

# Partners in Terror

The United States government has not named the Philippines as its second front in its global war on terror for nothing. The US considers the Philippines important for its economic, military and geo-political interests in Asia.

The Bush regime is directly involved in Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's systematic campaign of annihilation and repression of the Philippine progressive movement and the Filipino people in general.

After September 11, 2001, Arroyo was among the first heads of states to pledge all-out support for Bush's war on terror in exchange for continued U.S. support for her regime.

## **Partners**

In his visit to the Philippines in December 2005, America's top intelligence official John Negroponte said, "The United States and the Philippines are close partners in the international war on terrorism."

Negroponte met with Arroyo and with Philippine national security and intelligence officials. His visit was considered significant in relation to how the Macapagal-Arroyo government conducted its own "war on terror". Negroponte is the current US Director of National Intelligence. He oversees 15 spy agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He was the first US ambassador to Iraq after the invasion.

The Counter Terrorism Center led by Negroponte declared that the Philippines is one of the priority targets of the center's activities.

The US-RP "partnership" in the "war on terror" is reflected in the Arroyo government's efforts to crush revolutionary organizations labelled by the U.S. as "terrorist groups". In the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, the US State Department has branded the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People's Army (NPA) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as foreign terrorist organizations (FTO). The U.S. aims to eliminate national liberation movements and revolutionary movements that threaten U.S. imperialist interests worldwide.

Jose Maria Sison, political consultant of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) has also been included in the U.S. "terrorist list". Sison is a vocal critic of U.S. imperialism and is the chief political consultant of the NDFP in the peace process with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP).

## **Funding, trainings**

According to the country report of the Library of US Congress-Federal Research Division on the Philippines dated March 2006, total U.S. military assistance to the Philippines rose from US\$38 million in 2001 to US\$114 million in 2003 and a projected US\$164 million in 2005. This makes the Philippines the fourth largest recipient of U.S. foreign military assistance.

Moreover, another \$2.7 million was given as part of the International Military Education and Training Program in 2004. The country is the second largest recipient of U.S. military education and training. At \$148 million, the Philippines is also the number one recipient in Asia of Excess Defense Articles.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) remains to be a U.S.' surrogate army. Being a surrogate army, the AFP ensures that the Philippine president remains friendly to the U.S. For decades, it has been dependent on the U.S. for military aid and training. The AFP's junior officers as well as police officers are being trained at the U.S. military's special training schools to further hone their anti-insurgency strategy and skills.

### **Permanent presence of US troops**

The Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) allows the unhampered entry of US troops in the guise of war exercises.

Besides the conventional RP-US Balikatan 'exercises', anti-terror drills called "Kapit-Bisig" are also ongoing. The US will send commando teams to the southern Philippines late this year to hold anti-terror drills with local troops. These trainings have started from the second half of 2006 and will continue until the first half of 2007. Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz also announced that the Philippine and US military planners would be drawing up a five-year activity plan from 2007 to 2011.

In August, the Philippine Navy (PN) and the United States Navy (USN) held a week-long bilateral Cooperation Afloat and Training (CARAT) Exercise 2006 in Subic and other sites in Zambales and La Union. Some 2,000 PN and USN sailors and marines joined the bilateral exercise.

In May, the Security Engagement Board (SEB) was established by the US-RP governments purportedly to address non-traditional threats. The definition of non-traditional threats is very broad and vague. Non-traditional threats will include transnational crimes, maritime safety and security, man-made disasters, epidemics and natural calamities. The broad parameters embodied in the SEB will allow continued US intervention in the country under various pretexts.

In the case of the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and the Non-Surrender Agreement, the Philippine government has evaded the treaty-ratification process to avoid scrutiny by the Senate and strong opposition from the Filipino people. The MLSA allows the US government to use the Philippines as a launching pad for its war of aggression in Iraq through the pre-positioning of war materiel in country via "virtual bases". The Non-

Surrender Agreement, on the other hand, prohibits the Philippine government from filing charges against American troops and personnel before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

### **Covert operations**

The unhampered entry of American troops in the country paves the way for the US' covert operations in the Philippines.

