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PRIMED AND PURPOSEFUL

ARMED GROUPS AND HUMAN SECURITY EFFORTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Armed Group Engagement and the Small Arms Survey

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Primary purposes, concepts, and audience

One of the primary aims of this book is to reach a deeper understanding of the many armed groups that operate in the Philippines today. They range from the ideologically driven and militarily strong to the opportunistic and criminal. The main focus of the book is ‘non-state armed groups’, which the South–South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement (SSN) takes to refer mainly to rebel or insurgent groups, i.e. groups that are armed, use force to achieve their political or quasi-political objectives, and are opposed to or autonomous from the state.¹ ‘Non-state armed groups’ do not include state-controlled militias or paramilitaries, civil defence units, mercenaries, private military and security companies, or proxy armed forces, though these groups are covered in some measure in this publication (see Chapters 7 and 8). The Small Arms Survey offers a slightly different definition of ‘armed groups’ as ‘groups equipped with small arms that have the capacity to challenge the state’s monopoly of legitimate [coercive] force’ (Berman and Florquin, 2005, p. 1, citing Policzer, 2004). This could include pro-state or para-state armed groups that act autonomously from the state or challenge its monopoly of legitimate coercive force. On either definition, the holding of small arms is axiomatic. Some Filipino rebel groups also carry light weapons such as recoilless rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars.

At the centre of this book are the protagonists of the country’s two major internal armed conflicts: the nationwide Communist insurgency, mainly of the CPP-NPA; and the Moro insurgency in the Muslim part of Mindanao. The latter is represented by the MNLF and the groups it spawned, principally the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—which has since surpassed it as standard bearer of the Moro cause—and the ASG. These are the ‘primed and purposeful’ of this book’s title. This characterization borrows from Stephanie Koorey’s paper (2005), ‘Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups in South-East Asia’. The armed groups that this book investigates are for the most part ideologically driven, predictable, and supported by a part of the local population.

