
The Terrorist Insurgency

The growing power of the outlaw NPA

by Al Douglas

On Feb. 26, following the U.S.-backed coup in the Philippines which ushered in the government of President Corazon Aquino, new Prime Minister Salvador Laurel announced that the Aquino government would amnesty all political prisoners, including the founders of the terrorist New People's Army, jailed for the past decade. Said Laurel: "I believe that given a credible government . . . 90% of the New People's Army will lay down their arms and come home." Less than four months later, in the face of an increasing number and ferocity of NPA attacks, Chief of Staff of the Philippine Armed Forces Fidel Ramos had a different assessment: "Time is on the NPA side. If we don't move just now, we may end up like Vietnam or Cambodia, which just let things slide. We have to choose what kind of society we want."

The chief rationale for the coup against President Ferdinand Marcos had been that the presence of this "hated dictator" was the major factor in the growth of the NPA. Having amnesty all political prisoners, including NPA founder José Maria Sison, the Aquino government has begun the process of "reconciliation talks," whose first formal session took place in Manila on July 2. The NPA's response to these overtures has been a brutal escalation of attacks, including the ambush of an army convoy in Quezon province, killing 11 soldiers and wounding 8, just two days before the talks opened. Agriculture Minister Ramon Mitra, one of the government's chief negotiators, said of the attack, "I'd like to think it has absolutely no bearing on these talks. It could well be just another isolated incident."

The drumbeat of these "isolated incidents" has been intensifying ever since the Feb. 22-25 coup, to the point that the NPA has taken control over various areas of the country:

- **Northern Luzon:** NPA actions dominate the Cordillera mountains, where they are coordinated with local natives who grow marijuana, on contract to the NPA.

- **Negros Occidental:** The major sugar-growing region. Particularly southern Negros has been a prime NPA recruiting ground since the collapse in sugar prices which destroyed

local farmers. An NPA unit took over an Army camp in the town of Hinobaan in the south, 348 miles south of Manila.

- **Samar:** According to Provincial Commander Col. Ibarra Mariano, 871 barangays (village units) in the 15 towns of northern Samar have been penetrated by rebels. Among the 970 barangays in Samar, 323 have been entered by NPA people, 100 are under NPA influence, and another 400 are targeted for near-term penetration.

- **Mindanao:** In this rich, southernmost island, the center of much of the country's mining activity, the central government maintains very little authority. The NPA-allied and Qaddafi-backed Moro National Liberation Front has demanded autonomy for the island from the Aquino government.

The scale and coordination of NPA attacks is mounting. The attack on Hinobaan was carried out by a 300-man unit, the largest such unit yet deployed, and coordination is being maintained over increasingly greater areas, through the use of UHF tranceivers.

The Khmer Rouge of the Philippines

In opening the reconciliation talks, the Aquino government has fundamentally miscalculated the nature of the NPA. Far from being idealists who "went to the hills" because of injustice, the core of the NPA is comprised of terrorists, whose ideology and methods mark them as the Philippine equivalent of Cambodia's genocidal Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge forces. Further, the NPA is not a centralized organization with which the government can negotiate, but rather an amalgam of 1) a dominant faction of leftist-terrorists operating under the banner of Theology of Liberation, 2) drug-growing narco-terrorists, and 3) tribal groupings such as the Kalingan headhunters, organized by the anthropologists who have infested the Philippines since World War II, and who have deployed the "endangered peoples" against crucially needed economic projects such as the Chico River Dam hydro-power plant, which had been planned for the Cordillera.

To the extent that the NPA has a centrally deployed force, it operates using Pol Pot-style tactics of terror, including the systematic assassination of government officials, trade-union and village leaders, and peasants who refuse to pay revolutionary "taxes." In so doing, the NPA insurgents are following the guidelines set in the official NPA manual, *A Guide to Establishing a Mass Base in the Rural Areas*, which instructs cadre to assassinate any "enemies of the people, spies, and unreformed elements who hinder the development of the revolutionary movement in the *barrio*."

Precisely as the Khmer Rouge carried out some of the first major slaughters against their own members, on June 19, at a site 520 miles southeast of Manila, soldiers found a mass grave of 28 "suspected informers" from the NPA, together with some civilians. In the southern island of Mindanao, Church authorities report the recent torture, and then

slaughter, of another 30 NPA members suspected of being army "deep penetration agents." The "informers" are dragged before an audience of villagers, stabbed first in the legs, buttocks, back, shoulders, and stomach before a dagger is plunged into their chests to finish the job. In Butuan City, the bodies of at least 24 victims of summary executions have been discovered over recent weeks, often with their hands and feet chained and padlocked, and brutally tortured.

