

The "Rambo Mystique": Philippine Para-Military and Society

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Early in December, 1988 leaders of some twenty anti-Communist vigilante groups in the Philippines decided to form an umbrella organization, the "National Alliance for Democracy" (NAD). Participant organizations came from all over the country, ranging from *Alsa Masa* ("Masses Arise!") in Davao at the southeastern tip of Mindanao, to the "Manila Crusaders for Peace and Democracy." With the encouragement of the military, who long have been concerned to provide control over the 200 or so anti-Communist vigilante organizations and "private armies" of greatly varying size operating in the Philippines today, support for the NAD grew. On March 16, 1989, the NAD convened its first "national congress" in Manila, chaired by the fiery crusading radio commentator and journalist Cerge Remonde, and with 300 delegates in attendance. The latter were described as coming mainly from the "lower income" strata in the provinces "who are in the vanguard of the fight against the insurgents." Demonstrating the official blessing for the NAD congress by the government of President Corazon Aquino and by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Defense Minister and former AFP Commander General Fidel Ramos, in his address to the congress, praised the NAD as an example of how to wage "people's war."¹

There must not be many nations in the world, where armed bands, recruited in part from the always large social subset of drifting guns-for-hire and criminal racketeers, or else from the ubiquitous private bodyguards of local political powerbrokers, wealthy landowners or business tycoons, are legitimized by a government-endorsed "alliance" that is dedicated to and considered to be a part of the nation's counter-insurgency effort.

That this happened in the Philippines at present is the result of the interplay of two factors - an interaction that is the substance of the following pages. The first factor is the attempt at a systemization by the Aquino

1 Radio Manila, Manila Broadcasting Company, December 10, 1988 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Reports, East Asia, hereafter FBIS, DR/EAS, December 13, 1988, p. 58), and *The Straits Times* (Singapore), March 17, 1989, p. 12.

government of its national counter-insurgency effort against the continuing guerrilla campaign by the "New People's Army" (NPA), the fighting arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). This attempt as we shall see, involves the formation of a three-tiered anti-Communist popular defense force, supporting the regular military. The second factor is a long enduring and persistent feature of the Philippine political and social system, i.e. the armed gang or "private army." As an institution such armed gangs go far back into Philippine tradition and history, as will be more fully indicated below (pp. 20-22). Today, however, the phenomenon of the Philippine armed band is suffused by a rock music and motion picture-fed "pop culture" of defiance or romantic, cause-oriented heroism, and draws its recruits from the hordes of under- or unemployed in the rural areas as well as the cities. The Philippine private army phenomenon of today both assists in the further development of and provides an outlet to express its own national imagery of romanticized, gun-toting derringdo against Communist malefactors. Though identified here as "the Rambo mystique," the symbols and icons of Philippine "private armies" today, though all of a similar theme, to be sure do show some variety: "Clint Eastwood Express" was the lettering on the side of one jeep "staff car" of the Alsa Masa vigilantes which this author observed roaring through a back alley of Davao, Mindanao, this past June. "Say goodnight, sucka!", embellished by a first smashing the letters NPA, was painted on the front bumper of another vehicle, identified as belonging to El LibreCom ("The Liberation Command") vigilantes, and encountered on the outskirts of Cebu City.

I. The Counterinsurgency Structure

The organizational essence of the Philippine counter-insurgency today is the mobilization of a nationwide, AFP-supervised (with varying degrees of care and intensity) para-military force recruited from among the Philippine civilian population.

On May 20, 1987, the Philippine Defense Department announced the establishment of a "Civilian Volunteer Defense Force Organization" (CVFDO), soon commonly designated simply as DVOs ("Civilian Volunteer Organizations"), or in the national Philipino language "Bantaybayan" ("Guardians of the Nation"). The CVOs, in mid-1989, according to an estimate made for the author by one AFP spokesman, numbered about 20,000 "and growing." Formally the CVOs are to be supervised, according to Defense Secretary General Fidel Ramos by a multi-tiered bureaucratic agency, a "Peace and Order Council" system operating from the barangay (district) and municipal

levels, through provincial and regional levels, to a national council, headed by the Secretary of Local Governments (i.e., Minister of the Interior). In its announcement of May 20, 1987, establishing the CVOs, the Philippine Defense Department stressed the civilian character of the organization, whose volunteer members according to a subsequent description by Ramos are ready "to fight anything that is deterring the progress of the people" - not just the NPA but also crime and even "poverty."² AFP Staff Chief General Renato deVilla has been careful to stress that such "fighting" as the CVOs intend to do will be without arms; indeed, the CVOs, unlike the CAFGU ("Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit" - see pp. 11ff below), "need not have military skills." Even so, de Villa has said, CVOs can help the regular military by supplying intelligence about the CPP-NPA and their allies, and by articulating government counter-insurgency measures.³

Organizing the national CVO structure has been difficult. Developing the "Peace and Order Council" system, let alone coordination between lower level supervisory agencies and the Local Governments Department, have barely begun. Evidently the Aquino government does not regard such coordination as an administrative priority at this time. Moreover, in the context of "the Rambo mystique" the CVOs lack "macho" imagery and glamor: participating as volunteers in an as yet undefined, unarmed struggle against poverty or crime, tends to have little appeal for the gun-toting members of marginal social strata that have provided the Philippine vigilante and other paramilitary groups with regular recruits over the years. Employment in the private army of a local political-business tycoon is more remunerative, as is criminal racketeering. Even CAFGU, to be discussed presently, offers more opportunities.

Then, too, the CVO has failed to attract the members of such pre-Aquino para-military organizations as the Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF) and "The Lost Command," active during the Marcos era. One reason for the development of the new Philippine counter-insurgency structure is because groups like CHDF had acquired an odious reputation as a result of their human rights violations.⁴ The Aquino government well realized the entrenched, indeed virtually institutionalized character in the country of paramilitary groups (with varying degrees of respectability) and armed bands, and determined to co-opt and supervise them in a new "people's war" program of

2 People's Television Channel 4, Quezon City, May 12, 1988 (interview with National Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos), in FBIS, DR/EAS, May 16, 1988, p. 40.

3 *The Manila Chronicle*, June 12, 1988, p. 18 (FBIS, DR/EAS, June 15, 1988, p. 36).

4 On the CHDF and similar groups see Justus M. van der Kroef, "Private Armies and Extra-Judicial Violence in the Philippines," *Asian Affairs* (Washington), Winter, 1986-87, pp. 1-21.

its own.⁵ The CHDF, like the fast proliferating vigilantes, were to be incorporated into this new counter-insurgency structure. However, as far as the CHDF is concerned, the CVOs thus far have been the least popular tier of that structure, with most CHDF members preferring to join CAFGU.

Lack of supervision and operational guidelines have left existing CVOs largely to the command decisions of their own leaders and those of local AFP commanders. The result has been that the lines between CVOs, CAFGU, vigilantes not affiliated with either, and the remaining 21,000 CHDF members who still remain to be phased into the new counter-insurgency program, continue to be blurred.

II. Organizational Blurring

Certainly public perception in the Philippines today tends to make little distinction, especially when it comes to the longstanding problem of human rights violations by military and para-military groups.⁶ This problem, which in the nineteen-seventies and early eighties greatly added to the odious aura surrounding the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, now has come to bedevil the Aquino presidency as well. Not just the AFP, but also what the press these days loosely calls the "controversial civilian militia forces," i.e. the para-military support units like CAFGU and CVO, as well as "rightwing vigilantes," are blamed for killings, abductions and "disappearances" of suspected CPP-NPA members and sympathizers.⁷

In the public perception, and certainly among the Aquino regime's human rights critics today, any organizational lines between the different levels of counter-insurgency are disregarded. Indicative was the report issued in late May, 1989, by a 60-member international factfinding mission organized by the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. The mission investigated a spate of recent human rights violations in the province of Negros Occidental. The mission's report, which was highly critical of the intense AFP campaign against CPP-NPA strongholds in the province, *inter alia* recommended not only the dissolution of CAFGU (units of which participated in the Negros

5 See by Justus M. van der Kroef, "The Philippines: The Day of the Vigilantes," *Asian Survey*, June 1988, pp. 630-649.

6 *Human Rights Violations in the Philippines. An Account of Torture, "Disappearances," Extra-Judicial Executions, and Illegal Detention* (New York, Amnesty International, U.S.A., 1983).

7 *Asiaweek*, May 26, 1989, p. 52; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 15, 1988, p. 42 and June 1, 1989, p. 30. See also *A Summary of Disappearances in the Philippines Since June, 1988* (London, Amnesty International, April, 1989).

campaign), but asked the government as well "to abolish the Civilian Volunteer Organization, also known as vigilantes."⁸

From Aquino on down, senior Philippine officials have emphasized that the CVOs and, for that matter, CAFGU, are not vigilantes and that the CVOs should not be armed. When visiting Swiss journalists after examining counter-insurgency measures, pointed out to President Aquino that many CVOs indeed were going about armed, and that as "vigilantes" they were being assisted by local AFP commanders, Aquino reiterated first that the CVOs and vigilantes "should not be armed." But, on the other hand, Aquino said, people could properly register their arms, and, in any case, "if the people themselves want to protect themselves against the insurgents, then we encourage them to do so." These and similar answers by the President left the Swiss press team wondering if Aquino had adequate information on the national security problem "or was not updated on the subject."⁹

An alternative explanation for Aquino's answers might be that to a government confronted by contending domestic and foreign political pressures, virtue is seen to lie, precisely, in blurring the lines within the national counter-insurgency structure. On the one side there are the human rights critics, foreign and domestic; in this context a positive perception of the President herself and her regime is essential to the continuation of financial stabilization policies and foreign investment. As long as possible the Aquino regime must maintain the image of having wrought a sharp break with the practices of the Marcos era. On the other hand, there is the practical, "on the ground" reality of the daily battle against CPP-NPA insurgents. Freewheeling vigilantes, whatever their names or degrees of legitimacy, who carry the counter-insurgency struggle right into the villages and city streets, constitute a supporting force that local AFP commanders are loath to forego.

