² After these attacks, Duterte withdrew these offers.

²⁵⁸ Mark R. Thompson, "The Early Duterte Presidency in the Philippines," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 35, no. 3 (December 1, 2016): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810341603500301>.

²⁵⁹ Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2020 for Philippines," accessed May 18, 2021, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020>.

²⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Philippine Peace Talks," Redaksjonellartikkel, Republic of Philippines, December 2, 2019, https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/foreign-affairs/peace-and-reconciliation-efforts/norways_engagement/talks_philippines/id2522232/.

²⁶¹ Manuel Mogato, "Duterte Readies for Philippine Peace Talks Restart as Rebel Team Arrives," Reuters, May 17, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-politics-idUSKCN0Y819Y>.

²⁶² Ruth Abbey Carlos-Gita, "Duterte Can't Ignore NPA Attacks," Philippine News Agency, December 19, 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1089149>.

Another significant difference between the Duterte administration and its predecessors has been the perceived “militarization” of his government. In a special report for the *Sunstar Manila*, investigative reporter Ruth Gita revealed that as of 2019 Duterte had appointed 46 former military and police officers to key positions in the government, including ten Cabinet-level positions.²⁶³ She reported that Duterte’s reasoning behind these appointments was his dissatisfaction with the sluggish work of some of the civilians in the government agencies.

D. CONCLUSION

Although the initial results of DSSP *Kapayapaan* have been promising, it remains to be seen whether this campaign will achieve its objective of defeating the communist insurgents by the end of Duterte’s term in 2022, or even if its six-year timeline is reasonable. The new initiatives that the Philippine government and the AFP are implementing seem to address sizable gaps and shortcomings of the previous campaigns. The creation of the NTF-ELCAC has so far been successful in ensuring that the AFP has been receiving the necessary collaboration and convergence that it needs with the national government agencies, LGUs, and civil society. The CSP operations being conducted by the AFP have also been effective in identifying community issues that need to be resolved. Finally, although the Duterte administration faces the same socio-economic problems as those of his predecessors, it has not yet had to contend with political instability, which hindered previous administrations’ counterinsurgency plans.

²⁶³ Ruth Abbey Gita, “Special Report: A ‘Militarized’ Government,” *Sunstar*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1815070/Manila/Local-News/Special-Report-A-militarized-government>.

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VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After more than five decades, the Philippines is still fighting a domestic communist insurgency. To this date, the CPP-NPA remains the primary threat confronting the AFP.²⁶⁴ Although the AFP data show that the CPP-NPA military capabilities have been significantly reduced since their peak in the mid- to late 1980s, it is insufficient to rely on these statistics alone to measure the government's counterinsurgency success. This chapter summarizes the reasons why the CPP-NPA re-emerged in the 1960s and offers three primary explanations for why the CPP-NPA has not yet been defeated, despite the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s and continual efforts by the AFP. This chapter also provides recommendations to address the major factors that have hindered the AFP campaigns in defeating the communist insurgents and makes recommendations for future studies.

A. MAJOR FINDINGS

The Philippine government has implemented four primary counterinsurgency strategies since the Marcos dictatorship was defeated in 1986 and democracy reinstated: the National Reunification Policy implemented during the President Corazon Aquino and President Ramos administrations (1988–92 and 1992–98, respectively); Strategy of Holistic Approach implemented by the President Arroyo administration (2001–2010); the people-centered security strategy during the President Benigno Aquino administration (2010–2016); and the whole-of-nation approach currently being implemented by the Duterte administration (2016–present).²⁶⁵ In each, the AFP, in particular, has played a central role, not just in combat operations but in governance itself.

²⁶⁴ Dencio Severo Acop, "The Expanded Nontraditional Role of the AFP," *Prism* 3, no. 2 (March 2012): 105.

²⁶⁵ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Campaign Plan (Bayanihan)*, 5.

