

NATION

Sayyaf still a potent force, says AFP official

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MANILA, Philippines - Beheadings and kidnappings in Western Mindanao only showed that the Abu Sayyaf – the main suspect in these lawless and violent acts – remains to be a force to reckon with, a senior military official said in his dissertation essay at Singapore's Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies.

Brig. Gen. Francisco Cruz, chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines-Civil Relations Service, added that despite the military's continued gains in its war on terror, military-based solutions are not enough to destroy the homegrown terrorist group.

Even as the Armed Forces scored anew against the Abu Sayyaf with the recent capture of one of its leaders, Kaiser Said Usman, Cruz said there is still "a need to re-examine government policy in annihilating the terrorist group."

Cruz underscored in his essay as part of his Master in Strategic Studies what he described as glaring weakness in the overall policy and strategy to defeat the Abu Sayyaf.

This, he attributed to the state's failure to contend with the Abu Sayyaf's radical and extremist ideology that drives recruitment, promotes hatred and propels recruits to engage in violence.

While the military solution offers a big help in addressing one of the country's main internal security concerns, Cruz said the greater and major part could be best addressed through the war of ideas.

Cruz argued that the Abu Sayyaf is not merely a group of bandits, as it is being portrayed, but a politico-religious terrorist group waging a jihad against the government to put up a separate Islamic state.

"A military-based response is not enough to destroy the Abu Sayyaf and other Muslim extremist groups in the country. It would need a comprehensive approach to confront an enemy whose roots have political, social, economic and psychological dimensions and whose ties with al-Qaeda and Jemaah Ismailiyah have not been cut off," said Cruz in his essay entitled "Defeating Abu Sayyaf: The strong and urgent need for an ideological response."