The para-military question then becomes one essentially of establishing some kind of control and direction over and - especially for foreign eyes - legitimacy to this support force. It is just here that the institution of the armed gang and of the "Rambo mystique" in Philippine life confront the reformer. The fact is, that for some indefinite time to come, the formal counter-insurgency program - AFP, CAFGU, CVO - floats on a mass of vigilantes at varying degrees of respectability.

The blurring of the lines between counter-insurgency para-military groups is aggravated by two other factors. One is the ease with which firearms can be obtained in the Philippines. In February, 1989, the Philippine government

8 *The Philippine Daily Globe* (Manila), May 25, 1989, p. 6 (FBIS, DR/EAS, May 26, 1989, p. 47).

9 *The Manila Chronicle*, June 14, 1988, p. 9.

estimated that there were at least 189,000 unlicensed firearms in the country, in addition to 439,000 with licenses - a total, in a country of 58 million people, that far exceeds the number of firearms in the hands of the 165,000 regular members of the Philippine Armed Forces. Some Philippine leaders consider these official estimates much too low - former Defense Minister and now Senator, Juan Enrile, an Aquino critic, asserts that "there are more than 1 million firearms on the loose" and he particularly points to the upsurge of private armies as the cause. Enrile also notes a failure of "leadership by example," citing for example the existence of President Aquino's own "family army" and her personal, heavily armed 1,000-man "Presidential Security Group" as the reason why "lower-echelon officials are emulating the presidential example."¹⁰

Be that as it may, within the context of the "Rambo mystique," the Filipino male does not feel properly attired or personally secure without a (discreetly worn) firearm. Under such circumstances, expecting the CVOs, as one official element of the government's counter-insurgency program, to remain unarmed is unrealistic. Nevertheless, Philippine officials, from the President on down, no doubt pained by the common perception of the Philippines as a land flooded by guns and gunmen, and sensitive to charges of human rights violations, cling to the myth of unarmed CVOs. Independent observers know better, finding, in practice, often little to choose between CVOs and vigilantes.

III. Constitutional Authority and the Para-military

A second factor blurring the organizational lines between Philippine counter-insurgency organizations today is rooted in the ambiguities of the nation's fundamental law and in its public policy applications. The present Philippine Constitution, approved by national referendum on February 2, 1989, *inter alia* provides (article 13, section 15) that "the State shall respect the role of independent people's organizations to enable the people to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means." Another clause (article 2, section 23) provides that "the State shall encourage non-governmental, community based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation."

Top Philippine officials have interpreted these clauses to mean specifically the right of community self-defense. In her earlier cited interview with visiting

¹⁰ *Asiaweek*, February 10, 1989, p. 26. See also *The Straits Times* (Singapore), March 20, 1989, p. 11.

Swiss journalists inquiring into the Philippine security situation (note 9 *supra*), President Aquino had upheld the right of people to protect themselves against insurgencies. Defense Secretary Ramos, in his explanation of the function of the CVOs and of popular involvement in the national counter-insurgency program generally, put it even more succinctly: "The Constitution says that the people have the right to organize themselves into associations, in order to protect their interests, and there is no higher interest in a neighborhood than the security or the survival of that neighborhood and the members therein."¹¹ Armed Forces Chief de Villa has been equally emphatic, saying that "the concept" behind the CVOs "is the right of our people, as embodied in the Constitution, to get themselves organized for protection and for civic duty."¹²

However, these Constitutional "community welfare" clauses are but one side of the coin. For the Philippine Constitution also provides (article 18, section 24) that "private armies and other armed groups not recognized by duly constituted authority shall be dismantled," including "all paramilitary forces" such as the CHDF. According to the same clause, however, such armed groups "where appropriate" can also be "converted to regular forces." This Constitutional language has permitted the Aquino administration at one and the same time to portray itself as banning the "private armies" and vigilantes, and allowing for their continuation in a new form, legitimized by "duly constituted authority," including through incorporation by the regular AFP.

Policy pronouncements on the abolition or "conversion" of the CHDF or vigilantes thus have tended to sound contradictory. For example, on June 25, 1988, President Aquino, in her "state of the nation" address, ordered the AFP to disband the vigilantes "in line with the constitutional injunction against paramilitary groups." Within hours an outpouring of negative reaction - especially from vigilante-dependent local military commanders in the field and from provincial political powerbrokers - apparently caused the government to change its mind. Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos issued a "clarification," apparently with the President's approval, saying that the vigilantes would not be disbanded. Ramos said that "only scawlags" and other undesirables would be eliminated from vigilante ranks.¹³

Even Aquino's own Vice President, Salvador Laurel, termed the vigilante banning "ill advised," and shortly afterward he called for Aquino's Resignation as president because of her alleged incompetence in fighting the Communists. Throughout the country, various para-military organizations, some organized

11 See note 2 *supra*.

12 *The Manila Chronicle*, June 12, 1988, p. 18 (FBIS, DR/EAS, June 15, 1988, p. 37).

13 *The Manila Chronicle*, August 1, 1988, p. 3 (FBIS, DR/EAS, August 3, 1988, p. 57).

with the support of local AFP commanders, announced that they would disobey Aquino's order, and if necessary would carry on their activities "underground."

Under the circumstances, the basis for compromise between the human rights foes of the vigilantes and their supporters in the counter-insurgency program seemed to lie in a "conversion" to a new legitimate status of all or many of the existing armed groups. Meanwhile, AFP senior commanders kept on emphasizing that any effective counter-insurgency without "citizens armies" would be impossible. It is just at this juncture that the CAFGU fits in. CAFGU, the so-called "Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit," received its "Implementing Rules" from President Aquino on June 8, 1988, and at the close of May, 1989 consisted of 508 "companies" under direct AFP supervision, with a total strength of 44,704 men.¹⁴ CAFGU's maximum strength originally had been set at 80,000, but subsequent budget cuts brought this figure down to 53,000. In announcing the formation of CAFGU, government spokesmen emphasized that, though considered a "civilian force," CAFGU would function as the formal replacement of the CHDF, and would play an integral role in the nation's counterinsurgency program. But unlike the CVOs, CAFGU personnel would (1) be expected to have had some prior military experience, (2) would operate in close contact with AFP counter-insurgent units such as the Special Operations Teams (SOT), to be discussed presently, and (3) would be paid. Each of these characteristics deserves closer attention.

IV. Civilian Armed Force Geographical Units

Under earlier mentioned "Implementing Rules" issued by President Aquino, CAFGU personnel are to be drawn primarily from a diversity of persons with prior military training. Among these are qualified, honorably discharged, former officers and enlisted personnel of the AFP, and of "Allied Armed Forces who are Filipino citizens," various categories of "affiliated reserve" and "inactive" AFP personnel whose names appear on official rosters, the graduates of authorized military training programs ranging from the National Defense College to "citizens military training" programs in secondary and tertiary educational institutions, and, not least, "recognized, World War II guerrillas, honorably discharged from the service."¹⁵ CAFGU recruits, according to AFP spokesman, are "thoroughly screened" before entering a

14 *The Philippine Star* (Manila), May 23, 1989, p. 4 (FBIS, DR/EAS, May 26, 1989, p. 46).

15 See for example the remarks of Ralph Tagle, President Aquino's press spokesman in *Philippine Daily Globe*, May 5, 1988, p. 2 (FBIS, DR/EAS, May 5, 1988, p. 44).

three-month "rigid" military training program in appropriately designated camps, supervised by regular AFP officers and enlisted personnel. Each CAFGU member receives an allowance of 18 Pesos (US \$ 0.90) a day, in addition to housing, clothing, some medical care, and equipment, during training and actual field operations against guerillas. In principle, the CAFGU member "is a mere civilian volunteer and not a regular trooper," but, as one commentary has noted, "in this seemingly endless season of joblessness in the rural areas, being a CAFGU member is a livelihood by itself." From the government's point of view, according to the same commentary, CAFGU has the potential of being quite cost-effective. It is estimated that it costs about 26 million Pesos a month to maintain a regular batallion (three companies) of the AFP, versus 6 million Pesos a month for a comparable CAFGU unit (thus far CAFGUs only have been organized to the company level).¹⁶

The vast majority of CAFGUs still were considered by the AFP to be "trainees" in mid-1989. However, AFP commanders by that time also had become particularly sensitive to reports that a number of CAFGU personnel already were being accused of theft, robbery and murder. For example, a prominent Philippine Roman Catholic Church-related human rights group, "The Task Force Detainees," reported in early 1989 that over 10% of the more than 1,260 cases of human rights violations in 1988 had been committed by CAFGUs, including killings of clergymen in Davao and Misamis.¹⁷ And in mid-April, 1989, 12 Roman Catholic and Protestant church groups urged the government to disband the CAFGU because of "a long list" of human rights abuses.¹⁸

With their camps dispersed over the widely scattered islands of the Philippines, recruitment practices, training, and supervising of CAFGU operations varies greatly. For example, though most CAFGU were still considered in training, they nevertheless had become sufficiently active in some areas to have sustained 446 killed and 332 wounded in anti-NPA guerrilla counter-insurgency clashes by April 30, 1989.¹⁹ Defense Secretary Ramos and AFP Staff Chief de Villa have sought to emphasize that unlike the abuse prone (and now dismantling) CHDF, the members of CAFGU are "subject to the articles of war," and that there will be no toleration of what Ramos called "kanya-

16 Jarius Bondoc, "Cafgus May be Cheap, But ...," *Philippine Daily Globe* (Manila), May 16, 1989, p. 5.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), April 29, 1989, pp. 1, 8 (FBIS, DR/EAS, April 25, 1989, p. 52).