1. Reasons for the Communist Insurgency’s Re-emergence and Sustainment

The reasons for the communists’ re-emergence are closely linked to the reasons why the insurgency has continued for the past five decades. From its humble beginnings in Capas, Tarlac, in 1969, the CPP-NPA gradually evolved to become a potent threat to the Philippine government for three primary reasons.²⁶⁶ First, the presence of severe political and economic inequality within the country provided widespread grievances for the CPP-NPA to exploit. In particular, the government’s inefficiency, corruption, and inability to deliver basic services to the people, particularly to those in the countryside, have provided the communist insurgents with narratives to use against a state that is expected to foster democratic ideals, justice, and opportunity.²⁶⁷

Second, the CPP-NPA identified and committed to the Protracted People’s War (PPW) strategy. Since its beginning, the CPP-NPA divided its struggle into three major stages: strategic defensive, strategic stalemate, and strategic offensive.²⁶⁸ Although the CPP-NPA did not seem to move past the strategic defensive stage, PPW remains an effective strategy for prolonging the conflict against the Philippine government.

Third, the CPP-NPA has effectively exploited social and political conditions in the country. The group has demonstrated its capability to mobilize the masses through agitation and propaganda activities, as well as local politics and regular leadership changes in government and the military. Deeply rooted inequities in land ownership, labor rights, and access to political and social power worsened during the Marcos era and remain unresolved.

2. Why the CPP-NPA Has Not Yet Been Defeated

By examining four major AFP campaigns—*Oplan Lambat-Bitag* (Net Trap) from 1989 to 1998, *Oplan Bantay-Laya* (Guarding Freedom) from 2001 to 2010, IPSP

²⁶⁶ Mapping Militant Organizations, “MMP: Communist Party of the Philippines - New People’s Army.”

²⁶⁷ Philippine Army, *The Communist Party of the Philippines*, 3–16.

²⁶⁸ Corpus, *Silent War*, 27.

Bayanihan (Civic Unity) from 2011 to 2016, and DSSP *Kapayapaan* (Peace) from 2016 to the present—this research has identified inadequate sustainment capability, lack of support from government institutions, and challenges to political leadership as the primary factors that hindered the AFP campaigns from achieving their overriding objective of defeating the CPP-NPA.

Inadequate sustainment capability, particularly in terms of equipment and personnel, was the primary reason cited by AFP senior commanders in a report published by the International Crisis Group in 2011.²⁶⁹ The inability to provide adequate forces to sustain the operational gains in the *barangays* was a main weakness of *Oplan Lambat-Bitag*.²⁷⁰ The AFP encountered the same problem of inadequate sustainment capability during the implementation of its *Oplan Bantay-Laya* and IPSP *Bayanihan*, again leading to the AFP’s inability to capitalize on the gains made in cleared areas.

Lack of crucial support from government institutions has also significantly hindered the implementation of the AFP campaigns. This research identified three factors contributing to this lack of support: first, a lack of understanding and appreciation among various government institutions for the AFP’s counterinsurgency efforts. This led to persistent shortcomings of these agencies to deliver the necessary development activities in areas cleared by the AFP.²⁷¹ Second, government officials lacked a common understanding of the communist insurgency. Despite adjustments made over the years by the government to implement a whole-of-government counterinsurgency strategy, the insurgency was, and perhaps still is, viewed by many officials as a problem solely for the military to solve. Further, although the Philippine government and even the AFP have received significant support from its allies and security partners, this support has not been focused on defeating communist insurgents but instead on counterterrorism, maritime security, and developing the defense industry.

²⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, “The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks,” i.

²⁷⁰ Morales, “Perpetual War: The Philippine Insurgencies,” 29.

²⁷¹ Peña, “Finding the Missing Link to a Successful Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy,” 52–53.

