

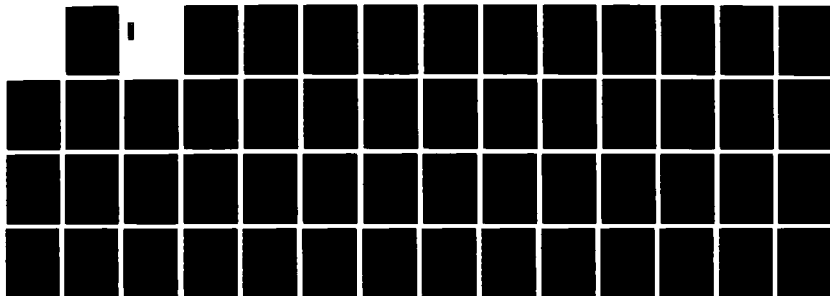
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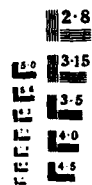
THE PHILIPPINE NPA (NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY) INSURGENCY: A  
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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE PHILIPPINE NPA INSURGENCY:  
A CENTER OF GRAVITY ANALYSIS

by S.A. Spottswood

CDR      USNR

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U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
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# ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Stephen A. Spottswood

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The intent of this paper is to identify the center of gravity of the New People's Army insurgency in the Philippines. In order to accomplish this task an indepth review of the origins and major characteristics of communist revolutionary warfare was first undertaken so that these characteristics could then be applied to the particular situation in the Philippines. The NPA insurgency was then analyzed using the four main components of revolutionary war-Party, Military Arm, Population, and Secure Base Areas. The purpose of the analysis was to determine the main element upon which the whole force of the movement rests. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for national policy makers were offered. The perspective of this paper is strategic and operational vice tactical and strictly unclassified sources were used throughout in order to not get bogged down in tactical details. Accordingly, this paper does not attempt to recommend specific counterinsurgency strategies nor review NPA tactical strategy except when appropriate to the strategic and operational perspective.

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## INTRODUCTION

The ancient Chinese master strategist, Sun Tzu, once wrote that " War is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied."<sup>1</sup> As early as 1948, an international conference of Asian communist front organizations held in Calcutta adopted revolutionary guerrilla warfare as the strategy for Asia.<sup>2</sup> Since the United States is by history, trade, and world economic trends becoming increasingly oriented towards the Far East, it therefore becomes critical that U.S. policymakers understand the nature of communist revolutionary war and how best to aid our Asian allies in the region in its defeat. Further, the nature of superpower relations makes this form of ideological competition the most likely to continue in the future. Therefore, understanding its organization, functioning, and true political motivation will enable us to provide the most effective type of assistance that we can provide our Asian allies-unwavering financial, military training/equipping, economic development, and diplomatic support.

Clausewitz in his doctrinal work, ON WAR, notes that belligerents in any conflict will each have dominant characteristics. Further, he recommends that "...one must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain center of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all our energies should be directed."<sup>3</sup>

Using this as my guide I will attempt to first study the nature of revolutionary warfare in order to determine its central elements of power, then to analyze the Philippine Communist Party Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) insurgency from a strategic vice tactical perspective so as to determine its center of gravity and recommend a strategy for its ultimate defeat. Additionally, I will make tentative recommendations on appropriate U.S. assistance strategies.

THE MARXIST-LENINIST INSURGENCY MODEL: Definition, Historical Roots, and Theory of Operation.

#### DEFINITION

Revolutionary guerrilla warfare, or communist insurgency, is a form of protracted irregular warfare which usually contains parallel political techniques by a group(s) who are normally indigenous to the country and who are organized for protracted resistance to the government in power.<sup>4</sup>

#### HISTORICAL ROOTS

This form of military/political struggle has its roots in the early days of communist ideology. Karl Marx defined the concept of the class struggle. Lenin provided the structural framework of the party controlling the struggle and also defined twin strat-

egies for class struggle. The first was the Proletarian Revolution, to be used in industrialized nations with an educated but discontented class, while the second was the War of National Liberation for use in agrarian countries without benefit of the educated class that was needed to lead the revolutionary struggle.<sup>5</sup>

Mao Tse Tung later refined the practical dynamics of revolutionary guerrilla warfare in his long battle for control of mainland China. According to Mao, revolutions are made to happen, they are created and do not just spontaneously occur.<sup>6</sup> The Russian model for the class revolution was to seize power in the cities, where the seat of government and industry was, and then to spread out control over the countryside. The Maoist model was exactly opposite due to the demographics of agrarian societies. His strategy was to take the countryside, surround, then engulf the cities.<sup>7</sup>

Wars of national liberation are in fact Marxist-Leninist revolutions. As such, the aim is always ideological and political-total control by the revolutionaries. According to Mao, politics and war are two sides of the same coin, both are forms of struggle with the same driving purpose. In his words...."Politics is war without bloodshed; war is politics with bloodshed."<sup>8</sup> Since the struggle is viewed as war between the classes, there are no moral issues with the Marxist-Leninist save that of continuing the revolution. Therefore, any tactic, alliance, or accommodation, such as that of forming political alliances with Roman Catholic activist

organizations in the third world, is appropriate provided the protracted struggle continues. Thus, Marxist-Leninist insurgents actively seek to build political legitimacy in the very society and government they seek to destroy.<sup>9</sup> To them, revolutionary war is total war. Consequently it tends to operate at the extremes since the end, total victory or total defeat, is so final and absolute.<sup>10</sup>

Mao's strategy was evolutionary, evolving as stratagems failed or succeeded. In his writings he spells out two stages of revolution-the bourgeois democratic and the proletarian socialist. During the bourgeois democratic stage, united fronts are formed to unite and control the opposition, gain political legitimacy, and build mass appeal. Thus political accommodations are evident with the purpose to build the widest possible opposition base. Socialism is de-emphasized and nationalism, land reform, and free enterprise for native businesses is stressed. In the second stage the real purpose of the Marxist-Leninist class struggle, the restructuring of society along Marxist-Leninist lines, is implemented since power has already been wrested from the capitalist opposition.<sup>11</sup>

#### THEORY OF OPERATION

There are four critical elements required for revolutionary warfare-the party; the army; a mass base; and secure bases of

operation.<sup>12</sup> Implementing and directing this revolutionary strategy is the indigenous communist party. Mao's thinking was that it was the party, controlled by the central committee, that formed the driving force of the revolution. For example, party members would infiltrate and control political fronts. The party would also provide the leadership of the army and thoroughly indoctrinate its guerrilla soldiers so that it would be a professional political force.