19 *The Philippine Star* (Manila), May 23, 1989, p. 4 (FBIS, DR/EAS, May 26, 1989, p. 45).

kanyang" (distinctive, independent) operational methods. CHDF who can't abide such discipline Ramos said "can stay unarmed" or else become CVOs.²⁰

In some areas the transition from CHDF to CAFGU seems to have occurred smoothly. For example, AFP spokesmen for the Northern Luzon Military Command declared in early March, 1989, that all CHDF units in the Command Region had now been replaced by 76 CAFGU companies.²¹ Elsewhere, however, and particularly in Mindanao, slower and (*pace* Ramos) more "hanya-kanyang" style transitions are occurring. Inadequate budget provisions, slowness of pay for CAFGUS, and the pull of other private armies maintained by political or business magnates, or of freely roaming, presumably anti-Communist vigilantes, all more or less suffused by the satisfying pop-culture imagery of "the Rambo mystique" among the teeming underclass - these have helped to create and perpetuate many groups of trained or only partially trained CAFGUs with other part-time organizational and employment loyalties, drifting from one gun-for-hire affiliation to another in the course of a single week or month. As early as mid-July, 1988, Colonel Hoberto Ribo, the AFP Staff Chief, Southern Military Command in Mindanao said that "armed civilian volunteers numbering 65,748 are deployed all over Mindanao" and were assisting in the counter-insurgency operation against an estimated 50,000 NPA guerrillas. Ribo noted that 28,673 of these "armed volunteers" were receiving pay in various ranges from the Philippine government. According to Ribo, the remainder of the volunteers "are employees of private companies," and presumably were and are being paid by their employers.²²

It is to be noted that the term "private companies," when applied to the maintenance of armed gangs, has a certain flexibility in the Philippines. In the 'seventies and early 'eighties it was common, especially in the sugar producing areas of Negros, for CHDF units to be maintained by local sugar barons and political leaders.²³ Certainly in Mindanao today one frequently meets with the same kind of "privatization of CAFGU and Bantaybayan (CVO) units, as well as with other bodyguards and vigilantes who continue to operate, with a wink from local AFP commanders, outside the official, counter-insurgency "citizens army" structure. Especially in the southern provinces, farthest from the reach of Manila, Defense Secretary Ramos has made a particular effort to develop CAFGU units whose members train and stay within their home areas, be-

20 Interview with Defense Secretary Ramos and AFP Staff Chief de Villa in *The Philippines Free Press*, April 1, 1989, pp. 4-5, 23, 38-39 (FBIS, DR/EAS, April 12, 1989, p. 67).

21 *Manila Bulletin*, March 6, 1989, p. 14 (FBIS, DR/EAS, March 8, 1989, p. 47).

22 *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), July 14, 1988, p. 1 (FBIS, DR/EAS, July 15, 1988, p. 46).

23 *We Forum* (Quezon City), October 22-28, 1985, p. 1.

cause as Ramos has put it, "the best form of community defense is that which comes from the community itself."²⁴

But in these same outlying provinces enveloped predominantly, as they are, by local community concerns and loyalties, the routine of counter-insurgency activity tends to make little distinction between CAFGU, CVO, or vigilante status, between legitimate or unlawful possession of arms, between the right to participate in actual armed combat against the NPA insurgents or not, or even between the right to draw a government allowance benefit or equipment or not. Such effectiveness as the Philippine counter-insurgency now has, or may yet acquire, would tend to be vitiated by such legalisms. Close daily contact by regular military as well as paramilitary bands with the villages and rural areas that are believed to be NPA-infiltrated, is the key strategy of the Aquino government's counter-insurgency program: the "hearts and minds concept" attempted in countering the Communist advance in Vietnam is to be applied again in the Philippines.²⁵

V. Counterinsurgency Tactics

Under the general strategy of "Low Intensity Conflict," now officially adopted by the AFP's and Philippine Constabulary's (i.e. national policy) counter-insurgency campaign, the officially recognized components of the Philippines' "citizen army" - AFP, CAFGU, CVO - each will have a specific role to play in the overall counter-insurgency strategy. In the first, or "clearing" and "isolating" phase of this strategy, the regular AFP has the major responsibility: it must conduct "massive military operations in identified insurgency-influenced areas designed to cut off the NPA stronghold," as one Philippine Constabulary Commander has put it. In the second, or "holding" phase, measures are to be taken (e.g. close patrolling, developing active local intelligence networks, interdicting NPA supplies and NPA attempts at contact with the population) so as to secure and "sanitize" the "cleared" area. During this phase, too, groundwork is to be laid in developing active CAFGU-CVO units. In the third or "consolidation" phase, the main burden shifts to the local paramilitary; an active mobilization of local population is sought, as meanwhile social and public betterment services are introduced or extended. The final phase puts the long-term development of the "cleared" and consolidated" region in the spotlight. It is a phase in which, as Defense Secretary Ramos has

²⁴ *Philippine Daily Globe*, April 25, 1989, p. 6 (FBIS, DR/EAS, April 25, 1989, p. 53).

²⁵ See the remarks of Philippine Army Operations Chief Colonel René Dado in *The Straits Times*, September 22, 1988, p. 10.

put it (*supra* note 2), "anything that is deterring the progress of the people," including crime and "poverty" is to be addressed.²⁶

The tactical aim of Philippine counter-insurgency today appears to be to match the NPA in winning control, village by village. Clearly this is a daunting task. This is not the place to describe the historic evolution of the strength of the CPP and NPA.²⁷ Suffice it to note here that according to a NPA leadership document entitled "Assessment of Lines of Work" (1988), guerrilla insurgency and party activity now have spread to more than two-thirds of the Philippines' 73 provinces, and that more than 11,390 or 27% of the country's barrios (villages) are under Communist influence.²⁸ Government estimates are much lower, but still alarming. For example, the 1988 report of the Philippine Defense Department submitted to President Aquino on the condition of the Communist insurgent activity in the country states that 7,852 barrios (out of a total of 40,761) in the country are "affected" by the Communist insurgency, a drop of about three per cent from the year before.²⁹ The report also notes the capture of 41 senior Communist party officials, and the "neutralization" of more than 3,900 "CPP-NPA regulars" during 1988, including 1,925 killed, and the remainder captured or surrendered. But despite these losses and constant intra-party leadership quarrels, there has been no decline in the rate of armed clashes with the NPA, and there has been no drop in the insurgents' overall strength either. Indeed, the NPA never seems to want for recruits for its guerrilla ranks. No government or other authoritative assessment of NPA strength known to the author puts their total numbers today below 23,000, and most estimates go considerably higher. For example, in an address to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on

26 *The Manila Bulletin*, March 22, 1989, p. 18 (FBIS, DR/EAS, March 24, 1989, p. 60). For this description of long-term Philippine counter-insurgency strategy I also have relied on advisories provided by AFP intelligence sources in June, 1989.

27 There is no comprehensive up-to-date history of Philippine Communism. Various insights are offered in Renze L. Hoeksema, *Communism in the Philippines: A Historical and Analytical Study of Communism and the Communist Party in the Philippines and its Relation to Communist Movements Abroad* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1956); *The Communist Movement in the Philippines* (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Short Paper no. 46, Bangkok, 1970); Alfredo B. Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction* (Manila, Ateneo de Manila Publications, 1969); David A. Rosenberg, "Communism in the Philippines," *Problems of Communism*, September-October, 1984, pp. 24-45; Francisco Nemenzo, "Rectification Process in the Philippine Communist Movement," pp. 71-101 in Lim Joo-Jock, ed., *Armed Communist Movements in Southeast Asia* (Gower Publishing Company, Hampshire, UK, 1984); Justus M. van der Kroef, "Philippine Communism's Drive to Power," *Asian Profile*, February, 1988, pp. 43-57; and Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution. Inside the Philippine Guerilla Movement* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1989).

28 *The New York Times*, January 15, 1989, p. 14.

29 *We Forum* (Quezon City), May 19-21, 1989, pp. 12-13.

April 19, 1989, Philippine Vice-President Salvador Laurel, an Aquino critic, put it this way:³⁰

"When Cory (i.e. Philippine President Corazon Aquino) and I took over as President and Vice-President respectively, the Communist insurgency in the Philippines numbered about 14,500 fully armed regulars.

"Now, based on captured documents and admission by responsible representatives of the Department of Defense, it is more than 30,000. Some people even place it at 33,000, fully armed."