For the peasants not killed, increasing numbers in remote areas are forced to work in NPA agricultural concentration camps, e.g., in the mountainous areas in Inpakibil, Clavaria, and Gingoog City, where 1,000 peasants were kidnapped from nearby towns and taken to work at slave-labor farms to provide food for the NPA. Most of the hostages were abducted on Feb. 17, and by June, 18 of them had died from hunger and disease, their bodies left in the forest or thrown into the river. As for the rest of the Pol Pot program, one Communist Party leader called for the depopulation of Manila: "We can't support Manila the way it is."

NPA faction in the government

In an interview in the Philippine newspaper *We Forum* published on March 24, José Maria Sison, the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) announced, "The left has plenty of leverage in the new government. I am confident that the left has enough leverage to gain a major position in the flow of legal political life in the country. . . . In a certain sense, the NPA is even supporting Mrs. Aquino." The "major position" in the political life of the country which the CPP-NPA is pushing for, includes the following demands:

- The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) must be "completely overhauled"; Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos must be fired; the AFP budget must be drastically cut, and its troops not be allowed to leave their barracks.
- The strategic U.S. facilities, Clark Airfield and Subic Bay Naval Base, must be dismantled.
- The CPP/NPA must be formally included in the ruling government coalition.

NPA leaders have said that they are unanimously agreed that under no circumstances—even inclusion in the government—will the NPA rebels lay down their arms.

The left-wing support apparatus for anti-Marcos terrorism is already included in the government. NPA leader Sison's personal lawyer is Joker Arroyo, who is also President Aquino's executive secretary, a post so powerful that its holder is traditionally referred to as the "Little President." It was Arroyo who put together the current reconciliation talks.

Since Sison and company have repeatedly stated that they will not lay down their guns under any conditions, and make other impossible demands, the talks are only serving to buy time for the NPA. As one Philippine officer put it: "We are

prevented from launching a major offensive because of the government's policy of reconciliation, and rebels have been taking advantage of the situation. Our hands are tied by a populist image of the President who promised to negotiate a cease-fire with the Communists."

Another chief NPA asset in the government is the "human rights" mafia around governmental press spokesman Rene Saguisag. When asked if they would investigate the countless incidents of torture and assassination by the NPA, Human Rights Commission Chairman José Diokno replied: "In the case of the NPA it is assumed that they would violate the law and break the law. On the other hand, the military is supposed to uphold the law and safeguard the lives of citizens. I don't see how we can."

Saguisag, Arroyo, and Diokno have long been defense lawyers for the NPA, a fact reflected in Diokno's analysis of the NPA assassination of "corrupt" local officials, "It's rough justice, but in their way the NPA is doing what the government should be doing."

Diokno has campaigned relentlessly for the past 10 years for another key NPA demand, the removal of the U.S. bases. As head of the Anti-Bases Coalition, he also took a leading part in sponsoring a national conference against foreign military bases throughout the world." The purpose of this conference, held Oct. 23-25, 1983 in Manila, was to launch a Soviet-designed "peace movement in Southeast Asia."

The Jesuits and the NPA

Though the NPA encompasses a number of diverse elements under its banner, by far the most coherent and well organized are those sponsored and protected by the Theology of Liberation wing of the Philippine Catholic Church. *Ten percent of all the Catholic priests and nuns in the Philippines belong to the Christians for National Liberation, an arm of the NPA.*

Eighty-five percent of citizens in the Republic of the Philippines are Catholics. Throughout the vast, 7,000-island archipelago, there are two, and only two, organizations commanding a mass allegiance from the population of 55 million: the Church and the State. Beginning shortly after the Second Vatican Council in November 1964, the Jesuit order began a process aimed at the overthrow of the State. From Ateneo de Manila University, their headquarters and training ground for the elite of the Philippines' oligarchy, the Jesuits began a Theology of Liberation-premised "orientation toward the poor."

In 1969, when the combined CPP and its military arm, the NPA, had perhaps a total membership of less than 200, one of the leading theoreticians of Ateneo, Fr. John F. Doherty, S.J., published a book, *Can We Predict a Philippine Revolution?* His answer was, "Yes." The following year, Ateneo began a series of mass-distribution pamphlets, begin-

ning with "The Morality of Demonstrations and Violence," by Vitaliano Gorospe, S.J., in which he argued, "What is needed today is to develop, apart from the ethics of a justified revolution, a contemporary and radical morality of violence more adequate to the moral exigencies of the times."