It was to the army that Mao looked to ensure the success of the revolution. The army would be used to indoctrinate and mobilize the masses. Consequently it had a political, cultural, and educational role to play in forming revolution. However, all activity must be driven by the party's political ends. In other words the army was the weapon while the party was the hand that used the weapon. These two, when combined with secure bases where revolutionary control is complete and where the resident population provides a mobilized base of support for the revolution, enable the struggle to continue over extended periods.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of the army's revolutionary guerrilla struggle is to destroy the enemy's will to resist. Society's institutions, processes, and leadership structure become targets for destruction and its armed forces are continually harassed, pursued, and ambushed. Further, the revolutionaries skillfully use the inherent instabilities of democratic societies to blunt, confuse, or otherwise subvert the opposition thereby seeking to force the government into negotiations and concessions.<sup>14</sup>

Central to whole revolutionary strategy is the struggle for control of the population.<sup>15</sup> Primarily, the population acts as the main supplier of logistics, funding, and personnel recruitment source for the revolution. It therefore functions as the power expansion element of the revolution. Mao's forces always worked at organizing and indoctrinating peasant groups, actively pushed land reform issues, kept troops tightly disciplined, all to attract the support of the peasant farmer and expand the movement outward from its secure bases. Further, his forces nurtured the feeling of exploitation, part of his creating a revolution, in order to undermine the legitimacy of the government and sell the idea that the new order would be better. Once physical control was established, then political indoctrination and population control was implemented, militias organized and trained, and the population mobilized to continue the struggle.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps fundamental to understanding the role of the populace are these concepts:

\*Population is the main force of the revolution.

\*Only a small part of the population must be totally committed.

\*The population is the main supplier of the people, logistics, and funding required to continue the revolution.

\*Only a small geographic area of control over the population is needed to continue the struggle.

\*Most critical level of support required from the masses outside direct guerrilla control is passive support.<sup>17</sup>

The population becomes the focus of the struggle for control outside the secure base areas for it is here that the insurgent is most vulnerable. Passive acceptance by the populace ensures his continued invulnerability, his ability to move about nearly at will, and thus his ability to continue working at widening the revolution from the secure base areas. It is precisely this aspect of population behavior, passivity, that allows the ruthless minority represented by the insurgency organization to eventually predominate.<sup>18</sup>

Since the population is the real key to eventual victory, revolutionary insurgents must organize to achieve population control. A critical first step in this process is the advertising of the existence of the insurgency for this awakens the passive populace and prepares them for the next step of organization. Attacking the infrastructure of the government weakens its ability to maintain population control and adds legitimacy to the insurgent's cause especially if the targets are owned by the capitalist exploiters of the people.<sup>19</sup> Infiltration methods are used to organize and control various fronts which further arouse the people against the government.

Issues and causes are carefully chosen to most arouse the masses and to put the insurgent on the side of the people for without wide appeal, the insurgency's organization for population

control fails. Latent dissatisfaction with local conditions such as land use arrangements, rents, crop prices, and wages are issues which stir up the population and direct their anger toward the ruling class. Stirring up the masses provides legitimacy for the political organizational efforts of the party cadres and also conditions the people for active struggle against the government.<sup>20</sup>

Once the population is stirred up and front organizations functioning, potential candidates are screened and recruited for indoctrination as party cadres so that the insurgency support base can be expanded. The majority of the population remains largely ignorant of the true purpose of the Marxist struggle. This process continues relentlessly until revolutionary control over a geographic area is complete and the insurgency can impose its own political and economic systems in place. It is critical that the large majority of the population remain passive while the organization of targeted groups is completed since this allows the insurgency to operate invisible to the government.

Militarily, communist revolutionary insurgencies use a strategy that is evolutionary and conservative. Mao's writings reveal a very adaptive, careful strategy motivated by the desire to survive first, then to win. His approach is to be aggressive if the government is weak, and cautious if the government is strong.<sup>21</sup> It is this survival instinct and its ideological twin, the protracted struggle, that drives the insurgent into constantly seeking ways to pit strength against the weakness.<sup>22</sup>

The commonly held instinct to ensure the survival of the revolutionary organization gives communist insurgencies unique characteristics which make them difficult to combat. This, added to a low budget approach to military operations dictated by constrained resources, mandates the following characteristics:

- \*Austerity and efficiency
- \*Inherent resistance to transition to conventional war.
- \*Flexibility in military and political strategy.
- \*Endurance and longevity.
- \*Tactical characteristics of stealth, surprise, evasion, and maintenance of the initiative.
- \*Commitment to combat only when victory assured.
- \*Territorial goals de-emphasized.
- \*Consistent desire to impose static defensive posture on government forces.
- \*Low visibility except when politically and militarily mandated.
- \*Combination of military and political struggles, with political ends driving both.<sup>23</sup>

With the above as a normal mode of operations, time becomes the ally of the insurgent. Further, the added stress imposed by the political turmoil generated by the revolutionary organization through its various fronts puts tremendous pressures on newly emerging democracies. Given freedom of movement and an expanding

recruiting base generated by the political radicalization and organization of the populace described above, maintenance of the initiative, replacement of casualties, and growth is assured.<sup>24</sup>

Communist revolutionaries use a three phased strategic planning approach to revolutionary struggle. Stage one is a base building and consolidation phase often referred to as the strategic defensive during which the main emphasis is on building a power base by organizing the political and military arms of the struggle at the local level. Military action in this phase is designed to build morale, publicize the insurgency, and keep the government off-balance. The morale of government forces is also a key target during this phase. Phase two is reached when a strategic stalemate exists in the balance of power between insurgent and government forces. Parity of forces does not necessarily mean equivalent numbers but does imply equivalent capability. The purpose of military action in this phase is to continue keeping the enemy offbalance, force him to dissipate his strength while simultaneously maintaining insurgent forces at stable or increasing levels. Either option will eventually result in the arrival at stage three in which revolutionary forces are now superior and the enemy is destroyed through conventional means.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, stage three is followed by political power consolidation wherein the ideological and targeted class opposition is brutally eliminated and the revolutionary government's control extended throughout the country.<sup>26</sup>

Implementation of this grand strategy presumes total party control, or centralized strategic command, over implementation.

