

Demystifying LIC

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In early 1987, the Philippine Left suddenly discovered a new, threatening form of US intervention called Low Intensity Conflict, or LIC. Referring to American use of LIC in Central America, trade unions and human rights groups pointed to the proliferation of armed, anti-communist vigilantes in the villages as one of many ominous signs that US was introducing LIC into the Philippines.

The situation was, in fact, more complex. First, LIC itself is to a certain extent, an indigenous anti-communist warfare doctrine, pioneered during the anti-Huk campaign in the 1950s by the Philippine Defense Department and the US Central Intelligence Agency. If we are to search for the origins of the contemporary doctrine of low intensity warfare, we will find it, not in Malaya, but in the Philippine anti-Huk campaign. Indeed, nearly 40 years ago, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) developed a range of unconventional tactics that remain, at least in theory, its standard counter-guerilla doctrine. Looking back on the Huk campaign from the vantage point of current AFP operations against the communist New People's Army (NPA), the tactics of the 1950s seem to have achieved a sophistication never since equalled.

Over the coming decades, veterans of this campaign— notably, Col. Edward Lansdale of the CIA and Col. Napoleon Valeriano of the Philippine Constabulary worked to convince the US national security establishment of the efficacy of their unconventional doctrine. Although generally ignored in Vietnam, their ideas have gained acceptance in years of reflection and reappraisal that followed America's humiliation in Vietnam.

Refined in a formal warfare doctrine in Central America in the early 1980s, LIC has recently returned to the Philippines in a guise combining many of the original, Philippine essentials with some Central American variations.

Most importantly, LIC has moved from battlefield experiment to war fighting doctrine, with a full array of support from official and unofficial American agencies. If the tactics have not changed greatly in the past 30 years, their level of application has greatly intensified.

In analyzing the recent rise of LIC in the Philippines, it would be a mistake to overemphasize American influence and consequently minimize the role of the indigenous political dynamic. Freed from the defense of Marcos' Palace since 1986, the AFP has returned to its primary security mission of crushing Muslim and communist insurgency. Moreover, contemporary politics have played a key role in shaping the military's response to its new mission. With Manila's General Headquarters (GHQ) mired in factionalism, regional military commanders, in alliance with local elites, sought ad hoc solutions to the insurgency crisis in the countryside. Almost simultaneously during the first two years of the Aquino administration, local commanders, usually in the Visayas and Mindanao where the insurgency was strongest, discovered that their only effective weapon against the NPA was the village militia, later known as "vigilantes". As reports of their success gained currency, GHQ adopted the vigilante tactic as its own, decorating and dignifying this traditional form of Filipino violence with the formal LIC doctrine, the latest in US pacification tactics.

Lessons from the Huk Campaign

During the six years of the Huk campaign from 1948 to 1954, the AFP gradually shifted from crude, conventional operations that produced embarrassing village slaughters to a clever style of counterinsurgency that broke a major peasant revolution.

Working under Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay, a charismatic former World War II

guerilla leader, two key US advisers collaborated with Filipino military commanders to create some novel tactics. A former San Francisco advertising executive, Col. Edward Lansdale was a master of the propaganda and disinformation aspects of special warfare. A former ethnographer at the Smithsonian Institution and a specialist in Navajo folklore, Col. Charles Bohannon applied the study of folk religion, particularly superstitions, to psychological warfare against a peasant guerilla army.

Through the complex interaction of these three- Lansdale, Bohannon and Magsaysay, the AFP achieved a major conceptual breakthrough in counterinsurgency doctrine. Until the 1950s, conventional pacification strategies involved more or less crude applications of conventional military force against guerillas and their supporters. The more brutal operations, such as the Japanese Imperial Army in North China, could degenerate into an orgy of raping that redoubled resistance. If, as in the Philippines at century's turn or Manchuria in the 1930s, the guerillas had no refuge of hope of external support, such tactics could eventually break the guerilla infrastructure.

Instead of applying external military force against either the guerillas or their mass base, the limitations of previous doctrines, the AFP devised tactics to break the guerillas from within. Instead of allowing the guerillas sole access to the strength of mass culture and social structures, the AFP used those very elements to break the Huk peasant army.

