

Philippines: The Marawi Siege and the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao - Part III

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The Context

Veni, Vidi, Vici, a famous pre-Christ Latin (47BC) saying of Julius Caesar, which means “I came, I saw, I conquer” can still be very appropriate today when one refers to what has happened to Isnlon Hapilon the self-proclaimed ISIS Emir in Southeast Asia. But, as it has been already announced by the country’s security sector that he has escaped and left Marawi, one is tempted to add to Julius Caesar’s saying and that is “I vanish”.

Hapilon came to Lanao in the middle of last year and it was all in the news. In fact, there was a well-published merging of his group – the Abu Sayyaf from Basilan – with the Maute group in Butig, Lanao del Sur. He saw a big opportunity to establish a Wilayah or a caliphate of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City to the Daesh or the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). He (Isnlon), together with the Maute group have since built-up their forces through massive recruitment, Jihadist indoctrination and military trainings. Clearly, their family-based groups have morphed into fully developed Jihadist militants.

It has become clear that the attempted seizure of the municipality of Butig and the big military showdown in the town of Piagapo late last year and the beginning of this year, respectively, were preparation of Hapilon and the Maute group’s conquest of Marawi.

When the security sector has started to announce that Isnlon Hapilon might have already escaped Marawi on the third week of the Marawi’s rampaged – then the disappearing or the vanishing act begins.

The seizure of Marawi by ISIS-inspired Maute/Abu Sayyaf groups has entered its sixth week today. Obviously, it has caused the biggest and most serious internal security crisis in decades for the Philippines or any Southeast Asian country for that matter.

It has started on the 23rd of May 2017, with the botched arrest operation of the most wanted terrorist in the country – Isnlon Hapilon by a joint military and police forces in a community, inside the city. The Islamic Jihadists led by the Maute brothers and Isnlon Hapilon in return have attacked and laid siege of Marawi, the only Islamic City in the predominantly Catholic Philippines, making it into a smoldering war zone.

The government troops have made counter-siege and launched a relentless and massive air and

ground offensives in a bid to crush the Islamic militants but as of today, they have failed to dislodge the fanatic extremists from their well-entrenched and strategic positions in the city.

The protracted seizure of Marawi has turned into a very brutal urban warfare which both the government forces and the Jihadist extremists are not very much familiar with. So, while the latter has made use to its outmost advantage their familiarity of the areas in the city as well as the streets and the buildings to strategically put their skilled snipers into position and block the advance of the government forces, the former has made use of its superiority in military hardwares and its air assets. The intense bombings and the massive artillery shellings have reduced Marawi to rubble.

The would-be caliphate has been laid into ruin. And the attempt by the government forces to wrest control of the city has resulted into its destruction.

The Salafist/Jihadist model of Islam which the extremists have tried to impose on the population of Marawi disrupted their very social fabric and did not get the latter's support nor sympathy in the former's war against the Philippines security forces. The longer the battle of Marawi progresses, the more the Jihadists are finding themselves friendless.

The declaration of Martial Law by the President as a response to the rampage of the extremists in Marawi has caught everybody but especially the "Marawinians" by surprise. But the manner of how the battle to retake Marawi has progressed made more and more Maranaos to be critical of Martial Law.

The Islamic City of Marawi has been emptied by its population both for the protection of their families and not to be caught up in the middle of the raging bloody war between the country's security forces and the ISIS-inspired group. It is important to note that both the security forces and the extremists are mainly coming from the outside the Islamic City.

Furthermore, the local government units (LGUs) have been paralyzed by the surprised seizure of the extremist group and the counter seizure by the government security sector. It has taken several days before one could hear the voices of the city government and the provincial government officials. It is no different with the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in which the city of Marawi and the province of Lanao del Sur are both organic part. It has taken several days before an Assemblyman, representing Lanao del Sur in the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA) came out and become the spokesperson of the province of Lanao del Sur in the government's counter-offensives to retake Marawi.

It has been the play of the security sector which has been calling the shots in the whole counter offensives of the government to retake Marawi. The LGUs have been put to take charge of the humanitarian efforts which in the context of Martial Law - the security sector can still intervene in its deliveries and performances.

One important reality which has been revealed by this humanitarian crisis is the nature and functions of the LGU officials in this part of the country.