However, geographic separation of secure areas as well as regional differences demand decentralized execution of the grand strategy.<sup>27</sup> Central to the whole strategic plan is the survival and maintenance of four key elements-the party or control element; the guerrilla army or armed element; the secure bases or protection element; and the population or power expansion element. The first two elements together give the insurgency the ability to continue the struggle in both the political and military realms, always keeping in mind that the purpose of the struggle is to destroy strength not conquer territory. <sup>28</sup> The third element provides the revolutionary organization with the logistical, personnel, and funding base upon which the effort rests. Lastly, the population, or power expansion element, is critical because the country's population forms the revolution's strategic power reserve and determines its long term growth potential. As the revolution controls more of the population, its power base expands and therefore its military and political capabilities grow while that of the government's declines relatively.

## THE PHILIPPINE INSURGENCY: Its Origins, Growth, and Strategy

### ORIGINS

The New People's Army (NPA) was created as a fighting force in 1969 with only 65 men and 35 rifles.<sup>29</sup> It is the military arm of the Communist Party Philippines (CPP), a Maoist split from the original and pro-Soviet Philippine Communist Party (PKP). Formed in 1961 by radical urban intellectuals who later merged with a group of agrarian guerrillas led by Commander Dante to form the CPP/NPA combination, its avowed purpose is the overthrow of the existing government through armed struggle.<sup>30</sup> Idealistic student youth groups radicalized by years of political turmoil as well as remnants of the earlier communist insurgency formed a potent, readily available manpower pool for the NPA to use to quickly expand its forces from its earlier modest beginnings.

Political conflict in the Philippines has a long history and ideological clashes between those desiring central authority over a disciplined people and those desiring personal freedom dates back to the writings of A. Mabini and S. Laurel. The declaration of martial law by President Marcos in 1972 was an equivalent step by those political forces desiring a strong government.<sup>31</sup> Further, active dissidence and insurgency have been a way of life for generations with active insurgencies fighting against Spanish, American, and later, Japanese

forces.<sup>32</sup> Finally, endemic agrarian unrest fed by an dissatisfaction with traditional land tenant arrangements in certain parts of the Philippines has historically provided a fertile field for insurgent organizing and recruiting.<sup>33</sup>

#### GROWTH

The fuel which enabled CPP/NPA success beyond that of an earlier communist insurgency appears to have been the unhappy marriage of economic disaster and political heavy handedness by the Marcos regime.<sup>34</sup> This combined with simmering frustration over economic exploitation by well connected corporations or individuals due to political corruption, at a time when world market prices for Philippine products were plunging disastrously and costs for loans were rising, provided ample opportunity for anti-government feelings to grow.<sup>35</sup> The long years of martial law and the concomitant politicization of the Armed Forces Philippines (AFP), with its use in the stifling of political dissent while protected elitists were getting rich with government approved monopolies, gave rise to a growing pool of people who were unhappy with government's policies. This systemic unhappiness and frustration made them susceptible to anti-government propaganda.

There are four generally accepted preconditions for the existence of an insurgency-a general hostility towards the

government; existence of a discontented elite; acceptance of violence as a proper means of protest; and a capacity to conduct insurgent operations.<sup>36</sup> These four elements were increasingly present within the structure of Philippine society. The assassination of B. Aquino by suspected government agents provided dramatic stimulus to the opposition and effectively destroyed the credibility of the Marcos government, both internationally and locally. Using the CPP led and dominated National Democratic Front to further stimulate and incite the people, the growing opposition to the government was radicalized and dominated. This combined with the effects of the previously mentioned economic disaster and left the Marcos government isolated politically, diplomatically, and economically.<sup>37</sup>

In the early formative years of the insurgency, particularly from 1973 onward, the Philippine Army was increasingly preoccupied with combating the Moro National Liberation Front's revolt on the island of Mindanao. Up to three quarters of its combat strength was committed against the Moro insurgents, thus leaving the rest of the country stripped of the means to fight the NPA insurgents. Virtually unopposed, the NPA was able to organize and spread throughout the interior.

With this as background, it is not hard to see how the CPP/NPA insurgency could grow steadily. Between 1983 and 1987 it grew from 36 fronts, or areas where the insurgency is active, to 60 fronts, with shadow governments in 10%-15% of the villages and 50,000-60,000 party cadres working at the local level in political organization and indoctrination of the populace.<sup>38</sup>

## STRATEGY

The present Philippine insurgency organization is ideologically communist, nationalistic, rurally based, committed to a protracted struggle using both political and military means, controlled by a central party organization which also forms the core of both the political and military organizations, and fundamentally self-supporting. It is therefore a classical Marxist-Leninist (ML) revolutionary organization which uses Maoist agrarian based military and political strategies to overthrow the government. However, it started as an urban based revolutionary party formed by disgruntled intellectuals at the University of the Philippines who were unhappy with the passivity of the Soviet backed existing communist party and who therefore turned to the more successful revolutionary strategies of Mao.<sup>39</sup> Driven out of the cities and into the countryside in the early days of martial law, the CPP/NPA devised a simple strategy: build rural party organizations; recruit armed NPA guerrilla bands; and build political influence in urban areas through political, labor, professional, social welfare, and agrarian front organizations.<sup>40</sup> 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.