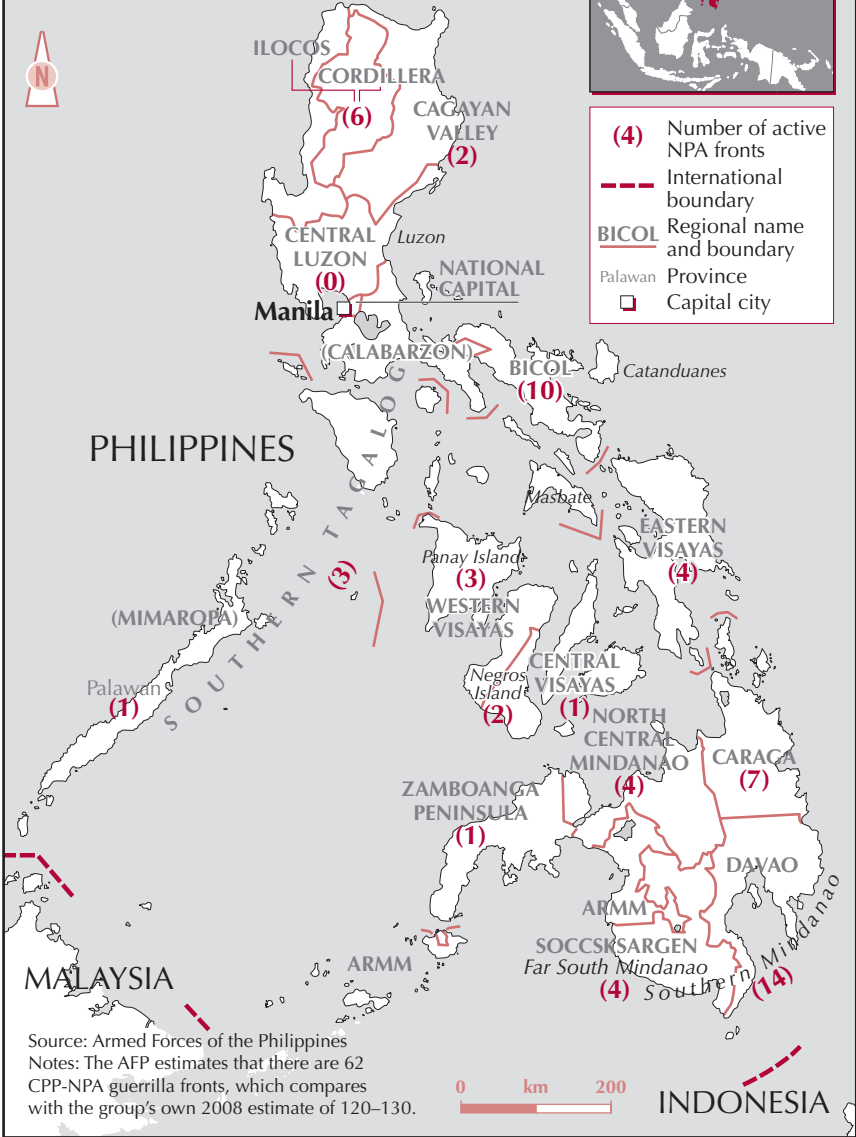


Rocket-propelled grenades are part of the arsenal of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces, the armed wing of the MILF.
© Arthur C. Fuentes/SSN

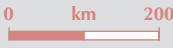
The ideological foundations and activist nature of many Filipino armed groups steer the thematic discussions in Part One of this volume. Since the groups are more amenable to constructive engagements in peace processes and other human security endeavours than predatory or opportunistic armed groups would be, we chose to home in on human security *efforts*. While the human security *impact* of the insurgencies is a vital area of study, it has been well documented elsewhere.² Thus, the thematic chapters of Part One cover: the various peace processes and negotiations; ceasefires; counter-terrorism; disarmament, demobilization, and integration into the armed forces and police; and small arms control. Philippine armed groups are undoubtedly part of the human security problem in the country; a working hypothesis of this study is that the ‘primed and purposeful’ non-state armed groups must also be part of the solution.

Among the intended audiences for this book are those people who interact with, affect, or are affected by Philippine armed groups, be they from government, business, or civil society. We hope the academic community—in particular in the fields of conflict and peace studies, sociology, and political science—will also engage with this volume, which is steeped in first-hand knowledge of the conflicts and contains the most detailed, insider-informed group profiles available.

Map I.i CPP-NPA guerrilla fronts by region, end 2008



Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines
 Notes: The AFP estimates that there are 62
 CPP-NPA guerrilla fronts, which compares
 with the group's own 2008 estimate of 120-130.



INDONESIA

Current relevance at a critical juncture

This book comes at a critical time. Expectations are high that conflict will be brought to a close in this, the fifth, decade of the two main insurgencies. Yet in August 2008 fighting erupted on the border of Maguindanao and North Cotabato provinces after the Philippine Supreme Court—acting on petitions filed by local leaders of affected Christian communities—blocked a controversial interim agreement on ancestral domain between the government and MILF. In doing so it virtually closed the door on what appeared to be a real chance for a negotiated political settlement of the Moro conflict. This most promising human security effort dating back to 1997, when a peace process and ceasefire were initiated, unravelled in a matter of days.

The government subsequently announced a new peace policy which moves away from peace negotiations with armed groups to direct ‘authentic dialogues’ with affected local communities and is centered on ending or rejecting all forms of armed struggle. Any future engagement with armed groups is to be framed within the context of DDR. The implication is that negotiations will be resumed only if MILF first disarms—an impossibility as far as the group is concerned.

The crucial policy question remains whether the ‘primed and purposeful’ armed groups of the Philippines will be constructively engaged as part of the solution to the country’s human security problems. For this to happen, both the government and the groups themselves will have to demonstrate exceptional levels of political will, sincerity, and constitutional creativity. ■

Endnotes

- 1 This builds on the definition of 'armed groups' as 'groups that are armed and use force to achieve their objectives and are not under state control', in International Council on Human Rights Policy (2000, p. 5).
- 2 See PHDR, 2005. One of the main authors of that report, Soliman M. Santos, Jr., is a lead author of this book. The report succinctly defines 'human security' as 'the security of real people' which 'consists of the freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from humiliation', so 'that people can make those choices [for their development] safely and freely.'

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