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THE EVENTUAL DEMISE OF THE COMMUNIST INSURGENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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After 41 years of fighting the government, the CPP/NPA/NDF (CNN) miserably failed to achieve its strategic goal of seizing political power. Inarguably, the future seems bleak for the movement, as its military capability and people's support to its cause continue to decrease consistently each year. Today, it has lost its revolutionary character and has mutated into a criminal group. It is getting its strength and endurance, not from ideology but merely from extortion and propaganda. It is no longer a national security threat but a localized problem which the local government units can address with improved delivery of basic services and effective governance.

This essay upholds the view that the CNN's war is a lost cause.

MILITARY VICTORY NOWHERE IN SIGHT

The CNN's new tactical objective of establishing a guerilla platoon in each town and attaining a strategic stalemate stage (its firepower at par with government forces) in five years is deceptive and meant only to boost the sagging morale of the NPA rank and file. In fact, it planned to force a stalemate in 1992, but it failed.

The CNN simply refuses to see the realities on the ground. From its peak of 25, 200 in 1987, its strength declined to just 4, 702 in 2009. Its number of firearms has been reduced significantly from 15,500 in 1987 to a meager 4,895 in 2009. Today, NPA presence can be felt only in 1, 077 barangays which is merely 2.5 % of the 42,000 barangays nationwide, compared to 20% (8,500 barangays) in 1986. Undeniably, military victory for the CNN is nowhere in sight.

The CNN is disintegrating. It has lost external support, has extinct ideology and has committed unthinkable sins against the Filipino people. It needs to rise to the strategic stalemate phase and become a mobile conventional force in order to decisively confront the much stronger security forces head-on. It needs an arsenal of firepower greater or at par with the uniformed services. Most importantly, it needs a general uprising or a nationwide insurrection to be successful. So far these conditions are not forthcoming even after four decades of struggle.

With a democratic Philippines and the absence of a state sponsor, the CNN's only main chance is survival, its activities confined to small scale hit and run attacks, murders, extortions and propaganda. From the words of Che Guevarra: "It is not possible to make a successful revolution against a state that is democratic, or pretends to be, the ballot box is the coffin of insurgency... guerilla insurgencies failed to overthrow regimes that conducted reasonably free elections." As long as an effective democracy flourishes in this country, the CNN cannot achieve its long-term objective of establishing a communist state through armed struggle.

The demise of the CNN is inevitable.

FACTORS LEADING TO THE CNN's DEMISE

Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation.

Mao Tse Tung

Internal Factors

The Splits: CNN in Self-Destruct Mode

First Wave

The first wave of the CNN split took place during and after the infamous communist purges. At least 3,200 communist members and sympathizers suspected of being government agents or “traitors to the cause of communism” were tortured and killed by their own comrades in gruesome purges in 1983-88. The bodies of the victims were discovered in at least 239 mass graves all over the country. The two bloodiest purges, codenamed *Kampanyang Ahas* in Mindanao and *Operations Missing Link* and *Olympia* in Southern Tagalog, killed more than 2, 430 rebels.

Dubbed as the CNN’s “*period of insanity*,” the internal purges severely split the Party and left an atmosphere of mistrust and deep penetration agent (DPA) paranoia within the movement. Morale plunged to its lowest as above ground personalities were also targeted. As a result, hundreds of guerillas and thousands of civilian supporters deserted the communist movement leading to its near collapse.

Robert Francis Garcia tells his personal accounts of the CNN’s cruelty and barbarism during the purges in his 2001 book, *To Suffer Thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated Its Own*. CyberDyaryo reveals, “As it is, the CPP can make no claim to moral high ground, not after Garcia’s telling of the unspeakable atrocities he and others experienced at the hands of comrades.”

Second Wave

In 1992-93, differences over strategy and tactics seriously divided the CNN. This led to the second wave of CNN split. The Reaffirmists (RA) of Sison wanted to retain the status quo of protracted people’s war, while the Rejectionists (RJ) led by Popoy Lagman clamored for armed insurrection in the cities to grab power. The RJ groups declared autonomy from the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and some National Democratic Front (NDF) leaders also separated resulting in divisions in legal fronts. The split almost destroyed the CNN. Its number of supporters and fighters shrank. By 1995, NPA strength dropped to a low 6,020 and its number of firearms to 5,350. In 1997, both RA and RJ factions further split, so that by year 2000 the local communist movement had splintered into eight factions. As an offshoot, hundreds of former CNN members surfaced to join progressive groups and moderate left organizations.

Third Wave

The current internal debate over the primacy of electoral politics or armed struggle continues to fracture the CNN. This sparked the third wave of the CNN split. Sison seems to favor electoral politics and peace talks as the primary route to power, while Tiamzon, the Vice Chairman of the CNN supports armed struggle as the key to victory. Sison is now looking at the Nepal model where the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) succeeded in seizing state power after decades of armed struggle by signing a peace deal with government and later joining elections. The CPN-M became the dominant party in the Nepalese parliament and its leader was elected Prime Minister.