VI. Para-military and Communist Guerillas

Tactically and organizationally the Philippine counter-insurgency and its Communist opponents sometimes seem to resemble each other. When in the course of 1988 the Manila policy developed fast-moving Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) units to deal with the growing danger of Communist assassination squads, it was not long before the NPA initiated highly mobile "quick reaction forces," which, like the SWAT teams, are equipped with high powered rifles (e.g. M-16 Armalites and AK-47s).³¹ Meanwhile, in the countryside, the Philippine Army's "Special Operations Teams" (SOT), skilled in psychological warfare and in community centered "civic action" programs, and increasingly operating with the support of local CAFGU units, have become the targets of special NPA units determined to win back peasant support. These special units wage a brand of "psy-war" of their own, frightening villagers into attending covert "liberation" indoctrination groups, as well as hunting their counter-insurgent opponents. In the Quezon and Bicol regions of Luzon, NPA units, in May, 1989, were reported to have been instructed by their leaders "to shoot CAFGU and SOT members on sight."³²

In the barrios under their control today, the CPP-NPA not only steadily works on the creation of counter-governments of its own, sometimes in competition with other movements for local autonomy, as e.g. in the mountainous Cordillera region of Northern Luzon. But the Communists also were developing a militant civilian "mass base" of support - again a near mirror image of the para-military base and its unauthorized anti-Communist vigilante adjunct that form the hub of the Philippine government's counter-in-

³⁰ *The Straits Times*, April 21, 1989, p. 15.

³¹ *Manila Bulletin*, October 13, 1988, p. 1 (FBIS, DR/EAS, October 14, 1988, p. 52).

³² *Manila Bulletin*, May 11, 1989, p. 1 (FBIS, DR/EAS, May 11, 1989, p. 45. On the SOT see also "Straight for the Heart," *Asiaweek* (Hongkong), May 12, 1989, pp. 53-59.

surgency program.³³ For example, women, children, and old people in Negros, as well as active workers and professionals, are being mobilized in what local counter-insurgency commanders have called the Communist "Revolutionary Spectrum" of support and cause-oriented groups, e.g. "concerned teachers," "student leagues," "women's action fronts," and so on. This is not aimed merely at building a traditional political Communist united front. Rather, the eventual aim is to establish a pattern of NPA-controlled "fighting villages" and militant urban neighborhoods.³⁴

But in so doing, and particularly in carrying their struggle into the streets of Manila and other urban slums where the insurgents' "Sparrow" death squads roam, the NPA works the same social milieu, and, in effect, cultivates the same "Rambo mystique" as do its opponents. Like the anti-Communist vigilantes, or the recruits who use the CVO as a backdoor to get into the CAFGU with its regular pay and opportunities, so the NPA's rank and file seems like a pool or reservoir, whose level never perceptibly falls, and indeed which constantly is replenished by a steadily incoming trickle. To the gun-toting drifters of the Philippine underclass today, it is not the ideological abstraction of a cause, but rather the life style of the contemporary, pop-culture man-at-arms, celebrated in comic strip and motion picture, that is the main shaping factor of their existence.

This tends to be so, whether one looks at one of the free-wheeling CAFGU units paid by private employers in Mindanao, or at the vigilante "Crusaders for Peace" in the Bicol region of southeast Luzon, or at the ranks of one of the NPA's "people's justice" commands in Negros. The hundreds of NPA members who annually defect, surrender, or are captured (and usually within months of perfunctory rehabilitation are released) readily are replaced; many, after transitory legitimate employment, succumb again to the lure of life in another armed gang. Indeed, for some anti-Communist vigilante groups, like Davao's *Alsa Masa* ("Masses Arise"), "converted," ex-NPA members have particular recruitment appeal.

The expanding counter-insurgency itself adds to the reservoir of recruits, whether for CAFGU or the NPA. Intensified government operations against the NPA in Negros, Luzon and Mindanao, during the first half of 1989, for example, created some "180,000 displaced persons," mostly "poor farmers and their families."³⁵ No systematic relief program was or thus far has been put in place to accommodate these "domestic refugees," let alone provide them with

33 *Manila Bulletin*, September 10, 1988, p. 1 (FBIS, DR/EAS, September 15, 1988, p. 58).

34 *Philippine Daily Globe*, January 13, 1989, pp. 1, 8 (FBIS, DR/EAS, January 13, 1989, p. 43).

35 *The Manila Chronicle*, September 9, 1988, p. 5 (FBIS, DR/EAS, September 14, 1988, p. 63).

new homes and new work environments. Some displaced have drifted to the cities, there to augment the hordes of un- or underemployed (together estimated as high as 60% of the nation's total work force of about 38 million).³⁶ Others, as much in anger as in search for opportunity, have gone over to the NPA; and still others have drifted into the counter-insurgency para-military life style. But the problem hardly is confined to Negros. As the counter-insurgency program, aided by CAFGU, CVO and vigilantes is extended, the numbers of "internal refugees" throughout the country increases. The Catholic Church-affiliated "Coordinating Body for Displaced Families" estimates that from January through June, 1989, alone some 237,349 persons (or approximately 37,000 families) fled the Philippines' rural hinterlands, having become caught in the crossfire between the NPA and its counter-insurgency opponents.³⁷ This number significantly surpasses the 195,836 persons driven from their homes and lands between December, 1987, and September, 1988. The rootless, drifting underclass in the Philippines seems to be growing. And the ranks of both Communist guerrillas and of the counter-insurgency groups are likely to swell by recruits from the same human flotsam that "people's liberation" and "low intensity" warfare have helped to create.

Meanwhile, the Philippine national economy under Aquino has not been wanting for some dynamism: GNP growth rates in the past two years, for example, have averaged 6%, a marked contrast with the negative growth rates during the last two years of the Marcos administration (1984-85). But such growth is not enough to meet the employment needs of an annual population increase of at least 2.8%. According to the government's own statistical indices, poverty remains serious. The Philippines' National Statistics Office, an agency attached to the government's National Economic and Development Authority, determined in 1988 that a Philippine family of six would need to earn at least 2,709 Pesos (U.S. \$ 119) a month, on average, to move past the poverty level. It was determined that 5.3 million Philippine families, or 49.5% of the total population in 1988, did not earn as much.³⁸ Even so, the 1988 poverty percentage was said to mark an improvement over 1985 (the last year of the Marcos era), when 59% were considered to be below the poverty level. In a recent risk assessment analysis written for an international development and lending agency, the international economist, Gustave Ranis, of Yale University, notes that the Philippines has "the worst income distribution in all of Asia, as well as the largest percentage of its population in absolute poverty

36 *Bulletin Today* (Manila), December 16, 1985, p. 25 (FBIS, DR/ASA, December 24, 1985, p. 16).

37 *We Forum* (Manila), June 21-22, 1989, p. 2.

38 *The Philippine Star* (Manila), June 24, 1989, p. 3.

in Southeast Asia." Ranis notes as well that the Philippines has "one of the worst land tenure systems" and "the largest mass of landless rural workers."³⁹ There is a hard nubbin of truth in the recent observation of CPP-NPA founder, José Sison, that there is not going to be a level of industrial development or agrarian reform sufficient "to absorb the ever-accumulating surplus labor and reduce the root causes of social unrest."⁴⁰ The insurgency-counter-insurgency phenomenon in the Philippines, floating on that unrest, appears to have become a significant "growth-industry" in the Philippine political economy in its own right.

VII. Characteristics of the "Rambo Mystique"

As a measure of AFP-imposed discipline and supervision, spurred by foreign and domestic human rights critics, begins to curb the worst excesses of CAFGU and CVO, it is in the freewheeling vigilante groups that the "Rambo mystique" perhaps most fully shows itself. That mystique, and the vigilante phenomenon itself, resonate in harmony with much of the Philippine historical and cultural experience. The pre-colonial Malay world already had know various institutionalized forms of brigandage. The gang of roaming outlaws, preying on village society and on occasion capable even of attacking the strongholds of *datus* (chiefs or territorial rulers), had a long history in the Philippines, especially the South. Such bands, called *tulisandes* (a Tagalog term generally meaning outlaws or rebels) in the pre-colonial Philippines, had "their own established customs and group culture, often headed by leaders renowned for their magical powers and bravado."⁴¹

Today, things magical charismatic and talismanic still never are far from life in the vigilante band: the use of amulets (e.g. medals depicting Christian saints believed to bring good fortune); incantations, including phrases in broken Latin, also shouted as battle cries; sometimes even the very names of the bands themselves, such as "The Four K's" (*Kasalanan, Kaluwasan, Kinabuki, Kabus* - or Sin, Salvation, Life, Property) in Mindanao - all these are suggestive. The heady aura of mystical religiosity accentuates the "Rambo mystique": vigilante gang membership is the means whereby one can be on a Manichean crusade against Satanic Communism; on the other side, for the less tutored NPA guerrilla footsoldier, there is the justification of the struggle

39 *The Manila Chronicle*, June 23, 1989, p. 4.

40 José Maria Sison, "Revolutionary Prospects in the Philippines," *Monthly Review*, December, 1988, pp. 2-3.

41 Joel J. Steinberg, ed., *In Search of Southeast Asia. A Modern History* (Revised Edition, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1987), p. 26.

against the equally demonic foe of imperialism and feudalism. Attention should also be called to the institution of piracy in this pre-colonial Malay world. Exercised at one time as a matter of royal right in the waters south and east of Mindanao, the practice is by no means gone, as entire fishing villages and sailing vessels plying the coastal trade with Borneo today know to their cost.