The LGU officials in the city of Marawi as well as in the municipalities of Lanao del Sur do not regularly stay in their offices except on special occasions or when the elections are fast approaching. So, in terms of the basic social services reaching the people, one would not be surprised that it is in its minimum. The mayors and many of LGU officials are having their houses and residences in the cities of Iligan, Cagayan de Oro or as far as Davao and Manila. They usually spent most of their times in these areas. Such situation cannot be much different from the other areas in the whole of the ARMM. This is inspite of the fact that the Region is considered to have the lowest poverty

indicator in the whole country. It is useful to highlight that, 48.2% of the families in the ARMM which includes Marawi live below the poverty line compared to the national average of 16.5%. It is no wonder then that in these areas, rebellion and insurgency have found fertile ground and have taken roots easily. In the same manner, that the extremists and the terrorists can likewise easily attract followers who are ready to follow their fanatical activities out of their extreme poverty and desperation. The absence of government's representatives in these places has not helped in correcting this situation.

The Moro Revolutionary Fronts (MNLF and MILF) have been struggling to correct the historical injustice on the Bangsamoro through their quest for the right to self-determination. But for almost five decades they have not reached even a minimum level of determining their own economic, political and cultural lives. With the neo-liberal globalization the country has been closely tied up and integrated with, the global economy and politics. The national liberation of peoples like the Bangsamoro has been more integrated to the mainstream economy and politics of the country. The framework of the peace talks of the different Philippine administrations has been determined by these national and global realities. The mainstreaming approach of the Philippines government has pushed the Moro Fronts to scale down their political demand from independence/secession to autonomy. In the different peace processes, the development of the Bangsamoro consciousness among the different ethno-linguistic groups has been stunted and frustrations and desperation on the Moro people have turned them into passive stakeholders or desperate seekers of other solution. The different autonomous governments have been disowned by the fronts and the Moro traditional leaders have slowly taken over the reign of the autonomous governments including the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The lone criterion for the traditional Moro leaders to be in charge of the ARMM is his/her outmost or blind loyalty to Manila or specifically to Malacanang.

After several decades and spending billions of pesos of the taxpayers' money, this kind of political solution has never answered the Moro peoples' quest for genuine self-determination and the ARMM experimentation has been considered as a political failure.

Currently, the struggle for substantially different form of autonomy has been bannered by the MILF and based on the lessons in the past, they tried to define the legal parameter of the nature of Bangsamoro (both the people and their ancestral lands) and work on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). This is now pending in Congress but can have complication with the Administration's move to change the form of government into a federal type and the place of BBL in this framework has not been clearly defined.

The more protracted the peace processes have become, the more opportunities they created for the Jihadist extremists and their brand of building an ummah which is strictly based on shariah and the literal translation of the Holy Qur'an.

The economic aspect of the development of the Moro people has been seriously neglected. Basically it follows the mainstream economy of the country which is export-oriented and import-dependent. Agricultural production has been very minimal and mono-cropping is promoted like the oil palm trees. Its natural resources like mineral resources have been subjected to extractive method of mining. Many of the families have been dependent on the remittances of their relatives working in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

But in reality, the formal economy and the financial system of the country have not really penetrated into the system and lives of the people in the rural areas. Hence, the major role of the informal economy and financial lending networks, have successfully thrived in those areas and even in many urban areas of the ARMM. The local moneylenders have become more popular and influential in these areas than the elected politicians. But in many instances the politicians and their families are also the moneylenders making them to have effective control of the whole area in both politics and

economy. Even the revolutionary groups and even the Islamists have become dependent to these powerful local lenders cum politicians in their financial needs for weapons, budget for military trainings, ammunitions and foods. Clans who are involved in the clan feuds or *rido* have also become dependent to these local usurers.

The situation of Marawi and its neighboring municipalities in Lanao del Sur have been in similar situations. They have not developed their own economies and business tradings. They became dependent on the economy of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro cities. Big part of the income of these two cities have come from Marawi City or the municipalities around Lake Lanao. The moneylenders have played important role in these financial activities and business trading of peoples in both the urban and the rural areas.

So, when the ISIS-inspired extremists stormed the city of Marawi last month and have been locked in fierce fighting with the Philippine security sector, they have not only destroyed the city but also the informal economies thriving around the city which have been dependent to the latter. Furthermore, it has also affected both the formal and informal economies of the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro. This kind of symbiotic relationship has been maintained and nurtured through all these years.

It is not surprising then to see that when more than 90% of the people of Marawi have evacuated mostly to Iligan, it has almost doubled the population of Iligan from 342,618 to almost 500,000. The number of vehicles has almost tripled causing daily traffics to the city and its residents.

