

Peace Talks in the Philippines: Communist negotiators have no control of the NPA. So what for the peace talks?

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EVEN WITH TALKS, NPA RAIDED SY'S PICO DE LORO IN NASUGBU

PRESIDENT Duterte announced in the past two days the virtual end of his peace talks with the Communist Party of the Philippines (masked as the National Democratic Front), mainly because the communists' armed groups have continued to attack government forces, and he cannot allow the Republic's soldiers and officers to be killed with impunity.

Duterte even actually played down a recent attack by the communists which demonstrate their thinking, that they can do whatever they like in the land, even while their negotiators enjoy European tourist sites in Oslo and Rome, when they take a break from their "grueling" talks.

Strangely unreported by mainstream media, to the credit of Henry Sy's PR experts, but reported only by several tabloids and, very briefly in just several seconds, by two TV stations, the communist New People's Army, raided January 29 the security headquarters of the tycoon's posh Pico de Loro Resort in Hamilo Coast in Nasugbu, Batangas, a favorite of Manila's elite partly as it is just two hours away from Tagaytay City.

A platoon (roughly 30) of heavily armed NPA managed to enter the area and disarm the resort's three dozen security as the rebels fooled the guards at the entrance by wearing military uniforms, and pretending to escort a comely female officer of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The rebels ransacked the security office building and torched the staff house. They took with them the security detachment's 16 shotguns, four M-16 rifles, three handguns as well as several laptops, handheld radios and cell phones. The NPA commandeered a silver Toyota Hi-Ace and three Mercedes-Benz cars, which they used to even ride through the resort and flee through the back gate.

Sources said the raid was a warning to Sy and his resort to pay an extortion amount of P500,000 monthly euphemistically called "revolutionary taxes," which the NPA two months ago had demanded but which the magnate's executives ignored. Sy's people, however allegedly asked the police to keep the NPA raid under wraps, since the incident would frighten and drive away potential buyers of the high-end lots and condominium units at the Pico de Loro resort.

Making a fool out of Duterte

A source claimed that the NPA raid, other than the NPA's ambush of an Army detachment in Davao del Sur February 1 that killed a lieutenant just months after he graduated from the Philippine Military Academy, convinced Duterte that the peace talks with the NDF were useless, and that the communists were just making a fool out of him.

Duterte also claimed it was impossible for him to release the 400 "political detainees" the communists demanded. Indeed, "political" their motive may be, but it was to topple the Republic. The military would probably revolt if Duterte ordered their release: Many of these "political detainees" were NPA regulars, who had killed government soldiers in ambushes. It would also be tantamount to returning to the field the communists' cadres corps captured over so many years.

To be fair, though, the communist negotiators, even the party's founding chairman Jose Ma. Sison, and its recent chairman, Benito Tiamzon, actually do not have control over the local communist party organizations and the NPA, especially in the countryside.

The communists practically have become similar to the Mafia organization in the US in the 1930s, its leadership a collective of peers—mainly of regional commanders—headed by a boss they agree to recognize, who was Tiamzon for nearly a decade.

Tiamzon had relied on Sison, whose role since the 1970s has been as the communists' writer par excellence and demagogue, to churn out documents that portrayed a unified party led by its chairman, "Armando Liwanag," in reality merely the personification of the collective decision of the group of regional leaders.

Aggregation of organizations

Since the 1980s, the communists had been essentially an aggregation of regional organizations plus two "centers," its "legal struggle" group that directs its party-list congressmen, and the NDF negotiators in the Netherlands who idolize Sison.

The local party leaders have reluctantly recognized the Sison group, despite his absence from the Philippines for nearly 30 years—a generation—because of the international funding from socialist groups he has been raising, his prestige as party founding chairman, and the author of the only party books published.

The strongest regional organizations had been the Manila-Rizal organization, especially when it was headed by the fiery, vociferously anti-Sison Popoy Lagman; the one in Southern Luzon built up by the late Roger Rosal; the Visayas organization that had been headed by the de facto chairman Tiamzon; and that in Mindanao headed by Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos and strengthened by veteran communists still not publicly known (which therefore I prefer not to disclose.)

Led by cadres who practically have led their entire lives in armed struggle and in the underground—who therefore have scanty knowledge of contemporary society—the regional organizations have little interest in the peace talks, as they enjoy their de facto fiefdoms in the guerrilla areas they control. However, they support such talks since their experience has been—since the Cory Aquino presidency—that the military leaves them alone, allowing them to expand and raise more funds through "revolutionary taxes" whenever there are ongoing peace talks.

The military has been averse to wiping out the NPA and all Presidents since Cory Aquino undertook

“peace talks” with them. Never in fact has there been a President who has ordered the military to wipe out the insurgency—as had been done in most Southeast Asian countries. For the military, there is the negative lesson in the case of retired Gen. Jovito Palparan. He took every effort to wipe out the NPA in his area of jurisdiction in Luzon, but today suffers the ignominy of being labeled a “butcher,” thanks to the communists’ vast propaganda machine, and facing charges of human-rights abuses.

Moreover, Armed Forces generals, who are given regional commands when they are already in their 50s, prefer to “keep the peace” in their areas of jurisdiction, as fights with the NPA could get out of control and that would endanger their quiet retirement when they reach 56. There is also the fear that the communists would retaliate against them when they retire, and lose their bodyguards.

Decentralized communists

The Philippine communist organization actually had been a decentralized one, since its founding, despite Sison’s success in portraying it as being led tightly by an “Amado Guerrero,” his nom de guerre. After its establishment in 1968, it was the NPA commander Dante who had been revered as the real revolutionary leader, who was starting to develop the kind of legendary status revolutions require to inspire the masses to revolt.

When Dante and Sison were captured in 1976, the party consisted of powerful factions led by such nearly charismatic communist leaders as NPA veteran Rolly Kintanar who led the Mindanao insurgency that made even Davao City nearly a Red base, Popoy Lagman who headed the Manila-Rizal organization and commanded the dreaded Alex Boncayao urban guerrillas (and deadly assassins), and Ka Roger of the Southern Luzon regional party.

After their assassinations, their successors have maintained the quasi-autonomy of their regional organizations, and therefore do not simply follow orders from the NDF negotiators, whom they don’t even, really respect as these figures have spent more than three decades abroad moving from one European capital to another while they have suffered terribly in mosquito-infested jungles in the country.

This then is essentially the problem that has emerged every time there have been peace talks since the Cory regime.

There is no real central communist leadership to deal with. The people that various administrations have talked to for a peace settlement have not been in command of the NPA. They just do whatever they want, still fervently believing in the myth of the people’s army eventually surrounding the cities, as Mao Zedong’s army did a long time ago in a land far, far away.

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* "Communist negotiators have no control of the NPA. So what for the peace talks?". MANILA TIMES. FEBRUARY 6, 2017 OPINION ON PAGE ONE:

<http://www.manilatimes.net/communist-negotiators-no-control-npa-peace-talks/310747/>