

**Monitor and analysis of AFP
counterinsurgency operations
during Covid-19 crisis**

Information Bureau
Communist Party of the Philippines

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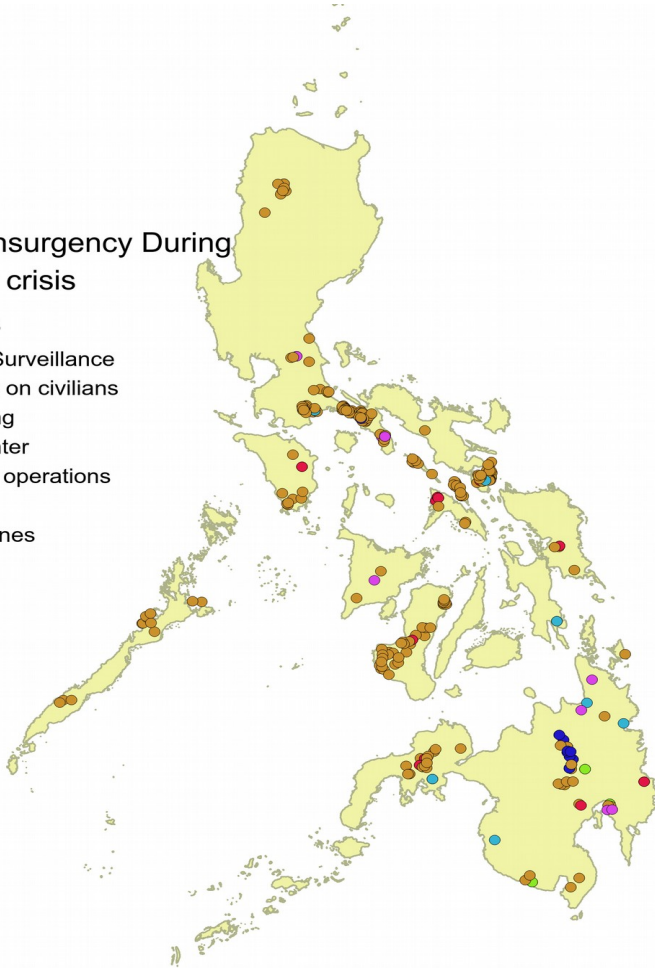
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Counterinsurgency During Covid-19 crisis

Operations

- Aerial Surveillance
- Attacks on civilians
- Bombing
- Encounter
- Military operations
- Raid
- Philippines



Foreword

Simultaneous with placing the island of Luzon under lockdown over the Covid-19 pandemic, GRP President Duterte announced his intention to declare ceasefire on March 16. The ceasefire took effect on March 19, 2020 and ended on April 15, 2020. The NDFP Negotiating Panel expressed openness to recommend a similar ceasefire and awaited a formal offer of truce by the GRP. However, no such offer was made.

On March 24, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres issued a call for a “global ceasefire between warring parties for the common purpose of fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.” Heeding the call, and upon the recommendation of the NDFP Negotiating Panel, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP-CC) issued a unilateral ceasefire declaration which covered the period March 25-April 15. The CPP-CC extended the ceasefire to April 30 to “ensure quick and unimpeded support to all people requiring urgent medical, health and socioeconomic assistance.”

Based on verified field reports of the NPA, as well as media reports and AFP statements since March 16, AFP counterinsurgency operations did not cease during this period and, in fact, intensified especially during the second week of March. Over the past six weeks, the AFP carried out widespread deployment of troops, psyops, aerial surveillance, aerial bombardments and combat operations across the country. As a consequence, a number

of armed clashes erupted between units of the NPA and the AFP. Human rights abuses were perpetrated by the AFP.

This report aims to expose the characteristics, objectives, extent and key incidents of the AFP's counterinsurgency operations over the past six weeks during which the Filipino people suffered great hardships under the Duterte regime's Covid-19 lockdown.

This report is an initial release. We anticipate more reports to come in before we release the final report by the first week of May. Readers can send their feedback, comments, suggestions and questions.

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Summary information

Since the Duterte regime declared a lockdown on March 16 over the Covid-19 pandemic, the AFP mounted counterinsurgency operations in over 37 provinces, 48% of which are in Visayas and Mindanao, 33% in the Southern Tagalog region and 18% in Bicol, and 4% in provinces north of the NCR.