It should also be noted that the latest number of the IDPs has reached more than 270,000, which is much higher than the population of Marawi (200,000). It is simply because the population of the neighboring towns have also left their places because they had been dependent to Marawi in terms of their food needs and financial activities and which in turn came also from the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro.

The peoples of the municipalities of Marantao, Bubong (towns near Marawi City) and others have left their places not primarily because of the threats of the extremist Jihadist but because their food supply lines to and from Marawi have been cut-off. These people became part of the constantly increasing number of the IDPs specifically in the city of Iligan. In fact, in some of Iligan's 44 barangays, the population has increased by more than 50% since May 23, 2017.

Iligan City, 27 kilometers away from Marawi, is the nearest city from the latter. It became the destination of most of the 264,000 IDPs and its social service institutions together with the humanitarian non-government organizations have almost been exhausted. Other social service institutions coming from the ARMM and Region X - the Region which Iligan geographically belongs could still hardly cope-up with the demands of humanitarian tasks at hand. There are more than two thousand of the IDPs mostly women who have been suffering mental disorder after more than a month of staying away from their own homes and staying in places which urgently need cleanliness and sanitation. For those women with their small children and some of the members of their families are still unaccounted for, their situation in the evacuation centers would be more than enough than they could handle both physically and psychologically.

The other day, the legislative as well as the executive branches of the city of Iligan have turned down the proposal of the civilian authority of Marawi and Lanao del Sur that the mass burial of those civilians newly found dead bodies in the ruined city should be done in Iligan. It should be recalled that earlier those unidentified dead from Marawi were already buried in an Iligan cemetery. This time the reason given by Iligan is that, they are considering the religious sensitivity as they would not want to handle problem that may erupt later.

But this fact is really pointing out to the paralysis suffered by the civilian authorities of both Marawi and the province. Part of the reason might be, they, themselves, have been victims or IDPs too or maybe nobody could want to be accountable to the kind of responsibility or manage the massive problem brought about by this humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, Iligan City has been feeling the negative impact on its economy. With the sudden increase of the people staying in the city, the people have complained on the daily traffic and its malls have been earning less even with more people staying inside the establishments but these people are more of getting the respite of the very hot temperature outside and they are not definitely purchasing goods from the businesses in the malls. The Iligan famous water resorts have also felt the negative impact of the crisis in Marawi. They simply lost almost all their customers and patrons - which means that in the past they had been catering people mostly from Marawi or the neighboring towns.

Moreover, an almost hourly non-stop sounds of the ambulances carrying both the dead and the wounded down to Iligan City or the nearest airport for airlifting of those seriously wounded can be heard. This simply means that the offensives and counter-offensives by both the government forces and the extremists have intensified and become more and more bloody.

It does not really help, except for propaganda purposes that the security sector and its spokesperson would describe a different picture than what is happening on the ground. For instance, when they (spokesperson) have described that the ISIS-inspired extremist group has been already push from 8.7 square kilometers to one square kilometer cannot simply be supported by facts on the ground. It might be of service when the Sri Lankan Armed Forces had used this similar picture to describe the encirclement of the forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) in the famous battle of Jaffna peninsula in 2009 . The battle was fought in a conventional manner and mainly in the rural areas of the Northern part of Sri Lanka so one could really see the blow by blow and hourly development of the battle. Before the literal annihilation of the LTTE including the death of its leaders Velupillai Prabhakaran, it was shown to the world through the modern technology of the media how the LTTE was pushed to a square kilometer shrinking their area of maneuverability before the big punch and the LTTE final defeat at least militarily.

The battle of Marawi is basically fought in an urban type of warfare that when one mentioned of four barangays of Marawi namely: Lilod, Bangolo, Raya Madaya and Marinaut, it is practically referring to the whole city center, where it can still connect to the mountainous areas at the eastern side and the Lake Lanao in the western part of the city through these barangays.

Hence, the Jihadists have still plenty of area to maneuver or outmaneuver the country's security sector. In fact, based on survivors' account, the extremist could even outsmart the advancing security forces and avoid the bombs unleashed by the Airforce, by advancing very close to the latter and engage them in a bloody close quarter combat while the aerial bombings are hitting the empty spaces or hitting the empty buildings.

Furthermore, it is very important to note that the President's postponement of his plan trip to Marawi to be with his soldiers on the first year anniversary of his presidency, is a clear manifestation that not all is well in the government's campaign to retake the city.