For example, if a guerilla entered their sights, the AFP often rejected the conventional alternatives of killing or capturing for intelligence. If found in the countryside, the guerilla could be executed to make him appear the victim of *vampira*, thus encouraging desertions by peasant lads more afraid of imaginary fangs than of machine gun fire. If found in the city, the clandestine cadre would be confronted with an evil eye painted on his wall or a black spot in his daily newspaper, a frightening experience that encouraged disappearance or defection. As defections and desertions mounted, Huk morale began to crumble from within. While the application of conventional force could often strengthen the morale of a guerilla army, these unconventional tactics injected a psychological corrosion that gradually destroyed the guerilla force from within.[1]

Beyond the battlefield, Magsaysay's Defense Department realized that the Huk revolt was at base a political cum economic struggle. Instead of ignoring the roots of the insurgency, Magsaysay's team engaged in political warfare that coordinated propaganda, economic reforms and political programs. In a society knit together by personalist ties, Magsaysay, a dynamic and charismatic leader, effectively imposed civil control over military operations by his omnipresence.

As in their warfare tactics, Magsaysay's team was thus challenging the guerillas on their own ground- a perception which lies at the core of contemporary LIC. If the guerillas tried to mobilize the peasantry through shared culture and social connections, then the counter-guerillas played upon that same culture, drawing from its darker side of superstition and tugging at vertical rather than horizontal social ties. While the communists relied on peer horizontal ties to recruit guerillas, the government could use vertical ties to extract rebels from the underground, thus turning them into counter-guerillas, informers and cooperative surrenderees. If the guerillas appealed to the peasant desire for economic and political reforms, the military used propaganda to promise political change and state power to release frontier lands for surrenderees.

From the vantage point of 30 years' hindsight, we can summarize some of the innovative counterinsurgency tactics that emerged from the Huk campaign. In counter-guerilla warfare, the mass fire power of a modern army is counter-productive. If applied against the guerillas in combat, it may raise morale by binding rebel forces through the experience of shared struggle. If applied against the mass base, force produces abuse that can strengthen popular support for the guerillas. Instead of hammering the guerilla infrastructure with counter-productive external force, the government should construct a politico- military strategy that defeats the guerillas on their own terms.

Complementing these unconventional tactics, the AFP broke its divisions into smaller, self-contained mobile units to pursue the main-force guerilla squadrons. Unlike conventional warfare, these operations could not, and did not, seek victory on the battlefield. Instead, the AFP maintained pressure that would destabilize and demoralize the Huks, initially by denying them

strategic initiative and, ultimately, forcing them to live on the run.

Under Magsaysay's leadership, conventional AFP units adopted unconventional tactics that remain integral to the AFP's counter-guerilla warfare doctrine today. Instead of large unit operations, the AFP adopted flexible, small unit tactics to counter the Huk guerillas. As its main striking force, the AFP, well supplied with US aid and equipment, expanded to form 20 battalion combat teams, or BCTs. Detached from the control of the divisional superstructure, each BCT was a mobile force with integrated logistics, light air and artillery. Like the Huk main forces units, each BCT could operate autonomously for months at a time, pursuing the enemy without pause for fuel, food or fire power. To prevent guerilla squads from ambushing these larger battalions, the AFP formed the Scout Rangers, company-sized mobile units of select commandos. Modeled on US Army's Alamo Scouts, the Scout Rangers today remain the AFP's most effective counterinsurgency units.

More broadly, Defense Secretary Magsaysay and his US advisors from JUSMAG (Joint US Military Advisory Group) reformed the AFP to improve morale and discipline, ending the massacres that marred the early phase of the Huk campaign. During the immediate postwar years, the Military Police Command (MPC), successor to the prewar constabulary, was poorly disciplined and responded to the Huk threat by intimidation and random slaughters. At a 1963 Rand Corporation seminar on the Huk Campaign, Gen. Volckmann, a WW II guerilla commander, claimed that he had "protested violently" in 1945 about the MPC's recruitment of "out-and-out bandits" and "riff-raff". Consequently, the troopers "treated the people worse than the Huks did". [2]

Even after the Philippine Constabulary was reorganized on prewar lines in 1948 and reinforced by a regular Army battalion, the civilian abuse continued. Led by Col. Napoleon Valeriano, the Nenita Unit, a specialist counterinsurgency force in the revived Constabulary, later compiled an horrific record of human rights abuses during the first years of the Quirino administration. Seeking to terrorize the population, the Nenita squads responded to any sign of guerilla activity with unrestrained force. Troops entered suspected Huks barrios with Thompson sub-machine guns blazing, cutting

down carabao, chickens and villagers. After a Huk ambush, Nenita troopers slaughtered nearby villagers, stacking their corpses along the roadside as a deterrent. Both efforts were counter-productive and strengthened Huk support in Central Luzon.[3] Even Col. Valeriano later admitted that "the Constabulary had actually, though, of course indirectly, helped the Huk's cause".[4]

