

## Weekly Country Report

### Philippines

23 – 29 June 2008

#### ASG

After the celebrated abduction of a media personality Ces Drilon, and the paying of a reported 20 Million ransom, the ASG again hit the headlines with a reported abduction of 5 workers of Basilan province Electric Cooperative, demanding another ransom for their release<sup>1</sup>. The Abu Sayaf Group has recently intensified its terrorist activities, mostly abduction of known personalities such as teachers, local businessmen and targets of opportunity, such as the Drilon case. All released through local crisis management committee because of the no ransom-no negotiation policy of the government against terrorists. In the Drilon case, another complication is the arrest of the then Chief Negotiator, Sulu town mayor Alvarez Isnaji, his son and 17 others, who were implicated in the abduction incident. Thousands of their supporters protests and condemn the arrest in a highly emotional protest rallies in Sulu capital<sup>2</sup>. This suggests a picture of deteriorating support for the counter terrorism campaign of the government in the area and the support base of the ASG.

Security analysts suggest that these abductions will intensify in the coming months and will provide platform for the ASG to replenish not only its logistic capability but most importantly its human resources. This was evidenced by the immediate increase of ASG members after the abduction and reported ransom pay-out<sup>3</sup>. This improved capability may likely be translated to operational terrorist attacks on soft government or civilian critical infrastructures in the coming months.

#### MILF

There is a noticeable increase in the number of incidents of actual armed confrontations between the Philippine Armed Forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the recent months. Most recent was the fierce firefight between Philippine Army troops and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern province of Sarangani on Wednesday, June 25, 2008, leaving at least one rebel killed<sup>4</sup>. In the adjoining province of Sharif Kabungsuwan, Moro Islamic Liberation

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<sup>1</sup>Basilan cops say 1 of 5 seized power linemen freed, 02:38:00 06/28/2008  
<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/regions/view/20080628-145256/Basilan-cops-say-1-of-5-seized-power-linemen-freed>

<sup>2</sup> Isnaji supporters hold rallies in Sulu, <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/102731/Isnaji-supporters-hold-rallies-in-Sulu>

<sup>3</sup> Marines start offensive vs Abu Sayyaf in Sulu town, <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/102063/Marines-start-offensive-vs-Abu-Sayyaf-in-Sulu-town>

<sup>4</sup>Army, MILF in fierce fighting in Sarangani; one killed ,  
<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/regions/view/20080625-144693/Toilet-only-casualty-as-MILF-attacks-Army-base--spokesman>

Front (MILF) rebels attacked an Army base with rocket-propelled grenades<sup>5</sup>. The increased fighting has is further complicated by allegations of abuses in cultural sensitive issues such as reported human rights abuses and desecration of Muslim graves perpetrated by the Military, such as the incident in barangay Buhati, Lahing-Lahing, Luuk, Sulu. The MILF accused the military of failing to coordinate its movements in the recognized MILF area of operations<sup>6</sup>.

These incidents suggest the increasing tension between the government forces and the elements of the MILF at tactical level which could spark a widespread armed confrontation in the future. The continued delay of the peace talks is creating a tension-filled situation in areas such as in Basilan and in Sarangani province. This may intensify if there are no concrete efforts to renew the covenant on cessation of hostilities which will end in August. The fast expansion of the MILF in the areas traditionally influenced by the MNLF suggests its preparation for a worst scenario in case of resumption of hostilities and flexing its muscles in case of a resumption of the peace process. Either way the Philippine Armed Forces is at disadvantage position.

## **NPA**

The Philippine Communist insurgents continue to intensify their terrorist attacks against military targets, government critical infrastructure and private telecommunication lines. This can be attributed to the recent pronouncement of the communist rebels to intensify government attacks and improved its manpower and logistic capabilities.

The most recent was the communist rebels attacked on two police outposts and government offices in Dapa and General Luna town on Siargao Island. Two policemen were killed and four other officers were injured in the attacks. However, reinforcements from a joint military and police forces in the area caught up with the withdrawing rebels and as of this writing (9:00 am), the rebels are trapped in Lapinigan, an adjacent island of Siargao, Surigao Norte. The Army spokesman said 12 of the escaping rebels have been arrested by the troopers and the policemen. This is one of the biggest blows to the communist rebels as initial report revealed that Some 15 suspected members of the New People's Army have been killed in an ongoing gun battle.

## **Political Development**

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo met with Republican presidential nominee Sen. John McCain Saturday (Sunday in Manila) and had a telephone conversation with democratic candidate Barack Obama<sup>7</sup>. McCain and Arroyo discussed the long-standing relations between the Philippines and the US, food security, and the Philippines' fight against terrorism in Mindanao. McCain was reported to have praised the Philippines counter terrorism efforts and was quoted to have said in his meeting

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>6</sup> [www.luwaran.com](http://www.luwaran.com), <http://www.luwaran.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=760>

<sup>7</sup> **Arroyo, McCain discuss fight vs terrorism**, <http://mw1.abs-cbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?StoryId=123434>

with Arroyo his strong support for Philippine fight against terrorism and radical Islamic extremism:

*"In fact, I'd just like to say that I'm very grateful for the opportunity of this meeting. We have many mutual interests, including our cooperation on the issue of Mindanao and the progress being made in all fronts, which is the way that we effectively address the challenges of radical Islamic extremism"<sup>8</sup>*

Security analysts suggest that United States will continue to actively support counter terrorism initiatives in the Philippines even after the term of President Bush. What some Mindanao academics question is the posture of US in case of resumption of hostilities with any of the secessionist groups, such as the MNLF and the MILF, as both are non-US terrorist proscribed liberation movements. Any resumption of hostilities and Island wide armed confrontation will significantly affect the gains of counter terrorism in the area. The most rational action of the United States will likely help push for the resumption of peace talks, and maintain a friendly relationship with other secessionist groups in the area while helping in the neutralization of the ASG.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.,