But then again, the planned President's visit has added pressures to the government troops to advance and occupy more areas but this also means putting themselves to the lines of fire by the extremist snipers.

The number of deaths and wounded from both sides but especially from the civilians has been

increasing. The other day, there were 17 dead civilians in the different stages of decomposition which were found in the central part of the city. Five of these bodies were headless which could mean that they were beheaded by the extremists or had been directly hit by high caliber sniper fire or even by the bombs. In any case, one can help but think about the level of bestiality that this brutal war has reached especially towards the unarmed civilians.

That is why, it would be very difficult to comprehend the President's reasons why he would not be open to other ways to hasten the end of this brutal war. The civilian traditional leaders of Marawi and Lanao (the Sultanates) had earlier volunteer to talk to the leadership of the extremists. Their agenda (according to their letter to President Duterte) is to convince the Jihadists to immediately end the war and leave Marawi. This cannot be a compromise or a soft approach to the extremists as what the President would want to believe. This is delivering the message of the people of the city and the surrounding municipalities that there is no point of continuing a war without the peoples' support. But the most important thing there is to have a direct knowledge who is still in control of the Jihadists and to know the status of the hostages.

In the situation where the intelligence sources of the security sector is almost nil, this can be one of the most reliable way to know one's enemy and to defeat him without even firing a single shot. But this cannot be the framework/mentality of cold war soldiers where body counts is given paramount importance to gauge one's winning or losing the war. In ending the war in Marawi in the soonest possible time one does not need this cold war mentality.

On the other hand, since the most affected stakeholders in this urban war in Marawi are the civilians, then their voices should be given more importance. The security sector or the government should read and understand the situation of the war in Marawi in such a framework even if Martial law is still in operation in Mindanao.

I. Humanitarian Works under Martial Law

Responding to Climate Change related disasters is not very difficult for humanitarian workers and volunteers in the disaster-prone areas like in Mindanao or the Philippines. But is very different if one does it in a human-induced disaster like war or massive destruction caused by terrorism. And doubly difficult for humanitarian works when one is doing them under Martial Law. This is exactly the concrete experiences of humanitarian workers and volunteers who have gone out of their comfort zone to help in whatever ways and means they can for the dislocated population of Marawi.

The declaration of Martial Law by the President in the whole island of Mindanao when the Jihadists rampaged Marawi has caused difficulties not only to the movements of the IDPs but also to the humanitarian workers. The security forces have acted as if they are seeing all the time the fingerprints of the Jihadists in every IDP and the humanitarian organization.

Moreover, the very peculiar nature or characteristic of the people (Maranao Muslim) of Marawi and its neighboring towns, which is clannish has added to the difficulties for humanitarian responses and actions.

The IDPs have grouped themselves on the basis of their relationships (relatives) and they preferred to stay as a group in houses of their relatives than the formal designated evacuation centers. Hence, as has been mentioned earlier, only 5% of the almost 300,000 IDPs are staying in 79 evacuation centers (ECs) in the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro as well as the province of Lanao del Norte. The other 95% of the IDPs are home-based (HBs) or staying in the houses of their relatives mostly living in Iligan City.

The negative implication of such arrangement is that the social service institutions of the government like the Department of Social Welfare and Development have difficulties in tracing those IDPs who stay in the HBs and therefore support in terms of relief goods and psychosocial services could hardly reach these people. The social institutions of the government have only catered to the ECs (5%) as what they used to do in the past and almost nothing in terms of relief and psychosocial services to the IDPs in the HBs. And, as a result, there are so many relief goods like canned goods and non-food relief which have been delivered to the IDPs creating a surplus in the ECs so that one can easily see these goods being sold out in the neighboring grocery stores. The EC-based IDPs have received so much quantity of relief goods and from the social institutions of the government and they simply sold them in order to buy other food items like vegetables and other basic needs.

The humanitarian workers from the civil society are basically the only ones who have tried to trace these IDPs who are home-based. But since they have limited and less resources compared to the government social institutions, they can only help so much. Added to the difficulties of the humanitarian workers are the strict measures that the implementers of Martial Law are subjecting them. The vehicles use to deliver the humanitarian relief goods for the HB-IDPs are required to renew their vehicle passes every three days otherwise these delivery vehicles have to queue or line up several kilometers along with other vehicles and wait in turn to pass military checkpoints, which would mean waiting for one's turn to be checked for several hours. The humanitarian volunteers without military or government-issued identification cards (IDs) have to go down from the vehicles and walk for more than a kilometer before one is allowed to ride again with the vehicles carrying the humanitarian relief goods. Again, with the news coming out nowadays that bullets and ammunitions are allegedly found in the relief goods intended for Marawi IDPs, one can just imagine the extreme added difficulties of bringing relief goods to the IDPs if all the items will be subjected to intense inspection.