The AFP has so far deployed its troops in at least 396 villages in 148 towns and cities. Armed troops roam around communities, enter homes and accuse residents of being members or supporters of the NPA, set up checkpoints, occupy civilian structures and impose curfews and other oppressive policies. There are mounting complaints against soldiers going around and confronting people without wearing face masks raising fears over the probability of spreading Covid-19.

The AFP has conducted at least six aerial bombardment operations in Bukidnon (three rounds), Davao de Oro, Davao del Norte and Sarangani provinces, all in Mindanao, as well as aerial surveillance operations using drones or planes. Helicopters were also used to drop propaganda leaflets in the Mt. Province and Masbate. There have been several attacks on civilians including mass arrests of peasants.

Since March 17, there have been at least 33 armed clashes between various units of the New People's Army and operating troops of the AFP. From March 16 to April 15, there were 16 such encounters (or four a week). From

April 16 to 24, the number of armed clashes increased 17 or more than two a day. Of the 33 clashes, at least 17 were raids against NPA encampments, while others were encounters with NPA units.

In line with the orders of the CPP-CC, NPA units have ceased from mounting tactical offensives against the AFP, the PNP and other armed organizations of the GRP since March 25. Following international humanitarian law, the NPA is also reminded not to prevent, on the contrary, facilitate the work of organizations or agencies delivering relief or assistance to the people. The Central Committee has commended the NPA for strictly observing the ceasefire order, and for training their efforts at addressing the health and economic concerns and problems of the people. While on ceasefire, the NPA is instructed to maintain strict secrecy to avoid detection, and remain vigilant and ready to carry out active defense actions in the face of an armed attack by the AFP. Some units of the NPA have successfully thwarted the offensives of the AFP.

Key points of analysis

1. Despite GRP President Duterte's declaration of ceasefire, purportedly to enable it to train all resources to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Armed Forces of the Philippines has not relented in their costly counterinsurgency operations. There is no suspension of the Duterte regime's strategic aim of crushing the NPA before the end of its term in 2022.
2. The GRP's counterinsurgency operations are indecently costly in the face of urgent needs of the people amid the Covid-19 crisis. More or less 11,500 combat troops (or one platoon of 30 in every barangay covered) have been mobilized by the AFP to carry out intensified nationwide counterinsurgency operations. Receiving an allowance of P200 per meal, the AFP would spend at least P70 million for a 10-day operation. Tens of millions of pesos are also squandered in drone flights and aerial bombardment using fighter jets and attack helicopters.
3. The intent of the extensive deployment of forces and unabated combat operations is to engage NPA units in armed encounters during the Covid-19 ceasefire and amid the public health and economic crisis. To justify their attacks, the AFP has been quick to accuse the NPA of attacking their units, even when their own reports state that their units initiated "security patrols" which led to the said encounters, and by the fact that these armed clashes occurred in NPA encampments away from the villages.

4. The AFP has systematically propagated false information to depict the NPA as “thieves” who “stole” or are “planning to steal” relief goods intended for the people. The AFP started to peddle this lie as early as March 31 in their public statements regarding the armed clashes in Quezon. However, it would gain traction only around the second week of April when the government’s official media published news stories which condemned the NPA for taking away relief goods in Balangiga. Although the news story was revealed as fake, the AFP and Malacañang repeated the claim, and used it to fabricate more stories about “stealing” or disrupting the distribution of aid to peasants.

5. The intensified counterinsurgency operations of the AFP also aim to prevent the NPA from carrying out its own public health drive, mass campaigns to address the peasants economic problems and mobilization to assist in raising food production. This NPA campaign is being well received by the masses as they confront not only the Covid-19 pandemic, but also the hardships brought about by the lockdown and sharp downturn of the economy. The AFP wants to hinder this campaign as it deepens the unity between the NPA and the peasant masses, and help in further strengthening the NPA.

6. Duterte’s ultimate aim has unraveled when he declared on April 23 his intention of declaring martial law, purportedly to stop the NPA from attacking his soldiers who he claims are delivering service to the people. Clearly, by intensifying counterinsurgency operations, Duterte has created the conditions for widespread armed

clashes, which he is now using as an excuse for establishing a fascist dictatorship, something he has long sought to do, to suppress all democratic forces who have been actively criticizing his government's failure to address the Covid-19 pandemic.