Finally, centralized challenges to political leadership have hindered the implementation of the campaigns and whole-of-government response. All four administrations were hindered in fully implementing their respective counterinsurgency strategy because of fragmented government structure and corrupt leaders. In addition, ongoing and widespread political instability from other sources regularly threatened the central government, thus distracting from the implementation of the counterinsurgency strategy. For instance, Presidents Corazon Aquino and Arroyo both faced several coup attempts that shifted the AFP's focus and bred distrust between civilian and military leaders. President Benigno Aquino also faced several destabilizing events—the Manila hostage crisis, Scarborough Shoal incident, and Mamasapano clash—that weakened his political legitimacy and power.²⁷²

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having identified the three main factors that hindered the implementation of the AFP's campaign, this section provides the author's recommendation on how these factors can be addressed.

1. Addressing the Inadequate Sustainment Capability

The Philippine government has found ways to address the AFP's lack of resources in terms of material, personnel, and equipment but has yet to be able to sustain these gains. The recent recruitment of additional personnel, procurement of equipment, and activation of additional units of the AFP are welcome developments. While it can be argued that the AFP still lacks the number of personnel and the equipment needed to address the threats, the current AFP deployment of forces has proven to be effective in significantly reducing the CPP-NPA military capabilities.

Yet, this is only a first step. The AFP also needs to focus on establishing a conflict-resilient community that ensures previously cleared areas remain free from insurgent threats. Conflict-resilient communities can be established at the *barangay* level and initiated by Community Support Teams deployed in the area. The CSTs, however, cannot

²⁷² Villa, "10 of Aquino's Biggest Hits and Misses, as Seen through Social Media."

do this alone and should partner with LGUs, the PNP, civil society, faith-based groups, and the community. To be effective, the AFP should first ensure that conflict-affected communities understand that soldiers will have to transfer out and eventually move to clear other areas. The local PNP should be capable of securing the community. LGUs, particularly their leaders, and civil society should be fully integrated into supporting the various peace and security initiatives in the *barangay*.

Second, is the establishment of an Integrated Territorial Defense System (ITDS). The ITDS is designed to secure previously cleared areas from communist insurgents' re-entry by providing ongoing security.²⁷³ The ITDS concept was previously implemented during *Oplan Bantay-Laya*. At that time, however, ITDS was mostly composed of paramilitary forces and did not have adequate support from the LGU, civil society, and the community.

A best practice being implemented in the EASTMINCOM area that can be implemented in other Area Commands is organizing former rebels and former supporters of CPP-NPA in the *barangays* as a people's organization. These groups are organized by the CSTs deployed in the *barangays* and awarded livelihood programs by LGUs and national government agencies. This action has proven to be effective, because it has made the communist insurgents' recovery efforts in the area difficult, given that there are fewer community grievances to exploit. The existence of people's organizations also serves to counter the insurgent's propaganda in the *barangays*. Aside from depriving the CPP-NPA of manpower resources, these people's organizations can also be utilized to form part of the ITDS. As such, the livelihood programs provided by the government become part of the sustainment effort of the AFP against communist insurgents in the *barangays*.

Third, the AFP needs to enhance its intelligence operation. The success of CSP is heavily reliant on information provided by the intelligence community, which is highly reliant on community participation. All the campaigns have focused on improving the intelligence system of the AFP, resulting in a decline in CPP-NPA military capabilities. Yet, the intelligence operations should also focus on identifying supporters and

²⁷³ Devesa, "An Assessment of the Philippine Counterinsurgency Operational Methodology," 68.

underground mass organizations established by the CPP-NPA. These underground groups provide structure that supports the insurgents, politically and economically, in the community. To bolster sustainability, the intelligence community should be able to capitalize on the gains made by CSTs in conflict-affected communities.

2. Addressing Lack of Government Institution Support and Lack of Civil Society Support

It is very important for political and military leaders to understand the urgency of destroying the communist insurgents' infrastructures. Paul Melshen, a professor of Strategic Studies and Military History at the National Defense University, argues that "without the elimination of both the political and economic infrastructure, it is almost impossible to defeat insurgents."²⁷⁴ Yet, without the support of government institutions and civil society, it would be very difficult for the AFP to do this alone.

Three programs being implemented by the current administration offer promise in this area: first is the implementation of the Community Support Program, being implemented by the CSTs in conflict-affected areas, which places the program in an important role that can serve as a link between the community and government institutions. This access should help ensure that the grievances and concerns of the community are addressed by the right government agencies and should help minimize community issues that the CPP-NPA can exploit.