In addition, the IDPs, both from the ECs and the HBs are facing another problem. Many of them do not have proper identification cards or government-issued IDs which the security sector would randomly ask from them. Not few of them simply forget to bring these documents or lost them when they hurriedly left their homes in Marawi City. In many instances these people (IDPs) would have difficulties in explaining to the Martial law authorities who always see the Maute's or Abu Sayyaf's faces in the "undocumented" people, who (IDPs) do not have documents. For these IDPs, their personal documents are less in their mind to worry about because they are more concerned of the safety of their persons and their houses and valuable materials they left behind when they hurriedly left their instant war zone city.

There are very few humanitarian workers and volunteers who are helping the IDPs with regards to this particular problem. But oftentimes, these humanitarian volunteers also need to be helped in the long and very meticulous process of obtaining legal requirements so that the IDPs can have their legal documents. Specially so in the case of Marawi and Lanao del Sur province where keeping proper record or legal documentation have not been a practice. One has to go to several layers and see lawyers (advocates) to get proper authorization to obtain a voter's ID for instance. One needs not only human resources but financial resources as well in order to accomplish this work and in the context of Martial Law it is almost an impossible mission.

Meanwhile, the people hosting their IDPs relatives are themselves to be helped, too. For more than a month or 48 days to be exact, they have been supporting their instant expanded families and since they have not been reached by the government social institutions they have not received the food and non-food relief goods. Only a few and mostly from non-government humanitarian organizations which have reached and offered help to them. And again, their not having proper documents have made them to stay put at the places or houses that they are staying rather than go out and make connections with government humanitarian institutions which can be

very risky.

The congestion as a result of so many people living in small houses/places have caused several problems like hunger because of lack of available food and nutrition, health and sanitation. As mentioned earlier, there are more than two thousand five hundred people (mostly women) who have already suffered mental illnesses. Several children have also died because of common diseases.

These IDPs have been the victims of not only human-induced disaster (war) but they have also become victims of Martial Law. Their basic human rights like access to food, free association with other human beings and basic health care have been restricted if not violated by Martial Law. The extremists have destroyed their houses and properties but Martial Law has ruined their lives and dignity as people.

Humanitarian workers and volunteers have found out that it is indeed very difficult to help the displaced and dislocated people in a raging brutal war but it is doubly difficult or almost impossible to help the victims (IDPs) when you have people always watching your back and restricting your actions and your works.

The Presidential pronouncements have indicated that Martial Law continues until the war in Marawi ends and when the security forces are satisfied and advise the President to lift up Martial Law in Mindanao. But as developments have unfolded the war in Marawi is continuing and can possibly surpass the 60 days Constitutional limit of a period of the declaration of Martial Law. The 60th day will be on the 23rd of July – a day before the President will address the nation when he will make his State of the Nation Address in Congress. Both Houses of Congress have already compromised and expressed their unconditional support to the President to extend Martial Law in Mindanao. The Supreme Court will give its decision on the legal bases of the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus by the Presidential Proclamation 216 in the first week of July 2017. Everybody, especially the humanitarian organizations have placed their high hopes in the Supreme Court to defend the country's Constitution and advise the President to lift up Martial Law in Mindanao even if the security sector and the Presidential generals (active and retired) will recommend the opposite to President Duterte.

II. The US and other Countries' Role in the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao

The role of the US in the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao and in the raging battle in Marawi should be understood in its long history of strategic and tactical interventions in the affairs of its most reliable ally in the Southeast Asia. The US relationship with the Philippines is always defined by its interests only and how can its ally help to secure them. It would help much to have profound understanding of the development of such interventions by briefly reviewing its immediate past.

A month after the botched PNP Special Action Force Mamasapano, Maguindanao operation in January 25, 2015, the US Intelligence operators who had actively taken part in this action had left Mindanao and avoided Congressional investigation. Since then, the US has maintained a skeletal force in Zamboanga City.

The current US involvement in the Marawi siege and its counter siege should be understood as just part of several decades of the US ongoing program of misjudgments, misbehavior and series of bombing interventions in Mindanao until the present day.

