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THE PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. BASING

BY

COLONEL ALFONSO P. CAGURANGAN, JR.
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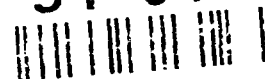
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THE PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY
AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. BASING

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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The Philippines and the United States enjoy excellent bilateral relations which pivot on the existence of military bases. This relationship, however, is continuously being disturbed by some Filipinos who are either nationalists or communists. The communists take advantage of the issue of a poverty-stricken Philippine populace to advance their cause as insurgency thrives in an economically weak government. Meanwhile, the Philippines also derive major economic benefits from hosting the military facilities in terms of financial assistance and employment opportunities for a large number of Filipinos. It is a fact that the U.S. military is the second largest employer in the Philippines next to the Philippine government. This assistance is justified by the needs for economic development which is necessary to alleviate poverty and thereby undermine the appeal of the insurgents.

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THE PHILIPPINE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. BASING

INTRODUCTION

President Aquino's leadership faces a serious threat to its survival as once again democracy in the Philippines is being tested. Meanwhile, the communist movement remains a challenge which will continue well into the decade of the 90's. Moreover, until the nation can mobilize the will and resources to redress the problems that fuel the insurgency, battlefield "successes" will remain illusionary. Further coup attempts are not unlikely. A successful coup would probably restore a Marcos-like regime with a new set of players. The resulting policy regression in human rights and continuing corruption would help revitalize the insurgency which already show signs of preparing to take advantage of current and anticipated political instability. The overall result would be a protracted struggle and likely disintegration of central government authority. These circumstances would make maintenance of U.S. bases and security of the American forces in the Philippines exceedingly difficult.¹ While the preceding opinion is generally held from an American point of view, it is believed that the Filipino people, in the closing decade of the century will find ways and means to close ranks in order to achieve political stability, economic vitality and military unity. Such objectives are not too difficult to achieve if Filipinos put their hearts and minds together as a democratic society and contribute their share to a new world order.

THE INSURGENCY MOVEMENT

The Philippines' communist movement is the country's most serious challenge to stability.² Communist-led revolution is not new, the current insurgency was preceded by a similar one, more than 40 years ago. That

earlier struggle began during the early 1940's, under the leadership of the merged communist and socialist parties as a resistance against the Japanese and against collaborators among the land-owning class. They were known as HUKBALAHAP or HUKS, an armed group against Japan. When World War II ended, they did not cease operations, in fact, their leaders participated in the 1946 elections but lost out to the more influential political parties. The Huks then resumed their military campaign, this time against the new Philippine Republic. By the early 1950's, they had become a serious threat to the state.³

However, a charismatic Filipino leader named Ramon Magsaysay, a young member of Congress who had been appointed Secretary of National Defense and later elected President of the Republic, defeated the Huks entirely. Magsaysay's strategy of "all out force and all out friendship" combined with the use of military power against the Huk's stronghold offers of frontier homestead for those who surrendered, a program of rural improvement and promises of land reform. Thus, many of the party's leaders had been captured, had surrendered or were weakened by internal division. Most Huk units had been disbanded, some had degenerated into bandits and only a few continued to fight the government. By 1954, the old pro-Moscow leadership of the Communist Party had abandoned revolution for parliamentary struggle and in 1974, most of its remaining leaders formally surrendered to the government.⁴ Magsaysay used the following steps in defeating the insurgents:

- o Destroyed insurgent political organization through improved intelligence and arrest of the leadership structure.
- o Revitalized the Army with new training, doctrine and purpose.

- o Used armed forces to guarantee fair, free elections thus putting them into the role of protectors/defenders of the people and not abusers of the people.

- o Provided fair, humane treatment of all insurgents who surrendered.

- o Implemented limited land reform in certain key areas of the Philippines.⁵

In 1968, a new Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was founded based on Peking doctrinal guidance instead of a Moscow-oriented revolution. They returned to a strategy of armed struggle, but with major modifications. The New People's Army (NPA) was created as a fighting force with only 65 men and 35 rifles. It is the military arm of the CPP.⁶ This CPP/NPA combination founded by radical urban intellectuals who later merged with a group of agrarian guerrillas vowed to overthrow the existing government through armed struggle. Idealistic student groups radicalized by years of political turmoil as well as remnants of the earlier communist insurgency, found a potent, readily available manpower pool for the NPA to use to quickly expand its forces from its earlier modest beginnings. Agrarian unrest because of dissatisfaction over land-tenant arrangements has provided a fertile ground for recruitment and organization of insurgents. The growth of the CPP/NPA was a direct result of the political heavy-handedness of the Marcos era and the seemingly endless economic problem. The rapid growth of the communist movement can also be attributed to the fact that it has been led at all levels by members of the educated class, that is, by university-trained instructors and their students. This gives the new movement a great advantage over its Huk predecessor, and makes it a more potent threat against the government.