7. Despite the widespread deployment of AFP forces, there is still a wide latitude for NPA units to continue conducting its work of rendering public health and economic service to the people. There are guerrilla fronts which the AFP cannot effectively cover, especially with the deployment of troops in the National Capital Region and to do road security. As instructed by the Party, the NPA can continue to carry out information drives and help the masses prepare for possible Covid-19 infections in their areas of operation.

Summary of key incidents

Raids and armed encounters

- 1) March 16. Troops of the 8th IB and 1st Special Forces Battalion mounted successive raids against NPA encampments at Sitio Bendum, Barangay Busdi, Malaybalay City, and in Mt. Kitanglad in Bukidnon.

- 2) March 21. Troops of the 44th IB raided an NPA camp in Barangay Penaranda, Kabasalan, Zamboanga Sibugay. Prior to the raid, the 44th IB deployed combat troops and conducted intense counterinsurgency operations in several barangays in Kabasalan since March 18, under the guise of “Covid-response.” Hundreds of troops were deployed in barangays Bakalan, Dimpak, Gumitna, Lakanapan, Penaranda, Sayaw and Siolan. The NPA unit noted in its initial report that it has maintained an active defense posture since the deployment.

- 3) March 24. Elements of the 60th and 56th IB attacked and shelled an NPA unit at Sitio Tapayanon, Barangay Gupitan, Kapalong, Davao del Norte. The AFP mobilized two columns of soldiers and three armored fighting vehicles. The AFP claimed that the clash was an NPA attack, although it was clear that they were carrying out offensive combat operations as evidenced by the fact that they had prepositioned artillery units to back up their ground troops.

- 4) March 28. Forces of the 80th IB attacked a unit of the NPA in the mountainous area of Barangay Puray, Rodriguez, Rizal, several kilometers away from the village center. One soldier was killed. The AFP's spot report also indicated that the 2nd Division Reconnaissance Company was mobilized to carry out blocking operations.
- 5) March 31. Troops of the 59th raided an NPA camp in Barangay Mabunga, Gumaca town, Quezon.
- 6) March 31. At 4 a.m., armed troops of the 97th IB raided a house where a sick NPA fighter was staying in Barangay Dapiwak, Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur.
- 7) April 1. Troops of the 85th IB successively raided an NPA camp in Barangay White Cliffe, San Narcisco, and another in Barangay Ilayang Yuni, in Mulanay, both in Quezon province.
- 8) April 1. The 44th IB ambushed an NPA team at Sitio Sikatuna, Barangay Natan, Diplahan, Zamboanga Sibugay, at around 9:00 p.m. Four NPA fighters were wounded in action, one of whom was captured and was finished-off by the soldiers. The 44th IB fabricated a story claiming that they were raided in Barangay Balagon, in Siay town.
- 9) April 7. Armed troopers of the 301st Brigade fired at an NPA unit in the early hours of April 7 at Sitio Agilan, Barangay Panuran, Lambunao, Iloilo. The NPA and its medical officers were conducting an information drive in the said area. Forced to defend themselves and the

villagers, the NPA fired countershots and safely withdrew from the incident. According to reports, one soldier died and some others were wounded.

10) April 10. A platoon of 30 soldiers of the 2nd IB and combat police led by 2Lt. Jay Zachary Tunguia attempted to encircle an NPA unit in Barangay Cabas-an, Aroroy, Masbate at 5 p.m. As the combat troops closed in, the Red fighters were left with no other option but to conduct active defense maneuvers resulting in a 30-minute skirmish which resulted in at least 10 casualties on the side of the military and police, with 1 killed and 9 wounded. The NPA squad was able to safely withdraw.

11) April 16. Forces of the 31st IB raided an NPA camp in Gabao, Irosin, Sorsogon.

12) April 19. Pursuit operation by the 2nd IB, together with the RMFB and 91st DRC resulted in a skirmish against the same unit they encountered on April 10.