The situation changed dramatically in 1950 when Pres. Quirino appointed Congressman Ramon Magsaysay as Secretary of National Defense. With, in Lansdale's words, "a deep understanding of guerilla life from personal experience", Magsaysay revitalized a troubled military. To end the abuses, he transferred the Constabulary, formerly under the Secretary of Interior, to his Department and gave the regular Army primary responsibility for the Huk campaign. Under Magsaysay's dynamic leadership, military pay improved, new battalions were formed and morale improved. Within 14 months, in Lansdale's estimation, "the Huks had lost the initiative and were on the run".[5]

In reforming the AFP under Magsaysay, US advisers had a unique leverage which they have not enjoyed elsewhere in the Third World. When the AFP was established in 1935, a US Military Mission led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower, supervised the formation of the Philippine Army. From broad strategy to the brass buttons on cadet uniforms, American influence over the prewar Philippine Army was paramount. After the war, the Philippine economy was ravaged and US advisers again played a key role in re-establishing the Philippine armed forces. Without consultation, Washington decided that the AFP's mission was to maintain internal order and serve as a reserve in defense of US bases in the Philippines. To implement that role, the US Defense Department then determined the AFP's postwar troop strength, set its order of battle and supplied all its equipment and logistics. In the postwar decade, virtually all senior Filipino officers received their advanced training in the United States.

In this respect, the US was in a position of quasi-colonial power in the postwar Philippines. Formally, American officers were only advisers. But informally they had great knowledge, extensive contacts, and, thus, considerable leverage over the AFP. In sum, the CIA's first major victory

in counterinsurgency against the Huks could not have been possible had not the US Army's advisory effort been so successful.

Paralleling these conventional operations, Col. Lansdale's team used Central Luzon as laboratory for experiments in psywar and intelligence. With a playful amorality, Lansdale's team exploited novel tactics to break the Huk morale- peasant superstitions, disinformation, penetration agents, and political propaganda. At base, Lansdale's tactics involved a creative mingling of good intelligence operations with psywar disinformation that subordinated fire power to political and psychological goals.

While World War II commanders had used psywar to soften enemy morale in support of conventional attacks, Lansdale achieved a tactical breakthrough by reversing the priority. "Conventional military men think of combat psywar almost exclusively in terms of leaflets or broadcasts appealing to the enemy to surrender," wrote Lansdale in his memoirs. "Early on, I realized that psywar had a wider potential than that. A whole new approach opens up, for example, when one thinks of psywar in terms of playing a practical joke.... When I introduced the practical joke aspect of psywar to the Philippine Army, it stimulated some imaginative operations that were remarkably effective." [6] Not only did Lansdale leave a legacy of effective counter-guerrilla tactics, he trained a cadre of skilled Filipino officers, notably Jose Ma. Crisol, who maintained a tradition of psywar and special intelligence operations.

Instead of deploying troops to engage the entire Huk force, the AFP intelligence services adopted "hunter-killer" tactics to locate and eliminate the top leadership. With heavily publicized cash rewards appealing to the materialist side of Filipino peasant culture, the AFP accumulated intelligence and then used it to pinpoint a top cadre for kill or capture. Effective when used against the hierarchical Huks, the AFP's current facility at eliminating guerrilla commanders is proving less effective against the NPA's decentralized command.

Similarly, the AFP found that guerrillas make the best counter-guerrillas. Instead of killing or abusing captured rebels, the AFP turned them to fight against their former Huk comrades. On Panay Island, for example, a Military Intelligence Service team used surrendered guerrillas to

penetrate Huk's Regional Command.[7] Thus, the current AFP program of using rebel returnees to fight the NPA, best exemplified by Davao City's *Alsa Masa* vigilante group, has clear antecedents.