This situation has been clearly seen in the case of Michael Terrence Meiring, a 67 years old

American who accidentally exploded his ammonium nitrate bomb in his room in Evergreen Hotel in Davao City on May 16, 2002. His case was put into the limelight because when he was in the hospital, US agents had immediately arrived and spirited him away to Manila courtesy of the US National Security Council which chartered a private jet to facilitate the escape of their special guest. Among the documents found in his Evergreen Hotel room was his Moro National Liberation Front - Bangsamoro Armed Forces Identification Card (ID) complete with his picture and his officer's rank. Before he blasted himself in his hotel room, there was already a big blast on April 21, 2002 in General Santos City killing 15 people and wounding 35 others. After the Evergreen explosion, there were series of explosions in Davao City, the old airport on March 2003 which killed 21 people and wounded 148 others. Another blast was in Sasa wharf which had killed 17 people and wounded 36 innocent people which had happened on April 2003.

It has been known that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is maintaining its connection with different terror groups in Davao and the neighboring areas. The CIA has made sure that they can always use these "sleepers" for special missions.

It should also be recalled that on July 2002, there was a twenty hour mutiny by 300 Junior officers and their troops in Central Manila. The officers and their troops came from the elite units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and their issues against the Arroyo government and the AFP leadership were corruption and selling military hardwares to the Moro Liberation Fronts and to the Maoist New Peoples Army. Furthermore, these officers had revealed that the series of bombings were done to "destabilize" the government so that it would be the bases for the declaration of Martial Law in the country by the Arroyo government. They (Junior officers) also claimed that they were asked by their higher ups (including the Commander in Chief) to initiate bombings in Mindanao and blame these to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) - this special operation was called OPLAN Green Base.

Anyway, in all these events the fingerprints of the US covert agents were clearly manifested. Meanwhile, Michael Terrence Meiring had changed his identity when he went back to the US - he became Michael Van de Meer and finally disappeared in 2010.

Further, one had to take note the US active presence in Mindanao even in 2013 Zamboanga siege of the Nur Misuari faction of MNLF. The US agents had used their modern technology like the unmanned drones but they did not do much to help lessen if not to avoid the burning and ruining of the big part of Zamboanga City.

The US active involvement in Marawi today should be critically examined. They had already lost one of their unmanned drones in the second week of Marawi rampage. It is too much of a coincidence that when the overt US agents began to closely monitor the development of the ruining of Marawi by both their unmanned drones and the P3 Orion Surveillance planes, it was almost the same time that news of the escape of Isnilon Hapilon from Marawi had happened.

One cannot help but be concerned once again that what had happened to the Special Action Force (SAF) 44 in Mamasapano under the close watch of the US covert agents would again happen to the gallant soldiers of the AFP in the siege in Marawi.

In the US bid to block the pivoting away of President Duterte from the US, it makes sure that it must have an active presence and influence in the abovementioned battle. It wants to strengthen its connection to the corps of officers of the AFP so as to continue determining the latter's direction. It (US) is also trying to make sure that the result and the impact of the Marawi takeover will keep the Philippines and its President into the circle of the United Front against terrorism led by the US.

Meanwhile, Australia a close ally of the US in the Pacific has already entered to help the Philippines' offensives to retake Marawi from the extremists. Specifically the Australian government in aiding the Philippines by providing intelligence and technical assistance in its battle to retake Marawi.

Not to be outdone and in order to maintain the momentum of the efforts that the Chinese government and President Duterte have started in terms of economic and military agreements, the Chinese delivered military hardwares like assault rifles and long range sniper rifles worth \$7.8 million or 50 million yuan. It also donated a cash of Php15 million as an immediate help to the people of Marawi. Accordingly, the Chinese Ambassador, who personally delivered the military hardwares and the cash donations, these military hardwares and donations are just the first delivery and more help will be delivered to the country soonest.

Definitely the reasons of these countries in offering the help to the Philippines is not so much to really help the country in solving the reasons behind the proliferation of the extremists and Jihadists so that the siege like Marawi will not happen again. It is obvious that it is a way to influence the foreign policy direction of the Philippines to favor the donors' interests, one of which can be part of the reasons why there is so much social inequity and extreme poverty in the areas like Marawi or the ARMM. The same situation which have caused the birthing of rebellion, insurgency, extremism and terrorism in Mindanao and in the whole country.

Raymund De Silva, June 30, 2017

P.S.

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