

The Government and the Communist Insurgency

(Speech by AFP Chief of Staff Fidel V. Ramos
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The country today continues to be threatened by communist insurgency. The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), despite its "commitment" to peace, has not given up its central task of seizing political power in the country.

There are many people, particularly government authorities, who do not really understand the insurgency problem. Most of them would argue that people's power would solve the insurgency problem and that the CPP and its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), would eventually lay down its arms and participate with the people in the task of nation building. This is a dangerous half-truth which carries within it the seeds of destruction.

The government can defeat the people's democratic revolution if it will only endeavor to understand the problem and formulate a comprehensive strategy consisting of social, economic, political and military measures fused into one integrated political weapon against the CPP. It is imperative that the government today make a careful estimate of the situation, develop realistic, short and long term plans, and commit sufficient material and human resources to attain and maintain an offensive momentum to defeat the revolution.

The strategy of the people's democratic revolution is simple in concept but complex in application. Following Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tse Tung Thought, the CPP envisions to fight the government in a protracted war and win by attempting to reverse the power relationship between the government and the CPP in favor of the latter.

The key to success of any communist-inspired insurgency, including the people's democratic revolution, is the *mobilization of the people* for the revolutionary cause. Aware of this, the CPP espouses that the revolution can be advanced

in the countryside by "arousing and mobilizing the poor peasants and farm workers mainly and by winning over and uniting with the middle peasants into an anti-feudal revolutionary united front".

To the CPP, mobilization of the people requires more than just *persuasion*. It requires *intimidation*, followed by *organization*.

The basic source of CPP power necessary to mobilize the support of the people and organize them into "organizations for national salvation" does not lie in the communist ideology, but rather in the slumbering needs, grievances, emotions, and hatreds of the people, individually or collectively. This power is generated by political actions on a massive scale, employing a combination of persuasion and intimidation. Through the political underground infrastructure supported by the NPA, the people in the rural areas receive a one-sided education of political ideas designed to change their thinking about the present social, economic, and political systems in the country.

How does the CPP accomplish this task? Captured CPP documents reveal that communist expansion and organizational work in a barangay or in a social organization is carried out in four steps: *social investigation*, *live-in/work with the people*, *teach-in/education* and *development of mass organizations and party structures*. The CPP sends out small political units (3-20 men) consisting of political cadres *armed* for their own personal protection and for the psychological effect the presence of guns creates in the rural population. The CPP believes that it takes the power of the gun to safely enter a rural barangay and it takes the power of the gun to let the people assemble and listen to what the political cadres have to say about the government.

The needs, grievances, emotions and hatreds of the barangay folks are highlighted. Among the favorite grievances are land for the landless, inept government officials and military abuses. In the absence of help from the government's side, the communist cadres pressure the people to attend such meetings regularly where they are incited to show disrespect for the government. The power of the gun is always present if anyone would resist the communist presence or when it is necessary to eliminate a corrupt or hated person to gain more influence on the people. The elimination is done in such a way that it would get the people involved; for instance, the killing of a hated barangay official in the presence of the people.

The political objective and the political program of the people's democratic revolution are explained to the people in these meetings. Everyone is made to understand why the revolution must be fought and how it concerns him. Most important, the political cadres link the political program with the developments of the revolution and with the life of the people, showing to them that their future depends on the success of the revolution under the auspices of the CPP, and not on the present social, economic and political system under the government.

According to AFP estimates, the revolution as of the end of 1986 has spread to at least 65 provinces throughout the country, affecting at least 20% of the total number of barangays nationwide. It is believed that the CPP political underground infrastructure has already established shadow governments in these affected barangays to undermine the political authority of the government. Relatedly, there has been a progressive escalation of guerilla/terroristic violence in the last four years, an indication of the accelerated growth in the number of affected barangays during the same period and the consequential expansion of CPP mass organizations, especially the NPA.

For the government under communist revolutionary pressure, the people's democratic revolution presents a burdensome and intricate challenge to the government. Facing a deliberate effort by the CPP to weaken the entire social, economic and political foundations of the country, the government has to take appropriate measures to *mobilize* the people for its cause. In other words, the government should oppose CPP mobilization with *countermobilization* and should show to the people that it is determined to defend its legitimacy and that it is always the better choice than the CPP.

In the past, the government has been tempted to meet each revolutionary action as a separate problem, playing down the extent and enormity of the revolution engulfing the country. This strategy can be likened to that of an engineer who plugs the cracks in a crumbling reservoir with the use of his thumbs to prevent water from spilling out. Later, he runs out of thumbs and the reservoir wall gives way.

There are several difficulties which delay immediate sustained and effective government actions against the people's

democratic revolution. These must be recognized by the government if it is to defeat the revolution in 1987 and beyond.

First, the revolution has to be perceived as a total war being waged by the CPP, using *people* mobilized through political actions to weaken the entire social, political and economic structures of the country. The problem should *not* be viewed as an armed confrontation between the NPA and the AFP, which is just the overt manifestation of a growing political disease, but it should be viewed as a struggle by both the government and the CPP for the entire Filipino nation, including its people, its economy and its government. Only recognizing this important fact will the government be able to develop a *comprehensive response* to the problem involving the full range of military and civil programs to strengthen the entire structure of the country and to win the people to the government side.