Finally, it remains to note that since so much of the vigilantes' "Rambo" imagery is derived from modern, "pop-culture" stereotypes, themes of piracy and a romanticized, Robin Hood-style brigandage generally, are among the favorite subjects of so-called *bombas*, i.e. the sex and violence type of adventure films that long have been the stock-in-trade of the Philippine motion picture industry.

The long era of Spanish colonial rule in most of the Philippines also significantly contributed to the eventual emergence of the "Rambo" mystique, in our day at least. The feudalization of the Philippine agricultural economy, especially in Luzon, through the royal granting of charters of land ownership and the creation of huge haciendas and encomiendas, provided the basis for the rise of an aristocracy of so-called *ilustrados* and *principales* who stood (and whose descendants stand today) in an authoritarian and paternalistic relationship toward their tenants, landless laborers and most of the rural population. In time, as the native Philippino *ilustrados* became central to the colonial and post-colonial political systems, relationships of mutual dependency and obligation were further strengthened through intermarriage and the religiously sanctioned *compadre* (godfather) system. In this feudal society, the keeping of one's own band of armed retainers and political-economic agents came and still comes quite naturally to the landowning-business-political elite. With all this too a code of conduct for the male in terms of risk-ridden prowess and daring adventurism tended to be accentuated further. Spanish romantic literature and its Filipino colonial derivatives, meanwhile, continued to celebrate - *pace* Cervantes' Don Quixote - the exploits of the dauntless *hidalgo*, the questing, chivalrous nobleman and man-at-arms, and his band of faithful followers.

The style of popular Filipino politicians today often follows these established feudal paternalistic themes. One illustration must suffice. A popular columnist in one of Manila's leading dailies, like a medieval troubadour, recently wrote admiringly of Rodolfo Aguinaldo, the Governor of Cagayan province, who, loved by his poor citizenry, is getting ready for what he calls "a bloody confrontation" between his own armed followers (including local military), and corrupt politicians. The code of chivalry with a modern, common touch appears to be strictly observed by our Governor. Surrounded by

his armed bodyguards, among them former NPA members, who, the Governor assured the columnist, "are willing to die for me, man," the governor "doles out every day from 50,000 pesos (U.S. \$ 2500) and 100,000 pesos in cash to charity." Among the beneficiaries, we are told, are "soldiers who claim they have sick relatives," or who need tuition fees for the schooling of their children, or who must meet transportation costs in order to go home. With such a *hidalgo*-esque picture before one's eyes, only a cynic would (1) inquire where or how the Governor of Cagayan manages to raise up to \$ 2500 a day for charity, or (2) ask about possible conflicts of interest among the local military who benefit from the Governor's largesse.⁴²

VIII. Poverty and the Vigilantes

Finally, and with more contemporary roots, there is the whole "pop-culture" of glamorized gangsterism and the ritualization of masculine violence that feeds the "Rambo mystique." To the enormously popular influence of motion pictures, video, and comic strips in Philippine daily life, there should be added also the impact of the rock music sub-culture, its defiance of convention, and its celebration of hedonistic individualism. The names of rock musik bands adopted by some vigilante groups (e.g., the Monkees and the Beatles), or the instances of the fusion of evangelical or charismatic religious experiences and rock music (e.g. "Rock Christ," a vigilante band developed with teh assistance of Philippine military, and active in the anti-NPA counter-insurgency in the early 1980's in the two Zamboanga provinces), are illustrative of that impact.⁴³ For the hordes of young males, unemployed in the cities, or who drift there from the rural areas, rock lyrics and rock life styles are a major source of new behavioral norms - stimulating self-assertion, rejecting traditional values, and conferring a sense of liberation and power through the beat and all-enveloping volume of the music.

Poverty, defiance, and a romanticized view of brigandage (particularly in combination) may well predispose toward crime and violence. Crime statistics in the Philippines are not always reliable or available. But the impression that the country is deeply crime-ridden is not without factual basis. In greater Manila, alone, for example, according to a Police Constabulary source in early 1989, one murder was being committed every 49 minutes, one homicide every 39 minutes, one robbery every 28 minutes, and one rape every six

42 Ramon Tulfo, "One Of A Kind," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (Manila), June 23, 1989, p. 3.

43 On these vigilante groups see Justus M. van der Kroef, "Private Armies and Extra-Judicial Violence in the Philippines," *Asian Affairs*, Winter, 1986-87, pp. 1-22.

hours.⁴⁴ Such an environment, and, indeed active periodic participation in crime, have conditioned and continue to condition the members of paramilitary and private armies.

Meanwhile, the number of landless rural workers and of slum dwellers caught in a kind of catch-as-catch-can scavenger existence in the cities appear to grow each year.⁴⁵ Certainly there is no indication that the Aquino era is leading to any diminution in the reservoir of available new recruits for the armed bands of all kinds now operating in the country. Yet, it is implicit in the current organizational structure of the Philippine counter-insurgency that such socially and economically marginal persons are joined by economically more established and even by middle class and professional individuals. Although the latter presumably, will more likely qualify and become part of CAFGU and CVO. In practice again, little difference between CAFGU and vigilantes may be apparent. For example, at the close of 1988, areas of Kabankalan township south of Bacolod, were reported to be "in the grip of terror" because of atrocities allegedly committed by anti-Communist vigilantes and CAFGU units, both of which had been organized by local AFP in their anti-NPA campaign. Residents of Kabankalan reportedly had been forced by the military to join the vigilantes. Those who had refused to sign up were branded NPA members or sympathizers.⁴⁶

IX. Typology of Vigilante Groups

The 200 or so vigilante bands and "private armies" in the Philippines today (the author has heard estimates by some human rights circles and by some journalists particularly critical of Aquino's shortcomings that put the number at two or even three times that figure) may be divided first into (1) community organizations at various levels of effective organizational and operational effectiveness, and (2) formally established, AFP-sanctioned, paramilitary groups, like the remnants of the CHDF, and the more recently formed CVO and CAFGU, already described above.

The "community" vigilantes may be further subdivided into three categories. First there are those vigilante bands which in the course of 1986-87 and in the wake of the Aquino revolution arose as a presumably spontaneous manifestation of "people power." These vigilante groups tend to seek a broad

44 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 16, 1989, p. 39.

45 See, e.g. Ruth S. Callanta, *Poverty - The Philippine Scenario* (Bookmark Publishers, Manila, 1988).

46 *Philippine Daily Globe* (Manila), December 2, 1988, p. 3 (FBIS, DR/EAS, December 2, 1988, p. 56).

popular following, e.g. if possible, even nationwide branches or spin-offs. Secondly, there are the much smaller, exclusive, cult-like and/or religious-charismatic armed gangs. Some of these are the offshoot of religious sects with distinctive rituals, talismans and incantations to the supernatural. Their ferocity and bizarre methods of operation have been a frequent source of embarrassment to the Philippine vigilante movement as a whole. Thirdly, there are what is popularly called the "goon squads," i.e. the armed followers, personal bodyguards of the Philippine élite of business-tycoons, political powerbrokers, estate owners and managers, like Negros' "sugar barons", and not least of the popular "glitterati" of Manila high society and their provincial imitators.⁴⁷

Just as the vigilante problem generally reflects a deep-seated malaise of poverty and lack of public confidence in law and political institutions, so these three community vigilante subdivisions reflect significant currents and problems in Philippine society. The rise and tribulations of one of the best known community vigilante groups, *Alsa Masa* ("Masses Arise") in Davao City, Mindanao's turbulent capital are illustrative. For Davao's present day 1.2 million inhabitants, provisioning of public security and other elementary public services always has been a difficult and haphazard affair - to put it mildly. In metropolitan Davao's teeming slums and alleys, affiliation with a criminal gang long has been indispensable - even for the many whose survival rate was and is destined to be brief: Davao's official rate of 12 killings a day, on average, during the early nineteen eighties, fully earned it the lugubrious sobriquet of the Philippines' "Murder City."

Much of the killing in Davao involves street warfare between the Communist NPA and its army of "tax collectors," "neighborhood watch committees" and "liberation social workers" on the one hand, and on the other non- or even anti-Communist gangs, among them supporters of the local Muslim secessionist movement, others engaged in mere criminal racketeering, and still others combining such ordinary brigandage and extortion with religious, cult-like appeals (like the earlier named "Four Ks" organization (*Kasalanan, Kaluwasan, Kinabuki, Kabus* - or Sin, Salvation, Life, Property - the ideological rationale apparently being that, after having been saved from one's sin, the life abundant comes to the 4K participant).

In Davao, as elsewhere, the ascent of Mrs. Aquino to the presidency, and the concurrent rise of reform expectations among human rights activists and others, gave concern to local Philippine military commanders who long had supplemented their limited manpower resources in the counter-insurgency

47 Justus M. van der Kroef, "The Philippines: The Day of the Vigilantes," *Asian Survey*, June, 1988, pp. 630-649.

struggle, by developing their own local para-military organizations. Complaints about extensive human rights abuses committed by these para-military auxiliaries, as well as by regular AFP personnel, led local Philippine Army and Constabulary commanders to expect that the Aquino regime would seek to rein in sharply any vigilantism and private armies.

