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UPDATES ON CURRENT TERRORIST THREATS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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INTRODUCTION

I am truly honored to share with you my humble knowledge on a very controversial topic that is really close to my heart as a retired police officer.

Throughout my entire career as a law enforcement officer, I ran after rebels, terrorists and organized criminal groups with the aim of either arresting them, lock them in jail or even neutralizing them. Now that I am retired, I still run after them but with a new mission: to understand their resilience and to develop counter measures for policy makers. I hope I will not run out of ideas as I present to you an update on current terrorist threats in the Philippines.

The January 25, 2011 bus bombing in Makati City is a clear indication that terrorism continues to pose a clear and present danger to Philippine

public safety and tourism. Terrorism disturbs the peace, threatens public order, destroys properties and even scares our personal safety.

To date, our law enforcement authorities have not specifically named the perpetrators or masterminds of the said bombing. But one thing is certain, the bomb used was an improvised explosive device (IED) made of 81 mm mortar with a mobile phone as triggering device.

While this type of IED is commonly being used in Mindanao, this is the first time that this type of IED was used in Metro Manila to sow terror. Thus, the Makati bus bombing is a watershed event in counter-terrorist investigation in the country.

My presentation today aims to update you on current terrorist threats in the Philippines by identifying existing and emerging threat groups in the country.

But allow me first to briefly discuss what terrorism means.

TERRORISM DEFINED

The most commonly cited definition of terrorism is from the US State Department, which defines terrorism as a *“Premeditated, politically motivated violence against noncombatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.”*

On October 31, 2000, the Philippine National Police (PNP) issued Memorandum Order No. 121, which defines terrorism as *“The premeditated use or threatened use of violence or means of destruction perpetrated against innocent civilians or non-combatant or against civilians and government properties, usually intended to influence an audience.”* PNP definition is apparently an echo of the US State Department’s definition.

But based on Human Security Act of 2007, which serves as the country’s anti-terrorism law, terrorism is a criminal act which aims to sow or create *“a condition of widespread and extraordinary fear and panic among the populace, in order to coerce the government to give in to an unlawful demand.”*

Section 3 of the Human Security Act of 2007 states that terrorism is any act under any of the following provisions of the Revised Penal Code:

- Article 122 (Piracy in General and Mutiny in the High Seas or in the Philippine Waters)
- Article 134 (Rebellion or Insurrection)
- Article 134-a (Coup d'etat), including acts committed by private persons
- Article 248 (Murder)
- Article 267 (Kidnapping and Serious Illegal Detention);
- Article 324 (Crimes Involving Destruction,

Or under

- Presidential Decree No. 1613 (The Law on Arson);
- Republic Act No. 6969 (Toxic Substances and Hazardous and Nuclear Waste Control Act of 1990);
- Republic Act No. 5207, (Atomic Energy Regulatory and Liability Act of 1968);
- Republic Act No. 6235 (Anti-Hijacking Law);
- Presidential Decree No. 532 (Anti-piracy and Anti-highway Robbery Law of 1974); and,
- Presidential Decree No. 1866, as amended (Decree Codifying the Laws on Illegal and Unlawful Possession, Manufacture, Dealing in, Acquisition or Disposition of Firearms, Ammunitions or Explosives)

Having said these, insurgent groups, criminal organizations or event private armies committing aforementioned acts of terrorism may be loosely labeled as terrorist groups if they are bent on committing the aforementioned acts of terrorism.

But who among these groups who might have masterminded the January 25 Makati bus bombing?

MASTERMINDS OF TERROR

Our knee-jerk reaction was to blame the Al-Qaeda linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) for the incident as it already targeted Metro Manila like the Superferry 14 bombing in 2004 and the Valentine's Day bombing in 2005.

