

Bullets and Bandages:

Public Health as a Tool of Engagement in the Philippines

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List of Acronyms

ACCORD	Army Concern on Community Organizing for Development
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
CAO	Civil Affairs Office
CARES	Community Assistance and Rural Empowerment through Social Services
CMO	Civil-military operation
EDCOR	Economic Development Corps
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
HMB	<i>Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan</i> [Army of National Liberation]
JUSMAG	Joint US Military Advisory Group
MBN	minimum basic needs
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement between the Philippine Army and three civilian agencies
MP	Military Police
MSOT	Modified Special Operations Team
NDA	National Democratic Front
NPA	New People's Army, military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines
PC	Philippine Constabulary
PKB	<i>Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas</i> [Philippine Communist Party]
PKM	<i>Pambansang Kaisahan ng Magbubukid</i> [National Peasants Union]
SouthCom	Southern Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines
SRA	Social Reform Agenda

Introduction

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) believes there are many ways to win a war. Militarily engaging the enemy through ground troops, naval forces, and air power has been, since the early 1950s, the AFP's usual *modus operandi*. The AFP, however, has long recognized that quashing the enemy through such means may “win the war but ultimately lose the battle.” After all, the conflicts between the AFP and the Muslims as well as the communists did not only take place in the battlefield. They were also played out in villages located close to the war zones.

The Muslim secessionist movement and the communist uprising in the Philippines which started in the early 1970s enlisted the sympathies, cooperation, and resources of civilians living in these villages. The villagers provided the rebels not only shelter and food but also transmitted any information on troop movements, encounters and skirmishes, and even rumors of surprise attacks and ambushes which the AFP intended to carry out. Much more, the villagers served as protective barriers, shielding the rebels from the onslaughts of the AFP and its paramilitary forces.

Thus, to win wars, whether of a secessionist or a communist nature, the AFP has decided to win over the “hearts and minds of the people” not only through bullets and bombs but through an anti-insurgency strategy with “civil-military operations” (CMOs) as part of its core. A crucial component of CMOs is the AFP's provision of public health services to villages which the AFP considers as the rebels' “areas of influence” and to villagers who, the AFP believes, constitute the rebels' “mass base”. These public health services include, among others, treatment of diseases and injuries, distribution of medicines, tooth extractions as well as drilling of water wells, construction of health centers, and building of latrines.

This paper discusses the uses of CMOs in three administrations under former presidents Ramon Magsaysay (1949-1957), Ferdinand Marcos (1966-1986), and Fidel Ramos (1992-1997) for three reasons:

- a) during their administrations that rebellions and uprisings had just started, were escalating, and had reached the point where outbreaks of violence and massive dislocation of peoples had occurred;
- b) the use of civil-military operations which started during Magsaysay's period went through a process of change during Marcos's and Ramos's administrations; and
- c) the different political contexts and the quality of leadership of each administration are discussed to show how these had influenced the nature of CMOs, and consequently, their effectiveness.

This paper further traces the historical roots of the AFP's CMOs, raises important issues such as the conditions under which CMOs are used; the assumptions underlying CMOs; their sustainability and selective coverage of services; and CMOs. More important, it shows that CMOs, despite the government rhetoric about contributing to the socio-economic and political development of the country, do not deal with the root causes of problems that sparked the conflicts. CMOs are concerned not so much with lowering mortality and morbidity rates or with improving living standards as with altering people's negative perceptions and capturing their loyalties.

CMOs then should not be a substitute for the longer-term and more comprehensive development efforts of civilian bureaucracies in national and local governments. Unless national and local governments respond to problems as deep as poverty and other painful inequities; and unless the AFP strictly adheres to its commitment to respect human rights, the prospects of CMOs successfully "winning people's hearts and minds" may not be as bright as expected.

I Countering insurgency: from psychological warfare to civic action

CMOs are a set of activities designed to gain the support of people in areas which have become zones of conflicts. The overall goal is to gain the allegiances of townspeople and villagers who otherwise would have been persuaded to support rebel groups. In doing so, the rebels' or insurgents' influence would diminish, their mass base eroded, and the chances of them winning the war reduced.

There are three phases of insurgency and for each phase, diverse forms of CMOs are applied.

In *Phase I, Latent and Incipient Insurgency*, subversive activity may present as a potential threat or may occur frequently in organized pattern. There is, however, no major outbreaks of violence which the host country cannot control. During this phase, CMOs contribute to the development process of the community with the intent of providing tangible benefits which people can associate with the incumbent government. Erecting physical infrastructure such as health centers, roads, and artesian wells and organizing regular medical missions as well as providing health education and literacy sessions, for instance, figure prominently during this stage.¹

CMOs' activities in Phase I are longer-term, usually a year, and take on a more permanent fixture or a more regular routine than Phases I and II. They lay the groundwork for quick-impact CMOs that need to be carried out in Phases I and II, if necessary. Thus, the more positive the effects of the activities are in Phase I, the more effective and successful the implementation of CMOs are in Phases II and III.

In *Phase II, Organized Guerrilla Warfare*, the subversive movement, having gained sufficient local or external support, initiates organized guerrilla warfare or related forms of violence against the established authority. Phase II escalates to *Phase III, War of Movement*, when insurgency becomes primarily a war of movement between organized forces of the insurgents and those of established government.²

In Phases II and III, as the situation is deteriorating and violent conflict has begun, the main objective of CMOs is to prevent its further escalation. CMOs then constitute immediate, shorter-term projects but they are still

“designed to show the populace that the government (and its army) is trying to help the people even while it is busy fighting the insurgents.”³

CMOs, by virtue of their nature, deal with perceptions -- transforming negative perceptions to polishing positive images till they acquire a brilliant shine and reinforcing these until such images are etched in the minds and imaginations of people.

Major contributions to CMOs have come from the fields of public health and engineering as these disciplines yield immediate, highly visible, and dramatic results. Construction of feeder roads and Bailey bridges, building of school houses and health centers, digging of water wells and draining of swamps, treatment of injuries and dispensing of medicines are high-impact activities which directly and indirectly affect people's lives and well-being.

Anything that stops chills and lowers fevers, rehydrates infants and revives them, contains hemorrhages and resuscitates moribund patients, or anything that eases pain and saves lives is received with gratitude. Likewise, any effort which multiplies people's harvests, brings water and electricity to their homes, and adds more food to their plates, or any effort that carries them through life's long haul is much appreciated, without any consideration of whatever motives may lurk behind such good deeds.

Never mind who did all these or under which ideology these were performed. In the middle of misery and dire conditions, what matters is that people have overcome difficult situations or life-threatening crises because men, either from the AFP or rebels from the Muslim and communist groups, gave them the assistance they desperately needed. If these men happen to come from the ranks of the AFP, then it is to them that the people's loyalties go. If they happen to be Muslims or communists, then the people's gratitude and sympathies belong to them.

Whoever therefore wins the “hearts and minds of the people” through such acts of “compassion” wins the war. Or so, the logic goes. But things are not that simple. Other factors apart from gratitude and appreciation come into play. Factors such as the nature of the political regime, leadership of the country, professionalism of the military, integrity and efficiency or inefficiency of civilian bureaucracies, prevailing socio-economic circumstances, level of

political and economic participation of people, nature of rebel groups and the causes they claim they are fighting for, are, for the longer term, far more critical than lifting the masses out of their deplorable conditions through CMOs.

CMOs conducted under a repressive regime and presided over by a dictator like Ferdinand Marcos, for instance, would hardly succeed in gaining the support and trust of the people. Similarly, CMOs carried out in the midst of an economic slump would not win people over. Pacification efforts such as CMOs are short-term quick fixes that may capture people's loyalties, for now. But it takes more to secure those loyalties, and much, much more to bind their hearts.

The military's badge of dishonor

Filipinos remember the AFP's checkered past. While the AFP has contributed positively and substantially to the control and management of natural disasters, it has not done as much in complex political emergencies.

When typhoons and floods come, or volcanoes erupt, or landslides bury villages and block roads; and when earthquakes bring buildings and bridges down, the AFP can be counted on to get to these devastated areas immediately and to organize mercy missions, search-and-rescue operations effectively. With their organization, training, equipment, and supplies, they have evacuated people to safer places, provided emergency medical treatment, distributed food and clothing, and in the process, saved hundreds and thousands of lives.

From 1973 to 1978, for instance, the AFP extended assistance to some 246,000 people, distributed some 19,000 boxes of medicines, 664,000 boxes of food and relief goods, 3,900 sacks of rice.⁴ This is no mean feat.

In complex political emergencies, however, the AFP's track record is not that pure. Dark, huge blots representing military abuses and atrocities mark its almost 65 years of existence.

