

# The Philippines explodes: New People's Army on the move

by Linda de Hoyos

Two events have propelled the Philippines into the center of the global strategic crisis. The first was the Oct. 28 murder of three American servicemen outside of Clark Air Force Base, an act of terrorism which "broke the rules" of violence in the country. The second was the appointment of Oleg Sokolov as the Soviet Union's ambassador to Manila.

The two events are not unrelated. Before his posting to the Philippines, Sokolov had been at the Soviet embassy in Washington since 1980, before that having headed the U.S. desk in the Soviet foreign ministry. By the time he left Washington, he was minister counselor of the embassy and had been the number-two man under Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin. From this post, Sokolov reportedly played a key role in Soviet negotiations with Israel, meeting Israeli ambassador Meir Rosenne in Washington; was the Soviet liaison officer to the Walter Mondale campaign in 1984; met frequently with then-U.S. Undersecretary of State Richard Burt for negotiations over Western Europe; and consulted often with Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy on crisis management of a "regional conflicts." Sokolov also helped stage-manage the Chatauqua meetings between Soviet and U.S. representatives, marking him a key player in Moscow's back-channel negotiations with Washington.

Sokolov is also a top-grade counterintelligence specialist, with special expertise in identifying U.S. intelligence deployments. His posting is not a demotion, but instead indicates the importance Moscow gives to the Philippines in its global strategy against the United States. Or, as one retired senior general who remains an adviser to the Pentagon remarked: "Along with West Germany, the Philippines has become the place where the Russians are testing the American will to capitulate."

## War declared against U.S.

The launching of Soviet irregular warfare operations was signaled with the Oct. 28 murder of three American soldiers in coordinated attacks. Although the communist New People's Army at first denied responsibility for the murders, within a week a series of threats was issued from NPA headquarters in Luzon and Mindanao, stating that any Americans involved in President Corazon Aquino's "total war" against the NPA would be targets for the NPA's "sparrow units." NPA spokesmen also declared that U.S. installations would

be targets for sabotage and destruction.

On Nov. 23, Saturnino Ocampo, a spokesman for the NPA's political arm, the National Democratic Front, admitted that the NPA had gunned down the Americans "as a matter of policy. . . . All U.S. military and civilian officials and personnel involved in the implementation of the total war program are to be targets for attack. . . . We are carefully watching whether the U.S. government will escalate the level of its intervention. The actual deployment of American advisers or troops in combat, for instance, will change the character of the civil war."

Ocampo also acknowledged that the NPA had received foreign monies, as charged by Defense Minister Rafael Ilto. Speaking on Nov. 22 before the Federation of Anti-Communist Movements, Ilto reported that the NPA and Muslim separatists had received \$8 million from foreign countries in 1987, as compared to \$2.5 million in 1986.

Ocampo added that the NPA had received overseas funding from a total of 25 countries. These include Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The Western European sources for this flow are detailed in the dossier below. National Security Adviser Emanuel Sorriano had also charged Nov. 15 that the NPA was receiving armaments from North Korea and the People's Republic of China, although the supply line from China was believed to be private and not official. Both governments protested the charge. If North Korea is arming the NPA, it is doing so at the behest of Moscow, with whom North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung now has a total military alliance. North Korea also boasts a spetsnaz force of 100,000 commandos.

There are also reports that spetsnaz forces have been deployed into the Philippines. On Nov. 18, U.S. Special Forces began protection operations of the nuclear dump sites at the U.S. bases. Spetsnaz deployed by the U.S.S.R. reportedly penetrated the dump sites at Subic Bay before the Oct. 28 assassinations, corroborating the assessment that the decision to kill Americans in the Philippines, is not the decision of the NPA, but of Moscow.

The NPA is also running "sapper teams" to plant explosives against targeted locations and infrastructure, report sources in Manila. The "sappers" were reportedly trained by the Russians at camps in Vietnam. Two American companies were hit in the week preceding the Oct. 28 assassinations,

and about 200 communist rebels Nov. 22 attacked the banana plantation owned by Dole Philippines in North Davao province, causing \$250,000 in damages.

Simultaneous with the attacks on Americans, the NPA has stepped up its scope of operations against the central government. "NPA Goes on Bicol Rampage" was the headline of the *Manila Bulletin* Nov. 24. Two thousand people fled their homes in four districts in Bicol, as NPA rebels went on a rampage-killing of civilians it believed were involved with anti-communist vigilantes. Another 29 people were killed in the area of Samar, when 300 NPAs attacked a police station. As in most instances, the breakdown of those killed was one-third NPA, one-third police, and one-third civilians.