Because of the type of IED used, some even pointed their hands against the Al-Khobar Group (AKG) operating mainly in Central Mindanao. Others pinned on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front-Special Operations Group (MILF-SOG) because that type of IED is its signature bomb. But there are those who still believed that it was the handy-work of the now dormant Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement (RSIM) – a group of violent extremist Muslim converts operating in Metro Manila.

In one of my media interviews, I mentioned the Moro Army Committee (MAC) as the likely perpetrator of the Makati bus bombing based on ground information that PIPVTR has gathered prior and in the aftermath of the incident. We are also hearing reports that the Makati bus bombing was planned by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), which is believed to be headed by Umbra Kato. It was argued that the incident was carried out by orphans and children of ASG and MILF operatives.

All these groups are said to be trained in bomb-making by the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operating in the Philippines. The IED used on January 25 carries the bomb signature of what we call as the “Bandung Device” because the manual of that IED was discovered in Bandung, Indonesia where JI also operates.

To fully understand the current terrorist threats confronting our country, allow me to describe the intent and capabilities of these groups and their interrelationship with one another.

THREAT GROUPS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Abu Sayyaf Group

The ASG is a well known terrorist group in the Philippines having been included in the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations and having masterminded several terrorism incidents in the country since its declared establishment in 1989.

I have a deep personal knowledge of the origin of ASG having interrogated their key founders like Edwin Angeles and Khadaffy Janjalani. I have also interrogated Jovenal Bruno, a less popular but highly influential original member of the ASG.

We discovered the link of ASG with Al-Qaeda as early as the 1990s when I headed a special investigation on the presence of international Islamic extremists in the Philippines.

In 1994, we published a confidential report describing Al-Qaeda operations in the Philippines and its ties with ASG.

Top Al Qaeda operatives such as Mohammad Jamal Khalifa (brother-in-law of Osama bin Laden), Khalik Sheik Mohammad (mastermind of 9/11 attacks), Wali Khan and Ramsey Yousef (mastermind of 1994 bombing of World Trade Center in New York City) were all in the Philippines. We confirmed and validated their plans and operations in the Philippines when we interrogated Murad who led us to the discovery of Bojinka Plot in 1995, a plan to bomb several targets in the United States through the use of eleven jetliners bound for America.

Currently, ASG is not as well organized as before. It has many commanders at present.

In Basilan, there are four commanders namely Khair Mundos, Isnilon Hapilon, Puruji Indama and Suhod Tanadjalin (who has been recently killed). In Sulo, there are also four commanders in the person of Radullan Sahiron, Yassir Igasan, Jum dai Gumbahali and Hajan Sawadjahan.

While Igasan was reported to be the Amir of the ASG when Khadaffy Janjalani was killed in combat, the group at present recognizes Radullan Sahiron as its over-all senior commander.

The ASG remains a very small organization. From the highest peak of 2,500 followers in 2000, official estimate says that the ASG has declined to not more than 350 members as of the end of 2010.

But we have a reason to believe that the ASG is much smaller than the official figure suggests. Even the ideological zeal of the ASG has declined sharply and most of its members have become entrepreneurs of violence engaged in kidnap-for-ransom, smuggling and extortion activities.

There is no doubt, however, that few others remain ideological and are committed to the principle of Al-Harakatul Al Islamiyah (AHAI) or the Islamic Movement, which aims to establish a separate Islamic state in Mindanao. Igasan, with his few followers, is a committed jihadist like his

mentor and ASG founder, Abdurajak Janjalani. ASG continues to have links not only with Al-Qaeda, JI, MILF and MNLF but even with NPA.

Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement

Sharing the virulent ideology of Al Harakatul Al Islamiyah, the original name of ASG, is the Rajah Solaiman Islamic Movement or RSIM. We validated the existence of RSIM when I led an investigation called “Operation Green Archer”. This investigation resulted in our discovery of its camp in Anda, Pangasinan in 2002.

The RSIM was originally composed of not more than 60 Islamic converts led by Ahmad Santos who is currently in Bicutan jail. Since the arrest in 2005 of Ahmad Santos, whom I call Lakay having interrogated him, the RSIM, as a separate organization of extremist Muslim converts, has become dormant.