As early as 1946, under Manuel Roxas's presidency, the government's strategy to prevent the further expansion of the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB) or Army of National Liberation and its political party, the Soviet-inspired *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (PKP) or Philippine Communist Party was the use of force. The Philippine Constabulary (PC), Military Police (MPs),

and civilian guards intimidated, arrested, and killed suspected HMBs and their supporters. One tactic used by the Skull Squadrons or “Nenita” under the command of the PC was to cordon off areas and anybody found within the cordon was an enemy. Many in the cordon were civilians but this did not deter the PC from arresting, torturing, and killing them. Military ambushes and raids of entire villages to flush out the Huks, as members of the HMB were called, became commonplace.

Military repression was so widespread and oppressive that the *Pambansang Kaisahan ng Magbubukid* (PKM) or National Peasants Union sent President Roxas a letter of protest on June 10, 1946. The PKM letter said that in two months alone after his (Roxas) presidency, Military Police and civilian guards had killed more than five hundred peasants and peasant leaders. Three times that number had been imprisoned, tortured, or were missing.⁵ In December 1947, a Filipino congressman denounced President Roxas’s iron fist policy towards the Huks and called it a “policy of madness” motivated “by a spirit of revenge.”⁶ On February 9, 1948, a municipal council even went so far as to pass a resolution detailing and condemning the “arbitrary acts” and abuses of the PC.⁷

This continued until Ramon Magsaysay assumed the post of Secretary of National Defense. The heavy hand of repression forced people to believe that there was no other alternative but to join an armed struggle. Under the guidance of his US military advisers, particularly Lt. Col. Edward G. Lansdale, Magsaysay drastically reformed, re-oriented, and re-trained the military.

But these moments in the AFP’s history as well as the country’s are difficult to eradicate from a people’s collective memory. This is not to suggest that the Huks were not above resorting to violence, too. As one of the leaders of the Huks said, they committed “mistakes against the people”. They ambushed PC patrols and civilian guards, hijacked trucks and cars, robbed civilians of their money and property, and even their own commanders decried their comrades’ “unnecessary abusiveness”. Yet, villagers and townspeople during those times preferred to support and cooperate with the Huks rather than with the military.⁸

Such memories live long and they are re-lived once again as the country, this time under Ferdinand Marcos's rule, was confronted by similar events -- different circumstances but the same repression handled through the usual application of violence and force.

Almost twelve years after the Huks surrendered, the Marcos government had to deal with another communist insurgency and a Muslim secessionist war. For the communists, Muslims, and most of the Filipinos, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have come to symbolize the perpetrators of repression and violence of the Marcos era.

The response of Marcos's AFP to the communist threat was the deployment of military troops to Mindanao, Northern Luzon, and to some provinces of the Visayas. Arrests, seizures, and detention of civilians without due process of law; tortures and "salvagings" or arbitrary killings of civilians on the slightest suspicion that they might be supporters of the communists; hamletting or the cordoning off of villages suspected of coddling communist rebels made the AFP one of the most feared and loathed institutions of the Marcos regime.

Marcos had essentially the same response to the Muslim rebellion in Mindanao. The memories of the AFP during those years are much too deeply embedded in the Muslim consciousness for an easy and painless excision. The 1968 Jabidah massacre where the military killed between 28 to 64 young Muslim recruits; the June 1971 Manili massacre where the *Ilagas* (Rats), an AFP-supported vigilante christian group, brutally murdered 61 unarmed Muslim men, women, and children gathered in a mosque; and the November 1971 ambush of 35 Muslims by the military at an army checkpoint and then hacked to death by the *Ilagas* have been engraved in the Muslim collective memory.

Since then, memories of this gruesome sort have haunted the Muslims. For them, as well as for the rest of the country, the AFP was full of men who arrested and jailed suspected "leftists", men who tortured, maimed, and killed political prisoners, and raped the women among them. They were men who helped sustain that long, desolate, and agonizing stretch of curtailed freedoms, suppressed dissent, and suspended lives. Together with their commander-in-

chief, Ferdinand E. Marcos, they wrote some of the darkest pages in the country's history. And to this day, the military's badge of dishonor continues to hang heavy on the public's mind.

II Events surrounding the birth of CMOs: a historical background

The history of CMOs in the Philippines is inevitably linked with the history of US post-colonial rule.

After almost 50 years of US colonial rule, the US granted the Philippines its independence on July 4, 1946. The US, however, continued to exert control over the country's governance through the approval of laws which secured US economic, military, and political interests in the Philippines as well as in the Region. To serve these purposes, the US pushed for the passage of these laws immediately after independence:

- a) the 1946 Military Bases Agreement which allowed the establishment of US military bases in the country, rent-free, for 99 years and renewable on expiration;
- b) the 1946 Military Assistance Pact which provided that the US supply the Philippine military arms, ammunition and supplies, train Philippine military personnel and send Filipino officers to US military schools. The Military Assistance Pact called for the creation of a Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG), paid for by the Philippine government, to advise the Philippine Army, Constabulary, Air Force, Navy, and Intelligence Services; and
- c) the Bell Trade Act of 1947 which ensured "free trade" between both countries although Philippine sugar, coconut oil, tobacco, and cordage were subjected to quotas while American goods entered the Philippines without any restrictions. More important, the Bell Trade Act provided that the Philippines grant US citizens and corporations the same rights as Filipinos in the exploitation of natural resources.⁹

The Military Bases Agreement and the Military Assistance Pact supported the continued presence of the US in the Philippines. From the Philippines, the US projected itself as a powerful check against the spread of Communism in the Region. The victory of Mao Tse Tung's Chinese Revolution in 1949; the Korean War from 1950-1953; the victory of Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap and the surrender of the French Union Force in Dien Bien Phu in 1954; and the Philippines's *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (HMB) or Army of National

Liberation which was successfully attracting peasants and expanding its networks in different parts of the country in the late 1940s were major concerns of the US in the Region.

The Bell Trade Act of 1947, on the other hand, did not benefit the Philippines as much as it did the US.¹⁰ Its adverse economic effects -- inflation, unemployment, dwindling foreign exchange, and a balance of payments deficits -- pushed the country into financial and economic crisis. This was exacerbated by corruption and graft at all levels of government. The disillusionment and discontentment over the disparity of wealth and legal entitlements which existed not only among Filipinos but also between Americans and Filipinos made Filipino peasants, workers, labor unions, and intellectuals seriously consider armed struggle as an alternative to parliamentary struggle.

As historian Renato Constantino wrote:

The year 1949 ended with portents of a major crisis for the country....The country was faced with a grave economic and financial crisis arising from the American-imposed policies adopted after the reoccupation and exacerbated by corruption in high places and an orgy of spending by the government, the elite, and the nouveau riches....Because of the economic crisis and the rapidly growing strength of the HMB, American strategic planners considered the Philippines as the weakest link in their Asian offshore island chain of defense.¹¹

It was during these turbulent times that CMOs started.

III Magsaysay's psywars: CMOs as public relations

As soon as Magsaysay was appointed Defense Secretary, he worked closely with JUSMAG's chief, General Hobbs and Lt. Col. Edward G. Lansdale, a JUSMAG military adviser and chief of CIA's Office of Policy Coordination in the Philippines. Later on, Lansdale became one of Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay's most influential adviser. Under their guidance, Magsaysay developed a two-pronged approach to the Huk rebellion: a) to engage the Huks militarily in a more organized and efficient way; and b) to show the disaffected populace that the government has their interests in mind and that the Armed Forces can be trusted to protect and take care of them.

With the help of JUSMAG, Magsaysay reorganized the Army by merging the Armed Forces and Philippine Constabulary under the unified command of the Chief of Staff; organized Battalion Combat Teams composed of 1170 soldiers, about 13 times more men than the old anti-Huk units; courtmartialled those who were guilty of abuses; dismissed those whose conduct was found dishonorable; and promoted officers and enlisted men.¹² Equipment, arms, and supplies came in from the US in 1951, quadrupling the amount of military assistance received in 1950.¹³

Together with Lansdale, Magsaysay established the Office of Psychological Warfare which later was renamed Civil Affairs Office (CAO) headed by Jose Crisol. This was the focal point of civil-military operations (CMOs), the center which designed strategies using civic action "primarily as a weapon to counteract the engulfing Huk menace which threatened the political stability of the nation."¹⁴ The insurgency had entered Phase II, Organized Guerilla Warfare, and the CAO immediately seized the initiative.

Military troops went on medical missions and provided emergency treatment and care and distributed relief goods to civilians caught in the crossfire of combat. They built temporary bridges and roads linking civilians to military camps which had become distributing points for medical and food supplies. They also constructed makeshift school houses and drilled water wells in villages which the military declared free from the influence of the Huks. In these villages which were spread in the plains of Central Luzon, the troops

escorted agricultural teams to assist peasants improve the quality of their crops and increase the yield of their farms. They constructed irrigation canals, established credit facilities for farmers, helped them market their produce, and even brought in lawyers to settle land disputes between them and their landlords.