In the Huk campaign, the AFP used intelligence and propaganda to destroy guerrilla morale. Indeed, the AFP found it far more effective to break the guerrillas from within. Black propaganda based upon peasant fears and superstitions reduced Huk morale. With a subdued glee in his memoirs, Lansdale recalled how superstition drove a Huk squadron away from a Central Luzon town:

A combat psywar team... planted stories among town residents of an *asuang* (vampire) living on the hill where the Huks were based. Two nights later, after giving the stories time to circulate among Huk sympathizers in the town..., the psywar squad set up an ambush along a trail used by Huks. When a Huk patrol came along the trail, the ambushers silently snatched the last man of the patrol, their move unseen in the dark night. They punctured his neck with two holes, vampire-fashion, held the body up by the heels, drained it of blood, and put the corpse back on the trail.... When daylight came, the whole Huk squadron moved out of the vicinity.[8]

Similarly, Lansdale's team, comprising both Filipino and American officers, used order of battle intelligence to convince the Huks of traitors in their ranks, prompting demoralizing internal recriminations. In a 1963 Rand Corporation seminar on air power in the Huk campaign, Lansdale and Valeriano recalled the success of these operations which, in their broadest outlines, seem the germ of the AFP's current deep penetration agents (DPAs):

Colonel Valeriano: We ordered the L-5 (aircraft) to fly over the fire fight and... the man with the loud hailer called the individual Huks by name to ask them to stop fighting, and told the vice-commander there was an Army rifle company behind his position. Then before the L-5 flew away, he made a parting remark: "Thank you very much, friend down below. By your information we have been able to contact your friends. Be very careful, I hope you have not exposed yourself unnecessarily."

Because of this broadcast the Huks began to suspect each other of being the spy planted by the Army.

General Lansdale: Using order of battle intelligence to call people by name, then thanking a mythical informer in their ranks frequently caused as many casualties as a fire fight. As the enemy withdrew, he would hold kangaroo courts. He may have suspected several informants and might summarily execute them.[9]

In his memoirs, published ten years after this Rand seminar, Lansdale embellished the tale with an even more satisfactory ending. After the aircraft flew off, AFP troops later found that 'mention of a mysterious 'friend' in their ranks had aroused the Huk's darkest suspicions of one another. Three of them were singled out and executed on the spot.'[10] Just as the AFP thus used enemy order of battle intelligence to convince the Huks of traitors, the current AFP has elaborated this principle into the effective "deep penetration agent" program.

Political propaganda based upon peasant aspirations for land and justice weakened the insurgents' appeal by challenging their exclusive claim to those aims. Specifically, Magsaysay's Defense Department gave surrendered Huks small homesteads in Mindanao and then brought successful farmers back to Central Luzon to spread propaganda about the program. As Lansdale recalled in the Rand seminar: "Later, Huk came in to surrender, saying, 'I want my farm.' This became a *quid pro quo* to surrender."[11]

The AFP's victory over the Huks by 1954 was, then, the product of two distinctive, but complementary, styles of counter-guerilla warfare. On the battlefield, mobile AFP units defeated similarly organized Huk main-force units in quasi-conventional warfare. Unlike the bloody Nenita tactics, this campaign was generally free of human rights abuses and left the AFP with a sense of institutional pride. While JUSMAG advisors assisted in the application of conventional tactics, Col. Lansdale's CIA team experimented in psychological warfare and special operations that remain integral to current AFP operations. The Huk campaign thus left with a tradition of sophisticated counter-guerilla doctrine.

LIC Doctrine

Generally ignored during the Vietnam War decades, the counter-guerilla tactics, such as those used in the Huk campaign, have only recently won acceptance as official US warfare doctrine. If we turn to the Field Circular-Low Intensity Conflict published by the US Army's Command and General Staff College in July 1986, we can find one of the most extensive and forthright summaries of the official LIC doctrine.



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A review of this Field Circular shows a marked similarity between current US doctrine and the Philippine Huk campaign of the 1950s, both at the level of broad strategy and tactical details. A checklist of similarities is revealing.

At the strategic level, the Field Circular states that counterinsurgency involves above all, "the art and science of developing... political, economic, psychological and military powers of a government." [12] While conventional military science applies maximum firepower to destroy enemy forces, LIC, by contrast, "is often characterized by constraints on the weaponry... and the level of violence." [13] Recognizing that US intervention may render its ally more "vulnerable politically and psychologically," American troops should not intervene until "insurgent activity reaches a point where the host government recognizes a serious threat to its continued existence." [14]

Instead the massive US intervention that overwhelmed the Government of Vietnam, American aid to the Philippines during the Huk campaign was limited to equipment transfers and introduction of key warfare concepts, tactical and psychological, through a very limited number of skilled advisers. At every step, US operatives worked with their Filipino counterparts in a way that developed the "psychological and military powers" of the Philippine government. Indeed, the basic concept of adapting a politico-military strategy to the nuances, the particulars of the local society is reiterated on almost every page of the Field Circular. In short, by subordinating firepower to political goals, both the Huk campaign and contemporary LIC doctrine represent a complete reversal of conventional military strategy.