In fact, Lakay, himself, has become a member of the ASG when he headed the ASG Media Bureau.

The Superferry 14 bombing in 2004, which was earlier argued, was carried out by RSIM because of Redento Cain Dellosa, a Muslim convert who put the bomb onto the ferry, was in fact the handiwork of the ASG.

Dellosa, an RSIM member whom I also interrogated, was the one who operated the Superferry 14 bombing upon the instruction of the ASG. In other words, the RSIM became the operational arm of the ASG in Metro Manila.

While the RSIM has become dormant, its members, who are still at large, have either joined the ASG, the MILF, or the Moro Army Committee or MAC, which I will explain later. I discovered that some original RSIM members were former NPA members who converted to Islam. I have a reason to believe that these members continue to collaborate with NPA through the MAC.

Moro Islamic Liberation Front -Special Operations Group

The MILF continues to deny the existence of Special Operations Group or MILF-SOG. But results of continuing counter terrorism investigations indicate that the MILF-SOG does exist and is responsible for

many bombing incidents in Central Mindanao. The MILF-SOG has strong links with JI, through Basit Usman, a master bomber.

We do not know the exact size of the MILF-SOG. But its members are drawn from many groups such as the 105 Base Command of the MILF and has ties with rouge elements of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), ASG, JI as well as criminal organizations like the Pentagon Gang, Abu Sophia Group and the Al Khobar Group.

Al Khobar Group

The Al Khobar Group or AKG is a certified extortionist gang operating in Central Mindanao. It is a very small but complex group because its members are drawn mostly from MILF-SOG, NPA, ASG and criminal organizations. Thus, its key operatives can reach the highest membership of 30 but can also be as low as 5 members. But their actual numbers do not really count. What counts is the number of bombing incidents that they can commit.

The AKG has the reputation of bombing buses in Central Mindanao, particularly in Kidapawan, Tacurong, Koronadal City, and General Santos City using an IED similar with the one used in Makati bus bombing. An interesting character of the Al Khobar Group is the link of its members with the Moro Army Committee.

Moro Army Committee

The Moro Army Committee or MAC is not a new group, strictly speaking. It was formally created in 1998 during the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

We discovered the existence of MAC when I spearheaded an investigation called “Operation Gallant Heart” that led to the report describing the alliance between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front/Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces or MILF/BIAF and CPP/NPA.

MAC is composed of Filipino Muslims and Christians inducted as CPP members. It is the result of tactical alliance between the MILF and the CPP working together to promote the principle of right to self-determination.

In 2001, MAS was put under the National Operational Command (NOC) of the CPP/NPA. Since then, it has become a strategic CPP/NPA organ and this was affirmed during the 11th Plenum in 2004.

MAC has formed its own Special Operations Command (SOG) to conduct joint bomb training and operations with the MILF-SOG and ASG.

Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters

Another group that can commit acts of terrorism is the newly established Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters or BIFF. Umbra Kato announced the formation of BIFF on December 4, 2010.

You may already know that Kato used to be the commander of the 105th Base Command of the MILF. Kato mobilized the 105th BC in 2008 to wage war against the Philippine government as a result of the non-signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). He was joined by the Commander Bravo of the 102th BC and Commander Pangalian of the 103rd BC.

BIFF is presently composed of around 1,000 followers coming largely from the 105th BC of the MILF. Only half of its followers are fully armed. But BIFF draws more strength from followers associated with MILF-SOG.

Kato has a very strong relationship with Basit Usman of the MILF-SOG. Usman is known for his notoriety in bomb training and operations. He trained bombers of MILF-SOG, ASG, and Al Khobar Group. Now, he is training bombers of BIFF, which is joined by other members associated with several threat groups operating in Mindanao. We are receiving reports that BIFF has links with MAC and their combined forces have something to say with the recent bombing in Makati City.