These expectations at first seemed indeed to be realized. Spokesmen for the Aquino government, in the course of 1986-87, indicated that such paramilitary groups as the CHDF would be dissolved shortly, along with all other vigilante groups. Those responsible for human rights abuses, including AFP personnel, would be brought to justice. But it was one thing to make such pronouncements in the Philippine capital, and quite another to have them realized in the counter-insurgency combat zones in the provinces. In response to a perceived threat, not only to their own military manpower capacity in the anti-Communist struggle, but also to their patronage powers, e.g. in job preferments working through the vigilante system, local AFP commanders struck back pre-emptively against the reforming intentions of the new Aquino regime in Manila. These AFP commanders gave strong encouragement to a mushrooming of new vigilante bands and "private armies" initiated by NPA defectors, local estate owners, businessmen or political leaders.

Alsa Masa, organized in the Agdao slums of Davao City in early November, 1986, is a prototype of this new AFP encouraged community vigilantism. Already having acquired some 3,000 members by early February, 1987, *Alsa Masa's* founding leadership consisted of defected former NPA cadres, among them Rolando Cagaya, a tire dealer and former NPA "tax collector." But the real driving force behind the organization from the beginning was the local AFP commander, Lt. Col. Franco Calida. Supplied with AFP-supervised training, and with jeeps, radio-communication equipment, intelligence support, and, unofficially, weapons and munitions when necessary, *Alsa Masa* soon cleared Agdao and most of Davao from the NPA. The regular AFP, meanwhile, intensified its own anti-NPA campaign in widening circles in the surrounding countryside.

Alsa Masa's success encouraged a spate of spin-off bands in Davao, in other nearby towns, or imitations in other parts of the country. Much publicized subsequent leadership quarrels within *Alsa Masa*, as well as an NPA guerrilla resurgence and counter-offensive in various parts of Mindanao in 1988-89, did not lessen the appeal of the new community vigilantism. On March 26, 1987, during a visit to Davao, Aquino herself voiced support for yet another new vigilante group, the Nakasaka (an acronym in Tagalog for *Nak-hahiusang Katawhan Alang sa Kalinaw* or "People United for Democracy")

describing it as an example of the "people power" that had carried her to victory over the Marcos regime.⁴⁸

This Presidential endorsement provoked sharp criticism from Philippine human rights circles. But the President, at least officially, appeared to be of the belief that Nakasaka and similar community vigilante groups were unarmed and therefore were legitimate expressions of community self-defense. Whatever such controversies, community vigilantism continued to grow. In Cebu City, and throughout much of the Visayas, such groups as CACA ("Citizens Against Communism Army") and *MalCom* (*Masa Laben sa Kominista* - "Anti-Communist Masses Power") began making a name for themselves. Their formation had been sparked by a combination of local business and military during 1987-88, Vigilantism even became fashionable for a while among Manila's corporate elite, which formed a still existing ADVANCE ("Association of Democratic Vigilantes and Concerned Entrepreneurs"). The "Manila Crusaders for Peace and Democracy," a vigilante organization established in early November, 1987 by Manila's Police Chief, General Alfred Lim, has a more proletarian following, and unlike ADVANCE operates in the capital's teeming, seamy underworld to ferret out NPA infiltrators. ADVANCE, as one of its members enthusiastically explained to this author in mid-June, 1989, is more involved in "consciousness raising" and "moral rearmament" of the national leadership, rather than in the muck and dark of actual counter-insurgency operations. On the other hand, CACA and *Malcom* members, as the "AFP's eyes and ears in the barrios," are no strangers to actual "on the ground" clashes with NPA guerrillas.

Under cover of a resurgent and popular vigilantism, however, ordinary criminals too have found it convenient to ply their trade, Already by mid-June, 1987, for example, in districts of Agusan del Sur, local units of the community vigilantes called *Pulahanes* ("Reds" - a name indicative not of members' ideology but of the color of their shirts and amulets), a nationwide organization, had become notorious for their robbery and extortion of local farmers.⁴⁹ Throughout 1987-88 in Ozamis City, a self-styled "Alsa Masa vigilante group" called *Kuratong Baleleng* ("Liberation Force"), led by an ex-convict, committed a string of robberies and holdups, engaging as well in clashes with roaming NPA bands. In conversations with this author in June, 1989, human rights activists and other critics of Aquino in Cebu City and Davao claimed that the practice of using vigilantism to eliminate political opponents or business rivals as well as a local NPA scourge had become well

48 Agence France Presse despatch, Davao, March 29, 1989 (FBIS, DR/APA, March 30, 1987, p. P1).

49 *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 24, 1987, p. 8.

entrenched in Negros and Mindanao. On the other hand, one should hasten to note that some vigilantes, e.g. the *Puersa Masa* ("Mass Power") around San Fernando, La Union province, Luzon, whose leadership from the beginning was assisted by local Constabulary and AFP screening procedures, have kept their ranks scrupulously clean from what AFP commanders call "scalawags" (scoundrels).

However, in the developing public perception of community vigilantes it has not been groups like *Puersa Masa* that have made the greater impression, but rather such criminal racketeering groups masquerading as vigilantes like *Akyat* (a Tagalog term literally meaning "to jump over," a probable reference to members' agility in eluding pursuit), and *Tok-Tok* (a name probably emulating the sound of a sudden, alarming knock on the door) in and around Davao and Zamboanga. And the same Metropolitan Manila Police officials who, at the close of 1987, had boasted that in the capital "between 4,000 and 5,000 people signed up for vigilante squads on the first day of application," by June, 1989 complained that "few of the applicants had been willing to complete the vigilante training course" of training and that most "dropped out after getting some free lessons handling guns."⁵⁰

Before taking a brief look at the composition and operations of some of the vigilante groups, mention should be made briefly of the religious-charismatic vigilante groups and the private armies of the political and business elite.

Religious cults have flourished for centuries in the Philippines, drawing syncretically from animistic, Muslim, and Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) beliefs, practices and imagery. Spurred by vague nativistic appeals to free their followers from foreign (i.e. Spanish or Western) dominion, such cults in the past occasionally erupted in brief episodes of violence against public authority. Such nativistic resistance broke out as early as 1621 in Bohol, and in 1660-61 it came to a full-scale anti-Catholic, anti-foreign revolt in Pangasinan and Ilocos, for example.⁵¹ The rise of vigilantism today has provided a setting for new militant organizations connected with a religious institution, and lending additional fervor to the anti-NPA crusade. Clashes can be bitter. In the village of Rano, Davao del Sur province, Mindanao, many of the inhabitants had converted to membership in the local Church of Christ. At the same time, members of the congregation had joined the *Ituman* ("Black Ones") vigilantes in order to confront a local NPA band. One day, at the close of June, 1989, it came to a bloody massacre in Rano. Marauding NPA guer-

50 United Press International wire service despatch, Manila, November 10, 1987.

51 John L. Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines. Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1967), esp. pp. 78-80, 144.

rillas attacked Ituman members and their families during a church service, leaving several scores dead and beheading two Ituman leaders.⁵²

The depradations of one religious cult-like vigilante group in the central and southern Philippines today, the *Sagrado Corazon Senior* ("Sacred Heart of God"), more commonly known as "Tadtad" (literally "chop-chop," because of members' proclivity to mutilate their victims), repeatedly have been condemned by human rights groups.⁵³ Tadtad members are said to participate in trance-induced rituals, during which human blood is drunk and members are made "invincible" by being given special talismans. It is one measure of the surge of nativistic values in Philippine society today on which the vigilante phenomenon rests in part that (1) among known Tadtad leaders in and around cities like Davao and Iloilo the present author, in June, 1989, found university graduates and professionals (including Western-trained ones), and (2) that senior AFP commanders defend Tadtad's gruesome practices by appealing to the values of the Philippine past. For example, AFP Chief of Staff General Renato de Villa has criticized those who, in his words, depict Tadtad as "marauding cannibals," pointing out that Tadtad and other religious armed bands are "something that must be understood within the Filipino culture." De Villa added that "those who have Westernized thought cannot understand why it is like this in the Philippines."⁵⁴ Especially in the southern and central Philippines the Tadtad, because of its ruthlessness, probably is the vigilante group most feared by the NPA. Occasionally, NPA spokesman claim to have evidence that Tadtad fanaticism is the result of a drug consumption by its members.

The recent, ongoing development of the CVO and CAFGU, like that of the CHDF (Civilian Home Defense Forces) before them, have provided a new avenue of semi-legitimacy to the dozens of "private armies" of the powerful and wealthy that have been a distinctive feature of Filipino political culture for centuries. Just as in the Marcos era *hacenderos* and *ilustrados* subsidized units of the CHDF, particularly in "Sugarlandia" (i.e. the sugar producing estate province of Negros and the Visayas), so today, particularly in the more freewheeling parts of Mindanao, private businesses are maintaining CAFGU personnel (cf. note 22 *supra*). However, it is not surprising that the private armies of the estate owners/political "warlords" need not necessarily always be committed to the nation's anti-Communist counter-insurgency program. An example is the land reform issue.

52 *The Bangkok Post*, June 27, 1989, p.1.

53 Amnesty International, *The Philippines. Unlawful Killings by Military and Paramilitary Forces* (New York, Amnesty International, March, 1988), esp. pp. 30-32, 35-36.

54 Press interview of de Villa in *The Manila Chronicle*, June 12, 1988, p. 18 (FBIS, DR/EAS, June 15, 1988, p. 36).

President Aquino's July 22, 1987 land reform proclamation, and subsequent executive orders, so incensed Negros sugar planters and big estate owners that they warned Aquino of rebellion and even secession. The planters began stockpiling arms, and augmenting their already sizable "private armies" by bringing in fresh recruits from the ranks of their *sacades* (field workers) on their estates. The sugar barons warned Aquino against any attempt to take over their land. The threat was not an idle one. Given the close rapport between Negros' "sugar aristocracy" and local AFP and Coonstabulary commanders, one can only speculate how forceful the Philippine military would have been in implementing any land redistribution scheme if it had come to that.