The umbrella front organization, the NDF, has numerous constituent fronts including various professional (teachers, lawyers, medical), religious, labor, agrarian, and student political organizations.<sup>41</sup> In order to portray the revolutionary

opposition as patriots and to build national appeal, the NDF's ten point program published in 1973 covers nearly every issue including democratic, economic, cultural, human rights, and nationalism with a strong anti-foreign bias, all worded to appeal to the widest possible constituency.<sup>42</sup> 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 geographic environment of the Philippine island chain created a need for a unique adaptation of the revolutionary model with a special emphasis on centralized command and decentralized execution. The small size of most of the islands and their physical separation reduced or even eliminated significant areas for organization of secure bases except on the largest two or three islands.<sup>43</sup> CPP/NPA strategy has been to create self-sufficient guerrilla fronts on the larger islands and use them as staging areas for expansion into the smaller islands after power is consolidated. These fronts are designed to be fully independent so that the local initiative can always be maintained.<sup>44</sup> Within this structure are two definitions of guerrilla fronts--guerrilla base areas are secure zones where insurgency control is assured while a guerrilla front is a contested control area often located adjacent to or near a secure area.<sup>45</sup>

The NPA approach to creating a revolution is simple yet effective. Using five or more organizers per armed insurgent, re

gions, districts, municipalities, and villages are targeted for development by political propaganda teams.<sup>46</sup> Initial contact by villagers with these teams is always positive. Hard working, well-disciplined teams appear in remote villages to help in planting, harvesting, or building projects and to provide medical care to the villagers. Group discussion sessions are led and local problems with landowners or rustlers are brought out. Nearby armed guerrilla bands administer swift justice to the rustlers and act as buffers between the tenant farmers and abusive landowners. Excessive rents are forced down and land reforms are forced on the landowners. All these actions advertise the existence of the insurgency and identify it with the needs and aspirations of the people.<sup>47</sup> These teams are then followed by other propaganda teams who start the organization of the village into various groups for further consolidation of control over the villagers. Party cadres accomplish this through the use of communist social engineering strategies to form highly structured village organizations that are carefully designed to replace traditional social groupings within the village structure.

Population behavior control is then assured by using simple yet effective means such as group indoctrination sessions, public admonition and warning, and propaganda or intimidation killings of recalcitrants. Once insurgency control over a village is complete the final step of control is village pacification wherein social elements that traditionally or ideologically oppose the

movement are eliminated. The result is always the turning of a village population from passive to active supporters through psychological and physical control.

The NPA serves two main purposes in the revolution. Its first function is as the military arm of the party's struggle while the second is as the enforcement arm of the CPP with significant political responsibilities. The NPA's military strategy embodies Mao's principles of advance, retreat, and constant harassment, all based on reacting to the government's posture. Never fighting unless victory is sure, the NPA insurgent seeks not territory but captured guns and enemy supplies. His purpose is not to win but to prevent defeat so as to maintain the constant presence and threat of a fighting force.<sup>49</sup> In order to accomplish its functions, the NPA is organized into several types of military units including mobile forces in the secure areas, guerrilla bands in contested areas, urban squads in the cities, and militia units in NPA controlled villages.

The self-proclaimed goal contained in the September 1983 issue of Liberation, the NDF's newspaper, is to continue in this stage, refraining from widespread armed confrontation, until Manila is besieged and its occupants ready to join in the armed uprising. Meanwhile, organization at the grassroots level continues and military action initiated only for political or propaganda reasons. Still in stage one, CPP/NPA strategy envisions attainment of stage two when 25,000 rifles can be fielded.

With only 10,000-15,000 rifles at present, the insurgency will stay in stage one unless considerable outside resources can be secured.<sup>50</sup>

Until late 1983 the CPP/NPA insurgency appeared to be entirely self-supporting in the areas of military hardware and basic logistics with Communist China providing only limited support. However, after 1983 increasing Soviet involvement, including suspected military hardware and financial support, became evident. This apparent shift by the CPP was due to American rapprochement with Communist China, China's own emphasis on improving Asian relations, and Soviet recognition of the internal situation in the Philippines as being ripe for exploitation.<sup>51</sup> As the amount of Soviet aid increased, the CPP naturally became increasingly pro-Soviet. Another reason for the increase in Soviet aid was CPP acceptance of the Soviet recommendation to concentrate on the basic aspects of organizing the insurgency, and to de-emphasize the armed struggle between 1975-1980 due to the strength of the economy at that time and the stability of Marcos government.<sup>52</sup> Later as the political turmoil of the latter stages of the Marcos era gave the insurgency better opportunities for expansion, declining economic conditions reduced CPP/NPA ability to finance operations from their population base. The Soviets, seeing this situation as a window of opportunity, rapidly increased the size of their diplomatic mission, infiltrated agents into NPA strongholds, smuggled weapons into the Philippines, and generally dramatically increased their level of support.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, some financial aid is being

received from various European solidarity front organizations which include radical church groups. However, the main purpose of these funding efforts and front organizations appears to be an attempt to stir international support and recognition of the insurgency organization as a provisional revolutionary government.<sup>54</sup>

The CPP/NPA is presently in state of strategy transition due primarily to its loss of credibility with the people as a result of its total rejection of the recent presidential elections. Sensing victory close at hand in the midst of the turmoil of the closing days of the Marcos presidency, especially after the assassination of Mr. Aquino, the armed struggle was reemphasized in order to increase the stress on the government. By 1985, a pattern of violence and repression emerged, and the election of Mrs. Aquino only intensified this development. Motivated by a desire to consolidate control in the early days of the Aquino presidency, informants and government officials in the rural areas were targeted for assassination.<sup>55</sup> However, the Aquino government survived. More aggressive counterinsurgency operations and increased political stability appear to have forced the CPP leadership to undertake a radical strategy shift. Trends that appear to be emerging are:

- \*Leadership change ongoing.
- \*Apparent shift to a more military less political strategy.
- \*Ongoing search abroad for heavier military weapons.

