

PHILIPPINE SECURITY AND TERRORIST THREATS IN THE NEW DECADE

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PHILIPPINE SECURITY IN THE AGE OF TERROR: NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN THE POST-9/11 WORLD

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Good afternoon to everyone!

Let me thank all of you for exerting your efforts to attend this book launching. I am truly grateful for your presence for being with me in this important moment of my career as a scholar.

This work is my humble, yet daring attempt to discuss Philippine security in the context of national, regional, global challenges after 9/11. This book is a product of my long, frustrating search for a single volume that covers the many facets of Philippine security in this age of global terrorism.

I do not have, however, the pretension of having covered all issues impinging on Philippine security. There are other ramifications of Philippine security that I fail to discuss as I intend to cover them in my future publications.

To make your time worth spending here, let me share with you some of my thoughts on current security issues facing the Philippines in this new decade. These thoughts are based on our independent ground and documentary research on various security issues confronting the Filipino nation.

On the peace front, the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research has been monitoring this issue. We support the peace process to solve the on-going internal armed conflicts in the Philippines.

On the GRP-MILF Peace Process, however, there are strong obstacles to the success of the peace talks as there are rouge elements of the MILF who remain determined to continue the armed activities.

Based on our ground research, MILF is presently composed of three major factions: **1)** The Al Haj Murad Faction in Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato, South Cotabato and Sarangani; **2)** Aleem Mimbantas Faction in Zamboanga Sibugay, Lanao provinces, Sulo and Basilan; and **3)** Hashim Salamat Loyalist Faction of Ameril Umbra Kato, Abdullah Macapaar, Sonny Davao and Gerry Abubakar, which are operating in Davao provinces, Palawan and portion of Maguindanao.

The Murad Faction, which represents what the government calls the Mainstream MILF, does not have full disciplinary control of the two other factions of the MILF. This makes the peace process problematic for the Philippine government.

The security situation is exacerbated by the fact that the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is expanding its operation in Zamboanga Sibugay, aside from its usual areas of operations in Sulo, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi. MILF Base Commander, Habib Aloy, in Zamboanga Sibugay is a close friend of Yasser Igasan, the known Amir of ASG. Igasan is also a close friend of Haber Malik who is heading the Nur Misuari Break-Away Group in Sulo.

Some MNLF followers in Sulo have, in fact, joined the ASG because of Abu Sayyaf's current financial standing as a result of its kidnap-for-ransom activities. Isnlon Hapilon has also intensified his operations in Maguindanao because he has a wife there.

Thus, despite the losses of ASG as a result of the success of Oplan Ultimatum, the group is recovering in strength because of its ability to replenish its membership through material and ideological inducements. Through its networks in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Brunei, the ASG is developing its terrorist financing capability abroad.

Thus, we see the resurgence of ASG in this new decade. ASG's continuing links with personalities associated with MILF and MNLF complicate and even obscure our understanding of terrorist threats in the Southern Philippines. This complicated reality is aggravated by their links with Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) personalities and foreign military jihadists operating in Mindanao. PIPVTR is currently verifying the information that there are already Filipino nationals that have become JI members in Mindanao.

On the issue of communist insurgency, it remains the greatest threat to Philippine internal security. While its armed groups have declined in membership through the combined operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, the greatest challenge is how to deal with passive and active sympathizers numbering millions in the entire country.

In the 12th Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPP/NPA held in July-September 2009 in the province of Quezon, the communist insurgents discussed how they can intensify their united

front struggles and international works while endorsing candidates for the 2010 May elections. The CPP/NPA has established the Moro Army Committee (MAC), which serves as its strategic channel and tactical bridge with the MILF, MNLF and even ASG personalities.

In other words, there are enormous challenges to Philippine internal security in this new decade because ASG, MILF, MNLF, JI and CPP/NPA personalities have the will to innovate in order to survive and continue their struggle. I may sound alarmist if I stress that their existing links with ordinary criminal groups engaged in kidnap-for-ransom, arms smuggling, narcotics trafficking, piracy and counterfeiting of commodities in their areas of operations compound the virulent threats emanating from these armed groups.

There are many other sources of Philippine insecurities in this new decade: warlordism, vigilantism, climate change and others. Sadly, we do not have enough time to discuss all of them today.

But I am happy to inform you that through the generous assistance of our partners from the private sector, non-governmental organizations and international donor agencies, PIPVTR will organize this year a series of talks, roundtable discussions, forums and conferences on various issues of Philippine security. These events aim not only to provide a venue for experts and practitioners to talk but also to develop recommendations for policy and strategy that have the ownership of stakeholders of Philippine security.

With that note, let me just thank you for coming. Mabuhay!