Driven out of the cities and into the countryside in the early days of martial law imposed by Marcos, the CPP/NPA devised a simple strategy: build

party organizations in the rural areas; recruit armed NPA guerrilla bands; and build political influence in urban areas through political, labor, professional, social welfare and agrarian front organizations.⁷ This was a significant transition for the insurgency since it changed its nature from that of an urban subversive organization to that of a true agrarian based revolutionary organization.

One of the driving forces in the fight against the government is the National Democratic Front (NDF), the umbrella front organization of the CPP. It has numerous constituent fronts including professional (teachers, lawyers, medical), religious, agrarian, labor and student political organizations.⁸ The NDF asserted that the overwhelming majority of the people have awakened and that the principles of popular unity had been understood and accepted by almost all. Points of unification include an end to foreign domination, genuine freedom for the people, unhampered economic development that serves the interest of the people, reduction of military power and justice for all. The NDF also seeks to unite, develop and coordinate all possible parties, groups and individuals for greater participation in the ongoing people's war until total, nationwide victory is won and a new republic with a democratic coalition government is established.⁹

In 1985, the NDF published a text containing a 12-point general program for implementation. They are as follows:

- o Unite the Filipino people to overthrow the tyrannical rule of U.S. imperialism and the local reactionaries.
- o Wage a people's war to win total, nationwide victory.
- o Establish a democratic coalition government and a people's democratic republic.
- o Integrate the revolutionary army.

- o Uphold and promote the free exercise of the people's basic rights.
- o Terminate all unequal relations with the United States and other foreign entities.
- o Complete the process of genuine land reform, raise rural production through cooperation and modernize agriculture.
- o Carry out national industrialization as the leading factor in economic development.
- o Guarantee the right to employment, raise the people's living standards and expand social services after establishing democratic power.
- o Promote a patriotic, scientific and popular culture and ensure public education.
- o Respect and foster the self-determination of the Moro and Cordillera people and all ethnic minorities.
- o Adopt and practice a revolutionary, independent and peace-loving foreign policy.¹⁰

The NDF serves multiple purposes in the revolutionary struggle and can be categorized into four major functions. They are to stir up the masses, keep the political pressure on the government, educate the people through its propaganda campaigns and political front activities, and recruitment of new members.

The NPA has two functions in the movement, first, as the military arm of the Communist Party and the second, as the enforcement arm of the party with political responsibilities. The NPA insurgent follows Mao's principles of advance, retreat and harass. He does not seek nor hope to win in an engagement. He only expects to capture arms, ammunition and other supplies and prevent defeat by maintaining constant pressure and the threat of a fighting force.

The insurgency in the Philippines has been self-supporting in terms of military hardware and basic logistics with Communist China providing only limited support. In 1984, there was evidence to show an increasing Soviet involvement including arms, ammunition and financial support. This was because the Soviets recognized that the situation in the Philippines was ripe for exploitation. As the amount of Soviet aid increased, the CPP became pro-Soviet.

CURRENT SITUATION¹²

For the past several years, the CPP/NPA/NDF continued to suffer setbacks in terms of strength, firearms, affected rural areas and guerrilla fronts. These could be attributed to the party's own strategic and tactical blunders. Internally, the party is beset by leadership problems. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the thawing of the Cold War between the East and the West are contributing gradually to the isolation of the CPP/NPA/NDF from the mainstream of Philippine society. The party's leadership problems are further aggravated by last year's capture of eight key members of the central committee of the CPP in addition to the neutralization of 51 other ranking leaders throughout the country.

The summary execution of more than 200 suspected Deep Penetration Agents (DPA), an agent of the government inside the communist movement, have also alienated the party mass base and prompted a significant number of cadres to renounce and desert the CPP/NPA/NDF. Moreover, poor organizational work among its organized mass base and sectorial organizations has adversely affected the party's recruitment and politicization efforts, thus delaying the elevation of mass activists and militia members to full-fledged or candidate members. The

constriction and disruption of the party's financial and logistics machineries has made its efforts toward manpower build up an added burden.