- \*Targeting of economic infrastructure.
- \*Resurgence of urban terrorism, especially assassinations of counterinsurgents and foreign personnel.
- \*Establishment of People's Revolutionary Governments in secure areas in order to obtain international recognition as a belligerent.<sup>56</sup>

The significance of this strategic change in direction is obviously open to debate, but it does appear evident that the shift may in part be motivated by a desire to force the AFP into a more aggressive and abusive posture. A sharp increase in military civil rights abuses could reverse several years worth of improvements in this area by the AFP and tend to isolate it from the people as it was in the later stages of the Marcos era.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile the CPP/NPA continues to exploit and even foster instability in the Philippine political process. Its negotiations with the government over the recent cease-fire and ongoing attempts to create an issue out of the presence of U.S. bases can both be viewed as attempts to both foster national/international political legitimacy and regain lost momentum.<sup>58</sup>

The bottom line on the present situation in the Philippines is that an apparent easy victory was snatched from the very fingertips of the revolutionaries by the people themselves. In fact, by their own calculations the insurgents were approximately three

years from reaching stage two strategic stalemate.<sup>59</sup> However, the election of Mrs. Aquino left the national political front that they led shattered and erosion from the ranks of the NDF and CPP occurred.<sup>60</sup> The current confrontational strategy is designed to increase the pressure on the government, sow discord between the government and the military, reassert its previous political ascendancy, isolate the military from the people, and further legitimize its presence nationally and internationally so that pressure can be applied to the Aquino government to force negotiations. These are of course standard communist revolutionary strategies and help to give this type of political-military struggle its flexibility and resiliency. The turn to violence is disturbing but predictable in light of the warning by L. Taruc, a communist guerrilla from the earlier Hukbalahap insurgency who witnessed the increasing use of violence in the first revolutionary effort-"As class hatred spread through their ranks and as the Bolshevism of their leaders became more apparent, cruelty and ruthlessness grew."<sup>61</sup>

CENTER OF GRAVITY ANALYSIS: Party, Military Arm, Population, Bases

## INTRODUCTION

The CPP/NPA insurgency is by any standard a communist revolutionary insurgency whose primary purpose is the assumption

of total political control through the use of a classical Maoist agrarian revolutionary strategy. As such its main purpose is to induce the collapse of the government in power and not necessarily to impose a conventional military defeat. Since this insurgency is primarily internally vice externally based, this study will concentrate on its organization and operation as this is where internal revolutions derive power.<sup>62</sup> As a communist revolutionary insurgency there are four critical elements required for its successful operation: the CPP for leadership; the NPA for military-political operations; a population base for power growth; and secure bases to provide a stable, secure area for training and a stable pro-insurgency population base for resource support. Consequently my center of gravity analysis will focus on these four critical elements of the insurgency, seeking to analyze its mode of operations hoping at all times to identify possible weaknesses and determine the relative importance of these elements to the continued success of the revolution. That element which appears to be the most important will by definition be the insurgency's center of gravity.

#### PARTY

The CPP is the motivational force behind the insurgency. As such it provides the strategic direction to the insurgency organization and ensures dedicated party members are placed in key leadership positions in both arms of the struggle. Its domination of the various political fronts which form the NDF is

well known and started with its early infiltration of the Christians for National Liberation in 1972. Other party members direct and lead military units as well as form shadow governments in the guerrilla base areas and guerrilla fronts.

One persistent problem with the CPP/NPA organization is weak ideological adherence by the rank and file.<sup>63</sup> This may be due to the explosive growth experienced by the revolutionary effort in the latter stages of the Marcos government. Alternatively, it may be due to a conscious decision to rapidly expand, foregoing the usual careful recruitment process, so as to intensify the pressure on the government. The precise long term result of this ideological impurity is hard to determine, but one that is certainly evident is the recent erosion of political support for the NDF after the election of President Aquino. The desertion of party workers and leaders from the ranks of the NDF may also indicate that its previous political popularity may have stemmed from anti-Marcos/anti-government feelings and not from genuine support for the revolution.

The party appears to have made a crucial and strategic mistake in its virtual abandonment of the political process during the presidential and constitutional elections. This election was truly a people's revolution which ended dramatically in the inauguration of Mrs. Aquino and the fleeing of Marcos.<sup>64</sup> The recent turmoil experienced within the leadership structure of the CPP/NPA, the significance of which will be discussed more fully in following sections, is just now being resolved with the selection of a more military vice political strategy. This is

certainly a change in strategic direction for the party and may in fact be recognition by the party that the election and continued survival of Aquino government has taken away their political option, at least for the near term. Although the CPP remains the driving force which impels the insurgency process, its survival as a predominant force, given a strongly elected people's government, is a question open for serious debate.

#### MILITARY ARM

The NPA, as the military arm of the revolution, is a formidable guerrilla force (24,000+regulars) by any standard of insurgency. Growing in numbers and in degree of influence over the past several years, it stands today as the single most important danger to the survival of the democratically elected government of the Philippines. However, it too has suffered the setbacks experienced by the CPP as a result of the presidential elections and previous growth rates have slowed. This has also slowed the recruitment process. However, its primary mission continues to be building the mass base in rural, remote areas where poverty and suffering predominate.<sup>65</sup> These are precisely the areas where government control is weakest and guerrilla control strongest. Consequently, continued slow growth can be anticipated if the NPA evolves strategies to compensate for the election of Mrs. Aquino.

As previously stated, insurgency movements are preoccupied with minimizing combat risks and are therefore very conservative

in their risk taking. Guerrilla morale and discipline stem from their camaraderie, ideological devotion, and group/peer pressure. Additionally, their size and relatively small support base requires them to maintain the tactical initiative in order to be successful. Consequently, insurgency guerrilla units are very vulnerable to mobile, counterinsurgency strategies since loss of the initiative, which this type of warfare can force on them, increases unwanted risks. Their desire is for the government to stay in a static defensive posture with forces spread out and therefore easily surrounded. This allows insurgents to concentrate at will thereby always ensuring the success of their military operations.