But one of the most highlighted programs was Magsaysay's Economic Development Corps (EDCOR), a project which used and revolved around the Huks' slogan – land for the landless. Through EDCOR, Magsaysay offered homestead lands located in Mindanao to Huks who surrendered. Within these homesteads, communities were organized and little villages were formed. Schools, health centers, churches, and even tennis courts were built.

The civic action programs continued even when Magsaysay became president of the country in 1953. He was an immensely popular president and he projected himself as a “man of the masses”, opening his offices to the peasants and the poor, walking with them on rice paddies, and offering them hope that their lives would soon turn around for the better. And in 1955, most of the rank-and-file Huks surrendered, many of their leaders gave up, though many more were arrested and killed.

A combination of factors led to the decline of the Huk movement in the mid-50s. Peasants formed the backbone of the Huk movement in Central Luzon, the main zone of conflict between the Huks and the government. They claimed it was Magsaysay who as defense secretary (1950-1953) and later as president (1953-1957) made them believe that conditions would improve. Magsaysay immediately demonstrated to the disaffected populace that he had professionalized and disciplined the military and that the government was working to make life better for them. Even Huk leaders observed that as soon as Magsaysay reformed the military, abuses were curtailed, repression was eased, and there was an intensification of delivery of basic services in health, sanitation, and agriculture. Although promised reforms and programs were partially fulfilled and implemented, many Huk followers believed these would continue and they no longer found any reason to pursue their armed struggle. They left the movement.

Besides a more disciplined military force and a populist and well-loved president, peasants and other villagers and townspeople remembered the rural projects in Central Luzon. These included the health clinics, “liberty” water wells, agricultural extension services, bridges and roads, and agrarian courts which settled grievances between tenants and landlords.

These projects were, as CAO head Jose Crisol admitted to Benedict J. Kerkvliet, a social scientist doing research on the Huks at that time, aimed at the “soft core” of the Huk movement, those who were not “hard-core communists or Huk leaders, but rather the lower levels of the movement and the mass base.”¹⁵ Crisol further admitted to Kerkvliet that these projects were not effective as they were “very small compared to the total agrarian problems” but they were “effective for the method in which they were publicized and advertised.” Crisol said that these projects “gave people hope that the government could do things for them, which they were trying to get by violence and at the risk of their lives.”¹⁶

Similarly, the EDCOR program resettled only 950 families in Mindanao. Out of these, only 246 families were in the Huk movement and the others were retired military personnel and poor tenants. The EDCOR, as a land for the landless program, had a negligible impact on the number of tenant farmers or Huks in Central Luzon. But as a tool of psychological warfare, it was a great success for Magsaysay and the government. It was the most publicized government program with films, leaflets, posters, and newspapers which showed Magsaysay accompanying the first Huk families to Mindanao and which depicted large tracts of lands and new opportunities open to anyone who would take them.¹⁷ It also co-opted the idea of “land for the landless” from the Huks and showed the people that government could do much more than the Huks had been able to.¹⁸

Civic action and psychological warfare substantially contributed to quelling the Huk rebellion. These civic action programs were able to undercut support for the Huks which effectively isolated the Huk leaders from the peasants who fed and sheltered them. As Luis Taruc, one of the top Huk leaders, said, “The Huks can only hold out as long as it is supported by the masses. No more, no less.”¹⁹

IV Marcos's force and repression bred violence

Three presidents later and almost thirteen years after the Huks surrendered to the government, President Ferdinand E. Marcos had to deal with two ideologically separate insurgencies that happened almost simultaneously. This was in the late 1960s.

One was organized by the Maoist-oriented Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), and the National Democratic Front (NDF) which was gaining strength in Northern Luzon, some provinces of Bicol and the Visayas, and Mindanao; and the other was the Moro National Liberation Front's (MNLF) war of secession localized in the western part of Mindanao.

The CPP-NPA-NDF, led by a group of university instructors and students in Manila, infiltrated and recruited members from organizations as varied as labor unions, universities, farmers, and church groups not only in the urban areas but also in the country side. They argued that the deteriorating economic conditions, state of inequitable land ownership, and deepening poverty were due to the exploitative policies imposed and encouraged by the US in close collaboration with the Philippine government and its elites. They showed that the corruption and graft in Marcos's government was so pervasive it had seeped all the way from Marcos, his family and cronies, to the lowest ranking government employee, police officer, and soldier.

The disparities in economic and political opportunities and wealth were so marked that the CPP-NPA-NDF did not have a difficult time convincing the populace that it was fruitless to change things through government institutions such as Congress and the Supreme Court. The only alternative the CPP-NPA-NDF offered was armed struggle.

On the other hand, the MNLF was spearheaded by Muslim intellectuals who recruited Muslims from Mindanao to unite and fight against the Marcos dictatorship and the increasing militarization of Mindanao. MNLF leaders pointed out to their followers that their war was simply a continuation of the Islamic struggle against centuries of discrimination, exploitation, and

oppression by the Spanish and US colonial governments and by the christian Filipino national government which took over the reins from the US in 1946.

Structural causes of the MNLF war were attributed to the Muslims' marginalization, politically and economically, through: a) a series of laws passed during the mid-1930s, early 1950s, and 1970s which systematically robbed the Muslims of their lands; b) a deep-seated and widespread discrimination which made it difficult for Muslims to gain political representation in national policymaking bodies such as the Congress and the different departments of the Cabinet; and c) inequitable distribution of national resources, i.e., government budgets and the necessary infrastructure that made it difficult for Muslim political leaders to deliver basic social services to their constituents.

Before he declared martial law in 1972, Marcos pushed Congress to approve a 38 per cent increase in the budget of the AFP. He intended to expand his troop base and to modernize the AFP through the acquisition of equipment and weapons. As soon as he declared martial law, however, Marcos abrogated all powers of Congress and conferred upon himself legislative, executive, as well as judicial powers. Without any check and balance mechanism, Marcos infused some 3.5 billion pesos into the AFP from 1973 to 1975. This was a 700 per cent increase in the AFP's pre-martial law budget.²⁰ The AFP also recruited several thousands more into their ranks swelling the number of regulars from 70,000 to 275,000, representing an increase of more than 300 per cent.²¹ Apart from this, Marcos appointed military officers to key civilian posts such as some of the government-owned and controlled corporations.

During Marcos's rule, the AFP became the most important state machinery in the country and it did not hesitate to exercise power at its rawest. Marcos dealt with the Muslim secessionist war and the communist insurgency primarily through militarization and secondarily through CMOs.

The AFP's home-defense program

In 1968, while the CPP-NPA-NDF and MNLF were gaining adherents and influence, Marcos appointed Jose Crisol, the Civil Affairs Office head during Magsaysay's time, as Presidential Assistant on Civic Action and later on, as Undersecretary of Home Defense. Crisol, in effect, became Marcos's personal

representative to supervise all civic action activities of the Armed Forces. This move not only reinforced the institutionalization of civil-military operations in the Armed Forces but made it one of Marcos's highest priorities in dealing with the insurgencies.

Having learned from his previous experience in civil affairs during the Huk rebellion, Crisol recognized that it was no longer sufficient to use the police powers of the state to curb subversion and that civil action activities were not tools of engagement which could be shelved aside once the rebels were subjugated. In one of his essays, Crisol wrote:

The nature of the country's internal threat, particularly insurgency and subversion, is that it cannot be permanently solved or even reduced to negligible proportions by the application of force alone. Sheer force would only address itself to the symptoms of the problem but would not reach deep enough to remove the causes.²²

In addition to the application of force, the AFP home-defense program which "provided complementary action to security operations while supporting national development programs" was created. The program, being noncombatant, was designed "to win the hearts and minds of the people, gain their support for the military, and persuade them to accept the military as partners in nation-building."²³

The home-defense program had seven major components: manpower, reserve-affairs administration and reserve-force development, civil-security force development; civil assistance; civil relations; mass-base operations; motivational enlightenment; and military economic development. Of these seven components, four -- the civil-security force development, civil assistance, civil relations, and mass-base operations -- were particularly relevant as they directly dealt with psywar operations and counterinsurgency while the rest focused on the training needs of enlisted men and officers as well as agro-industrial and engineering projects.

The *civil-security force development component* intended to generate the support and active participation of local citizens in the defense and security of their communities. This would then provide a link between the military and local population and in the process, develop an AFP mass base. Members of this force belonged to the armed civilian group and the unarmed group.

The armed group assists the AFP regulars in combat while the unarmed provides support to the civilian bureaucracies such as the Health, Social Services, and Public Works Departments as well as to the local Red Cross and other civic and religious organizations. Services include escorting health personnel, food and medical supplies to civilians in critical areas; providing direct medical services such as treatment of common injuries and diseases to civilians; and transporting patients from villages to hospitals.