In spite of these setbacks, party, army and united front activities continue. NPA efforts to launch large-size guerrilla operations in the countryside persist. The party stressed that the strategic approach of surrounding the cities from the countryside remains valid. The NDF reaffirmed the correctness of the strategy of "people's war" for the overthrow of the so-called semi-colonial and semi-feudal system and the dismantling of the U.S. military bases. The NDF also declared its readiness to act as a channel for uniting and giving full play to the effort of all patriotic and progressive forces in their struggle to end U.S. domination and the "evils" of the ruling system.

In a bid to turn the tide of the effectiveness of the government counterinsurgency campaign, the CPP/NPA/NDF has adopted a so-called politico-military strategy which calls for a combination of mass movement and military actions in the greater Manila area or National Capital region and other key urban cities. The strategy is clearly directed towards insurrection and in line with the doctrine of Lenin. The terroristic activities, that accompanied the October nationwide strike and the bombings conducted by the CPP/NPA partisan elements, confirm the party's efforts to advance its politico-military strategy. The objective of this strategy is to create an insurrectionary situation. Earlier, the party used the RP-US bases talks and the adverse in-country effects of the Middle East crisis to mobilize mass support but failed.

The CPP/NPA/NDF is also closely watching and assessing the prevailing social, political and economic situation in the country and the various scenarios that may develop. The party is also prepared to undertake

unilateral action against the government and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in case of another coup attempt.

Meanwhile, the increase in the prices of oil products and consequent increase in prices of basic commodities and services have helped the communist movement win over the middle forces and facilitate its return to the political mainstream. The NDF believes that with the present crises, they can win back the middle forces and incite them to mobilize forces for urban insurrection.

The current economic crisis could further open a new venue for the communists to conceive of a coalition that could attract both organized and unorganized individuals and independent organizations to unite on common issues. The offer of a militant labor organization called KMU (Kilusang Mayo Uno - or May 1st Movement) with remaining Marcos' loyalists and some traditional politicians could be seen as new developments along this line.

Abroad, the NDF continues to undertake anti-government activities and works hard to raise funds and gain political support. Government's success in exposing the movement's true agenda particularly in Europe has resulted in a substantial decrease in the flow of foreign funds to its coffers. Recent developments, however, indicate that the NDF is exploring fund sources in the United States and Canada. The NDF perceives that the United States is the center of finance and has a liberal democratic atmosphere where communist groups could operate openly. Their objectives in the United States are to influence it not to provide aid to the Philippines and to withdraw all its forces from the country. Similarly, the party considers Canada in its fund-raising campaign because of the existence of liberal democratic organizations.

The new CPP/NPA/NDF campaign plan initiated in 1990 was aimed at isolating the government, developing a broad based mass support and obtaining support for and recognition of the NDF abroad. The campaign is intended to weaken the

present democratic government of President Aquino and sabotage her economic development programs. Its campaign plan also calls for comprehensive consolidation and strengthening of the revolutionary forces hand-in-hand with launching sustained, widespread and intensified guerrilla warfare. Additionally, their campaign includes a two-year plan that will intensify production of local explosives and armaments, and improve their military capability by conducting raids on Armed Forces of the Philippines arsenals.

Meanwhile, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines has established specific objectives for 1991 as follows: Intensify the anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, and anti-feudal campaign by creating an issue out of the presence of U.S. bases, heighten agitation and propaganda efforts, conduct a widespread tactical offensive and exploit divisiveness in the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

The Philippine government continues to face this challenge to democracy through democratic reforms, strong economic growth and improved military performance. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is making a greater effort to expose communist front groups masquerading as human rights organizations, labor unions, student groups and peasant organizations. Nevertheless, they remain an important part of the political scene. Communist groups have succeeded in getting aid from foreign humanitarian organizations and in influencing the political debate on issues such as human rights.

The peace and order situation is improving in many areas of the country but the insurgency is more active in some parts. The communists still maintain support bases in many isolated rural areas. Should the rural economy deteriorate, the insurgency could regain momentum.

Economic recovery in the Philippines is continuing. Recent increases in investment are sustaining a broadly based growth. During the long reign of

the previous administration, investment was at low levels because of the widespread impression among potential investors that the political climate was fragile. Along with this growth, company profits have increased as sales of consumer goods have surged. Unemployment decreased and manufacturing employment increased. Even with this economic progress, there continues to be significant poverty and underemployment. Some 52 percent of all households fall below the official poverty line of \$540.00. Rapid population growth is straining social services and an expanding labor force is holding down real wage rates.