There are a number of specific tactical similarities as well. At the core of both Huk campaign and current LIC doctrine lies a juxtaposition of liberal government reforms and a determined military campaign combining appropriate force with psychological warfare. First, the Field Circular states that defeating insurgency involves "isolating the insurgents from the population" through "psychological operations." [15] Reminiscent of the Huk campaign's propaganda to encourage surrenders, the Field Circular explains that "psyops... must be directed at the individual insurgents" to offer "an honorable reason to surrender." [16] Although psywar was used in support of combat opera-

tions during World War II, Lansdale's emphasis on the primacy of psychological operations in counterinsurgency was pioneering. Significantly, the Field Circular frequently emphasizes the paramountcy of psyops. "The commander must," the manual says, "consider the psychological impact of his military operations. He should not sacrifice important long-range political objectives for temporary tactical gains." [17]

Just as the AFP Scout Ranger and intelligence units used hunter-killer techniques against the top Huks, so the US Army's Field Circular states that "a major consideration of national strategy is eliminating or neutralizing the insurgent leadership." Without specifying the means, the manual states that destruction of the leadership "results in elimination of centralized direction and control, fragmentation of insurgent infrastructure, and the eventual destruction of the insurgent organization." [18]

Just as Secretary Magsaysay reformed the AFP, ending its abuse of the civilian population, and promised to make the government more responsive to the people, so LIC doctrine now involves reforms of both soldiery and state. Significantly, the CIA's final battle in the war against the Huks was an attempt at fundamental government reform by supporting Magsaysay's election as president in 1953. In the early 1950s, Magsaysay's political control forced the military to restrain its violence against civilians and redirect it against specific targets. Moreover, Magsaysay's emphasis on rural development as the long-term solution to the Huk problem is echoed in the US Army's LIC doctrine. Without "unduly disrupting the cultural system," says the Field Circular, the host government should both "provide private business with an appropriately large share of limited resources" and "broaden the bases of political power through education and health programs." [19]

In sum, the lessons of the Huk campaign, largely forgotten in Vietnam, have reappeared in the LIC doctrine of the 1980s. In essence, the Huk campaign showed that soldier must find non-military solutions to defeat insurgency - an insight that is the essence of the LIC doctrine.

Counterinsurgency Under Aquino

Although President Marcos emphasized anti-communism to justify his authoritarian rule,

his regime, in fact, largely ignored counterinsurgency operations. With eight of its crack battalions positioned for defense of the presidential Palace and its GHQ politicized for greater executive control, the AFP was effectively immobilized as a counterinsurgency force.

Throughout the Marcos years, however, military intelligence units maintained their campaign against the NPA hierarchy. Following the hunter-killer tactics of the Huk campaign, intelligence units continued to identify and target individual NPA leaders. The capture of Communist Party founder Jose Ma. Sison in 1977, the later liquidation of NPA commander Edgar Jopson, and the more recent capture of NPA head Rodolfo Salas are among the notable of AFP intelligence coups.

More importantly, the AFP elaborated disinformation cum penetration operations used against the Huk into an innovative new tactic, the deep penetration agent. As the NPA spread into the sprawling suburbs of Davao City in 1983-1984, unknown military intelligence units seeded DPAs, or "zombies", inside anticipated recruitment zones. Since estimated NPA strength in Davao increased rapidly from 1,000 in 1983 to 2,680 in 1984,[20] the screening of recruits became perfunctory and, the local NPA began to suspect that AFP agents were penetrating their ranks. Whether the penetration constituted a real threat or was inflated by AFP disinformation, the NPA over-reacted and slaughtered hundreds of its own members. Indeed, one informed Western military observer stated that, according to his AFP contacts, there had been few if any DPAs in Mindanao- just clever disinformation to prompt internal liquidations.[21] By the time the Party could restrain the cycle of accusations, trials and executions that had spun out of control, the Davao front had collapsed and many genuine cadre sought refuge from the slaughter with the AFP.[22] The AFP's use of disinformation about alleged traitors in the NPA is strikingly reminiscent of Lansdale's account of the same tactic against the Huks.