Within the capital city of Manila, the NPAs are carrying out an assassination campaign, targeting military officers of the Philippines Armed Forces (AFP). With the government paralyzed by factionalism and lack of will, the city has become completely lawless, with shootouts with NPA "sparrow unit" assassinations now a daily occurrence. Although it is the height of the tourist season, the Manila hotel occupancy rate is at 20%.

### **NPA's growing potential**

The NPA will take over in the Philippines in less than two years, if there is not a comprehensive program, including national economic recovery, to fight the insurgency and remove the causes for it.

Authoritative sources now estimate that the NPA controls 20-30% of the country. "Control" means that the NPA can move with impunity, enjoys protection from the local population, and has created primitive forms of local administration—including taxation. While protecting the NPA in these areas, the local population would not vote for the communists. The military will tend not to pursue the NPA into areas of insurgency control, although the locations of NPA encampments are known.

According to sources recently returned from Manila, the NPA now controls major sections of Luzon (the island where Manila is located)—the Bicol region to the south of Manila, and to the north, large areas of Cagayan and the Cordilleras. It also controls sections of Mindanao in the south; most of Negros island; large portions of the Visayas islands, of Cebu, of Leyte, of Samar, and of Panay islands. In the smaller islands north of Luzon, the NPA has nearly free rein, since there are no armed forces there at all. In general, "the NPA is everywhere." However, although it controls large towns on the eastern coast of Luzon, it controls no cities. Its strong grip over Davao City in Mindanao was broken by the Alsa Masa vigilantes.

If the NPA has no toehold in an area—as in the western island of Palao—it is due to the strength of the local economy. The NPA is strongest in the most poverty-stricken regions of the Philippines, where the communists enjoy a "Robin-Hood" image.

The NPA is not the gravest threat to the government, however, in the estimate of the head of the national intelligence agency, Eduardo Canieso. The more significant danger is the Communist Party of the Philippines, which commands the NPA politically. Over the last three years, the CCP has moved steadily toward Moscow. It has 3,000 hardened, full-time cadre, many of them in Manila. It has penetrated deeply into the peasant organizations and trade unions, exerting effective control over the May First Movement (KMU). At any time, it can bring out 30,000 people into the streets of Manila. The CCP also reportedly has at its command 20 columnists in Manila.

Romulo Kintanar, a member of the 30-man Central Committee of the CCP, is the head of the NPA.

Both the NPA and the CCP are part of the National Democratic Front, the coalition that brings together all leftist organizations in the country, including those tied to the Catholic Church. This organization supplies the political support apparatus for the NPA-CCP.

A reporter who toured with the NPA last spring in Bicol, reports that a typical local NPA unit is comprised of 60 cadre. In the case of the unit visited by this reporter, 56 were men, 4 were women; all but 5 were armed with M16s or AK47s. There were five machine guns to the unit; two specialists in explosives. All had grenades; ammunition was plentiful.

If the unit is mobilized to conduct a major attack on the armed forces—upwards of 100-300 men—then the local unit is supplemented by roving units of hardened fully trained NPA soldiers, who are also heavily armed.

The cadre in this local Bicol unit were all between the ages of 17 and 22, with the exception of the unit commander, who was 24. Their responsibility was to attack AFP units and take their arms. The unit received orders via messengers from the regional command in Legaspi City. While none of the cadre in the local area had an education past primary school, the regional commanders all had at least one college degree, many possessing postgraduate degrees. Most were graduates from the University of the Philippines. The regional commanders, in turn, received their orders from Manila.

In comparison to the typical soldier in the AFP, who tends to come from the same poverty-stricken background as the typical NPAer, the NPA recruit is better off. The AFP soldier is paid \$50 a month, if at all, is without uniform, without equipment, facing an enemy in hostile terrain. The NPA cadre is politically and ideologically motivated, operates in a terrain he knows intimately, and has plenty to eat.

The motivations of the NPA recruits point to the fact that there can be no defeat of the NPA unless the Philippines is given freedom from International Monetary Fund austerity and formulates a comprehensive program for economic recovery. For the NPA, there has been no change in the Philippines since President Ferdinand Marcos left—the abuses of the military persist, land reform has not been instituted, and there are still no jobs.