U.S. ASSISTANCE

The U.S. military assistance is in the form of FMS (Foreign Military Sales) and IMET (International Military Education and Training). These programs provide essential resources to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, promote military professionalism and improve morale thereby enhancing the AFP's capability to support democracy. This aid is targeted on improving the AFP's ability to counter a threatening communist insurgency by improving training and by upgrading tactical mobility and communications. The U.S. military assistance is also designed to improve troop morale by providing basic soldier needs (uniforms, boots and medical support).

The U.S. economic assistance supports the Philippine government's reform programs, which are keys to revitalizing the economy, improving social conditions and providing essential rural infrastructure. The U.S. has encouraged Philippine efforts to attract foreign investment and the best guarantee that there is stability not only in the Philippines but also in the region is the presence of the U.S. bases.

THE U.S. BASES

A Military Bases Agreement between the Philippines and the United States was signed on 14 March 1947. The agreement was based on a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress authorizing the U.S. President to acquire bases for the mutual protection of both countries and a similar resolution of the Philippine Congress authorizing the Philippine President to negotiate with the view of ensuring the territorial integrity of the Philippines and the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.¹³ This agreement stipulated a term of 99 years, subject to extensions as may be agreed upon. A corollary pact was also signed in the same year calling for the United States to furnish military assistance to the Philippine government in the training and development of the armed forces and the provision of firearms and other military equipment.¹⁴

On 16 September 1966, an agreement was signed in Washington shortening the 99-year period in the original grant to 25 years effective on the date of its signing. America has therefore until 16 September 1991 to legally operate its bases in the Philippines, unless a new treaty extending the grant is ratified by the two governments.

As of this writing, the two countries are engaged in negotiations. At stake are two of the largest and most effective American military bases outside the United States—Clark Air Force Base, Subic Naval Base, and a few minor installations.

America's desire to keep its military forces in the Philippines arises from the basic policy that the United States is and must remain a power in the Pacific. As Mr. Richard Armitage, the Chief U.S. negotiator, said:

Regardless of the choices the Filipino people make, I can assure you of one immutable and central fact: The U.S. will remain, for the balance of its national existence, a Pacific power. Nothing we say or do here will in any way affect this proposition.¹⁵

The American national interest to remain a Pacific power and the Philippines' strategic role in serving it are realities that are not new, they have long existed. In 1898, the United States annexed the Philippines, along with Puerto Rico and Cuba in a treaty with Spain, after Admiral George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. The Philippines was to be America's Pacific outpost offering entry into the arena of world politics. However, the Filipinos had other things in mind. They too were thinking of what would be vital to their national interest. All they wanted was independence, after more than 300 years of Spanish colonial rule.

Throughout three centuries of Spanish occupation, there were rebellions in the country which Spain effectively stopped by the sword and by the cross. The influence of the Catholic church had Christianized a large majority of the population, and to this day, 85 percent of the Filipinos are Catholics. By 1898, however, the nationalist movement had reached a point where the Filipinos were able to mount a revolution that would culminate on 12 June 1898, when Philippine independence from Spain was proclaimed.

As this was the same year when the United States annexed the Philippines as its territory, what followed was an inevitable clash between the Filipinos and the new colonizer. It was a clash between the superior arms of a fledgling world power and the native weapons of a people yearning to be free.

However, there were some benefits derived from this new colonial rule. Schools were opened, a judicial system was instituted, public works were built, health measures were instituted, and the protection of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution was extended to the Filipinos. Elections were held and Filipino leaders participated in the colonial government.

Nevertheless, the quest for freedom did not stop. Filipino leaders went to Washington to lobby for independence. Their efforts were not in vain, as

in 1935 the U.S. Congress passed and the U.S. President signed the Philippine Independence Act restoring Philippine independence after a 10-year transition period as a Commonwealth.

The outbreak of World War II and the subsequent invasion by the Japanese forces brought about a change of heart in both Philippine and American leaders. Even before the end of the war, they were of one mind that for the security of both countries, the United States should maintain military force in the Philippines. Thus, in 1947, the Philippines entered into a Military Bases Agreement with the United States establishing bases in the Philippines.

Unfortunately for the Philippines, the circumstances in which the negotiations for the agreement took place worked against her. Totally devastated by over three years of Japanese occupation and the war, her cities and towns were in shambles, her people hungry. She was totally dependent on the United States for her rehabilitation. Meanwhile, America had emerged from the war as the strongest nation in the world. This disparity in situations was reflected in the terms of the Mutual Bases Agreement. It was not so much a treaty between two sovereign nations as it was the extension of American sovereignty in the Philippines through the establishment of U.S. enclaves of extra-territoriality on her soil. The terms of the agreement were of pre-war colonial vintage. The United States had full control of base areas. The Philippines had no say whatsoever in the administration of the bases, or the operations of American military forces. Unhampered U.S. military operations were guaranteed. Some 500,000 acres of land were deemed to be owned by the United States. The Philippine flag could not be flown over them.