13) April 19. The 94th IB conducted combat operations at Sitio Kamuag, Barangay Carabalan, Himamaylan City, ten kilometers away from the village center. The NPA unit carried out active defense maneuvers and successfully countered the attack. Three assaulting soldiers were killed including a lieutenant, while four others were wounded during the 30-minute encounter.

14) Troopers of the 91st IB reported to have engaged an NPA unit in Barangay Diaat, Maria Aurora town. Combat operations by the 91st IB have been carried out unabatedly

since the first week of March since purported discovery of an NPA "arms and food cache" at Sitio Dayap, Barangay Punglo.

Aerial bombardment

1) March 18. The 1001st Infantry Brigade carried out aerial bombing runs in upland villages in the town of Mabini in Davao de Oro last March 18. The bombing started at 4 a.m. and lasted until late afternoon that day. Residents reported at least 20 bombs were dropped in the vicinity of Barangay Cabuyan, forcing 50 families to scramble to safety. The AFP justified their bombing by claiming it engaged an NPA unit in the area, although no such armed engagement occurred that day.

2) March 27. Philippine Air Force units under the 4th ID used an FA-50 fighter jet to drop 500-pound bombs near two Lumad communities in Barangay Mandahikan, Cabanglasan. Three bombs were dropped at around 9 a.m. and two more at 2 p.m, traumatizing children and the community residents. The airstrike severely damaged the environment which serves as the primary source of food and livelihood of the Lumads in the area.

3) March 29. Another round of aerial bombardment was carried out by the 4th ID, this time, using attack helicopters. At least 10 rockets were dropped in the same barangay (Mandahikan) at noontime. Rounds were also fired from artillery cannons installed at an adjacent barangay in Loreto, Davao del Norte. A Cessna surveillance aircraft flew overhead the whole day after the

airstrike. The military also deployed an additional column of soldiers at Sitio Miyaray to conduct combat operations.

4) The 27th IB dropped at least four bombs in the vicinity of Sitio Kapanal in Barangay Gasi, Kiamba town at around five in the morning. A number of Lumad peasants were already at their farms when the bombing commenced. The bombing and strafing traumatized the community, especially the children. The AFP claim that the bombardment served as “aerial support” for their relief work.

Rights violations

1) March 18. Six residents of Barangay Cabuyan, Mabini town in Davao de Oro, were arbitrarily arrested and taken to the detachment of the 1001st Infantry Brigade, a few days after their village was subjected to aerial bombardment.

2) April 10. Soldiers of the 2nd IB and policemen arbitrarily arrested residents Romnick Vargas, Juan Dikino and Alden Javier in Barangay Cabas-an, Aroroy, Masbate, whom they paraded as members of the people’s militia. They also burned the house of Basyon Meralles and forcibly evicted residents Jun Dikino and Marven “Binoy” Grazil from the village.

3) April 16. Soldiers of the 31st IB ransacked the houses in Barangay Gabao, Irosin, Sorsogon and accosted at least 13 residents. Their cellphones were seized and some were mauled.

4) April 18. Troops of the 61st IB arrested at least 12 farmers, including five children, who are residents of Barangay Igpanulong, Sibalom, Antique. The farmers were gathering honey to augment their income. The arrested individuals are being accused of being members of the New People's Army (NPA). The 61st IB claim that they were arrested after a supposed armed encounter with the NPA unit in the Antique and Iloilo border, which did not happen.

Psyops

1) April 7. The 8th ID spread false information that local NPA Red fighters "robbed" the food aid intended for residents of Sito Bangon, Barangay Guinmaayohan Balangiga, Eastern Samar. Local officials including the town mayor and chief of police denied such an incident took place in the area. On April 13, 8th ID officials sat in the Municipal Peace and Order Council meeting to push for a resolution to support their story. Despite pressures from the military, local officials refused to say that the NPA "robbed" or "forcibly took" the food aid, but acceded to saying that the NPA just "took a portion" of it.

2) April 14. In Sorsogon, the 31st IB which is currently occupying a certain village in Bulusan attempted to take over the distribution of relief goods which were solicited by barangay officials. The soldiers wanted to grab credit and take photos of each beneficiary for "profiling." The barangay officials refused to hand them over the aid and confronted the soldiers instead.

Data Resources:

COIN_Operations_During_Covid-19_ceasefire_period_20200425.ods
COIN During Covid Shape File (for geomapping)