Insurgency morale is a fragile thing, dependent on immediate success for its maintenance.<sup>66</sup> The loss of initiative by the insurgency organization through more aggressive small unit operations by well trained forces unwilling to be pinned down in static defensive positions, and which are persistent in their attempts of force contact, can have nearly immediate effects on insurgent morale. Reduced military success, loss of the tactical initiative, and increased casualty rates can very easily translate into higher desertion rates and lower recruiting effectiveness. Thus recent improvements in AFP training and equipment, combined with a change in strategy to an emphasis on small unit tactics away from secure areas has pushed the NPA out of certain key areas where they once operated freely.<sup>67</sup>

Recent NPA emphasis on urban violence through the use of Sparrow assassination squads, its targeting of the economic

infrastructure, and widespread purgings makes them very vulnerable to loss of mass appeal. The impact of this on NPA effectiveness remains to be seen, but one sure result will be the increasing loss of political clout. This will most assuredly translate into increasingly difficult organizational effectiveness at the local level.

Finally, the NPA suffers from endemic shortages in critical supply/logistics requirements including food, medicine, arms, and funding. These shortages may in fact reflect the limited resource base of their secure support populace which although taxed by the NPA are chronically poor and unable to provide significant funds to the revolutionary cause. These shortages limit them to small unit operations, restricts military options, and makes them especially vulnerable to counter-production strategies.<sup>68</sup> If the predicted change in strategy to a more confrontational strategy is in fact true, this situation will only worsen unless significant outside sources of aid are identified.

A problem imposed on the insurgency by its geographic location in the Philippine island chain is the remoteness and physical isolation of its various guerrilla fronts. To date this has been used as a positive factor by the military arm in its implementation of a strategy that stressed the total tactical and logistic independence of each front. Recent initiatives by the AFP to more aggressively pursue contact with NPA units makes each front vulnerable to being isolated and their supply lines interdicted. Should this happen, supply, logistic, and recruiting problems could worsen and retention of the initiative made even

more difficult. Thus the CPP/NPA growth potential remains in serious question given these vulnerabilities and its ability to transition into stage two is severely constrained.

#### POPULATION

The CPP/NPA leadership clearly recognized the importance of the mass base to the insurgency effort. Using discontented members of the educated elite as well as disgruntled members of labor, student organizations, and leftist clergy to form and then run various political fronts, all the while keeping control of the entire process, a popular, mass based anti-government movement was created. Effectively picking issues with regional appeal, the insurgency's political front organizations were rapidly becoming the voice of the people in each of these regions since political opposition had been stifled under President Marcos. A major catalyst to this process as well as a major contributor to the radicalization of the political opposition was the airport murder of Mr. Aquino.

Significantly, the murder gave the insurgency four main issues with national vice regional appeal. These were: the murder itself and outrage over the government's apparent cover-up; frustration over the government's corrupt practices; continuing civil rights abuses by the AFP; and land reform. These issues, when added to the general unrest due to economic malaise, turned the insurgency into a national movement for the first time and its

corresponding growth in both national influence and size was electric. As a result of this growth the leadership was able to move up the tentative date for transition into stage two, strategic stalemate, to within three years of the election. Therefore they were unwilling to participate in the election since things were truly going their way. However, this was a significant strategic blunder for this one mistake may irrevocably have separated them for the first time from the aspirations of the people.

In the opinion of some authorities, the mass base of an insurgency is the single most important element necessary for the continuation of the revolution.<sup>69</sup> Within this mass base only a small portion needs to be actively involved in supporting the revolution while the remainder needs to be passive.<sup>70</sup> From this passive base political organization turns selective portions into an active anti-government opposition led by the revolutionaries. Screening and continual recruitment provides an ever-growing radical base for the insurgency organization while the remainder are usually blissfully unaware of the true nature of the movement. Thus much of the CPP/NPA's popular support seems to be based more on festering resentment over the previous government's wrongdoings or other perceived problems than on a real popular fervor for the cause of the revolution. However, the core of the revolution, that which keeps the populace stirred up, is Marxist-Leninist.<sup>71</sup>

The election of President Aquino rendered a remarkable transformation of the insurgency's mass base. The election cam

paing itself seemed to reawaken the Filipinos' desire for a responsive government after years of lying dormant. The triumph of her campaign gave moderates a long overdue voice and prevented a complete radical left takeover of the opposition. Most importantly, it stopped the desertion of moderates to the resistance movement, the effects of which are still being felt by the insurgency. The basic fact that most of the people voted for Mrs. Aquino, that 85% voted for and approved the new constitution, and that overwhelmingly large percentages are involved in local elections shows that the people's voice is being heard, that the population is being aroused, and that its passivity is no longer certain.<sup>72</sup> Based on her demonstrated electoral margins, Mrs. Aquino's continuing popularity should not be contestable by any dissident elements, including the radical right and the AFP. If this is true, her popularity could serve as a deterrent to the radical opposition and give her government a clear and continuing mandate for rule.<sup>73</sup>

The abandonment of the political process by the CPP/NPA which started with the presidential elections, and which is currently indicated by its apparent shift to a more military strategy, is in my opinion a critical failure for this decision turns a classic Marxist-Leninist agrarian insurgency movement into a strictly conventional military type revolution. This really simplifies counterinsurgency strategies for once this process starts, the insurgency can very quickly lose the cover provided by the passive population. With this loss of ability to move freely about the population defeat of the insurgency becomes more

of a military problem than a sociopolitical problem.

Indications of CPP/NPA loss of the trust and confidence of the people due to their no longer representing the will of the people and to their continuing use of repressive, often brutal tactics, include:

- \*Overwhelming majority of people involved in electoral process.
- \*Growth of national vigilante movement.
- \*Desertion of moderates from NDF fronts.
- \*Recent mass desertions from NPA ranks.
- \*Selection of a more confrontational military strategy.