It is highly possible that the American forces are involved in actual intelligence, psywar and combat operations in the Philippines, acts that are prohibited under the Philippine Constitution. This can be gleaned from statements of military authorities. Philippine defense officials have disclosed that the Kapit-Bisig war games also support local military operations against Muslim armed groups. Vice Admiral Mateo M. Mayuga also said that the Fleet-Marine Tandem is the Philippine Navy's contribution to the internal security operations of the AFP.

Other incidents also show US covert operations. The shooting of Buyong-buyong Isnijal, a civilian in Basilan, by American soldier Reggie Lane in 2002 is a case in point.

In May 2002, CIA operative Michael Terrence Meiring was caught with explosives in his possession at the Evergreen Hotel in Davao City. An unintentional blast caused by these explosives severely damaged his hotel room and seriously injured him. But before he could be interrogated by Davao City authorities, foreign agents from the U.S. National Security Council and the FBI preemptively cordoned Meiring from criminal inquiries and whisked him away to a U.S. medical facility. A few weeks after the incident, the *Manila Times* disclosed Meiring's ties to the CIA and the Abu Sayyaf.

In an interview with *Philippine Star*, Negroponte said, "The real keyword of our intelligence strategy, a watchword if you will, is integration - integration of our intelligence effort. We want to integrate foreign, military and domestic intelligence so that we avoid repetition of the mistakes of 9/11."

The CIA's covert operations in the Philippines are not new. In his book *In Our Image*, Stanley Karnow said that as early as 1950s, CIA operatives Gen. Edward Lansdale and Charles Bohannon brought the concept of death squads in the Philippines.

The Marcos dictatorship ruled with covert CIA backing. An armed group known as "Monkees" killed hundreds of suspected members or supporters of the NPA, as well as Marcos' political rivals.

The Corason Cojuangco-Aquino regime implemented the low intensity conflict of the US government. More than 50 vigilante groups terrorized the nation at that time.

Fidel Ramos' Oplan Lambat Bitag is characterized by intensified psychological warfare and intelligence work. Government soldiers conducted all-out military operations in the

alleged bulwarks of the NPA while offering capitulation and amnesty as options to the armed groups.

Even the Estrada regime's short-lived Oplan Makabayan and its all-out war in Mindanao followed the US doctrine. Every regime's counter-insurgency program is directed, approved and supported by the U.S. government.

### **Death squads**

Under the Arroyo regime, the Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security (COC-IS) implements and directs extrajudicial killings and other repressive measures. Its members are General Eduardo Ermita, National Security Adviser Norberto Gonzales, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales, Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz and AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Generoso Senga.

It must be noted that during Ermita's term as AFP Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, death squads were utilized to squash then progressive political party Partido ng Bayan. In the '60s, Ermita worked with Negroponte in Vietnam.

Negroponte was accused of utilizing death squads in suppressing national liberation forces in Latin America during his stint as ambassador. He also served as the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq from June 2004 to April 2005. It was also in 2004 that Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan Jr. led the Philippine contingent in Iraq.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita confirmed that during Negroponte's visit, he gave a briefing on the government's accomplishments in neutralizing terror suspects. Neutralization is the military's euphemism for physical elimination.

By that time, 534 unarmed civilians have been killed by state agents. Karapatan records show that as of September 11 this year, there are already 752 victims of extrajudicial killings. After Negroponte's visit, 218 have already been killed in a span of nine months.

The pattern of the extrajudicial killings is similar to the US' Operation Phoenix in Vietnam.