The problem with the AFP's counterinsurgency campaign lay in its conventional operations, particularly after 1978 when the dictatorship began its long decline. From 1972 to 1978, AFP combat units remained effective against both the NPA and the Muslim separatist

movements. In 1974, for example, the AFP enveloped and destroyed the NPA liberated zone in Isabela Province, a major blow to the Communist Party.[23]

After 1978, when the resumption of elections coincided with Marcos' failing health, the regime became obsessed with its security and began skewing military priorities towards Palace defense. Toward the end of his 10 years as Chief of Staff, Gen. Romeo Espino was no longer competent. But Marcos repeatedly extended his term to avoid offending any of his would-be successors. The politicization of the AFP accelerated after 1981 when Marcos finally appointed Gen. Fabian Ver, his cousin and long-time security officer, as Chief of Staff. In an effort to strengthen his personal control, Ver created multi-service Regional Commands directly subordinate to GHQ and then appointed factional allies to staff key posts in the hierarchy.

As Marcos succumbed to lupus, a degenerative systemic disease often accompanied by bouts of severe depression, his stewardship of the military became increasingly erratic. By 1983, the Presidential Security Command, still under Gen. Ver's de facto control, had become the most powerful unit in the AFP with eight battalions, about 25% of the nation's combat forces- backed by tanks, aircraft and ships. Believing in the propitious influence of the number 7, Marcos tried to assure his victory in the elections of February 7, 1986 by stripping units to create an AFP of 77 battalions. Denied resources or leadership from GHQ, troop morale declined and local commands yielded the countryside to insurgents. With strong popular support and no effective opposition, the NPA expanded rapidly during the 1980s.

Once the Marcos regime collapsed in 1986, the AFP was freed from defense of the Palace and resumed its primary security mission. Encouraged by both US advisors and conservative Filipino elites, the AFP proclaimed a rhetorical re-emphasis on counterinsurgency only months after the EDSA uprising.

However, the factionalism and hyper-centralized control that had immobilized GHQ under Gen. Ver continued under his successor Gen. Fidel Ramos, a Marcos relative who had switched his loyalties to Aquino during the February revolt. Heir to the power of Marcos'

centralized GHQ, Chief of Staff Ramos resisted reforms that would translate the anti-communist rhetoric into the reality of combat performance. Although the factionalism at headquarters crippled the AFP's operational capacity, it did allow Gen. Ramos strong political control over the military.

Denied support from GHQ in the capital, local military commanders, largely in the Visayas and Mindanao, devised their own ad hoc tactics that drew upon AFP counter-guerilla doctrines dating back to the Huk campaign. In Davao, the Metrodiscom Chief, PC Colonel Francisco Calida, recruited NPA returnees to form a vigilante group, *Alsa Masa*, reminiscent of the Huk penetration units.

Initially hesitant, local elites resolved their political differences with the Aquino administration during the 1987 elections and began to support the AFP counterinsurgency effort. This patchwork alliance of local elites with regional AFP commanders produced a combination of perfect information and unrestrained repression far more effective than the impotent centralized campaign of the Marcos military. Under various names and forms, the most tangible product of this alliance was the vigilante units organized throughout the Visayas and Mindanao from 1986 to 1987. Unable to engage the NPA, the vigilantes found their victims among legal, cause-oriented organizations- Task Force Detainees (TFD), human rights groups, and labor unions, notably the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW) and the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU).

By late 1987, after a year as Chief of Staff, Gen. Ramos had consolidated enough power to move beyond bureaucratic politics to an attempt at counterinsurgency. Subordinated to a factional struggle for control of the military, the counterinsurgency debate became politicized and suffered accordingly. Defense Secretary Rafael Ileta and his partisans, largely within the Army, favored breaking the Marcos system of over-centralized command to allow the AFP to conduct conventional search-and-engage operations against NPA regular units. "The solution is to get really good combat people in the armed forces," Ileta told the press after his forced retirement in January 1988. "Tell them your job is to neutralize 24,000 NPAs, get all their arms and that is your enemy. Forget about this infiltration in KMU." [24] As founder of the Scout Rangers and a veteran of the Huk campaign,

Ileta favored a conventional campaign that would avoid the destructive human rights abuses of special operations. Although veiled, Gen. Ileta's remarks were thus a pointed rebuke aimed at his rivals. [25] Indeed, the Ramos faction, based largely in the more political Constabulary, wanted to preserve their leader's command prerogatives by attacking the NPA mass base with special warfare.