The *civil assistance component* sought to “develop the people’s faith and confidence in the military as a friend and protector in time of calamities, disorders and emergencies and as a partner in national amelioration.”²⁴ Some of the activities included disaster relief and damage control; emergency civil support operations of public utilities which ensured that civilian bureaucracies were able to continue their operations and services; national development support which supported the tasks of civilian bureaucracies, particularly in medical and dental service, transport, and building of physical infrastructure; and resettlement, relocation, and rehabilitation operations.

The *civil relations component* included activities such as strategic psychological operations; consolidation of psychological operations; public information; and public assistance or civic action. In order “to neutralize antigovernment propaganda by insurgents”, military operations strategically focused on medical and dental needs and health education campaigns. Crisol’s data show that this component provided “medical-dental services to some 304,498 persons in the most critical and depressed areas of the country”; 6,185 medicine kits were distributed to indigent families; information drives on government social-amelioration programs were intensified through the distribution of some 3,011,855 leaflets.”²⁵

The *mass base operations component* was to enlist the cooperation of the people in insurgency-affected areas to support the military’s tactical operations. This component intended “to use the local populace to actively support military operations, whether in security operation, intelligence gathering or support services” as well as “to help improve the living conditions of the people in the affected areas” and “to cushion the adverse effects of military operations on the population by providing relief and rehabilitation to those affected.”²⁶

When CMOs did not succeed

In Mindanao, military operations and counterinsurgency measures were responsible for reducing the MNLF and its Bangsa Moro army forces from an estimated 16,900 to 14,000 in 1974. This was further reduced to 6,900 in 1976. Some 32,000 Muslim rebels surrendered and about 72 per cent of these returnees were integrated into the armed forces and the civilian home-defense force. Many were granted scholarships for special courses while others were provided technical and unskilled jobs.²⁷

Despite all this, however, the MNLF continued to engage the AFP in combat, though sporadically. It was in 1996, only after some 20 years, that the Philippine government and MNLF signed a peace agreement. And even after this agreement was signed, a breakaway group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which declared war against the Philippine government in 1987 has vowed to fight until the Muslims “enjoy their own freedom”.²⁸

On the other hand, counterinsurgency measures such as those described, together with the use of conventional weapons, were responsible for the capture of top leaders of the Communist Party in 1976. The CPP-NPA lost 10,421 combatants and government forces recovered 2,136 assorted firearms from the NPA. According to Crisol, the military’s civic action and socioeconomic programs decimated the NPA mass base of 65,000 in 1973 to 20,000 in 1978.²⁹

While the influence of the CPP-NPA-NDF has declined in the 90s, it was gaining influence and adherents throughout the countryside in the 80s. A study prepared by the US Senate on Foreign Relations Committee which analyzed the communist insurgency up to 1985 showed that the CPP was gaining strength because of, among others: a) the weakness of local government and local enforcement at the town; b) worsening living conditions in town, i.e., falling real incomes, unemployment, lack of medicines and medical care, and malnutrition; c) military abuses of civilians; d) political unpopularity of the Marcos government with key groups in the cities; and d) communist organizations skilled in penetrating the local levels and in establishing links with people in the villages.

Based on these findings, the study asserted that the Philippine government needed political and military leadership and resources which would contain the insurgency and the spread of communist political influence throughout the country. Among other things, it recommended that the AFP undergo training and retraining in counterinsurgency tactics and strategy; the AFP improve its conduct towards civilians; and that the Integrated Civilian Home Defense Forces be reconsidered.³⁰

Civil military operations (CMOs) under Marcos, however, did not succeed.

First, when Marcos declared martial law in 1972 close to the end of his second term, many Filipinos approved of this, even welcomed it. They believed this would put an end to student demonstrations, the escalating insurgencies, lawlessness in the rural areas, and rampant criminality in the cities. After a couple of years, however, most Filipinos denounced Marcos and martial law not only because Marcos secured himself and his family in power and ensured his easy and ready access to the national treasury but also because Marcos used martial law to suppress dissent and arrest and torture his political enemies. Due to the erosion of his legitimacy, Marcos was not considered the rightful leader of the country and he was no longer credible.

Marcos's leadership had lost its legitimacy as his continued stay in power was unconstitutional. To most Filipinos, Marcos simply usurped power. No amount of CMOs could do anything to salvage Marcos and his government.

Second, because Marcos needed to maintain his stay in power, he had to have the AFP solidly behind him. Marcos showered the military with favors in many ways. During the martial law years, Marcos increased the military budget and the AFP underwent a rapid expansion in size, authority, and perquisites. He appointed military officers to key posts in government corporations and ministries and in some parts of Mindanao, military officers were responsible for running local governments. Apart from this, Marcos promoted, assigned, and extended senior officers who were personally loyal to him and made sure that these officers occupied critical and significant posts.³¹

The politicization of the military had serious repercussions. It weakened the AFP's capability to perform its military missions, failed in its role to guarantee national security and independence, and demoralized a core of

competent and professional soldiers. Equally important, it undermined the AFP leadership, weakening the chain of command from the top to the lower levels. As a result of these, particularly the leadership failures, the AFP lacked direction and “unity of purpose, assumed a defensive orientation, and became undisciplined”.³²

The AFP’s relations with civilians were strained to breaking point not only because of corruption and greed but also because of gross violations of human rights principles and standards. Its response to the growing influence of the CPP-NPA-NDF in the late 70s and early 80s was the heavy militarization of many provinces in Mindanao, Northern Luzon, and some parts of the Visayas. The AFP saw anyone who had contacts with the NPA as part of the CPP-NPA-NDF organization which led to the arrests, torture, and “salvaging” [arbitrary killing] of large numbers of people with their bodies mutilated later on and dumped in ditches or along roads. Between 1977 and 1984, some 1,900 “salvagings” were document by human rights activists although such figures tend to be underreported for fear of AFP reprisals or failure to contact human rights organizations.³³

Militarization and military abuses succeeded in alienating themselves from the people they swore to protect and indeed were the major reasons why people who otherwise would not have joined the CPP-NPA-NDF became part of it. As long as the AFP bombed and “salvaged” people, the ranks of the CPP-NPA-NDF as well as the MNLF swelled.³⁴ All this made CMOs look irrelevant and worse, cosmetic.

Third, the economic situation in the country was deteriorating. Prices for coconut and sugarcane products, the country’s traditional exports, had dropped to all-time lows in the 1980s. In response to this situation, Marcos reorganized the milling and marketing of these crops which benefited only his cronies at the expense of the coconut farmers, other growers, workers, and millers.³⁵

Even prior to this, however, Marcos’s development strategy which rested on three pillars, i.e., the green revolution which intended to increase food production per unit land area; export agriculture and forestry; and massive foreign borrowing proved disastrous for the majority of Filipinos.³⁶ Gains from

the green revolution, agricultural and forestry exports, and foreign borrowing accrued disproportionately to the wealthiest strata of the population. The 1988 World Bank noted that the country “has one of the most unequal income distributions among middle-income countries” and in its 1985 report, it further observed that the Philippine income distribution was “closer to those of the Latin American countries than [to those of the] East Asian countries .”³⁷

Thus, during the Marcos years, poverty deepened, inequality widened, and most Filipinos did not have access to basic needs. The 1982 Food and Nutrition Research Institute Survey found that two-thirds of Philippine families consumed less than the recommended minimum daily intake and that one-third consumed less than 80 per cent of the recommended level.³⁸

A 1985 survey of the Philippine Nutritional Surveillance System found that 22 per cent were moderately to severely underweight, 14 per cent were wasted, and 25 per cent were stunted.³⁹ World Bank data during the Marcos regime showed that between 1970 and 1983, infant mortality increased from 54 to 59 per 1,000 in rural areas and from 45 to 55 per 1,000 in urban areas.⁴⁰

CMOs could not have arrested such income disparities or reversed the deterioration in living conditions. They were not intended to do these, despite the rhetorics on CMOs’ role in “nation-building” and “socio-economic development”.

Fourth, Marcos’s exploitation of public office for his private needs and for the benefit of his cronies and family, at the expense of the country, inspired the wrath of most Filipinos.

In Northern Luzon and Mindanao, for instance, to expand export crops such as bananas, pineapples, and sugarcane, the Marcos government gave favored Filipino and foreign corporations incentives to accumulate lands which were leased from small landowners at terms that were proved exploitative.⁴¹

Also in Northern Luzon and Mindanao, Marcos issued timber license agreements to reward supporters and friends and keep politicians under his patronage. A typical concession covered about 40,000 to 60,000 hectares but Marcos’s favored friends and family members would get more than 100,000 hectares.⁴² As a result, many uplanders, mostly tribal communities, were displaced.

Cronyism and such blatant misuse of power and misappropriation of resources in the midst of poverty turned the tide against Marcos and his entire government. In recruiting people to join them, the CPP-NPA-NDF as well as the MNLF exploited issues that revolved around military abuses, heavy build-up of troops, social injustice, the immorality of absolute power, and people's loss of entitlements even to basic needs.