In the event, however, a serious confrontation between the AFP, and the private armies, including CAFGU or CVO units, controlled by the landed gentry and local power brokers, thus far has not materialized, nor is it likely to. The reason is that Aquino's land reform program, like its predecessors, has done little to alter basic tenure patterns or weakened the estate owners' wealth and power. The Aquino regime's agrarian reform legislation, as one student has put it, "has not empowered the peasantry, neither has it changed property relations"; worse, serious charges of corruption in the purchase and redistribution process of the land reform program keep crowding Manila's press headlines.⁵⁵ Whatever else the advent of Aquino may have been, the traditional, Marcos era and pre-Marcos Philippine political culture, and the power of its established landed-, business- and political elites, are alive and well - along with their private armies.

It remains briefly to note the antecedents of the AFP-sanctioned paramilitary organizations, the second major division within the now existing constellation of Philippine armed groups noted above (see opening paragraph of section IX). As indicated earlier, CAFGU and CVO are the current manifestations of this particular para-military category. In the Marcos era it was the CHDF, originally founded in 1974. The CHDF, originally projected at a maximum of 10,000 members, already by 1980 had grown to an estimated 70,000. The casualness of forming and disbanding CHDF units, depending on local powerbrokers' whims, and poor supervision generally, has made it impossible to get an accurate accounting of CHDF strength and organization.

In forming the CHDF, Marcos drew on two models. One was the relatively successful Philippine counter-insurgency experience during the late nineteen-forties and 'fifties, when with US aid, a network of local para-mili-

55 José P. Cortez, "A Crisis in Social Justice," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 23, 1989, p. 8; see also Steven Erlanger, "In the Philippines, Criticism of Aquino's Record Is Growing Louder," *International Herald Tribune* (Hong Kong), July 3, 1989, p. 4.

tary auxiliaries and civilian guard units had been created in the barrios (villages) during the struggle against the Communist Hukbalahap movement. In the later sixties, the Philippines became one of the few Asian nations to commit its forces on the side of the US in the Vietnam war. A similar, civilian village defense structure, developed in Vietnam by US counter-insurgency specialists, further impressed itself on Marcos, precisely at the time that a re-constituted Philippine Communist party began mobilizing a systematic guerilla campaign with its "New People's Army."⁵⁶

A second model was already described existing tradition of Philippine private armies maintained by powerful local élites. This tradition well suited Marcos as he developed his own power base in the provinces, granting business monopolies to and confirming the powers of patronage of his followers, thus further strengthening his own system of political satrapies that undergirded his regime for two decades. But in essentially turning the development of officially sanctioned para-military auxiliaries over to local powerbrokers and to their AFP associates in the provincial and regional commands, the Marcos system also encouraged a proliferation of free-wheeling, "spin-off" armed bands, charged with special missions of counter-insurgency by local AFP commanders.

Thus a bewildering variety of counter-insurgency "strike units," "patrols" and "task forces" began operating in the course of the nineteen-seventies and early eighties, particularly in the NPA-invested Bicol region of southeastern Luzon, in Negros, Samar and Mindanao. Special LRP ("Long Range Patrol" groups) developed by local Constabulary quickly made themselves notorious as early as 1976. Shortly afterwards, the AFP's Eleventh Infantry Battalion in Negros Oriental province spawned its own private counter-insurgency units, called KADRE (*Kalyaan Demokrasya Ug Repoma* - "Freedom, Democracy and Reform"). KADRE, in subsequent years, increasingly drew the ire of human rights organizations in the Philippines and abroad because of its campaign of terror among local civilians. Sometimes the AFP turned an already existing armed band to its own purposes. For example, the 125th Philippine Airborne Company, stationed in Pagadian City during 1980-81, transformed what was originally a minor charismatic religious band called "Rock Christ" into a feared, wide roaming anti-NPA death squad. "Rock Christ" soon became odious in Misamis Occidental and in the two Zamboanga provinces, as it maimed, killed, or "disappeared" suspected Communists and sympathizers. The group's curious mixture of primitive Christian soteriology, whipped to a fanatic, crusading anti-Communist zeal during rock music rituals

56 Justus M. van der Kroef, *Communism in Southeast Asia* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1981), pp. 88-94.

of "dedication," seemed to add to its awesome aura among the local populace.⁵⁷

As has been apparent in other vigilante groups, the pop-culture world of rock music, its lyrics and messages, became a powerful and distinctive ingredient in the Philippine "Rambo mystique" - ready to be tapped by AFP and Integrated National Police units in mobilizing their counter-insurgency campaign. Despite the current disavowals and denunciations by Aquino government officials and human rights critics of "Rock Christ" and other paramilitary and CHDF units in the Marcos era, the fact remains that the CAFGU, CVO and their para-military satellites and freewheeling vigilante allies today (e.g. El LibreCom, Alsa Masa, MalCom, and others noted above) are tapping into the same vein.

X. Internal Relationships of the Vigilantes

The vigilante groups and private armies noted in section IX above vary in size from about fifty ("The Night Watch" - a secretive, much feared, neighborhood vigilante guard group in the Tondo district's waterfront slums of Manila) to four thousand (the *Barracudas* - a private army of the powerful Dimaporo brothers in Lanao del Sur province). Discipline varies greatly: the *Tadtad* has been known to insist on lengthy probationary periods, with grueling (and greusome) tests of endurance and character strength for the neophyte, and merciless treatment for those who breach commands or codes of conduct. In other vigilante organizations, discipline is or eventually becomes much more lax. Some vigilantes, living off the fringes of criminal racketeering in or near the larger cities, or in such NPA infested areas as Bicol, tend to alternate their claims of membership in different organizations to suit the occasion.

Critical to participation in vigilante groups is not just pay (which for "converted" CHDF units in the employ of Negros sugar barons and now identified as affiliated with CAFGU may amount to 300 Pesos a month and up), but also (1) entry into a rewarding web of Patronage relationships and opportunities, and (2) a sense of protection and group identification - compellingly important for the increasing horde of un- or underemployed, pauperized drifters seeking to survive in an economy which, while growing again, is just

57 *Human Rights Violations in the Philippines. An Account of Torture, "Disappearances," Extra-Judicial Executions, and Illegal Detention* (New York, Amnesty International, 1983), pp. 16, 18-19; and *Ang Pahayangang Malaya* (Manila), June 8, 1986, p. 16. In this paragraph I also have relied on informants within the intelligence community of the AFP.

not growing fast enough to accommodate an even more rapidly expanding population.

The web of vigilante structured relationships is suffused with traditional Philippine values of reciprocity and mutual benefit (called *utang na loob*). Service, even in the cause of a national anti-Communist counter-insurgency crusade, expects to be rewarded: e.g. (a) by getting a job on the estate or in the business to which the vigilante leaders themselves, or by virtue of their respective *utang na loob* connections, have access through even more influential local power brokers or military commanders; (b) by grants of cash or other benefits in time of illness or family emergency (cf. note 42 *supra*); or by (c) the opportunity for advantageous marriages and extending one's kin support group system - essential to a secure old age in a country without social security or similar services for the elderly. One passes by in silence the opportunities opened by extortion and other criminal malversations which early on made the vigilantes a target of human rights critics.

Most vigilantes are "partimers." Hunting the NPA guerrillas in the hills, or pursuing NPA recruiters, "liberation social workers" or the feared NPA "Sparrow" death squads, through the slums of Davao or the streets of Manila, or (for AFP affiliates) undergoing instruction in the use of firearms or in understanding the aims of Philippine Communism - all these essentially have an avocational - if potentially highly profitable - character. Not the least of the reasons for the launching of the CVO and CAFGU was and is to provide more organization and discipline among the melée of para-military support groups in the nation's counter-insurgency effort. Success in this area is elusive. CAFGU units in many areas and in their original stages of growth, indeed have been trained, and commanded by AFP personnel. But the overall CAFGU command structure under the AFP still awaits completion, and development of local AFP supervision and training programs is incomplete, in part because of budgetary restraints. As a result, the tendency for individual CAFGU units to fall into the free-wheeling ways of their CHDF predecessors, and begin "living off the land" as they create their own financing and support systems, also has become quite evident.

The lack of discipline among vigilantes and para-military units makes criticism of them easy and raises as well legitimate questions about their effectiveness in the whole national Philippine counter-insurgency strategy. But there is another side to the coin. The ill-controlled, fluid, indeed seemingly near-chaotic character of the vigilantes and para-military in a curious way seems well attuned to the Philippine political culture and national life with their absence of strong and effective central institutions of governance, and their diffusion of loyalties over many separate small groups and interests. In

their reach for power, the Communist Party of the Philippines and its NPA have faced an identical problem of establishing strong integrative leadership and uniform strategy: as one American observer, long experienced in Filipino affairs put it to the author in mid-1989: "The messiness of the vigilantes is a mirror image of the messiness of the NPA."