In January 1988, the issue was resolved when President Aquino forced Secretary Ileta's resignation and appointed Ramos to succeed him. Even after he moved from Chief of Staff to Secretary of National Defense, Ramos maintained his factional favorites in GHQ and still controlled counterinsurgency. Rather than commit his resources to a conventional campaign against NPA main-force units, a move that required a looser political grip over the AFP, Ramos' faction instead devised a small unit civic-action cum militia program that, in effect, legitimated the spread of local vigilante organizations.

Instead of coordinated national operations, Gen. Ramos' faction, largely drawn from the Constabulary (PC) which he headed under Marcos, devised new small unit tactics. In late 1987 Gen. Ramon Montano, a Ramos loyalist later promoted to command the Constabulary, drew up a strategic plan titled "The AFP Broad Front Strategy", that summarized his faction's approach to the insurgency. [26] Arguing that Operation Pagsubok in early 1987 with "large-scale sweeping operations backed up by air power and artillery... failed to destroy the enemy's combat capacity or reduce his freedom of action to raid", Gen. Montano advocated a radical realignment of the AFP. Instead of such conventional operations against NPA main force units, the AFP would break its battalions into squads to attack the communist mass base. As long as the NPA maintained its mass base, Montano argued, conventional AFP operations would produce two results: if the NPA forces were inferior, they would retreat; if superior, they would ambush the AFP. "This mass base support system," wrote Montano in his confidential memo, "gives the CPP/NPA force maximum freedom of movement and limits severely government initiatives." In short, conventional combat operations against a guerilla with a strong mass base are pointless.

Gen. Montano further argues that the NPA mass base grew from 40,200 people in 1969 to

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South, March 1988

1,739,462 in 1986 because their organizing effort "was never seriously addressed by the government.... There were no government grassroots organizations established to counter the communist mass base operations." Instead of chasing NPA regulars, Gen. Montano proposed to break the battalions into small Special Operation Groups (SOG) to occupy NPA villages. Backed by vigilantes who provide intelligence, the groups "will conduct ever-widening prophylactic patrols on the periphery of the targeted barangays. These patrols are not tasked to seek and destroy the enemy, but as socio-economic patrols to show our presence to the people. "Gradually, as these patrols build mass support, the government will translate this loyalty into local Peace and Order Councils that will "root out and isolate the insurgent underground for easier neutralization by law enforcement operations." Through this strategy, Montano hopes to "reverse the NPA strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside by isolating the guerilla combat forces from their mass base of support".

Although this formal explanation of the SOG (later named Special Operations Teams, or SOTs) echoes the classic LIC doctrines of civic action to build a mass base for the government, it seems apparent that this rhetoric masks an unpleasant reality. A close reading of Gen. Montano's strategy reveals an apparent tactical flaw. Once the military's SOTs have 1) weakened

the NPA mass base through their presence, and 2) begin building a base for the government, they will have finished their mission and withdraw. The government simply does not have the resources to garrison each of the 8,496 NPA controlled villages with its own SOT. Mass support for the guerillas may well decline while the special team is present, but the NPA can quickly return and rebuild its mass base once the AFP pulls out. Indeed, Montano's strategy document addresses this problem in a vague way when he writes of "isolating the insurgent underground for easier neutralization by law enforcement operation or through other options under our administrative and judicial processes."

Since the AFP does not have 8,496 special groups for that many NPA controlled villages, the military must somehow "neutralize" the dedicated NPA supporters in target villages or the program will become a costly failure. Police investigation and prosecution of 1.7 million NPA supporters is far beyond the feeble capabilities of the Philippine justice system.

Confidentially, senior AFP commanders admit that their program has a third clandestine phase: After reducing the NPA mass base and building their own, the SOT will use intelligence and torture/interrogation to identify NPA supporters for extra-legal elimination. After testing the program in northern Mindanao in late 1987 and Bicol in early 1988, AFP commanders expect to deploy SOTs across the archipelago by late 1988.