The Cuban revolutionary, Che Guevara, recognized that as long as the opposing government was elected by the people, and further, as long as it maintained some semblance of its constitutional legality in the minds of the people a revolutionary struggle cannot be successful since the peaceful struggle has not yet been completed.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, the longer President Aquino continues as the constitutionally elected leader of the government and the more the people feel their voice is heard in the process of government, the harder it will be for the insurgency to win.

## SECURE BASE AREAS

Through the very effective combination of geographically remote areas of the Philippines where regional issues gave them a fertile field for organizing the opposition, the CPP/NPA insurgency built up several secure base areas. They currently include:

- \*Kalinga Apayao and areas in the Cagayan Valley of N. Luzon.
- \*Bicol Peninsula in S. Luzon.
- \*Twin Islands of Samar and Leyte.
- \*Negros Island.
- \*Agusan and Bukidnon in N. Mindanao.

However, government forces can and do dominate any area at will.<sup>75</sup> Given the recent more aggressive posture taken by AFP forces, existing secure base areas can be turned. The most critical requirement to neutralizing a secure base area is a long term commitment by the government to apply the sociopolitical and military resources necessary to drive out the guerrilla infrastructure and undo its various political and population control mechanisms. The destruction of the political infrastructure is important but not totally necessary at first since the very presence of government forces in the sanctuaries poses a force in being threat to guerrilla units. This obviously restricts their tactical flexibility and denies them their previous total freedom of initiative.

Defeat of the NPA will require the eventual neutralization and dismantling of the insurgency's secure base area support structure. The recent widespread and rapid growth of civilian organized vigilante groups such as the Alsa Masa may be the first indication that CPP/NPA control of their secure base areas is tenuous and further, that the best weapon to use in restoring government control in a contested area is a combination of government presence and an aroused anti-insurgency population.

An important component of the secure base area is the economic support it provides to the revolutionary cause. Taxation by the shadow government run by the CPP/NPA, especially on existing commercial enterprises, provides a large source of funding for continuation of operations. Since this shadow government exercises control far beyond the bounds of the secure base area, its destruction will inevitably be a long term process. An aroused people such as those involved in the vigilante movement can do much to quickly identify and then dismantle the shadow government's enforcement structure-its tax collectors, hit team members, guerrilla fighters, and political organizers. The concomitant loss of revenue from one major area within a secure base area can drastically reduce the insurgency's capability to conduct operations in the region thereby forcing reduced flexibility and a lower combat intensity on insurgency strategists. This gives the government more time, eases its political pressure, and enables it to initiate more aggressive operations.

Finally, as previously discussed secure base areas are increasingly vulnerable given their physical remoteness and isola

tion. If present indications of an aroused populace continue and if the improved counterinsurgency strategy of the AFP continues to deny the insurgency the initiative while simultaneously keeping it in the role of protector of the people, the CPP/NPA secure base structure and its population base may gradually erode leaving the revolution with a diminishing capability to continue. However, the existing secure base areas will continue to support a large insurgency effort. The mere fact that they are vulnerable does not in and of itself destroy their continued value to the revolutionary effort.

#### CONCLUSION

The one common element to all of the above discussions is people. It is the people who form the core of the revolutionary party, people who are receptive to the revolutionary propaganda and recruiting efforts, people who fight as guerrillas, people in secure base areas who fund and man the revolution, and people who remain passive while the revolution goes on around them. Accordingly, this insurgency's center of gravity is the Filipino people themselves. Significantly, the CPP/NPA seems to have separated itself from the aspirations of the people as expressed in two major elections and the people appear to have turned their back on the communist revolution. If present trends continue and if the government can consistently provide the basic services that it is

entrusted to provide than this process should accelerate. Some critical government actions required are:

- \*Establish credible, effective, and democratic governing bodies at the grassroots level.
- \*Continue the fight against corruption for it was the political and economic corruption of the Marcos era that separated the people from the government.
- \*Recognize the insurgency as the number one threat to continued Philippine independence.
- \*Improve the training and professionalization of the AFP, especially in counterinsurgency tactics.
- \*Significantly increase the resourcing of AFP requirements to combat the insurgency.
- \*Aggressively combat international efforts to recognize the movement as a belligerent.
- \*Continue recent improvements in economic performance.
- \*Implement significant land reform, especially in regions where this is a major issue.
- \*Get U.S. and other allied intelligence assets focused on arms trafficking into the Philippines, especially on sources, carriers, and routes.

\*Get national intelligence focused on the insurgency as this is the most cost effective weapon at hand to fight the insurgency.<sup>76</sup>

Fundamental to the accomplishment of the above is the preparation and publication of a national strategy which ties all the components of the nation's power, economic, political, diplomatic, and military, into one cohesive force to use against the revolution. Recognizing the insurgency as the number one threat is a key first step in this process for it would put military and civilian components of government into harmony of purpose. Further, the only option that should be offered insurgents is surrender since negotiation with a movement devoted to the violent overthrow of a freely elected government is absurd at best and self-defeating at worst. Once surrendered, insurgents should be humanely treated, otherwise their impetus for surrender is reduced and the conflict extended.

The population's role in the defeat of the insurgency is critical. If aroused and persuaded to back the government, it will uncover NPA activities, expose propaganda/political organizers, and even deny resources to the revolution if offered consistent protection. The single most important requirement for these actions is the nurturing of the population's perception that the government is their government and not the government of the privileged few.

Since revolutions are generally short if both the cause and the organization are good and protracted if the cause is weak

but the organization good, much struggle remains for the Philippine government.<sup>77</sup> This is because, in my perception, the cause which fueled the revolution is growing weaker as true democracy returns to the Philippines but the CPP/NPA organization is truly well suited to continuing a protracted struggle. This revolutionary movement is certainly a tenacious opponent with a twenty year record of success. The decisive first step on the road to victory has now been accomplished in the involvement of the people in the election of a national leader, approval of a new constitution, and completion of local elections. If the people continue turning to the government for resolution of their problems, and if the government is successful in resolving these problems, the insurgency's center of gravity will have been destroyed and time, initiative, and the moral high ground will reside with the government.