By 1972, at the national convention of the radical Philippine Priests, Inc., which commanded a membership of 1,500 out of the total of 13,000 priests and nuns in the country, a campaign was launched to "mobilize our people in a well-planned program of protracted and disciplined struggle for liberation." Later the same year, two of PPI's leaders announced the formation of the Christians for National Liberation, and declared its full alliance with the CPP and NPA.

This marked a dramatic expansion of the NPA's capabilities. Though the CNL has lay members and Protestant supporters, its core is the over 1,200 Catholic priests and nuns, organized into disciplined cell structures, and pledging allegiance to its constitution, which specifies support for a "protracted people's war . . . the armed struggle and the underground movement." CNL cadre are effectively CPP members. As one non-CPP Philippine leftist put it, "Liberation theology has gone much further in the Philippines than in Latin America. In Latin America, it justifies collaboration with the Communists. Here, it means joining the Communists."

Through the positions of CNL members in the vast "social welfare" apparatus set up to implement the "orientation toward the poor," they wield a great deal of the financial and logistical muscle of the Philippine Church behind the NPA. An excellent example is the island of Negros. The founder of the CNL, Fr. Luis Jalandoni, of one of the oligarchical families which has supported the NPA since its inception, directed the entire Negros Diocese's Social Action Office, as the right-hand man of the bishop. This apparatus interfaced the so-called Base Christian Communities, a major conduit of peasants into the NPA. The BCCs, usually in remote areas, are 40-50-person groups of peasants run by "lay leadership" and organized around a "conscientization process" of Liberation Theology: "The government is repressive, the peasants must have liberation." In Nicaragua the BCCs were a crucial element of the Sandinistas' march on Managua and seizure of power.

According to Ross Munro, writing of the NPA in December 1985 *Commentary Magazine*, it is an open secret that the BCCs of Negros form "the basic infrastructure of the NPA." Where an earlier attempt by communists to organize support in the countryside was a miserable failure, "When priests come to organize the workers under the banner of religion, better yet when the priests are Australian or Irish, it's easy. The landlords will never think that this is a Communist organization. But that is what happened; the Basic Christian Communities in Negros became the infrastructure of the NPA." Even where all the BCCs have not yet gone over to

the NPA, under conditions of continued economic collapse and weakened central government, that process will accelerate, as in Nicaragua.

The role of Cardinal Sin

Immediately after the February coup, Cardinal Jaime Sin announced, "We won during our February Revolution. It does not mean that the revolution is over." His meaning was unmistakable. The February 1917 "liberal" revolution in Russia had sufficiently smashed the old order, paving the way for the November Revolution of the Bolsheviks.

Not only did Sin play a crucial role in mobilizing the "people's power" for the February coup in Manila, but he and his Jesuit allies of Ateneo de Manila, such as the influential Father Bernas, have started distancing themselves from the present Aquino government. Sin has publicly stated that Mrs. Aquino "shouldn't consult me so much," while Bernas has repeatedly "recommended" that it is time for Defense Minister Enrile to leave his post, a process which would begin the disintegration of the AFP. As Sison and the Jesuits stress, though the "dictator is gone, the structures of exploitation and oppression are still intact, and have yet to be dismantled . . . for true liberation to be achieved."

If Sin were in fact concerned with "justice" and "liberation," he would be against the core oppressor of the Philippine people: the International Monetary Fund. On the contrary, Sin has publicly *supported* the IMF, as in a trip to the United States in May 1985. And while the IMF was grinding up the Philippine economy, Sin was giving *carte blanche* to the desperation fueled by the economic sabotage, as in his late-1985 statement, "What is truly despairing is the insensitivity shown by the powers that be, an insensitivity that is driving more and more people to the hills. Many people perceive change to be impossible except through armed struggle."

Sin's longtime support for armed struggle is a matter of public record. As early as Feb. 2, 1980, a *Washington Post* Manila correspondent reported that, "According to Church officials, many priests are seeking approval of armed resistance to the Philippine military and are urging open cooperation with Communist guerrillas." After interviewing Sin the same day, he reported, "Sin does not regard the issue as a serious problem. . . . The Cardinal said . . . that some acts of civil disobedience advocated by priests and bishops could be sanctioned, and he specifically endorsed the widespread practice of refusing to inform on guerrillas who seek food and shelter from the Church." "Freedom," Sin said, "is a gift from God." Sin's personal "nonviolent" spirit was indicated in an Oct. 28, 1983 interview with the magazine *Famiglia Cristiana*, where he said, "When I say the President [Marcos] must step down, I refer to a law of nature. . . . Every pig has the feast of Saint Martin coming to him, when pigs are slaughtered."