There are some preliminary indications that the AFP's special teams may eventually target legal "cause-oriented" groups for "neutralization". In his report, for example, Gen. Montano speaks about the "clandestine infiltration of media, the government bureaucracy and some human rights organizations by leftist propagandists." He writes further that "another CPP/NPA/NDF master stroke was the infiltration of clergy with Marxist ideologues and recruitment of some progressive minded clergy." Privately, Gen. Montano identifies the Church-based human rights organization, Task Force Detainees, as a communist front.[27] Similarly, his Negros Occidental commander, Lt. Col. Miguel Coronel (PC), has, since mid 1987, directed a province-wide indoctrination campaign which publicly identifies legal organizations as communist fronts- the Basic Christian Communities, the National Federation of Sugar Workers and Task Force Detainees.[28]

The SOTs appear to be as much a legacy of the Vietnam War as the Huk campaign. During the 1950s, AFP intelligence units had assassinated limited numbers of Huk commanders. But against lower ranking rebel soldiers and supporters, the AFP used propaganda and promise of land to induce surrenders. In Vietnam during the late 1960s, the US Central Intelligence Agency established a national network of Provincial Reconnaissance Units, similar to the SOTs, that killed an estimated 40,000 Viet Cong suspects. Significantly, current LIC doctrine speaks in general terms about "eliminating or neutralizing the insurgent leadership." [29]

Conclusion

Viewed from the vantage point of historical hindsight five or ten years hence, we might as well conclude that American LIC doctrine, when

applied by the politicized AFP of the late 1980s, legitimized a partisan and unnecessary decision by a single military faction to initiate a campaign of civilian liquidations.

Masking its partisan bias in the latest American LIC jargon, the Ramos faction seems to be promoting a pacification policy that may ultimately encourage death squad activity. Through these complex political twists, LIC doctrine is thus encouraging a savage civil war with the potential to traumatize and brutalize Philippine society for a generation.

As the Aquino administration matches the NPA's terror squads with a counter-terror of its own, the Philippines appears to be entering a downward spiral of kill and counter kill. Regardless of who wins this dirty war, the most lasting legacy of this pacification campaign may turn out the brutalization of Philippine political life.

NOTES

1. Interviews with Col. Charles Bohannon (ret.), Manila, February 1982.
2. A.H. Peterson, G.C. Reinhardt, and E.E. Conger, eds., *Symposium on the Role of Air Power in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: The Philippine Huk Campaign* (Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, July 1963), pp. 14-15.
3. Interview with Gen. Ramon Gelvezon, Manila, 18 November 1988. Gen. Gelvezon became PC provincial commander in Pampanga in the early 1950s, succeeding Col. Valeriano. Moreover, in May 1975, I conducted interviews with villagers in Bo. Isawan and Bo. Isian Kasling, Tigbauan, Iloilo Province who described in detail Nenita Unit operations in their area during the Huk campaign.
4. Peterson, *Symposium on Air Power*, p. 17.
5. Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, "Lessons Learned: The Philippines 1946-1953," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Institute, typescript, 26 September 1963), p.3.
6. Edward G. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 71-72.
7. Interviews with members of the MIS team involved in this mission, Alfredo Gloria, Manila, 26 November 1975; Pablito Gepana, Iloilo City, 26 November 1973; and Eduardo Tajarlangit, Iloilo City, 26 November 1973.
8. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, p. 72-73.
9. Peterson, *Symposium on Air Power*, p. 50.
10. Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars*, p. 74.
11. Rand Corporation, *Symposium on Air Power*, p. 31.
12. US Army Command and General Staff College, *Field Circular: Low Intensity Conflict* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: US Army Command and General Staff College, 16 July 1986 [marked "valid until July 1989"]), p. 3-1.
13. *Ibid.*, p.v.
14. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 3-2.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 3-3.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 3-13.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 3-3.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 3-9.
20. *Asiaweek* (Hongkong), 13 September 1985, p. 6.
21. Interview with Western military attache, Manila, 9 January 1988.
22. Interview with Luis Jalandoni, foreign representative of the National Democratic Front, Sydney, 30 May 1987.
23. Interview with "Ka Manuel", member of the NPA General Command, Manila, 23 January 1988.
24. *Manila Chronicle*, 7 February 1988, p. 16.
25. Interview with Sec. Rafael Ileto, Camp Aguinaldo, 21 January 1988.
26. Brig. Gen. Ramon E. Montano, Acting Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, "The AFP Broad Front Strategy Against the Communist Insurgency" (General Headquarters, Armed Forces of the Philippines, ms., n.d., p. 7).
27. Interview with Gen. Ramon Montano, Camp Aguinaldo, 6 January 1988.
28. Interview with Lt. Col. Miguel Coronel, Bacolod City, 14 January 1988.
29. *Field Circular*, p.3-3.