Given these, CMOs were seen by its "target beneficiaries" as weak, pathetic attempts made by a government which had lost touch with its people.

V Cory's ARMM: too short for basic reforms

In 1986, Cardinal Sin, Manila's catholic archbishop, went on air and announced that some key military officers who were about to stage a coup against Marcos were holding out in their camps and needed people to support them. Millions of Filipinos gathered on EDSA, one of Manila's major thoroughfares, and acted as a human shield around the military camps. For three days, this massive human phalanx solidly stood on EDSA and Marcos's armed personnel carriers were not able to break through. AFP soldiers armed with M-16s and grenade launchers who wanted to disperse the millions did not succeed. They did not even come close to the camps. On the third day after this momentous demonstration of protest, Marcos and his family fled to Hawaii. The enormously popular Cory Aquino took over the reins of government and appointed General Fidel V. Ramos as AFP chief of staff.

After Cory's election as president of the country, the influence of the CPP-NPA-NDF started to decline. The communists campaigned against the elections and urged people to boycott this exercise. People saw the elections, however, as their only way to support Cory and put her in power. This call for the election boycott by the CPP and NDF and the NPA's increasing use of violence against vital communications installations, bridges, and roads as well as against people who refuse to pay their "taxes" contributed in large measure to the CPP-NPA-NDF decline. The people could not accept abuses, either from

the military or from the NPA. Although some of their networks were still operating in the rural areas, their political mass base substantially decreased.

This was a time of relative quiet, at least before the right-wing military coup-plotters attempted to unseat Cory, but it was definitely not a time of peace. Rumbblings of war could still be heard in Mindanao, not from the MNLF but from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front [MILF].

In 1987, the MILF, a splinter group of the MNLF, declared war against the Philippine government. It wanted to establish its own Islamic state. The five-day war it waged in 1987 was contained and an informal truce was established between the MILF and Cory's government.

With the MILF temporarily at bay, Cory was able to lay down the groundwork for peaceful negotiations with the MNLF. On August 1, 1989, Cory signed Republic Act No. 6734, The Organic Act of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, which she called "a blueprint for peace in Mindanao". A plebiscite was held after this act was passed to determine which of the Mindanao provinces would agree to be under the jurisdiction of ARMM. Of the thirteen provinces, only four voted for inclusion in the ARMM.

ARMM is the only region in the country with its own executive, legislative, and judicial branches. It does not have its own armed forces nor is it authorized to establish relations or enter into agreements with other countries.

After almost ten years since its creation, ARMM is a bloated and inept bureaucracy composed of 19,000 employees whose past governors have been charged with corruption and graft. It has been receiving huge amounts of money from the national government to help finance its operations. For 1997, ARMM received 3.2 billion pesos; for 1998, it received 4.3 billion pesos for 1998; and for 1999, 4.7 billion pesos. Official data from the National Census Office show that ARMM has the highest maternal mortality and infant mortality rates, the lowest life expectancy, the lowest functional literacy rates, and the lowest per capita income in the country.

ARMM has the highest population-to-firearm ration and the largest number of private armed groups in the country. In the mid-70s, one of ARMM's

provinces was even listed in the Fielding Worldwide Guide to “The World’s Most Dangerous Places”.⁴³

When Cory’s term expired in 1992, Fidel Ramos took over. He had to continue Cory’s work towards peaceful negotiations with the MNLF; he had to deal with the MILF’s offensives and the remaining vestiges of the CPP-NPA-NDF; and more crucially, he had to strengthen the democratic principles and processes in the country.

VI Ramos: making Mindanao the country’s “front door”

Filipinos living in the two major islands of the Philippines, Luzon and the Visayas, have looked at Mindanao, the richest and second largest island in the country, as the “backdoor of the Philippines”. Located in the southern part of the Philippines, Mindanao lies close to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. For centuries, Mindanao and its own little islands had established thriving and lucrative commercial and trading relations with their neighboring sultanates in what are now known as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. A long history of colonial rule – almost 400 years of Spanish colonization and 50 years of American rule -- and a series of laws altered these trade relations and slowly, Mindanao’s trade and commerce dwindled. Since the turn of the century, however, with strong support from the US colonial government, commerce and trade started to originate from and flourish in Manila.

Eventually, Mindanao, from the 1920s to this day, became an agricultural area where rice, pineapples, bananas, abaca, coconuts, corn, and other crops were planted, processed, and exported to Manila and other parts of the world. Since then, it has been called the country’s “food basket”.

But Mindanao seemed so far removed from Manila, the seat of power, and it was turning into a “backdoor” which was thriving in other ways. It became the site of illegal logging, the route of illegal migrants from Mindanao’s provinces to Sabah, Malaysia and Indonesia, and the haven of smugglers, pirates, and arms dealers.⁴⁴

As soon as Ramos became president in 1992, he declared that peace in Mindanao was going to be one of his top priorities. He also vowed to make

Mindanao more competitive in the global marketplace. Thus, in a meeting with other Association of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) leaders in October 1992, Ramos raised the idea of opening up the borders of ASEAN member states which are in geographic proximity to the Philippines. Ramos pursued this idea through a series of meetings and talks with the heads and Cabinet members of Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. After almost two years, a ministerial document was signed creating the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA), a subregional economic zone, which has as its principal objective the initiation and expansion of trade and commerce. It covers Mindanao and Palawan of the Philippines, Sabah, Labuan, and Sarawak in Malaysia, Brunei, and some islands of Indonesia.⁴⁵

To show how important EAGA was in his agenda and how crucial the role Mindanao would play in this subregional economic zone, Ramos, in most of his trips abroad, would make it a point to stop over in Mindanao before flying back to Manila. He made people from Luzon and the Visayas look at Mindanao as the country's "front door", a "legitimate entry point" through which investments would flow, trade would flourish, and commerce would thrive.⁴⁶ And the Muslims as well as the Christians in Mindanao welcomed this. They are aware of what EAGA means in terms of job and small-scale business opportunities. Muslims not with the MILF usually ask how they can involve themselves in EAGA and extract as much as they can from it.

So far, the Ramos administration has not made any operational plans to help the Muslims get into EAGA. Hashim Salamat, chairman of the MILF, admitted that EAGA may be beneficial to the Muslims if they have their own freedom. "If we are not under the [Philippine] government," Salamat said, "we will benefit from the EAGA."

Nobody knows whether EAGA will succeed or not, whether the Muslims will seize the opportunities in EAGA, and whether the present administration under President Joseph Estrada (1998 - 2004) will support the Muslims exploit these opportunities.

One thing is clear, however. EAGA is a breakthrough not only in economic terms but in reconnecting the Muslims of Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia with Mindanao. Muslims in Mindanao appreciate Ramos's effort to

re-establish ties as their cultural bonding with the Muslims in the neighboring countries somehow strengthens and nourishes their identity.

By spearheading the creation of EAGA, Ramos has demonstrated to the Muslims and the Christians in Mindanao that they will no longer be neglected by the national government. This idea was further reinforced when Ramos signed the peace agreement with Nur Misuari, chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996.

With the EAGA in operation and with the 1996 peace agreement still holding, the stage has been set for peace negotiations to take place between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Somehow, it has been expected that economic opportunities and political autonomy would provide a more favorable climate for peace to grow.⁴⁷ But this has not been the case. The MILF has been actively recruiting Muslim men to join its ranks. The AFP Southern Command (SouthCom) admits that the MILF rebels have increased. "This is not surprising," said Hadji Murad, MILF central committee member. "The people feel that their survival is through the struggle. They feel threatened – in all aspects of life -- and the MILF is their only hope."⁴⁸

The AFP as partner in development

Since Ramos assumed office, the AFP and the MILF have had several sporadic conflicts which left scores of MILF rebels and military soldiers wounded and killed and displaced thousands of civilians. The MILF called for a ceasefire in late 1997 which Ramos readily accepted.

Since then, the ceasefire has been tentative and the peace uncertain. There have been occasional skirmishes, killings, abductions, and bombings perpetuated by heretofore unknown elements but which have effectively undermined the ceasefire agreement between the MILF and the military.

In between these conflicts, however, the Ramos government has agreed to carry out some physical reconstruction work in Muslim Mindanao. Military engineers installed a power-generating solar system and built roads inside the main headquarters of the MILF in Abubakar, Cotabato. Beyond the perimeters of the camp, military engineers and construction workers completed roads linking Cotabato City with other nearby provinces.

Building roads and installing power systems constitute only one of the various activities which the Intelligence and Civil Military Operations [CMOs] of the AFP's Southern Command [SouthCom] regularly conducts. The SouthCom's CMOs have built on the experiences and lessons derived from the previous civic action programs which Ferdinand Marcos and Jose Crisol used in the campaigns against the CPP-NPA-NDF and MNLF.