*Counter-spy* magazine describes Phoenix Program as "the most indiscriminate and massive program of political murder since the Nazi death camps of World War II." The anti-CIA magazine wrote in another article, "Phoenix demonstrated that the U.S. Government through the CIA will create, impose, and conduct an operation in another country without a semblance of a mandate from a given people or their representatives as long as the operation is considered in interest of U.S. governmental objectives."

According to Ralph McGehee, the Phoenix Program set a quota of 1,800 activists for neutralization per month. During Nixon's first two and a half years, the State Department officially admitted that the CIA-run Phoenix Program murdered or abducted 35,708 Vietnamese civilians.

Arroyo's OBL and the Operation Phoenix have similar objectives: to crush the political infrastructure of the national democratic movement by killing its unarmed leaders, members and supporters.

Likewise, according to McGehee's *CIA Support of Death Squads*, the structure, pre-determined areas of operations and the secret nature of the hit squads are similar to those of the regional, provincial and district Intelligence Operations Coordinating Centers (IOCCs) secretly organized by the CIA within the ranks of the regional, provincial and district level units of the Army of South Vietnam (ARVN) tasked to execute the liquidations and kidnappings. The OBL has 13 priority areas in seven regions. From January 2001 to May 2006, three of the priority regions under the OBL have the most number of victims killed: Southern Tagalog, 146; Central Luzon, 120; and Southern Mindanao, 84.

Another comparable feature is intensified intelligence operations. In Vietnam, the CIA established the Combined Intelligence Center to construct a "political order of battle". The AFP, meanwhile, maintains a sectoral watchlist of leaders and members of alleged communist front organizations. The AFP's trilogy *Trinity of War* and power point presentation *Knowing the Enemy* show a list of organizations under surveillance by the AFP.

Other similar techniques are the setting up of checkpoints and efforts to regulate movement of people. Again, notes on the *CIA Support of Death Squads* showed that during the U.S. war in Vietnam, every Vietnamese, 15 years and older, must register and carry an identification card. Here, in the countryside, local residents are forced to present their *cedula (community tax certificate)*. The Arroyo government also issued an executive order implementing a unified ID system for government transactions. The proposal for the registration of subscriber identity module (SIM) could also be used and manipulated for intelligence purposes.

### **Repressive legislation**

The attacks on the people's rights will escalate even more if the Anti-terrorism Bill (ATB) is passed. The proposal has been passed on third and final reading by the House of Representatives and is currently being deliberated by the Senate.

Negroponte said, "I think by strengthening your own institutions, by passing your anti-terrorist legislation - I think that's one of the areas we think would be very important."

Patterned after the USA Patriot Act, the ATB will curtail civil liberties and other rights. The definition of terrorism is vague and overbroad. The Philippine Supreme Court, in its ruling on Arroyo's Proclamation 1017 declaring a state of national emergency last February, emphasized that there is no definition yet of terrorism even by international

bodies. In the hands of the Arroyo regime, the ATB is potentially dangerous and will be prone to abuse.

While the ATB is silent on state terrorism such as the one being perpetrated by the US-Arroyo regime, it could be used by the regime to further clamp down on legitimate dissent. Even the members of the media will become vulnerable to charges of terrorism.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting this December in Cebu City will focus on the region's security, among others. Arroyo, as the number one puppet of the Bush regime in the region, aims to pass the ATB before the ASEAN meet to gain some ascendancy in the regional fight against 'terrorism and to earn brownie points with the US government.'

However, many have pointed out that the US' war on terror is itself state terrorism. The Bush regime is launching wars of aggression and sponsoring terrorist states such as Arroyo's.

The Filipino people have all the reasons to fight back. The terrorist U.S.-Arroyo regime must pay for its crimes against the people. The Filipino people have defeated the Marcos dictatorship. There is no reason that the weaker, more desperate Arroyo regime could not be ousted.

The defeat of another U.S. puppet would also be a major blow against U.S. imperialism. It is important the people's movement be conscious of the long-term fight to end foreign domination in the country as a requisite for genuine freedom and democracy.

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