Second, the establishment of the Multi-Sectoral Governance Council, or MSGC, should help the AFP in its professionalization and modernization agenda.²⁷⁵ Significantly, the MSGC provides a venue for civil society to engage the AFP in various areas, such as human rights and disaster relief, not solely in the implementation of the military campaign. Third, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, or NTF-ELCAC, a specific government entity, should help ensure more effective implementation of the government's whole-of-nation counterinsurgency strategy.

²⁷⁴ Paul Melshen, "Mapping Out a Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan: Critical Considerations in Counterinsurgency Campaigning," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 18, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 670, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310701778522>.

²⁷⁵ Oreta, "The Security Reform Agenda for the AFP and PNP in 2018."

3. Addressing Challenges with Political and Military Leadership

An effective counterinsurgency strategy should start with a clear political policy, grounded in a shared understanding of the root causes of the conflict and long-term commitment to tackling those root causes. Paul Melshen has argued that a strategy should evolve from political policy and not the other way around.²⁷⁶ Strong political leadership is necessary to ensure that any counterinsurgency strategy is implemented and supported in earnest. It is thus very important for the AFP to ensure that political leaders are properly apprised and advised of the root causes, conditions, needs, resources, and strategy, just as it is important for the AFP to be properly apprised of government priorities and challenges.

In addition to clear communication and plans, political leaders must demonstrate a strong political commitment to defeating the communist insurgents. The creation of the NTF-ELCAC demonstrated the determination of the Duterte administration to end the communist insurgency through a whole-of-nation approach. The AFP, for its part, should ensure that it is able to capitalize on the political support that it is receiving and ensure that this support remains true down to the local level. Even as leaders face other or unexpected challenges, they must publicly reiterate their ongoing commitment to the counterinsurgency plans.

Furthermore, political and military leaders should both realize that effective counterinsurgency requires involvement of a high number of personnel and greater cooperation among the different government agencies and the community. Some political leaders believe that insurgency is solely a problem for the military to solve. This mindset must change, especially since it has contributed to the lack of cooperation between the AFP and political leaders on the ground.

C. FUTURE STUDIES

Although the Philippine government has demonstrated its capability to defeat communist insurgents, as in its defeat of the Huks in the mid-1950s, it remains to be seen whether the government can succeed in resolving the five-decade-long communist

²⁷⁶ Melshen, "Mapping Out a Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan," 668.

insurgency in the country. The current DSSP *Kapayapaan* campaign has made significant strides toward this goal. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the current administration will achieve its objectives by the end of President Duterte's term in 2022 and, if not, whether the strides already made can be sustained.

Future studies could expand on the specific stumbling blocks that the AFP needs to address, such as inadequate sustainment capabilities in confronting the multiple security threats surrounding the country. Future studies could also explore the vital role of civil society in helping the counterinsurgency campaigns of the AFP and government. The current strides that the AFP has made in engaging and involving civil society in crafting and implementing its campaign represent a significant shift from a purely militaristic mindset to solve insurgency. Future studies could also explore the DSSP *Kapayapaan* in more depth after it has had more time to operate. This study has examined the early efforts made in the implementation of the campaign to address the identified gaps in the previous campaigns. It is important to understand whether, and to what degree, these changes have resulted in significant gains that could benefit the AFP and the Philippine government's counterinsurgency strategy. Such future studies could also help us understand why certain changes were successful and whether the counterinsurgency strategy helped address the roots causes of the conflict.

The security and development approach being implemented today has been a proven formula. It worked in favor of the Philippine government when it defeated the Huks in the mid-1950s. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these earlier counterinsurgency successes were also enabled by both the people's support and strong political and military leadership. Any current or future strategy, based on time-tested methods, will still require these qualities to defeat any insurgency. The current whole-of-nation approach has the potential not just to rally this necessary support but to institutionalize new approaches to governing.

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