Marcos's civic action programs were "developmental" in terms of providing rebel returnees as well as villagers training and livelihood programs in agriculture and forestry. While Marcos and his technocrats had development plans for the country, CMOs were intended to "contribute", "enhance", and "support" these plans. Operational details of CMOs' contribution or enhancement of the development plans or linkages between the AFP and the civilian bureaucracies were not spelled out. CMOs thus seemed as if they were a separate undertaking which was sporadic and reactive, going full blast only when the insurgencies were advancing or the AFP areas of responsibility cleared.

The SouthCom, on the other hand, has integrated its CMOs as part of President Ramos's Social Reform Agenda [SRA], a comprehensive set of anti-poverty interventions directed primarily towards, among others, farmers and landless agricultural workers, fishermen, and indigenous peoples in the poorest provinces of the country. The local government units are responsible for implementing these anti-poverty campaigns while the municipalities under them ensure that the poor meet their minimum basic needs [MBN].⁴⁹ The SouthCom's CMOs therefore are subsumed within a civilian plan and subject to civilian control.

The SouthCom's CMOs have three sequential programs: a) the modified Special Operations Teams [MSOTs]⁵⁰; b) the Army Community Assistance and Rural Empowerment Through Social Services [CARES]; and c) the Army Concern on Community Organizing for Development [ACCORD].

Started in 1993, the MSOTs mission is to "destroy the remaining local communist movement group and its political apparatus" through a "gradual constriction strategy" of clearing the area of insurgents, holding and

consolidating the gains that had been achieved so far, and developing the area after it has been further neutralized.⁵¹

After this is accomplished, the Army CARES program is implemented. This is a “one-stop shop CMO” which includes public information, civic action, community relations, and psychological operations directed to selected target areas in collaboration with local government units, NGOs, and people’s organizations. To make this a more effective approach, the Philippine Army signed a Memorandum of Agreement [MOA] with three civilian agencies – the Social Reform Council, the Presidential Commission to Fight Poverty, and the Basic Sector Counterpart Council -- which have been mandated to oversee the implementation of the Social Reform Agenda (SRA).

The MOA provides that the Army CARES program is recognized as one of the avenues for transmitting information on the SRA to the populace. It also calls all parties to share their resources with the three civilian agencies providing their technical expertise and the Philippine Army its logistics and support, i.e, transportation and communication facilities and medical and dental supplies. Moreover, the Philippine Army’s human resources, i.e., military doctors, dentists, and nurses are to augment the personnel of the civilian bureaucracies.

Further, the MOA provides that the three civilian agencies update the Philippine Army regularly on the implementation of the flagship programs of the SRA. The Philippine Army in turn is bound to provide the civilian agencies with “feedback on the actual services delivered and the issues raised and resolved during the conduct of the Army CARES activities.”⁵²

The Army CARES program as implemented usually runs for two to three days in a selected community. Its activities consist mainly of holding medical clinics, distribution of medicines, as well as meetings with villagers on SRA.

Before the Army CARES program is completed, and often, as soon as the area has been taken over by the SouthCom, the Army Concern on Community Organizing for Development [ACCORD] starts its projects. ACCORD’s main significance lies in organizing a community not only for the purposes of carrying out livelihood projects, agricultural cooperatives, or small-scale enterprises but also lays down the framework for “normal” democratic processes such as

discussions of issues, airing of grievances, and resolution of problems to take place. This hopes to encourage and foster the “spirit of self-reliance” within the community and to move on from conflict to peace.

The SouthCom has reported some modest gains measured in terms of numbers of rebels who surrendered and laid down their firearms. In the SouthCom’s report for 1998, 236 MILF rebels surrendered and gave up 188 firearms and the SouthCom is still persuading more rebels to realize the futility of fighting against the government.

The SouthCom CMOs further reports that in 1998, the accelerated civic action program was able to achieve “wide popular support” which “makes the SouthCom’s work for maintaining peace and stability easier.” Besides this, the SouthCom CMO reports that no human rights violations were committed by the military. This was attributed, the report says, to the CMOs’ education on human rights which the SouthCom has been conducting for its regulars and reservists.

Perceptions from the MILF

Despite the proliferation of development projects even within his own backyard, and despite the provision of social services to the Muslims, MILF chairman, Hashim Salamat, dismisses these as counterinsurgency measures, propaganda activities that intend to convince the MILF soldiers to surrender and lay down their arms. But, Salamat said, they are not convinced of the government’s sincerity. “For as long as the military keeps on oppressing our people, no amount of counterinsurgency measures will convince us,” Salamat said. “Let the military leave the area.”⁵³ General Antonio Santos, SouthCom Deputy Chief of Intelligence and Civil Military Operations, admitted that 75 per cent of the AFP had been deployed to Mindanao.⁵⁴

Mohaquer Iqbal, member of the Central Committee of the MILF, thinks that development efforts such as road-building and digging of water wells “only touch the tentacles” and believes these will not win the MILF soldiers to the AFP’s side. The MILF, Iqbal said, has lasted for 17 years and is even gaining in strength.⁵⁵

Estimates from the SouthCom show that the MILF had some 13,608 members in 1998 but the projections show that by the end of 1999, the MILF would have increased its membership to 16,688.⁵⁶

To date, the government and the MILF have taken steps that may lead to a peace agreement. In 1998, they created a peace panel composed of members from both sides. And in February 1999, the military and MILF field and deputy commanders went through a workshop where they attempted to identify the problems that made it difficult for the ceasefire agreement to hold and how they, within their own spheres of command and influence, could make the ceasefire agreement work. After this workshop and all these dialogues carried out in public view, backdoor negotiations between some cabinet members of the government and the MILF have been going on. While this informal diplomacy has started, the military stands poised, waiting on the wings.

Meanwhile, Salamat has called for an “obligatory jihad”, CMOs and workshops notwithstanding. Salamat repeatedly said that they will fight, “even if takes a hundred years”, until they gain their independence. They are, he said, ready for war.⁵⁷

VII Some policy issues and points for consideration

CMOs in the Philippines date back to the late 1940s when a communist insurgency threatened to seize power from the national government. To this day, the AFP has made CMOs a major policy of engaging the insurgents, whether communists or Muslim secessionists. This has brought to the fore a number of issues: conditions under which CMOs take place; underlying assumptions of CMOs; CMOs’ inability to offer real options; and CMOs sustainability and selective coverage.

Conditions under which CMOs take place

Should the AFP continue using CMOs as an instrument of engaging the enemy? And if it should, under what conditions should these be carried out?

First, the AFP should pursue CMOs only under a civilian form of government which the Philippines has now. The AFP’s commitment to the doctrine of the supremacy of civilian authority must be total. In this context,

therefore, the nature and functions of the military will be those that the civilian government alone prescribes.⁵⁸

This civilian government, however, should institute mechanisms that allow for the meaningful representation and participation of an independent-minded and robust civil society. In this way, any efforts to muzzle the civilian government can be thwarted by a civil society. Likewise, any efforts to paper over or sanitize military policies and practices which violate human rights principles can be exposed, opposed, and reported to the public – freely and unhindered -- by civil society.

Second, the civilian government to which the AFP has sworn its allegiance should be democratic, i.e, it provides “extensive protections for individual and group freedoms, inclusive pluralism in civil society as well as party politics... institutions to hold officeholders accountable, and thus a strong rule of law secured through an independent, impartial judiciary.”⁵⁹

It would be desirable, however, if the civilian government deepened its democracy, that is to say, if it were becoming even “more democratic”. This means the government is “making more progress in protecting individual rights, ensuring a rule of law, representing citizen interests, incorporating marginalized groups, institutionalizing ‘horizontal accountability’ of different branches of officeholders to one another, eliminating the ‘reserved domains of power’ enjoyed by the military and other social and political forces that are not accountable (directly or indirectly) to the electorate.”⁶⁰

Third, the civilian government should have an overall socio-economic development plan which should not only address issues of economic reforms or human resources but should also take into serious account ongoing conflicts, their impact on the development process, their human as well as economic costs, and suggest alternative courses of action which civilian bureaucracies and the AFP can participate in. ⁶¹

Since the AFP views CMOs as contributing to the country’s development efforts, then the AFP should ensure that CMOs should dovetail with the country’s overall development plans.

The Social Reform Agenda is illustrative in this case as CMOs have become part of the Agenda's project and implementation. But this should just be for starters.

The AFP should start discussions with the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) to see how CMOs can be part of the East Asean Growth Area (EAGA). It should also initiate talks with the Departments of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform to look into possibilities of including CMOs in the implementation of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law.

After all, the AFP – through its CMOs – has been involved in grassroots activities and has done “immersion work” especially in areas which the civilian government have difficulty reaching. In a strong sense, the AFP, particularly the SouthCom, has been touching base with the people.

Fourth, the present administration of President Joseph Estrada (1998-2004) should have an overall policy towards resolving the conflict in Mindanao. Other than Estrada's statements to bomb the MILF out of existence and to resolve the conflict in “a week's time”, the Estrada administration has not developed any sensible program nor come up with any decent plan on how to deal with the conflict in Mindanao. CMOs should be seen as simply part of an overall policy towards conflict resolution but should not deflect or prevent discussions of the more basic problems that confront Mindanao.