In 1987, the Philippines adopted a new Constitution which was ratified by the people. It expressly provided for the termination of the treaty upon its expiration on 16 September 1991. This reflected a national sentiment that

perceived the agreement as one of inequality where the United States was dominant partner and the Philippines a client state. As Mr. Armitage has observed:

Some Filipinos believe that the U.S. military presence on Philippine bases is a vestige of the colonial past and an instrument of neocolonial dependency. This school of thought holds that the Philippines can never be fully free until the Americans are out, once and for all.¹⁶

While this opinion is not shared by the majority of Filipinos, it is held by many in government, the academe, media and most of all, among the youth.

The United States now proposes that the Philippines, again to quote Mr. Armitage, "contribute greatly to the stability of its own Southeast Asian neighborhood by continuing to facilitate the forward deployment and training of U.S. forces on Philippine territory." In a joint statement, the panels of both countries last June 1990 announced:

. . . the two panels have decided to move on to discussions on the nature of U.S.-Philippine relations in the future. These discussions could include considerations of a new agreement concerning friendship, cooperation and security on the basis of new relationship between the Philippines and the U.S. and in the light of the changing global environment.¹⁷

It is significant that the scope of negotiations has been widened to cover the entire range of Philippine-American relations. The two countries have many shared values and ideals beyond the presence of American military forces. Both are dedicated to freedom, democracy, the rule of law and peace.

It is for this reason that President Aquino stated, not once but several times, that regardless of the outcome of the bases talks, the Philippines would wish to continue its friendly relations with the United States.

The Philippine position is that it is willing to grant the United States as a phaseout period of five-seven years. The United States is steadfast in

its desire to stay from 10-12 years, a period it considers as realistic for transitional adjustments. From the standpoint of a great majority of the population, a strong argument for the continued stay of these bases may be summed up as follows:

- o In terms of mutual security, the bases provide an umbrella of protection not only to the Philippines but to a wide range of the Pacific region. The lessons of World War II are too fresh in mind which the Philippines was the scene of utter destruction and death.

- o Where national security is assured and political stability enhanced, economic development is also accelerated. Working under the theory that foreign capital will only come into a country where there is a relative safety for its investment, the U.S. presence could give assurance to foreign investors that the Philippines is a safe haven for their capital investments which otherwise may be lured elsewhere where they are welcome.

- o These bases, with the multiple economic benefits that flow from their operations, are equivalent to hundreds of corporations for investors. United States pays some \$481 million a year as compensation for the use of the bases and employs 80,000 Filipinos by direct or indirect hiring. This work force enjoys compensation rates higher than comparable jobs in private companies or in the Philippine government. Apart from the crippling effect to the economy by the loss of compensation for the bases and the loss of employment by thousands of Filipinos, the resultant effect on the peace and order of the country, now reeling under attacks from the insurgents is not difficult to imagine.

Recognizing that insurgency is the most serious threat, the Philippine government should combine all the components of national power political, economic and military for use against the movement. An efficient and

effective government which represents the hopes and aspirations of the Filipino people, armed forces that are seen as real protectors of the people and an improved economy under more stable conditions would certainly contribute to a healthy Philippine democracy. The role that the United States plays towards achieving this end cannot be overemphasized. The benefits derived from the security relationship are many. In addition to the benefits mentioned previously, there are also intangible advantages. Because of the U.S. commitment to its external defense, the Philippines can devote its scarce military funding to combatting the domestic communist insurgency. The U.S. military presence also enhances the Philippines' image of political stability during a period of readjustment to democracy thereby increasing its ability to attract foreign investments.

The United States also enjoys significant benefits. Since the Philippines is at a crossroad between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea, adjacent to the Asian mainland and near the straits that lead to the Indian Ocean and the Middle East, U.S. forces deployed in the Philippines could effectively protect regional air and sea lanes and maintain a counterweight not only to Soviet forces but also to other communist countries in the South China Sea. This simply means that whatever support the Soviets could bring to the local communist cause would surely be hampered by the mere presence of these existing U.S. military facilities in the Philippines.

Clearly both countries have been well served by the existing base agreements. It would appear that the continuation of the agreements in roughly the same balance as exists today would be in the best interests of both countries for the foreseeable future.

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