Greed and Corruption

Quarrels over funds are also causing divisions inside the CNN. In 1987, at the height of NPA strength, the CNN collected US20M- US45 dollars in domestic revolutionary taxation (extortion) and US8M- US15M dollars from donors abroad. Although collections have dwindled over the years, the CNN managed to extort at least P130M from domestic sources in 2009. Ten to twenty percent of this went to the fighters, while 80-90 % was forwarded to the CPP National Finance Committee, a large portion of which was used to sustain their leaders abroad. The communists killed each other over these funds. At times, the money never reached the NPA foot soldiers but was pocketed by the Central Committee of the CPP. Many former rebels who abandoned the organization described in their debriefings that the CNN today exists not for a political cause but for financial reasons. Akbayan's Etta Rosales, who in the 70s joined the underground movement, has tagged the NPA as the new mafia.

CNN's Unthinkable Sins against the Filipino People

The CNN's propensity to employ terrorism and violence to achieve its ends is draining its pond of supporters and constituency. The CNN was declared a terrorist organization by the US Department of State in 2002 and by the European Union in 2005 because of its ruthlessness and unconcern for the lives of innocent people. The following are some of the major atrocities of the CNN:

Plaza Miranda Bombing

To create a revolutionary condition in the country, Sison initiated the bombing of Plaza Miranda on August 21, 1971 which instantly killed 30 people including Liberal Party leaders, and injured hundreds. Sison immediately blamed Marcos for this heinous act. Years later, Victor Corpus, who defected to the CPP in 1970 while serving as Army

lieutenant, publicly admitted that the bombing was hatched by Sison in the Isabela side of the Sierra Madre Mountains. In 1997, Senator Jovito Salonga, one of the Plaza Miranda bombing victims, accused Sison of masterminding the attack. This terrorist act has destroyed the reputation of Sison as a revolutionary leader. In 2002, former Foreign Affairs Secretary Blas Ople wrote, “No conscience nagged (Sison) when he ordered the bombing of the Plaza Miranda *miting de abanse* of the Liberal Party in 1971. He wanted to force a revolutionary situation that would split the country’s leaders and clear the way for the seizure of power by the CPP.”

Digos Massacre

On June 25, 1989, NPAs opened fire on a crowd of worshippers killing 45 innocent men, women and children inside the church of the United Church of Christ in the town of Digos, Davao del Sur, after the victims refused to cooperate with the NPA rebels. Two of the victims, UCCP Pastor Ruben Ayap and his brother were beheaded. The NPA General Command later admitted responsibility for this horrendous act.

Operation Dirty Job

In the early 90s, the CNN as part of its *Operation Dirty Job* formed The Red Scorpion Group (RSG) to terrorize Metro Manila. The group abducted rich Chinese businessmen and robbed commercial banks to fund the CNN’s urban operations. In 1993, authorities stormed an RSG safehouse in Bulacan killing its top leader Joey de Leon. Documents found in the scene pointed to Sison as the mastermind.

Economic Sabotage

The CNN was directly responsible for the destruction of business establishments after their owners refused to yield in to its extortion demands. From 1996 to 2008, at least P1 billion worth of properties were destroyed, including 129 cell sites belonging to Globe, Smart and other telecommunication companies worth at least P300 million.

CNN’s Use of Child-Combatants

The United Nations Security Council tagged the CNN as a *persistent violator* of children’s rights. Out of desperation, the CNN was forced to recruit minors mainly because of its problem recruiting from the ranks of the educated older youth and legal

left organizations, coupled by its known reputation for brutality and wickedness. From 1999 to 2007, 96 child-combatants have been captured and 169 surrendered, most of them now living peaceful lives with their families. The 2004 report by *Coalition to Stop Use of Child Soldiers* revealed massive recruitment of children aged 13 to 17 based on testimonies of former NPA rebels, and that a quarter of new recruits were children.

Matthew Jennings has co-authored the 2008 book, Atrocities and Lies: The Untold Secrets of the Communist Party of the Philippines, to expose the CNN's unthinkable sins against the Filipino people. It is available in bookstores.

External Factors

International Developments

The opening of diplomatic relations with China, the reluctance of Vietnam to get involved in the country's internal affairs, and the collapse of communist USSR left the local communist movement with no foreign sponsor. The outcome was devastating because a revolution without foreign support is doomed to fail. The CNN's recourse was to bleed the Filipino people by demanding extortion money from both the rich and the poor.

Domestic Developments: CNN Running Out of Issues

Return of Democracy

The return of democracy and free speech in the country after the fall of the dictator in 1986 has tormented the movement. The CNN saw Marcos' repression as the best recruiter to the movement. It needs another despotic, repressive government to create a revolution. The restoration of democracy weakened its anti-fascist line. Gregg Jones wrote in his 1989 book, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement*, "The restoration of democratic rule in the Philippines had a chilling effect on the revolution and slowed down the growth of rebel forces."

The Termination of Military Bases Agreement

The departure of the US bases, an issue which has been heavily capitalized by the CNN, diluted its anti-imperialist propaganda line.