Ramon Magsaysay, the late Philippine Defense Minister and later President, used several basic steps to defeat the previous communist insurgency. These were:

- \*Revitalized the army with new training, doctrine, and purpose.
- \*Destroyed insurgent political organization through improved intelligence and arrest of the leadership structure.
- \*Used armed forces to guarantee fair, free elections thus putting them into role of protectors/defenders of the people and not abusers of the people.

\*Provided fair, humane treatment of all insurgents who surrendered.

\*Implemented limited land reform in certain key areas of the Philippines.<sup>78</sup>

These initiatives provide a good starting point for the development of a national counterinsurgency strategy. The role that the AFP can play in this strategy is critical for the above reforms centered around a virtual turnaround in the performance of the AFP from an organization that was inefficient, non-aggressive, on the defensive, and abusive of the people, into an organization dedicated to combating the revolution while protecting the people. Corresponding reforms at the governmental level including the initiation of limited land reform left the people with the impression that the government was their government.

Finally, the dramatic improvement of the Philippine economy under the more stable conditions of Mrs. Aquino's government, with a 5.5% growth rate posted for early 1987 and an inflation rate which appears to be deflating, seems to have removed yet another stimulant to continued revolution. Although significant issues remain, poverty, national debt, land reform, and political divisiveness, the issues which fostered the insurgency's rapid growth can be dealt with over time now that the people are involved in the governmental process.<sup>79</sup>

## COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

The essence of strategy is to concentrate strength against weakness, to destroy the enemy through elimination of his vital component. In the era of revolutionary warfare, the strength of the revolution lies in the people for no revolutionary struggle can succeed without a political goal which meets the needs of the people. In a country with an abusive, corrupt government the needs of the people are not being met. This leaves the people as the weakness of the government and the strength of the revolution. Therefore the best counterrevolutionary strategy is an efficient, effective government which represents the hopes and aspirations of the people.<sup>80</sup> This is precisely what is happening in the Philippines today. Completion of local elections will result in village and town governments which are truly of the people, which represents their needs, and which responds to their voice. The critical CPP blunder of abandoning the political process separated the revolution from the will of the people and has given the government a tremendous strategic advantage in that the government's strength is now the insurgency's weakness.

The recent resurgence of the AFP presence in the field, its more aggressive pursuit of contact with the enemy, and its concentration on protecting the people puts the army back where it should be and eliminates another source of bitter opposition to the government. Their expanded presence should do much to blunt further NPA initiatives while the government continues

winning the hearts and minds of the people. The above is not to imply that the revolution is over but rather that although much hard fighting and though many serious problems remain for the government to resolve, the strategic initiative has passed to the government. Whether this is recognized or even accepted is another question.

Third world democracies are often the least able to combat communist revolutionary insurgencies precisely because the habit patterns of democratic government have not been firmly rooted. Thus their governments can be more prone to abuses since the usual protection mechanisms of a free society, such as an independent judiciary and a free press, are not in place and protected. Additionally, their economies are still emerging and are fragile due to their limited export capabilities and small domestic market sizes. This leaves them susceptible to extreme variations in performance due to world market conditions. Hence they are often not capable of providing the stability necessary to conduct a successful, but protracted, counterinsurgency effort. In the case of the Philippines, the democratic process is in place and the mechanisms of democracy strongly rooted despite the recent experience under Mr. Marcos. The economy is improving but still in need of diversification and development. Therefore assistance and international support is mandatory in order to enable the Philippines to develop while still combatting the insurgency.

Given the long held and mutually shared feeling of trust and confidence as well as the common values which motivate both

countries, the United States and the Philippines are truly bound together in a relationship best described in the Filipino phrase, "utang na loob "or "debt without end."<sup>81</sup> The strategic value of the two American bases in the Philippine Islands gives added impetus to our national obligation based on this relationship to continue or even increase the levels of support given our Filipino compatriots. Therefore, the priority of our support should be increased with special emphasis in the following areas:

- \*Economic support, loans, open-door trade policies and preferential treatment for newly emerging Philippine industries.
- \*Military aid targeted to provide the training and equipping of AFP units in the counter-insurgency, low intensity conflict mission.
- \*Increased U.S. business development in the Philippines, including high technology to take advantage of the high educational level of the people.
- \*Full diplomatic support to counter ongoing attempts to grant belligerency status to the revolutionary movement.
- \*Full intelligence and surveillance support to counter arms/supply smuggling to NPA units.
- \*Financial support of Philippine self-development projects designed to improve the economic

infrastructure. Examples include-land reform, agricultural development, medical services, and inter-island communication development.

When balanced against other U.S. commitments, the above recommendations will not cost the American taxpayer an inordinate amount. In my opinion, our support should be provided as a separate issue from the bases negotiation issue. Clearly, if the insurgency predominates, or should it force political concessions on the government, the loss of the bases will become inevitable given the insurgency's documented stand against U.S. presence in the country. Accordingly, it is in our own best interest to unconditionally support the Philippines just as it is in every case where the continuance of democracy and free economic development is in question.

The intent of our efforts should be to encourage economic development and self-sufficiency. Proper controls, audit mechanisms, and target dates will provide a realistic level of aid and known cutoff dates. Most of all, aid should be keyed to genuine local requirements and not driven by our own often very expensive requirements. Simplicity, effectiveness, and self-sufficiency should be the operating principles which drive the aid process.

The real payoff for American national interests will not be in the retention of the bases, which are strategically important, but rather in the identification with and support of true independence for a nation which has been irrevocable bound to our

own for over eighty years and which shares our love of true democracy. The Filipino people have voiced their will in the restoration of democracy and have elected a truly representative government. It is they who will do the fighting and dying. Our job is to lend support with those things that we can supply best-money, training, diplomacy, equipment, and intelligence.

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78. D. J. Steinberg. THE PHILIPPINES- A SINGULAR AND PLURAL PLACE. Westview Press, Boulder, 1982, p. 111. and Taruc, p. 97.

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