Fifth, the AFP should design exit strategies for its CMOs, in collaboration with civilian bureaucracies, particularly the Departments of Health, Public Works and Highways, Budget and Management, and local government units. Part of these strategies should include the systematic ways to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of CMOs and should identify relevant parameters against which CMOs are measured. Such measurements and evaluations should serve as the basis not only for the AFP's exit strategies but also for the civilian bureaucracies' reconstruction and development plans.

CMOs initiate rehabilitation and development activities during conflict situations; and these efforts should eventually serve as building blocks from which civilian agencies can proceed as they start implementing post-conflict reconstruction and development plans.

Civilian governments can then expand on CMOs and in this way, CMOs become sustainable and more oriented towards the longer-term. This presupposes, however, that civilian governments must have the administrative capacity to govern and to implement plans and deliver basic services.

Exit strategies, carefully participated in and executed by the AFP and civilian bureaucracies, give credence to civilian supremacy, prevent dependence of civilian bureaucracies on the military, avoid turf issues, and fosters more amicable civilian-military relations.

Assumptions behind CMOs

The rationale behind CMOs -- to diminish the enemy's will to fight and to win over their supporters, sympathizers, and would-be members -- is based on these assumptions: a) that the provision of public health and other social services and the distribution of food as well as the establishment of physical infrastructure will demonstrate to a disaffected populace that the government, particularly the military, works for their interests; b) that such services and public goods will contribute to a waning of the insurgents' influence and the erosion of their political mass base; and c) that without this mass base and with a weakening of the insurgents' will to resist, the insurgents will not be able to continue waging their wars. Once these are achieved, the AFP is assured of winning the war and the battle, and eventually of securing the peace.

These assumptions and the logic that runs behind them place a high premium on the idea that public goods and services are sufficient to pacify a discontented populace. While such goods and services do have an indispensable place in emergencies caused by natural disasters, they certainly are the minimum requirements to placate a populace.

Filipinos have shown, as they did during World War II and as they have done during times of financial crises, that they can withstand hunger and even forego basic services. They can live off the fruits of the mountains, drink from the waters of the rivers, or find shelter under the trees of the forests. But they cannot tolerate or endure abuses and torture inflicted upon them or their families, friends, and neighbors. These cause not only physical injuries, sufferings, and death, but, if they survive, also rob them of their self-respect

and dignity. The anguish which accompanies physical and mental torture; the pain which occurs as each layer of identity and dignity is stripped; and the deep sense of loss over family members and friends reported missing or murdered in some dingy prison cell cannot be compensated for by medical kits or a couple of latrines donated by men in fatigue.

What should be of paramount importance in CMOs is the military's knowledge and observance of human rights laws. More important, the military should be able to internalize a respect for a human being's personhood which encompasses not only people's right to public services and food but includes people's rights to a fair trial, to practise one's own religion, and to live on one's ancestral domain.

The AFP, as part of its CMOs, has been conducting what it calls "military values education", i.e., "the process of developing the spiritual, moral and nationalistic values of the soldier to transform him into God-centered, people-centered and nation-oriented individual" and has been inculcating the observance of human rights laws among its ranks. The AFP claims too that CMOs have also been fostering a "spirit of self-reliance" through "empowering communities".

To be more effective, the AFP should establish official linkages with the Philippine Commission on Human Rights which is directly under the Office of the President. Such linkages can lead to more formal mechanisms which allow these processes and activities to operate on a continuous basis not only for the AFP but also for the CMOs' clients.

CMOs offer no real options

CMOs are extremely short-term solutions to what are deeply ingrained political and economic problems. They do not present the people with real options but they have the potential to pave the way for such options to be realized.

Take Ramon Magsaysay's Economic Development Corps [EDCOR] program which parcelled out tracts of lands to Huk surrenderees in the mid-1950s. Then, it seemed to be a success. Now, in the late 1990s, it qualifies as a short-term success because it enticed several Huks to give up their arms and

quit the fight. It does not qualify, however, as a long-term success because Magsaysay's attempts at re-distributing lands equitably, despite the laws he pushed for the farmers, did not make it through Congress.

When Magsaysay assumed the presidency in 1953, the Hardie Report was just completed. Authored by Robert S. Hardie, the same man who conceptualized the land reform in Japan after World War II, the Hardie Report strongly suggested that the institution of tenancy be abolished as this was responsible for the widespread poverty which stalked the rural areas.⁶² The Hardie Report, as one can imagine, was not well-received by members of Congress who mostly came from the landed and elite class.

Had the Magsaysay administration pursued the Hardie Report, it would have presented the people in Central Luzon a real option and it would have contributed substantially to the eradication of poverty in that area and in the country. EDCOR had its place but within a largely inequitable land ownership structure, it was limited and was not bound to expand. As a propaganda measure, EDCOR was successful. But as to eradicating poverty even among the Huks, it was a failure.

This same argument applies to Marcos's CMOs. While he attempted to grant small pieces of land to farmers, Marcos still managed to retain the huge sugar plantations and rice fields for his cronies. His land reform program went to pieces because it was full of loopholes. All landholders who had more than seven hectares⁶³ transferred the land titles to their children or transformed these into residential or corporate lands, both of which were exempt from the land reform program.

Had he used martial law to pursue a genuine land reform program which intended to abolish exploitation and attack rural poverty, had he shown this commitment, Marcos would have solved one of the country's most vexing problem and in the process, he would have greatly undermined the mass base and political influence of the communist insurgency as well as the Muslim secessionist group. At the same time, he would have offered his people a real option.

CMOs may be selective and may not be sustainable

The AFP claims that CMOs, as part of the government's Social Reform Agenda (SRA), contribute to the country's socio-economic development process. In a sense, this may be true, especially if one looks at the agriculture and forestry cooperatives and the physical infrastructure which the AFP had organized and built under the banner of civil-military operations. The impact of CMOs on the country's development process, however, has not been measured and its effectiveness has only been judged according to the number of surrenderees and firearms collected from rebels.

Although they were never intended or designed to solve the larger development problems of the country, CMOs have contributed to countryside development, albeit in a sporadic and unsustainable manner. Three points for consideration are highlighted here.

First, CMOs are short-term measures which the AFP should endorse to civilian bureaucracies and organized community councils if these efforts are to be sustained and performed on a more regular basis. Provision of public health services as well as curative care, maintenance of irrigation canals, upkeep of artesian wells, for instance, should be turned over to the pertinent government agency and to organizations within the community.

Second, CMOs are usually carried out in "affected *barangays*" or those places where rebels have established some degree of political influence or are in the process of doing so. In a given town, CMOs are applied only in a few *barangays*.⁶⁴ The coverage of service provision is thus selective and limited. And the *barangays* that may be chosen are probably less in need of the services than other *barangays* that have not been selected.

As soon as CMOs have achieved their objectives in their "target" sites, the AFP should immediately endorse these to their counterparts in civilian bureaucracies to ensure wider coverage. Sustainability of service-provision can only take place though in *barangays*, towns, and provinces which have a strong, responsive, and functioning local government.

Beyond all these, however is a third issue which goes to the heart of sustainability.

Assuming that CMOs are effective and that they do affect people's lives in a positive way, how long can these benefits last before discontentment brews

and boils over again? How long can people live off the benefits of CMOs without them organizing in armed revolt because government has not dealt with resolving the root causes which brought about the conflicts in the first place?

VIII Conclusion

Civil-military operations (CMOs) are counterinsurgency measures which the AFP has designed in order to weaken the will of the enemy to fight, to win over the sympathies of people, to strengthen the military's mass base, and to enlist people's cooperation and support.

To achieve these, the AFP has been relying heavily on the contributions from the fields of public health and engineering. Medical services, as stated in the AFP's Handbook on CMOs, constitute the "number one essential" in one of the most important CMOs programs, the Army CARES.⁶⁵ Apart from medical and dental services, the AFP uses its engineering battalions to provide crucial infrastructure which includes health centers, school buildings, roads, bridges, water wells, and latrines.

The AFP has applied CMOs under three presidents, Magsaysay, Marcos, and Ramos. Magsaysay's CMOs were essentially propagandist in nature; Marcos' attempted to make CMOs contribute to the development efforts in the country; while Ramos's CMOs, at least fraction of it, have been integrated into the Social Reform Agenda, a comprehensive government plan to eradicate poverty. Under these administrations, the core services which CMOs relied on were medical and dental health services; public health measures, specifically immunizations, installation of water wells, digging of latrines; and engineering efforts which provided physical infrastructure.

To date, other than the number of surrenderees and firearms confiscated from rebel groups, the AFP has not developed a systematic way of evaluating the impact and effectiveness of CMOs. Evaluations of this sort should not only look at how CMOs' affect the resolution of conflicts but also on how CMOs have affected people's health and well-being.

