

# Philippine bases: NPA ups the ante

by Lydia Cherry

The New People's Army has reasserted its credentials as an instrument of Soviet irregular warfare, by making the presence of the U.S. bases in the Philippines a major point of its "negotiating" agenda. The U.S. bases in the Philippines—Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base—are key to enable the United States to deploy anywhere on the Asian continent, in an arc stretching from the Korean peninsula to the Persian Gulf. Their loss would hand hegemony of the South China Sea strategic waterway to Red China and the Soviet Union.

In recent weeks, the NPA has bombed a U.S.-Philippine communications base; killed a U.S. Army colonel who was helping the Philippine military in its anti-insurgency campaign; and offered an olive branch to both President Aquino and opposition leaders, by saying that all the Philippine government has to do to make peace with the insurgents is to dismantle the bases.

The deal came to light in a television interview that NDF founder Jose Ma Sison and chief fundraiser Luis Jalandoni granted in mid-March in Europe. It has not yet been aired, but a transcript was released to Philippine *Daily Globe* April 7. "If Mrs. Aquino is ready to make an executive declaration dismantling the U.S. military bases by 1991, the revolutionary movement will rush to a consideration of a unilateral cease-fire," Sison, the former chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines, told the independent broadcast journalist Nettie Wilde.

Former priest Jalandoni—who is from a large Philippine landowning family and has been the main conduit for funds from at least 31 countries to this allegedly "independent" insurgency grouping—also suggested the NDF would talk with Philippine opposition leaders: "But if the Aquino government shows hesitation, there are other political forces like the Liberal party of [Senate President Jovito] Salonga, the PDP-Laben [Filipino Democratic Party—Strength of the Nation] of [Sen. Aquilino] Pimentel, and there are other forces like the Partido ng Bayan [People's Party], and even the Union for National Action of Salvador Laurel and Enrile."

Three days after Jalandoni and Sison's offer became public in the Philippines, on April 9, five bombs rocked a joint U.S.-Philippine communications base at Mount Cabuyao, 120 miles north of Manila, toppling one microwave antenna and seriously damaging another. The NPA leadership quickly claimed responsibility. "These tactical offensives are meant to punish U.S. imperialists for arrogance, insolence, and abuse against our people and other peoples of the world."

The NPA statement said there were about 25 highly explosive devices planted in the giant radar communications van, and in four satellite radars. The statement said that "NPA commandos" had sneaked into the communication facility and planted the 25 bombs without the knowledge of U.S. and Filipino troops.

In the past, the NPA has only claimed having armed regulars and militia in the countryside, besides urban guerrillas known as city partisans or "Sparrow units." *EIR*, however, has earlier reported the existence of such *spetsnaz* capability, including Soviet *spetsnaz* penetration of the perimeters of these bases.

On April 17, NDF spokesman Satur Ocampo challenged the Aquino government to "make a definitive declaration of its intent" on the U.S. bases. "If the Aquino government continues to abdicate its responsibilities to the nation, the NDF calls upon the revolutionary Filipino people to themselves dismantle the bases," Ocampo said.

On April 21, a hit squad ambushed and killed U.S. Army Col. James Rowe, who was involved in helping the Philippine anti-insurgency campaign. "We think this is the first time that a serving U.S. military officer has been killed by the NPA," Col. Manuel Oxales, deputy head of the Manila region military command, told Reuters. Military sources said Rowe's job was to coordinate supply of weapons and equipment to the Philippine military.

Explaining the rationale for deployment of more Philippine soldiers around U.S. military facilities after the bombing of the communications installation, according to Kyodo news service April 15, Philippine Constabulary Chief Maj. Gen. Ramon Montano told field commanders: "The U.S. government advises that April marks the third anniversary of the retaliatory raid against Libya, and groups sympathetic to Libya have undertaken anti-U.S. actions directed against U.S. personnel and facilities to commemorate this date. . . . The bombing incident [in Benquet] and the attempt to plant landmines at Clark Air Base have caused the U.S. embassy to be very concerned."

To Jalandoni and Sison's "offer" both President Aquino's and opposition leaders' responses were weak. "The Liberal Party is willing to listen and to talk to the National Democratic Front," said Senate President Jovito Salonga. On the PDP-Laben side, party chief Pimentel, Jr. is quoted by Manila Broadcasting Co. April 10, that that party is willing to participate in peace talks.

Aquino, in an interview reported by Manila Radio Veritas April 17, said that she is confused by all the conflicting rebel statements and that until she finds a leader who can speak for all the rebels, it would be difficult to sit down with anybody. "We hear from people who are abroad saying that they represent the NDF, and then we hear some other leaders here from the NDF also speaking, presumably, on behalf of the NDF. Until we can find out who is the legal representative for all of them, I think it is very difficult to sit down with anybody."