Jemaah Islamiyah

JI is a generic term to describe foreign military jihadists operating in the Philippines. Most of these foreign jihadists are not in fact JI but associated with other groups like KOMPAK and Darul Islam. But we use the term JI as a brand name for foreign military jihadists coming largely from Indonesia.

We already know that JI continues to operate in Mindanao. Currently, there are three key JI operatives in the Southern Philippines: Omar Patek (Indonesian), Marwan (Malaysian) and Mauwiya (Singaporean).

In November 2010, we disclosed to the public that JI entry to the Philippines continues. JI is using three major routes to come to the Philippines and has discovered new routes to avoid detection.

Currently, around 30 JI's continue to operate in the country hand in hand with ASG and MILF-SOG.

What is not fully known, however, is that JI also operates in Metro Manila.

The Rizal Day bombing of 2000 was planned and carried out by JI master bomber, Al Farouk Al-Ghozi whom I had the pleasure to interrogate.

I also interrogated detained JI personalities who admitted that they are in Metro Manila not only for rest and recreation but also for possible operation.

We monitored that Sanusi, a violent Muslim extremist from Indonesia, was in Manila in the last quarter of 2009. I have a reason to believe that Sanusi has something to say about the Makati bus bombing last month.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TOURISM AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Having described the nature of current terrorist threats facing the country, allow me to discuss briefly the implications of these threats for tourism and public safety.

There is no doubt that terrorist threats scare not only foreign but even local tourists. The victims of 2000 Sipadan Kidnapping and 2001 Dos Palmas Kidnapping were mainly foreign tourists.

It is interesting to note, however, that despite the continuing terrorist threats confronting the Philippines, there is a continuous tourist arrival to the country. It only proves that the beauty of the Philippines is far more

compelling reasons for tourists to visit the country than the ugliness of terrorist threats.

On the issue of tourism, I would like to bring to your attention the issue of our Indigenous Peoples. More often than not, we view the IPs as tourist spots.

While IPs have indeed tourism values, some IPs can now be sources of terrorist threats as others are arming themselves to pursue their right to self-determination. Indigenous Peoples' Armed Groups (IPAGS) are emerging a few have already established contacts with other threat groups such as ASG, MILF and NPA to conduct training on bomb-making.

If not effectively prevented, some IP groups can evolve into terrorist groups if we fail to guarantee their inherent right to self determination. If that is the case, IPs arming themselves and establishing links with other threat groups can also pose a threat to tourism and public safety.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me stress that the threat of terrorism facing our country is real and not imagined based on the intent and capabilities of several threat groups I have described. We are saying this not to alarm the public but to alert them on the nature of threats before us.

We at the PIPVTR believe that countering terrorist threats in the Philippines is not the sole responsibilities of the police, the military or the entire government as described in the *whole-of-government approach*. The private sector, the academe, non-government organizations and the wider civil society have a great role to play in addressing terrorist threats. We call this *whole-of-society approach*. The combined whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches constitute the *whole-of-nation approach*.

In other words, the whole nation must be involved in this fight against terrorism. Thus, we advocate for a *whole-of-nation approach* to address the threats of terrorism in the country.

There is no doubt that this approach is easier said than done.

But we really need to say this in order to educate the public and raise their awareness on the nature of these threats so that the public will be more alert and vigilant amidst these threats.

To raise public awareness on terrorist threats, some information must be shared to the public as we are doing now. Thus, we also advocate for intelligence reforms to make our intelligence agencies accountable to the people they have sworn to serve.

As a former intelligence officer and detective manager in my entire career in the police force, I have seen the limitations of our existing intelligence capacities and resources. I can speak with strong conviction that intelligence reforms are strongly needed in our country to effectively address the threat of terrorism in the Philippines.

With that note, please accept my sincerest appreciation for your attention.

Thank you very much and Mabuhay!

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