The use of CMOs as a tool of engagement does raise certain issues which include the conditions under which CMOs are applied; the assumptions

underlying CMOs; the inability of CMOs to offer real options; as well as their sustainability and coverage.

These issues, though pressing, are seldom discussed, let alone, addressed. It is time the AFP and the National Defense Department did. It is also time that civilian bureaucracies, especially the Departments of Health and the local government units, examine their own roles in times of conflict.

The Estrada administration should take heed of history and should view the Mindanao conflict or the communist insurgency within such a historical perspective. There are many insights it can derive from such a history and many more lessons it can learn such as the serious repercussions which heavy militarization can bring as well as the limits which CMOs are used.

For – and this is now a truism -- as long as bombs fall and bullets fly, no amount of CMOs can salvage the government's image. People, after all, cannot live on bandages alone.

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² Glick, *Peaceful Conflict*, p. 24; and De Pauw, "Winning the Peace", p. 204.

³ Glick, *Peaceful Conflict*, p. 24.

⁴ Crisol, Jose M. 1980. *Armed Forces and Martial Law*. Agro Printing and Publishing House: Makati, Philippines. p. 52.

⁵ For an excellent account of the history of the Huks and an insightful analysis of the Huk movement's rise and decline, see Kerkvliet, Benedict J. 1977. *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 151. See also Constantino, Renato. 1978. *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*. Manila, Philippines: Foundation for Nationalist Studies. p. 207.

⁶ Manila Chronicle, February 18, 1947, p.1; April 22, 1947; and December 22, 1947, p. 24 as cited in Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 194.

⁷ Juan Cando, Municipal Secretary, "Excerpt from the Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Municipal Council of San Antonio, Nueva Ecija, Held on February 9, 1948; Resolution No. 11" as cited in Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, pp. 196-197.

⁸ Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 194 and pp. 205-206.

⁹ See Constantino, Renato, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, pp. 204-205.

¹⁰ The approval of the Bell Trade Act by the Philippine Congress triggered a wave of resentment among the country's political leaders as well as its populace. Not only was the Bell Trade Act the reason behind President Roxas's and Congress' removal of six Congressmen and two senators who would have objected to its passage. The Philippines' approval of the Bell Trade Act was also tied with the US release of war damage payments. At that time, the Philippines was just emerging from the ruins of World War II and reconstruction had barely started. Compensation for Filipino lives and property lost during the war were forthcoming from the US but these were made contingent upon the approval of the Bell Trade Act by the Philippine Congress.

¹¹ Constantino, Renato, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, pp. 226-227.

¹² Scaff, Alvin, H. 1955. *The Philippine Answer to Communism*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. p. 36; see also Walterhouse, Harry F. 1964. *A Time to Build: Military Civic Action: Medium for Economic Development and Social Reform*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press. pp. 85-86.

¹³ Constantino, Renato, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, p. 238.

¹⁴ Crisol, Jose M. 1981. *Men and Arms*. Makati, Metro Manila: Agro Printing and Publishing House. p. 86.

¹⁵ Benedict J. Kerkvliet's interview with Jose Crisol, Civic Action Program Office, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City, on December 15, 1969 is documented in Kerkvliet's book, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 237.

¹⁶ Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 237.

¹⁷ Constantino, Renato, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, pp. 240-241.

¹⁸ Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 239.

¹⁹ Luis Taruc to Manila Times correspondent Benigno Aquino, April 27, 1948 as cited in Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*, p. 247.

²⁰ Tutay, Filemon. "P1,500,000,000 MORE For the AFP?". Philippines Free Press. December 18, 1971. LXIV. No. 51. p. 3 and p. 64.

²¹ Jubair, Salah. 1997. *A Nation Under Endless Tyranny*, p. 181.

²² Crisol, Jose, M. 1980. *Armed Forces and Martial Law*. Agro Printing and Publishing House: Makati, Philippines. p. 37. The home-defense program of the AFP which was conceptualized and implemented by Jose M. Crisol is described in detail in Crisol's book. I relied extensively on this book for a description of civil military relations in the Philippines. Read pp. 36-62.

²³ Crisol, *Armed Forces and Martial Law*, pp. 37-38.

²⁴ Crisol, *Armed Forces and Martial Law*, pp.49-51.

²⁵ Crisol, *Armed Forces and Martial Law*, p. 54.

²⁶ Crisol, *Armed Forces and Martial Law*, p. 54-55.

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²⁸ In my interview with Hashim Salamat, chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Camp Abubakar, Cotabato, on January 25, 1999.

²⁹ Crisol, *Armed Forces and Martial Law*, pp. 19-21.

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³² Wise, William, M., "The Philippine Military After Marcos", p. 437.

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³⁴ Gareth, Porter, *The Politics of Counterinsurgency in the Philippines*, p. 22; see also Abinales, Patricio, N. 1998. *State Authority and Local Power in Southern Mindanao, 1900-1972*. p. 7.

³⁵ Kerkvliet, Benedict J., "Peasants and Agricultural Workers: Implications for United States Policy", p. 212.

³⁶ Boyce, James, K. 1993. *The Political Economy of Growth and Impoverishment in the Marcos Era*. Quezon City, Philippines: Atene de Manila University Press. pp. 8-11. For a thorough analysis of the economic situation in the Philippines during the Marcos years, see James K. Boyce's *The Political Economy of Growth and Impoverishment in the Marcos Era*.

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⁴⁴ Vitug, Marites, D. and Yabes, Criselda. 1998. *Jalan-Jalan: Journey Through EAGA*. PCIJ: Manila, Philippines. pp. 12-13.

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⁴⁶ Vitug, Marites, D., *Jalan-Jalan: Journey Through EAGA*, pp. 8-13.

⁴⁷ For several reasons beyond the scope of this paper, this has not been the case. EAGA is getting to be perceived as benefiting only wealthy families and political elites – both Muslims and Christians – as well as multinational and Filipino corporations based in Mindanao and Manila.

On the other hand, the 1996 peace agreement has not realized basic expectations such as improved delivery of basic health, education, and other social services; establishment of physical infrastructure and utilities; and peace and order.

⁴⁸ Interview with Hadji Murad, Camp Abubakar, Cotabato, January 25, 1999.

⁴⁹ The minimum basic needs approach involves the integration of non-income indicators in the formula for poverty incidence. This puts more emphasis on the "quality of life" of the population. For a more thorough discussion on the SRA, see Reyes, Celia and del Valle, Edwin. 1998. Poverty Alleviation and Equity Promotion. Discussion Paper Series No. 98-06 (Revised). Makati, Metro Manila: Philippine Institute for Development Studies. pp. 8-14.

⁵⁰ According to the SouthCom Handbook on CMOs, the old Special Operations Teams who worked under the Marcos regime were "barbaric", heavy on psyops, and had no follow-up plans on developing the areas which they had captured from the insurgents. The modified or new Special Operations Teams are knowledgeable on human rights laws, more disciplined, combine psyops with civic action, public information, and community relations activities, and recognize their jobs as initial activities before the civilian local governments, together with the help of the SouthCom, implement their rehabilitation and

development plans. See Raymundo, Serafin A. 1998. *A Handbook on CMOs*. Manila, Philippines: AFP Southern Command. pp. 90-102.

⁵¹Raymundo, Serafin A., *A Handbook on CMOs*, p. 14. For the CMO programs and plans, I relied heavily on Major Serafin Raymundo's handbook.

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⁵³ Interview with Hashim Salamat in Camp Abubakar, Cotabato, on January 25, 1999.

⁵⁴ Interview with General Antonio Santos, SouthCom headquarters, Zamboanga City, January 18, 1999.

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⁵⁶ These data were presented by the SouthCom Deputy Chief of the Intelligence and Civil-Military Operations, General Antonio Santos, and Col. Rafael Romero, Assistant Chief of Staff for CMO during a briefing which they organized for a journalist, Marites Vitug, who acted as my guide, and me, in the SouthCom headquarters, Zamboanga City, on January 18, 1999.

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⁶¹ As they have been since 1994, the development plans formulated by the now abolished Office of Presidential Assistant in Mindanao (OPAMIN) have not taken into consideration the conflicts in Mindanao. OPAMIN's plans look more like salesmen's brochures meant to attract investors. See OPAMIN and DMJM, International, Inc. 1995. *Mindanao 2000 Development Framework Plan*.

⁶² Constantino, Renato, *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, pp. 262-263.

⁶³ Marcos set the minimum number of rice fields one could own at 7 hectares. Beyond this, the Marcos government had to buy the rice fields.

⁶⁴ As defined in the Local Government Code of 1991, the *barangay* is the lowest political unit of the government and has a population of at least 2,000 for a rural *barangay* and 5,000 in an urban *barangay*.

⁶⁵ Raymundo, Serafin, 1998, Handbook on CMOs, p. 54.