The current official Philippine counter-insurgency strategy is that of "low intensity conflict," (*supra*, p. 15) i.e. containing Communist guerrilla activity within manageable bounds, as citizens' loyalties, meanwhile, are won, so it is hoped, by sustained long-term national and local development programs.⁵⁸ NPA tactics, meanwhile, are focussed on keeping up the pressure on the AFP and the government through relentless "People's War," including never ending, guerrilla and terrorist attacks at random locations throughout the country, debilitating the economy, demoralizing the citizenry, and developing a political united front of sympathizers. Both the vigilantes and the NPA are engaged in a "protracted war," in which great variation in unit operations and constant adaptation to local conditions is key- not uniformity, standardization of tactical strikes or even discipline.

The broader problem with such a strategy is that it essentially leads to a kind of military stalemate, leaving the real battles to be won in the economic and political arenas. And it is far from certain that in those arenas the Aquino government and her hopefully democratically elected successor regimes, necessarily would prevail. Even staunch supporters of Aquino and her "people's power" revolution now have begun to turn against her, charging, as Aquino's onetime press secretary and confidant Teodoro Benigno did recently, that economic growth since the overthrow of Marcos has "hardly trickled down to the masses" and that the President seems "unable to rise to the occasion" of the widening loss of public confidence in her policies.⁵⁹

In that crisis of public confidence a central issue may well turn out to be the questionable reputation of the very structures and institutions that have been created to confront the Communist insurgency. For example, of the depredations of the vigilantes many Filipinos - often to their personal cost - are well aware. But what is one to think of the revelation in June, 1989, by the Philippine Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Genreal Renato de Villa, that "close to 1,000 military officers and men were dismissed from the service last year for their involvement in criminal and other illegal activities" (the regular AFP numbers only 105,000).⁶⁰

58 Walden Bello, *Creating the Third Force: U.S. Sponsored Low Intensity Conflict in the Philippines* (Institute for Food and Development Policy, San Francisco, 1987).

59 *The Philippine Daily Star* (Manila), June 26-27, 1989, p. 1.

60 *The Manila Chronicle*, June 23, 1989, p. 3.

To be sure: vigilante and para-military units do actively participate with the AFP in confronting the NPA insurgents. In mid-1989, for example, one could read - to pick at random from press reports - that "CAFGU vigilantes" (*sic*) in Samar, together with AFP Rangers had demolished three NPA encampments in Samar. At the same time, two "mobile" CVO units were being organized with the aid of the AFP to counter the Communists' "National Democratic Front" recruiters in barrios in Lanao del Sur, and both Alsa Masa and their spin-off rivals, the so-called "Contra Force" vigilantes, had made a truce in Davao at the insistence of local AFP commanders in order to concentrate on combatting the NPA. But in the Philippine public mind, the question may well arise whether the problem of vigilante criminality will not inevitably aggravate a similar problem in the AFP, to the detriment of counter-insurgency strategy. It also can be small comfort to those who wish that counter-insurgency strategy well, that the NPA has demonstrated a ferocity and cruelty from time to time that has caused them to be likened to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.⁶¹ To the Philippine villager or worker, there can often be little to choose from between the methods of the Communists and those of their vigilante and AFP opponents.

XI. Conclusion: the Limits of Control

Perhaps the major reasons for the Aquino government's failure to give its counter-insurgency effort a better image is its lack of control over para-military operations and its own inconsistency in policy toward the para-military. The dispersed archipelagic character of the country, aggravated by poor roads and other communications problems in the outlying provinces, render supervision by the AFP and the "Peace and Order Council" system (see p. 3) very difficult. Moreover, the 200 or so vigilante organizations are not evenly distributed throughout the country. In early November, 1989, Major General Ramon Montanao, Chief of the Philippine Constabulary (or the "Integrated National Police," as it is now called), an AFP arm, said that currently Central Mindanao had the largest number of "private armies," namely 65, while Western Mindanao was next, with 37.⁶² The greatest concentration of Philippine vigilante groups today indeed appear to be on Mindanao and adjacent southern islands (together long popularly considered

61 Ross H. Munroe, "The New Khmer Rouge," *Commentary* (New York), December, 1985, pp. 19-38.

62 *The Philippine Daily Globe* (Manila), November 7, 1989, p. 1 (FBIS, DR/EAS, November 9, 1989, p. 48).

to be the Philippines' version of America's "Wild West"). But from the author's interviews and observations in the past two years, the sugar producing area of the island of Negros, and, on the island of Luzon, the NPA-infested Bicol region in the southeast, the greater Metropolitan Manila area, and, finally, the Cordillera Mountain ranges in the north central part, follow closely behind.

Allocating adequate resources of command and control over the para-military complex also becomes more difficult when it is apparent that in some sections like Mindanao a number of vigilante groups, not unexpectedly, have made common cause with new, flourishing "crime syndicates." Some of the latter now are operating nationwide. Indeed by Montanoo's own admission some of the crime syndicates even "have military and police personnel as members,"⁶³ thus contributing further to the AFP command's difficulties in weeding out "scalawags" from vigilante and CAFGU ranks. The current climate favoring the vigilante system also has begun to attract soldiers-of-fortune from other countries: What to think of reports, for example, that British mercenaries now are training "private armies" raised by estate owners on Negros, in order to resist extortion and guerilla deprivations by the NPA in their areas?⁶⁴

Central Philippine authorities also seem unable to decide whether to limit or expand, use or not use the para-military system they have developed and now in fact have sought to legitimize. By the close of 1989, in both houses of the national Philippine Congress, there was sufficient distrust of CAFGU and questions about human rights violations and the constitutionality of the new para-military counter-insurgency apparatus to defeat requests by the Philippine Defense Department for an increase in funding for CAFGU. Yet, demands from local political leaders and business elites to expand CAFGU ranks has continued, and, if a crisis occurs, funds for the formation of yet another CAFGU unit somehow appear to be available. For example, the slaying by NPA guerrillas in late June, 1989, of several scores of United Church of Christ members in the small community of Sito Rano, in Davao del Sur province, drew international attention. Although members of this Church, because of their human rights concerns, earlier had aroused the ire of local AFP and para-military units, the Davao del Sur AFP commander promptly announced that "two companies" of CAFGU would be organized in order specially to protect the Sito Rano survivors.⁶⁵

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Malaya* (Manila), Sept. 11, 1989, p. 1.

65 *The Manila Chronicle*, June 30, 1989, p. 1, and July 1, 1989, p. 5 (FBIS, DR/EAS, June 30, 1989, p. 42, and July 3, 1989, p. 86).

When it comes to dealing with violence or its instruments President Aquino herself appears uncertain. On the one hand Aquino in mid-July, 1989, spoke out against a decision by the "Peace and Order Council" (cf. p. 3) to allow governors and mayors in NPA-infested areas to arm themselves. Echoing reservations voiced by Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos on the matter, Mrs. Aquino noted that the number of unregistered firearms in the Philippines so far was estimated at 500,000.⁶⁶ However, Aquino's own Secretary of Local Government, Luis Santos, advocated that governors and mayors be allowed to arm themselves. Most knowledgeable observers regarded Aquino's objection as moot, in any case. The pervasive pattern of (fully armed) "private armies" already in the employment of government, political, and business élites in the Philippines today hardly is likely to be affected by such a decree from Manila. When it was revealed, however, shortly afterwards, that members of the Philippine Congress had procured some 150 Israeli-made Uzi automatic firearms for their own protection, Aquino first ordered the weapons seized and destroyed, but then, after a Congressional outcry, rescinded her order.⁶⁷ Such vacillation is not likely to induce ordinary Filipino citizens, with or without "private army" or CVO-CAFGU affiliation, to register or to turn in their own unregistered firearms.

Whether the NPA insurgency can be contained, let alone defeated, and whether or not the para-military complex mobilized against it can be better controlled, in a sense is irrelevant to the persistence of the cultural force of the "Rambo mystique." That mystique is the confluence of historical experience with contemporary social and economic problems in the Philippines. At the same time there is no denying the value of the "Rambo mystique" to current counter-insurgency policy.

Not Marxism, Leninism, or Maoism, but the romanticized idea world of high adventure, valor and derring-do in its typical Philippine context (cf. again section VII *supra*) is more likely to provide an effective and integrating public sensibility. The "Rambo mystique" in the Philippines of which vigilantism is only one, if significant, manifestation, contributes to the building of a national anti-Communist public consensus. If, in the Maoist adage, the successful Communist guerrilla is like the fish that must swim in the waters of a supporting, surrounding village populace, so the effective "counter-guerrilla," in this case, must swim in the supporting perceptions and imagery which "the Rambo mystique" perpetuates.

66 *Philippine Daily Globe*, July 19, 1989, p. 1 (FBIS, DR/EAS, July 20, 1989, p. 63).

67 Far East Broadcasting Company, Manila, August 30, 1989 (FBIS, DR/EAS, August 31, 1989, p. 44).

Abbreviations

- ADVANCE - "Association of Democratic Vigilantes and Concerned Entrepreneurs"
- AFP - Armed Forces of the Philippines
- CAFGU - Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit
- CHDF - Civilian Home Defense Forces
- CPP - Communist Party of the Philippines
- CVFDO - Civilian Volunteer Defense Force Organization
- CVO - Civilian Volunteer Organizations
- El LibreCom - "The Liberation Command"
- MalCom - *Masa Laban sa Komunista* ("Anti-Communist Masses Power")
- NAD - National Alliance for Democracy
- NAKASAKA - *Nakahiusang Katawhan Alang sa Kalinaw* ("People United for Democracy")
- NPA - New People's Army
- SOT - Special Operations Team
- SWAT - Special Weapons And Tactics units