Second, it should be recognized that there is already a sizeable population mobilized and organized by the CPP for the revolution. The spread of the revolution to at least 65 provinces throughout the country and the present estimated strength of the CPP and NPA (24,000 men) clearly show that there is a sustaining population supporting the revolution. If the existence of this base of political support for the revolution is not recognized, there will be a tendency to consider the CPP/NPA guerillas as mere bandits and to apply strong military and police measures to neutralize them without or with little supporting civil measures. Such actions would not only be unproductive but would contribute significantly to the further expansion of the political base of the insurgency.

Third, in relation to the second, it should be recognized that the successful exploitation of popular needs, grievances, emotions, and hatreds by the CPP for political purposes has caused the expansion of the political base of the insurgency. The CPP has worked hard since 1968 to identify itself with the problems of the people and to convince them that their needs and aspirations are linked to the successful outcome of the revolution. If this fact is realized, the government will be able to respond positively by *matching* the political activities of the CPP.

Fourth, it should be recognized that counter-revolutionary campaign is expensive, highly inconvenient, and of long duration. The security aspect of the campaign would be very demanding on the military and police forces of government. In addition, the political, social, and economic aspects of the campaign would be difficult for the government to pursue. Reforms, particularly land reform, is an expensive program and will require the taking away of privilege or property or both from those previously holding them.

Fifth and finally, it should be recognized that the destruction or neutralization of the CPP's underground political infrastructure and its mass organizations, particularly the NPA, is no simple task. It will require police and military actions

which would cause inconvenience to the population. It may even require force and sanctions being applied on the people themselves, especially those residing in CPP-influenced areas.

Aware of these difficulties, the government must carry out four distinct but interrelated programs in order to defeat the people's democratic revolution.

The government must have a program to keep dissent at a low key. It is not possible for the government to transform the country overnight into a beautiful garden spot for the Filipino people, but positive and well-publicized actions should be taken to improve existing social, political and economic conditions. To the people in the countryside whose life experience is limited to the area around the barangay, or to the people in the urban areas whose outlook is limited to few blocks of slums or to the confines of their places of work, small changes to improve their lot can be extremely significant, far more convincing than promises of future changes which are beyond the limits of their comprehension.

The second program which the government should improve is the security program to support the first program. There are two related but distinct tasks to be done by the security forces of the government. The first is the active search and destruction of the NPA guerillas in the field. It should be emphasized that the primary objective of counterguerilla operations is not to neutralize the NPA by inflicting casualties, but rather to make armed struggle a costly, unprofitable and hopeless effort and to pave the way for the rebel's re-entry into the mainstream of society.

Another task which is far more demanding is the denial of NPA guerilla forces' access to the population, particularly in the rural areas. Only when the NPA guerilla is separated from the people will the flow of supplies, recruits, intelligence and funds required to sustain the revolution be severed, or can be uncommitted and/or loyal elements of the population be protected from CPP intimidation.

Nonetheless, unless the people can defend themselves or be protected, they cannot be expected to cooperate with the government, in spite of their loyalty. While the *hearts* of the people may be for the government, their *minds* may not be so, if the presence of the CPP *gun* is more prevalent than that of the government.

Concurrent with reforms and security operations, the government must also mount an extensive information campaign. This is the third program. More often, past government programs were viewed as merely an effort to react to the propaganda offensives of the CPP. To be fully effective, the government information program should do more than that.

The government today is fighting two struggles, one is to defeat the immediate threat posed by the CPP and the other is to carry the country through the burdens and frustrations of nation building. The second struggle must be carried out whether the CPP exists or not, or is merely complicated by its presence. Still, unless the people can be convinced of both the

feasibility and the advantage of winning the long term struggle to develop the nation and improve their welfare, they will not be motivated and be determined to support the government in defeating the revolution.

To attain this objective, the government must explain to the people its social, economic and political programs in ways which are both understandable and credible to them. *Those programs must appear sufficiently attractive and attainable to make the people identify their own hopes for the future with the survival of the government rather than with its overthrow and removal by the CPP.* It will take highly skillful and convincing government salesmanship to get this message across to a population whose general contact with the government is limited to corrupt local government officials, abusive soldiers or inept policemen.

In this situation, the government's information campaign has to include convincing explanations to the affected persons of the need for reforms. In addition, the information program must be multi-faceted, for each economic, political and social strata in the population must be convinced of the advantage of supporting the government in defeating the revolution. In this regard, the government information program should be built on simple and direct themes. It should explain the government's long-term plans and intentions for the development of the country and the benefits that the people expect to derive from them. Furthermore, it must call for cooperation and support from the population in preventing the CPP from destroying these plans.

The government has still another problem in the information campaign. One is how best to handle the wave of rising popular expectations for the future. While the government information official must compete in reasonable measure with the CPP propagandist who is promising the moon and the stars to the people, he is painfully hampered by having to stick to the facts or the realities of the situation.

Finally, the government should give priority to the improvement of the country's economy. This program is often the most difficult aspect of countering the revolution, for not only are all political and military countermeasures tremendously expensive but, as stated earlier, the CPP makes every effort to disrupt the country's economy by instigating strikes, lockouts, demonstrations, and other civil disturbances.

Even if it has already developed the programs for *reform, security, information, and economic development*, the government must not be deceived into thinking that the revolution can be defeated without unity of effort among implementing government agencies. It should realize, however, that unity of effort is extremely difficult to achieve because it represents a fusion of civil and military functions to fight the revolution, which has primarily political objectives.

Of course, as it has done in the past, the CPP will always exploit any situation of disunity in government. They will continue to drive a wedge into any cleavage between civil and