

## Breaking News / Nation

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/nation/view/20100619-276485/Ideology-needed-to-fight-Abu-Sayyaf-says-military-officer>

# Ideology needed to fight Abu Sayyaf, says military officer

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MANILA, Philippines—It's the ideology, stupid!

After spending billions of pesos in armaments and losing the lives of hundreds of soldiers and innocent civilians, a senior military official said Saturday the government must rethink its militarist approach to ending the Abu Sayyaf's reign of terror in the country.

Brigadier General Francisco Cruz, the Armed Force's Civil Relations Services chief, pointed out that "a glaring weakness" in the government's anti-terrorism program was the lack of an "ideological response" to the problem.

"(The) war on terror is a war of ideas and, therefore, the strategy to defeat Abu Sayyaf and radical Islam... requires an ideological counterforce that would compete with the enemy's ideology," Cruz said in an e-mailed statement.

Despite its notoriety, Cruz said, the Abu Sayyaf can be considered as "a politico-religious terrorist group" as shown by its previous attacks, including the bloody Valentine's Day bombings in 2006.

"(W)hat keeps the Abu Sayyaf and other Muslim extremist forces alive in this country is radical Islam or the waging of jihad by violent means," he said.

These observations were contained in a paper, titled "Defeating Abu Sayyaf: The Strong and Urgent Need for an Ideological Response," which he presented at the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies in Singapore.

According to Cruz, the Abu Sayyaf's use of "radical Islam" to justify its lawless activities have been very effective in recruiting members and obtaining financial support from foreign Islamic groups such as the Jemaah Islamiyah and the Al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden.

Along with other state agencies, he said, the Armed Forces must take on proactive policies to put an end to the perceived bias and mistrust between Muslims and Christians.

By doing this, he said, the government would "destroy the enemy spirit and promote moderation."

"Where the main thrust is ideology for ideology, the government should promote the culture of peace and non-violence to counter the extremism espoused by the Abu Sayyaf and the violent Muslim groups through community-level peacemaking," he said.

He also criticized the government's "National Plan to Address Terrorism and its Consequences" for its failure to recognize "terrorist motivation and mindset."

Crafted by the Anti-Terrorism Task Force, Cruz argued, the program was not a holistic approach to address terrorism "as it focuses only on operational counterterrorism targeting terrorist cells and attack plans."

"A military-based response is not enough to destroy Abu Sayyaf and other Muslim extremist groups in the country," he said, adding, "It would need a comprehensive approach to confront an enemy whose roots have political, social, economic and psychological dimensions."

Cruz also dismissed the AFP's earlier pronouncements that the Abu Sayyaf was already a "spent force," noting that the terrorist group still has nearly 400 members who were trained in making explosives.

He said the bandits were also known to have "varying degrees of influence" in about 164 villages in Sulu, Basilan and

Zamboanga.

“Abu Sayyaf’s kidnapping business, which seem unstoppable, provides them funds to sustain the organization,” he said.

The Army official also stressed the important role of the media in the existence of terrorist group like the Abu Sayyaf.

He said the group has “skillfully used the media to gain domestic and international attention.”

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