Agrarian Reform Program

Government's agrarian reform program watered down the CNN's anti-feudal stance and reduced its military manpower as the peasantry, the main source of NPA fighters, cut its bond with the movement. This is the reason why the CNN exerts enormous propaganda efforts to undermine the government's agrarian reform program. From 1988 to 2005, under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), 6.6 million hectares of land were distributed to Filipino farmers, giving them hope. This practically broke the backbone of the revolution as farmers threw their allegiance to the government.

The forces of "imperialism, feudalism and fascism" are simply gone in the present Philippines and so are the CNN's exploitable issues.

Decline of Student Movement

The decline of the student movement since the 80s also crumbled the movement. Today's youth is more concerned with cell phones, internet, *Facebooks* and DVD's. Student activists, seeing no reasons to go underground as their grievances have been heard, are now disinclined to go to the mountains. As a result, the CNN is forced to choose from the less educated and less political peasants to fill up cadre and leadership positions.

Poverty Reduction

The government's Kapit Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan (KALAHATI) programs, aimed at reducing poverty in the country, has reached 12,826 KALAHATI barangays and in turn, helped reduce insurgent recruitment. These programs, which improved the quality of lives of the people and developed public confidence in government, include construction of water systems, farm-to-market roads, day care centers, health centers, flood control systems, footbridges, public markets, pump irrigation and barangay electrification. Today, there are already 41,722 barangays electrified and only 258 un-electrified. KALAHATI projects also include animal dispersal, agro-forestry, fish culture and other livelihood opportunities.

Cooperation of LGUs

The cooperation of the local government units (LGU) in counterinsurgency efforts undeniably decreased the people's support to the communist cause. Bohol is a perfect example of an LGU leading counterinsurgency and of a "carrot" dominated approach. Gov. Erico Aumentado declared the province insurgency-free in 2005, after an elaborate poverty reduction and rebel returnee programs convinced the insurgents to shift their loyalty from the CNN to the government. Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia also formed and led an anti-insurgency task force that succeeded in suppressing insurgency in the province.

The two governors' twin formula was collaboration with all sectors and effective governance.

AFP's Shift to Hearts and Minds War

The military shifted its strategy from attrition to "hearts and minds" war giving emphasis on soft power (development and humanitarian efforts). The AFP created the National Development Support Command to execute the government's Kalayaan Barangay Program (KBP) where soldier-engineers construct school buildings, water systems, farm-to-market roads and bridges in conflict areas to convert them to peaceful and progressive communities. A total of P3.4 billion has been spent on 1,723 KBP projects benefitting 797 barangays throughout the country. The AFP also continues to dispatch Peace and Development Teams in rural areas to help local officials hasten development and to hold dialogues with families of rebels who are better off outside the CNN. The AFP's focus on civil military operations (e.g medical missions, disaster rescue and relief operations, literacy programs, environmental protection) is winning people's loyalty.

With a better quality of life in the barrios, with no authoritarian ruler, with no valid issues to take advantage of, and with dwindling support from sympathizers, students, mayors, businessmen, land owners and farmers, the communist movement's relevance continues to fade. The insurgency has in essence withered.

THE FUTURE OF CNN

My sense tells me that we are on a countdown when the days of communism in our country are numbered...

Matthew Jennings, 2008

The *end is near* for the CNN. It is losing its fighters and support networks. It has metamorphosed from an ideological movement into a bandit group. Its appeal and influence are ceaselessly waning as the country sustains economic growth. Real GDP growth rates in 2003-09 averaged 5.2%. Areas which used to be rebel bailiwicks, like Camarines Sur, Bohol, Cagayan Valley, Negros Oriental and Davao City, are now the country's leading tourist destinations. Regions which used to endure rebel intimidations, like Northern Mindanao, Soccsksargen and Eastern Visayas, have been experiencing high gross regional domestic product growth rates for years.

The sorry state of the CNN today puts the movement in a position of weakness. With the refusal of CNN leadership to return to the negotiating table, the most viable course of action for government, to lethally *knock out* the CNN, is to push for local peace talks. The CNN sees peace talks (at the national level) as a tool to attain *belligerency status* and a component of protracted war. Even today, its demand for a coalition government (power sharing) is uncompromising.

Localized peace talks had been the government's fall back position every time the CNN withdrew from the negotiations. This was done by three Presidents in 1987, 1999 and 2005. Today, the Social Integration Program (SIP), a form of a local peace talks where government negotiates with individual rebels or through their families, is succeeding in reducing NPA strength and in changing the lives of former rebels, who resolved that staying in the CNN organization is a hopeless thing. The Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Annabelle Abaya says the SIP "has proven to be the most effective counterinsurgency weapon without guns and bullets, attracting rebels to surrender in 2009 to avail of government livelihood scheme." She adds that over 2,500 former communist rebels were given various government financial and livelihood assistance amounting to P65.62 million in 2009. At least 480 more rebel applicants are under process, and this year more negotiations are underway. Almost certainly, this trend is irreversible.

Without the NPA foot soldiers to extort and terrorize the people, the CNN will simply fade into oblivion. Today, it is fighting for its life.

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